

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SAVAGE PAGANISM

#### *THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD*

*The Well of the Saints* left Willie Fay, the Abbey's resident producer, with an acute headache. In the wake of the hostile reception to *The Well of the Saints* one of the Abbey Theatre's finest actors, Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh, decided to leave the company, citing irreconcilable differences over the direction that the company was taking. Shortly after the opening of *The Well of the Saints* the company decided to turn professional, with a directorate of W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge. Nic Shiubhlaigh pointed out that she had 'no desire to act professionally or otherwise, with any theatrical project unlike the one I helped to launch in 1902.'<sup>1</sup> The actor felt that Synge's plays were rubbing Irish nationalism in the mud and, privately, she admitted that she had grave concern over 'the national ideals of the movement [because they] were in danger of being shelved'.<sup>2</sup> In truth, Nic Shiubhlaigh was right. Whether the Abbey liked it or not, the company had made a Faustian pact with Irish nationalism by virtue of branding itself as the Irish National Theatre Society and, whether Synge liked it or not, his plays certainly debunked Catholic, bourgeois nationalism. Nic Shiubhlaigh's curtain call gave the cue for the exodus of other influential Abbey figureheads including Æ (George Russell) and to add insult to

injury, Fay was left with an account book in disarray; *The Well of the Saints* was a commercial failure.<sup>3</sup>

Fay was used to offering his counsel to the more rebellious members of the company, who refused to obey what he classified as the ‘approved rules of the theatrical game’.<sup>4</sup> The rebel Synge would not play by the rules. According to Fay, Synge deeply resented ‘the crass ignorance, the fatuity, the malevolence with which *The Well of the Saints* had been received’.<sup>5</sup> Synge’s next play, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), was the dramatist’s manifestation of what Fay considered to be Synge’s ‘anger in *excelsis*’.<sup>6</sup> When *The Playboy of the Western World* (hereafter referred to as *The Playboy*) was first performed the audience expected ‘to see on the stage noble Irish chiefs wearing grand cloaks, lined inside with red silk and embroidered on the outside with beautiful harps of green satin, slaying Ireland’s enemies by the score and delivering orations in Latin and Greek’.<sup>7</sup> Instead, they watched in amazement as an insular community in the west of Ireland – the symbolic repository of cultural nationalism – nonchalantly accepted a “murderer” into their midst. In his diary, Joseph Holloway summarised popular opinion on opening night, which was held by the average spectator for the rest of the week’s run:

What did Synge mean by such filth? Was there no one to supervise the plays? Synge met with his just deserts from the audience & I hope he’ll take the lesson to heart. This is not Irish life? [...] I maintain that this play of The Playboy is not a truthful or just picture of the Irish peasants, but simply the outpouring of a morbid, unhealthy mind ever seeking on the dunghoop of life for the nastiness that lies concealed there, perhaps, but never suspected by the

clean of mind [...] Synge is the evil genius of the Abbey and Yeats his able lieutenant, both dabble in the unhealthy.<sup>8</sup>

Such explicit debunking of Irish culture prompted so-called riots. However, what greeted the premiere of *The Playboy* were organised disturbances that, at the very best, incited the unorganised spectator to participate in a disturbance; Declan Kiberd is apposite when he points out that ‘those who disrupted the performance were no random collection of hotheads, but some of the most sensitive and intelligent thinkers of the time’.<sup>9</sup> Turning to the newspapers that documented *The Playboy*’s opening week, journalists constantly and consistently referred to the ‘renewed disturbances last night at the Abbey Theatre during the performance of Mr. Synge’s comedy’<sup>10</sup> as the auditorium was filled with the singing of rebel songs such as “The West’s Asleep”.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, while the reception to *The Playboy* was one filled with emotion, in no way can the reception be considered violent. This was not a riot. The closest *The Playboy* came to inciting a riot was a brief episode of sectarian violence as ‘some blows were interchanged’ between Republicans and Unionists. But that singular punch-up happened in the theatre on one particular evening (29 January) and the police were said to have ‘prevented [Republican and Unionist] from coming into collision’; it was only on Westmoreland Street that ‘two members of the rival parties got into fisticuffs, and one student was arrested’.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the analysis presented in this book will refer to *The Playboy* riots as *The Playboy* disturbances.

Yeats maintained that it was people with ‘no books in their houses’<sup>13</sup> that had instigated the *Playboy* disturbances and while this might be true, we would do well to remind ourselves that *The Playboy* was performed under the auspices of a literary theatre.<sup>14</sup> It is plausible to conjecture that those that rioted were familiar with

literature, hence their decision to attend a performance by a literary theatre. However, if we are to believe Yeats, those that rioted were unfamiliar with literature, which means that something other than the misreading of literature caused the disturbances. Scholars are in general agreement that this “something else” was Synge’s (mis)representation of the Irish populace under the auspices of Catholic bourgeois nationalism and salacious profanity is invariably invoked to substantiate the argument. But like so many things with Synge, there are often deeper and darker motives at work. This chapter proposes an alternative reading of the disturbances that invites the contemporaneity of sex and violence to substantiate Synge’s dramatisation of changeling belief in Irish folk culture and its manifestation in the “Clonmel horror” of 1895. Sex and violence are structurally integral to both the Clonmel horror and the dramaturgical content of *The Playboy*. It is necessary, then, to consider how Synge understood these dramaturgies to be concomitant with changeling belief.

#### **‘SAVAGE PAGANISM’<sup>15</sup>**

As a postgraduate student in Paris, Synge attended Anatole le Braz’s lectures about the similarities between life in Breton and Ireland. Le Braz taught Synge about the three ‘defining features of primitive Irish life’: ‘savage violence’ ‘savage sexuality’ and ‘savage paganism’.<sup>16</sup> It is without coincidence that *The Playboy* was predicated on these features. According to Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, for le Braz the first feature was ‘savage violence’.<sup>17</sup> Synge found this in the case of a ‘Connaught man’ named Ó’Máille who ‘killed his father with the blow of a spade when he was in passion’ and then fled to the Aran Islands (Inis Meáin) where the ‘impulse to protect the criminal is universal’.<sup>18</sup> Ó’Máille, the son of a petit-bourgeois Mayo farmer, managed to escape

to America before returning to Galway, accounts for Christy Mahon's attempted parricide. The second defining feature is 'savage sexuality'<sup>19</sup> and Synge found this in the case of James Lynchehaun, a Mayo man who assaulted his employer, Mrs. MacDonnell, by biting – as Susan Brady points out in *The Playboy* – her 'nostril on the northern shore'.<sup>20</sup> By all accounts Lynchehaun was a mercurial and attractive man with shrewd verbal ability. Even when he beat Mrs. MacDonnell within an inch of her life, she referred to him as 'a fine, young, strong, dark, animal-looking man'.<sup>21</sup> This accounts for Christy's ability to seduce Pegeen and woo the Mayo girls. The third defining feature of primitive Irish life was 'savage paganism'<sup>22</sup> and the savage paganism that was manifested in the Clonmel horror of 1895 would provide the dramatist with more than enough dramaturgical content.

Looked at from an alternative perspective, it is reasonable to postulate that *The Playboy* had been permeating Synge's thoughts since 1895 when the Clonmel horror became an overnight tabloid sensation. In March of that year, Bridget Cleary, a successful twenty-six year-old dressmaker from a townland just outside Clonmel in South Tipperary was ritually immolated because she was feared to be a fairy changeling. The folklore of changelings advocates that the fairies would often steal women, small children and, on rare occasions, even men, and leave a fairy changeling in place of the human.<sup>23</sup> On 23 March 1895, newspapers of all political persuasions began to report Bridget's mysterious death; the graphic turn of events were clearly accounted for by Katie Burke (née Kennedy), Bridget's eleven-year-old second cousin and 'an eye-witness of nearly everything'.<sup>24</sup> Burke took the stand at the Clonmel Magistrates' Court on 27 March and the correspondent for the *Irish Times* that attended the trial published Burke's story the following morning. It transpires that on approximately 6 March Bridget fell chronically ill with bronchitis and when the

local doctor (Dr. Crean) and the parish priest (Father Ryan) could not attenuate her affliction, the community turned to the local herb doctor, Dennis Ganey, who diagnosed Bridget as a fairy changeling. Bridget was immediately subjected to what the *Times* classified as ‘savage orgies’,<sup>25</sup> which included pouring a cocktail of freshly passed urine and hen’s excrement over Bridget’s body. Abjection such as this continued until the morning of 14 March when, from outside the house, Katie heard members of her family and the local community holding Bridget down as they attempted to give her medicine, while Michael Cleary (Bridget’s husband and a cooper by trade) ‘asked his wife to answer her name, in the name of God. She answered her name in the name of God [...] She had only her nightdress on. She was put on her back on the fire. She screamed.’<sup>26</sup> The situation died down until the evening:

Bridget Cleary was dressed and she got up. Witness’s mother got tea ready. Then Bridget Cleary sat down by her husband’s side, and the latter wanted her to take three bits of bread before she would take any of the tea. She eat [sic] two bits. Her husband said that if she did not eat the third bit down she would go. He knocked her down when she would not eat it and he put his hand on her mouth, and she would not eat it. Then he got a red stump and told her he would put it down in her mouth if she would not eat it. She did not eat it. Then he caught her and laid her on the fire. Then she took fire. He got lamp oil and put it on her – (sensation) – and she blazed up.<sup>27</sup>

As Angela Bourke suggests, ‘the last resort is to threaten a changeling with fire. This is said to banish it for good, and so force the return of the abducted human’.<sup>28</sup> Michael Cleary made all those present – including Katie – watch Bridget thrash with unimaginable pain on the floor; such was the extremity of her writhing that she broke both of her legs. In the stillness of the night, Michael Cleary and Patrick Kennedy (Bridget’s first cousin) wrapped Bridget in an old sheet and walked ‘about a quarter of a mile uphill from the house’<sup>29</sup> whereupon ‘the corpse [was] stuffed into a hole in a dyke’.<sup>30</sup> The two men returned to the house at five o’clock in the morning. The Royal Irish Constabulary found the shallow grave on 22 March as newspapers reflected on how ‘the character of an enlightened Christian community [was] maligned’<sup>31</sup> by what the *Cork Examiner* could only conclude to be Ireland’s ‘prevailing moral darkness’.<sup>32</sup>

Although Synge never commented directly on the death of Bridget Cleary, he would surely have known about it. When the Clonmel horror made headline news Synge may have been in Paris since 1 January, but when he returned to Dublin on 28 June the Clonmel horror would only have been three months passed. People in all walks of life were still talking about it; the extent to which the Clonmel horror permeated discourses of popular culture can hardly be overstated. By way of example, to suggest how probing the Clonmel horror was on *fin-de-siècle* Ireland, it is worth briefly pointing out that it even managed to orbit the trial of Oscar Wilde in London, where Wilde was being convicted of sodomy; on 13 April *United Ireland* ran articles on the Clonmel horror and Wilde’s case side by side.<sup>33</sup> Writing in *The Nineteenth Century*, Wilde’s friend (and closet homosexual) E.F. Benson, published an article concerning the Clonmel horror that reads, according to Angela Bourke, like ‘a masked or coded commentary on Wilde’s fate’.<sup>34</sup> Following the trial, homosexuality began to be denoted (in print) by the appellation “fairy”, for while fairies were

allowed to exist within the imagination, if they were identified within everyday existence they were promptly removed. The Clonmel horror, then, irrevocably changed the way Victorian Great Britain and Ireland perceived the fairies. At every turn Synge would have read or heard about the Clonmel horror; his newspaper of choice, the *Irish Times*, reported on the case almost daily over a three-week period: 26 March-13 April 1895. Indeed, when the Clonmel horror hit the headlines, both Lynchehaun and Michael Cleary were awaiting a trial ten days apart from each other and both men were being represented by the same counsel. Both were to be incarcerated into Dublin's Mountjoy Prison before being transferred to Maryborough Prison where the two men may have worked alongside each other.<sup>35</sup> The *Dublin Evening Mail* reminded its readers that those who had watched Bridget Cleary die were akin to those who hid the Lynchehaun in Achill, County Mayo, and although there weren't 'many Lynchehauns or witch-burners in Ireland' it was also true that 'sympathizers with [these] crimes [were] very numerous in Ireland'.<sup>36</sup>

Bourke has pointed out that in Ireland 'unofficial traditions about a fairy supernatural [...] [persisted] well into the twentieth century',<sup>37</sup> and in the wake of the Clonmel horror, Ireland was brought back to the pre-Christian future as it was generally agreed that 'this appalling episode proves that fairies are not everywhere discredited, that here and there in this storied island, with its large mass of heathen lore, a few people settled in some remote, wild region [...] blindly cling to old traditions'.<sup>38</sup> If Synge's drama privileges pre-Christian cultural residue then the Clonmel horror provided the dramatist with the perfect dramaturgical material to foreground le Braz's third defining feature of primitive Irish life. The 'savage paganism'<sup>39</sup> of the Clonmel horror curiously resonates with le Braz's other defining features of primitive Irish life: savage sexuality and violence. Synge needed to caution

himself against his anger in excelsis, which had reached boiling point in the wake of *The Well of The Saints* because he knew that even twelve years after the Clonmel horror, the ‘savage paganism’<sup>40</sup> would still be familiar to his Catholic bourgeois audience. With le Braz’s postulates of primitive Irish life firmly in his mind, the dramatist turned his attention to ‘a queer lot’ of ‘Christian sinners’<sup>41</sup> in Mayo, where, according to Synge, the ‘fairies are more numerous [...] than in any other county’.<sup>42</sup>

Synge maintained that it did ‘not matter a rap’ what critics thought he based *The Playboy* upon, insisting: ‘I wrote the play because it pleased me, and it just happens that I know Irish life best, so I made my methods Irish.’<sup>43</sup> As *The Playboy* was in rehearsal, Synge ‘sat silent, holding his stick between his knees, his chin resting on his hands’ and when Oliver St. John Gogarty questioned whether the play was just ‘a satire to show up, for one thing, how lifeless and inert was the country’,<sup>44</sup> the dramatist suddenly snapped: ‘he gave [Gogarty] a short glance and looked straight in front of himself, weighing [Gogarty] up and thinking how hard it would be to get the public to appreciate his play as a work of art, when one who should know better was reading analogies and satire into it already. He shook [Gogarty’s] question off with a shake of his head.’<sup>45</sup> However, if *The Playboy*’s dramaturgy did not hold its origin in real-world events, then not only would this have been the first of Synge’s plays to not draw upon such a provenance, it would also contradict his own private discourse with Stephen MacKenna, in which he acknowledged his debt to the cases of Ó’Máille and Lynchehaun in order to ‘controvert critics who said it was *impossible*’.<sup>46</sup> Synge began work in earnest on *The Playboy* in 1904 and in that year the changeling motif made a guest appearance in *Riders to the Sea* (1904), when Maurya divines ‘the fearfulest thing’ as her son, Bartley, is taken away by ‘the grey pony, and there was Michael upon it – with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet’.<sup>47</sup> As Chapter

Four suggested, changeling belief is written into the dramaturgy of *Riders to the Sea* but it is subdued in comparison to *The Playboy* because in *Riders to the Sea* the dramatist did not concern himself with the pre-Christian magical rituals that were concomitant with the residual belief in changelings. Detectable underneath the layers of carnivalesque debauchery is Synge's capitalisation on an acute cultural anxiety in fairy changelings, which was named but unknowable to Irish Catholicism. *The Playboy*, then, was going to deal with the savage sexuality, violence and paganism that were concomitant with the Clonmel horror so that Synge could seek revenge on those bourgeois members of Catholic Ireland that had protested at his previous works.

Changeling belief is necessarily dependent on Irish folklore, a cultural discourse that Yeats held in a higher regard than any religious doxology: 'Folk-lore is at once the Bible, the Thirty-nine Articles, and the Book of Common Prayer'.<sup>48</sup> Like Yeats, Synge also had a keen interest in folklore, maintaining that it required a 'frank imagination'.<sup>49</sup> In 1898 Yeats wrote a letter to William Sharp (who wrote under the pseudonym of Fiona Macleod) from Paris saying that he had met 'a new man – TCD graduate' and that he had 'started [him] in folklore'.<sup>50</sup> If Yeats really did introduce Synge to the study of folklore then his analysis was diametrically opposed to Synge's. What separated the two analyses was the efficacy of comparative social science; in February 1889 Yeats would write a letter to Gregory from Paris: 'I have seen Synge. He is a really and most excellent servant. He works very hard & is learning Breton. He will be a very useful scholour [sic]'.<sup>51</sup> Synge had been studying comparative social science as early as 1894. In March of that year, his German friend, Valeska von Eicken, wrote to Synge in Würzburg: 'Probably a little disturbance in your lonely life of art and science at which you are now so busy will do you good. Therefore I shall disturb your peace today and write you this ordinary letter[,] which is neither a

scientific nor an artistic essay.’<sup>52</sup> His postgraduate studies in Paris refined his scholarship of comparative social science and in February 1889 Synge, the scholar of comparative social science, was busy juxtaposing Aran folklore with various discourses that he had been asked to research by his professors. Yeats may have been a keen collector of folklore but his analysis of it was not scientific. ‘Lady Gregory told me that the article in the *Nineteenth Century* on Folklore, which was published under Yeats’ name, was written by her’ John Quinn admitted, ‘Yeats was dreadfully hard-up, practically penniless, and so she let him take her collected folk-lore things and put them into shape. He sold it to the *Nineteenth Century* for fifteen pounds’.<sup>53</sup> Éilís ní Dhuibhne-Almqvist suggests that Synge’s understanding of folklore was ‘much better than that of his great contemporaries in the Anglo-Irish revival, something that Yeats himself, far too subjective to be anything than a thorn in the side of folklorists, probably knew as well as anybody’.<sup>54</sup> Comparative social science advocated that human beliefs were a palimpsest that relegated magical and religious belief under the critique of science and even Yeats’s father wanted his son to see the efficacy of comparative social science: ‘My dear Willie – Again I am writing [...] Religion once was – the Queen of Sciences’.<sup>55</sup> It would be incorrect to say that Yeats was not interested in comparative social science – he certainly was – but he would misapply the critique; as Garrigan Mattar points out, ‘it could never be argued that Yeats was a student of comparativism in the way Synge was’.<sup>56</sup>

Le Braz had taught Synge that Irish folklore was symptomatic of ‘*des situations fortes* (strong situations)’ because such situations were redolent of ‘*une action pleine de mouvement et de vie* (the full of the material of life)’.<sup>57</sup> Synge was aware that changeling folklore, as characterised in changeling belief, was ripe with dramaturgical potential, which is why Synge valorises ‘the dramatic emphasis of the

folk-tale'.<sup>58</sup> In an unpublished essay entitled "On Literary and Popular Poetry" the dramatist advocated that 'the intellect [of] cultivated people in Ireland are beginning to take in the legends' and that the 'folk songs of this country is [...] not the task of any isolated professor'.<sup>59</sup> Synge encouraged the introduction of a popular analysis of folklore within Irish popular culture because it would afford the opportunity for the nation 'to realize that the song and story of primitive men were full of human and artistic suggestion'.<sup>60</sup> In the essay, Synge goes on to suggest that literature predicated upon folk culture will have an inherent 'brusqueness of attack' because other arts are simply 'losing themselves in mere technical experiments while the peasant music and poetry were full of exquisitely delicate emotions'.<sup>61</sup> This brusqueness of attack is rephrased in Synge's preface to his poetry where he argues that 'before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal'.<sup>62</sup> In *The Playboy* Synge's verse is certainly brutal, and the dramatist maintained that he 'used one or two words only, that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland'.<sup>63</sup> But while Synge may have promoted a popular analysis of folklore and folk culture, his own analysis was methodical and his investigation into the brutality of folk vocabulary and custom was scientific.

Ever since the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), comparative anthropologists had been quick to trace a Darwinian genealogy from savage belief to peasant custom and at the turn of the century, folklore, that essential rubric of the Revival, was under close Darwinian scrutiny. When it came to folklore there were, Yeats said, 'two boats going to sea'; there was 'the little boat of science' which would ultimately be 'shipwrecked', or alternatively there was the 'great galleon of tradition, and on board [there are] the great poets and dreamers of the past'.<sup>64</sup> To Yeats's chagrin, it appeared that Synge

had boarded the wrong boat and in January 1907 *The Playboy* broadsided the golden galleon with a certain brusqueness of attack by dramatising a scientific account of changeling belief. It can only be reductive to suggest that the Clonmel horror introduced Synge to changeling belief because he must have been aware beforehand of its currency in Irish cultural discourse. Nevertheless, of all the books that Synge recorded in his diary as having read up until the time of the Clonmel horror, none of them discuss changeling belief; the closest Synge would have come to encountering changeling belief in terms of critical and cultural scholarship is in books such as George Petrie's *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland*<sup>65</sup> and William Wakeman's *Handbook of Irish Antiquities*<sup>66</sup> but these books are solely concerned with the antiquarian study of megalithic monuments and early Christian architecture, not with residual pre-Christian sensibilities. It wasn't until September 1898 that Synge would have read scholarship on changeling belief in James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*<sup>67</sup> and Alfred Nutt's "An Essay upon the Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld and the Celtic Doctrine of Re-birth," which accompanied *The Voyage of Bran*.<sup>68</sup> Synge's decision to read Frazer and Nutt must have been informed by his first visit to Aran, during which he encountered people that actually applied changeling belief to rationalise their immediate reality. Comparative social scientists concurred that changeling belief was a narrative structure and on Aran Synge would have understood that the insensible was made comprehensible by the efficacy of a narrative:

My intercourse with these people has made me realise that miracles must abound wherever the new conception of law is not understood. On these islands alone miracles enough happen every year to equip a divine emissary. Rye is turned to oats, storms are raised to keep

evictors from the shore, cows that are isolated on lonely rocks bring forth calves, and other things of the same kind are common.<sup>69</sup>

Within Synge's dramatic treatment of changeling belief we can detect his notes on comparative anthropology, comparative sociology and Celtology. What was particularly alarming to comparative anthropologists and Celtologists alike, was their unanimous conclusion that changeling belief was far from passive but an ideological persuasion that reflected material conditions. As Nutt pointed out, in relation to the Clonmel horror, 'whilst the husband wanted to get quit of his wife, her father and cousins believed, more or less strongly, that it was a fairy substitute they were torturing'.<sup>70</sup> Changeling belief as a narrative structure had an immediate impact that deeply resonated with Synge; years later, when engaged to Molly Allgood, his term of endearment for the young actor was "changeling". Molly had a tendency to flirt with the Abbey actor Dossy (Udolphus) Wright, and Synge, always prone to fits of envy, was unsurprisingly jealous. At times he seems to be able to trust Molly's relationship with Dossy: 'I am *glad* Dossy is there to look after you. Nish! Never say I am jealous again.'<sup>71</sup> But at other times he is utterly ashamed of Molly's behaviour:

Glendalough House

Glenageary

Kingstown

Friday night

My dear little changeling,

I am writing this to you in my bed at one o'clock as I am not able to sleep [...] It seems to be a different occasion of walking with Dossy Wright that I heard of – some time when he had B.O.D. [Brigit O'Dempsey, another Abbey actress] on one arm and you on the other – so I was more hurt than ever. [...] [Y]ou have been doing all the little things you know I cannot bear as soon as ever you get away out of my sight. Don't you want me to have full trust in you, changeling? Don't you know that a suspicious love is more degrading than ennobling? [A]nd yet everytime that I am beginning to trust you fully – I always trust you in one sense – you do some foolish thing that upsets everything again.

[...]

The cocks are crowing themselves hoarse under my window so I'd best ring down the curtain and have a sleep[.]

Believe me

my worthy changeling

Yours fervently

J.M.S.<sup>72</sup>

Synge uses “changeling” as his chosen term of endearment because Molly encapsulated everything that the changeling stood for within the Irish popular consciousness of Synge's time: a mysterious and capricious figure that was not

everything that it seemed. Just like a fairy changeling, Molly had the potential to encompass what Synge sought in a partner in one instant and then, without warning, her demeanour would change and she would become another person, if only fleetingly. The term, “changeling”, then, was mobilised in *fin-de-siècle* Great Britain and Ireland in order to characterise those with a mercurial disposition and Irish folk culture accounted for this irrational change in temperament by blaming the fairies.

The alteration of reality that changeling belief precipitates says as much about those who apply its precepts as about those who are accused of being changelings. Those who are forced to apply the precepts of changeling belief are just as mentally unsure and insecure as those who are considered to be changelings. For changeling belief isn't really indexical of the fairies at all, but rather, it is indexical of the fragility of the human psyche. Years before Synge met Molly he identified a changeling in his nephew and later co-benefactor of his literary estate, Edward Hutchinson Synge. Edward had a vexed and troubled psyche that eventually led to his temporary confinement in Bloomfield Mental Hospital, County Dublin, in 1936, before he went on to achieve an illustrious career as a physicist in Trinity College Dublin. He would later recall that when was ill in the spring of 1897 (two years after the Clonmel horror), Synge ‘held very odd and altogether ridiculous views upon me, believing me to be a changeling whom the happenings of his own life had somehow or other brought into existence [...] a sort of double being’.<sup>73</sup> On one level Synge considered changeling belief to be a narrative structure that he could apply in order to find sense within the nonsense and therefore gain a degree of psychological appeasement. But on a different level, Synge considered the changeling to be alternative to the self, and as Bourke points out changelings were often described as ‘alternative selves’<sup>74</sup> by those that identified them.

Changeling belief was particularly embarrassing to the enlightened rationality of Catholic bourgeois rectitude because it was indexical of a consciousness that was irregular and insecure. When this mental imbalance was coupled with those creatures that characterised the pre-modern – the fairies – then changeling belief was promptly explained as being symptomatic of a consciousness that was still in the throes of evolution. But to Synge this mattered not, and within his subtle dramatisation of changeling belief it is possible to detect the socialist sentiment of a dramatist that was particularly recalcitrant to Catholic cultural imperialism. Ostensibly, not one member of the Catholic middle classes expected to be confronted by changeling belief and its vicissitudes on the national stage. When presented with changeling belief, the Catholic audience turned Yeats's self-styled drama of the drawing room into a savage state of affairs. In her letter to the editor of the *Irish Times*, Ellen Duncan, curator of Dublin's Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, argued that the people of Ireland 'do not ask what Mr. Yeats calls "the drama of the drawingroom [sic]" to give us types; we ask it to give us real men and women. It is the same with the drama of the village.'<sup>75</sup> In a similar line of thought the *Dublin Evening Herald* theatre critic drew an apposite comparison between Synge and Yeats: 'Mr. Synge differs from Mr. Yeats in being a dramatist, pure and simple. The latter seems never to be able to forget that he is a poet'.<sup>76</sup> Not only did Synge's account of changeling belief give the people of Ireland real men and women, it also gave credence to radical beliefs, radical actions and radical results.

While Deborah Fleming has suggested that Synge 'rejected the importance of Irish fairy lore so carefully studied by Yeats',<sup>77</sup> conclusions such as these are far too simplistic. The analysis presented in this chapter attempts to reconcile this reductive logic by concentrically engaging with *The Playboy's* dramaturgical content in order to

highlight the striking parallels between *The Playboy*, the Clonmel horror and changeling belief. Orbiting these three cultures of performance is Yeats and while the discourse will look beyond Yeats, we will rarely lose sight of him. In private, Synge pointed out to Yeats that the efficacy of his dramaturgy ‘comes from the shock of new material’<sup>78</sup> and Synge’s dramatisation of changeling belief was radically shocking, especially to Yeats. Yeats fetishised the fairy changeling and just a year before the Clonmel horror he had staged *The Land of Heart’s Desire* (1894), in which he pitted a resolute Catholic priest against a fairy changeling. Synge’s dramatisation of changeling belief, however, was far from romantic and therefore it was diametrically opposed to Yeats’s valorisation of changeling belief. What Yeats found particularly shocking was Synge’s juxtaposition of changeling belief with evolutionary theory and while Synge did not make the juxtaposition explicit in the play, Yeats must have hoped that nobody would detect Synge’s subtle manifestation of changeling belief or even worse, Synge’s appropriation of the events that took place during the Clonmel horror. Thus, *The Playboy’s* dramaturgical provenance in changeling belief will be substantiated by Irish folklore, anthropological and evolutionary arguments on changeling belief that Synge read, newspaper accounts of the Clonmel horror and current scholarship in order to distil the social ramifications that Synge’s changeling of the western world had on an Irish culture that wrestled with the discontents of Catholic modernity.

#### **AWAY WITH THE FAIRIES**

The symbolic capital of the fairies in Synge’s Ireland was inordinate. However, they existed in three very different landscapes of desire. In one respect, the fairies were the

fantasies of the middle and upper classes; whether it was through pictorial representation on the nursery wall or through theosophical investigations in the drawing room, these class formations allowed the fairies to stalk their unconscious so that they could escape the anxiety of modernity. In a similar vein, the Catholic peasantry had a tenacious attachment to the fairy faith because of its ability to explain the unexplainable and the fairies are the *sine qua non* of pre-Christian residual culture. However, to the majority of Catholic bourgeois Ireland, the fairies were childish and backward, only fit for children's bedtime stories or peculiar esoteric Protestants with too much time on their hands. The fairies were stigmatised in national-popular newspapers and journals as 'a sort of fever rash more symbolic of disease than health', with suggestions that it was extremely '[s]trange that when the peasant has ceased to believe in Fairies public writers should pretend to believe in them.'<sup>79</sup> The middle classes denounced the fairies as 'a symptom of decay'<sup>80</sup> on account of the bourgeois allegiance to the Catholic Church. In the decades after the Famine those members of the Irish populace that still continued to believe in the fairies were considered to go against epistemological and ontological presuppositions established during the Enlightenment.<sup>81</sup> Antonio Gramsci points out that while most intellectuals are predisposed to consider folklore as outdated and old-fashioned, folklore is, in fact, an important 'conception of the world and life'<sup>82</sup> that allows the subaltern classes to standardise their immediate reality. For Gramsci folklore is not a pre-modern rationalising tenet but rather, 'the residue of traditional conceptions of the world'.<sup>83</sup> Writing about the efficacy of a popular culture movement, Gramsci advocates that if the subaltern is to be enfranchised then the movement has to be firmly grounded within the 'humans of popular culture as it is, with its tastes and tendencies and with its moral and intellectual world, even if it is backward and

conventional'.<sup>84</sup> The Revival certainly grounded itself in Irish folklore because of its national-popular sovereignty. However, for hegemony to be consummated Gramsci maintained that the dominant class (in this case the Catholic bourgeoisie) must take the subaltern worldview as its own and, in the Ireland of Synge's time, this was far from achievable. Synge questioned how Catholic bourgeois Ireland could have so easily lost its conscious belief in fairies; fifty years ago, before the Famine, this class formation had believed in the fairies. The fairies may have dispersed and died with the implementation of Roman orthodoxy, but they still continued to linger within Irish folk culture and as Chapter Two suggested, the Catholic clergy often encouraged belief in the fairies because of their attachment to Popular Catholicism.<sup>85</sup>

Synge frequently encountered stories of how the fairies shared the material conditions of folk culture: the fairies traded horses, milked cows, laughed, danced, drank and smoked their way through everyday life. Irish folk culture divided the fairies into four distinct categories: Trooping fairies, Solitary fairies, Tutelary fairies and Nature fairies.<sup>86</sup> The Trooping fairies were subdivided into the Heroic and Homely fairies. The Heroic Trooping fairies are the aristocrats of the fairy kingdom. Ruled by a king and queen they exist within a cultural framework of medieval nobility; as K.M. Briggs points out, 'they hunt, they ride in procession [...] [and] [t]he best example of them in Britain is the Dana O'Shee of Ireland'.<sup>87</sup> The Homely Trooping fairies are the working classes of the fairy kingdom and, in the main, they are agricultural labourers that avoid human contact, choosing only to appear to humans to thank them for their generosity. The Solitary fairies are similar in kind to the Homely Trooping fairies in that they are self-supporting creatures that are predisposed to haunt a particular area. However, unlike the Homely Trooping fairies the Solitary fairies are malevolent tricksters that test the kindness of humans and

punish them for their selfish ways. The Tutelary fairies are creatures that attach themselves to human families to offer bittersweet favours. In an Irish context an example of a Tutelary fairy is the supernatural death messenger (that appears in *Riders to the Sea*: see Chapter Four) – the *bean sí* – that warns families of an impending death.<sup>88</sup> The nature fairies are those creatures that are concomitant with pre-Christian pantheism and, as Chapter Three suggested, these fairies relish in their malevolence towards humans.

Due to their mercurial nature fairy changelings lay halfway between the Homely Trooping and Solitary fairies.<sup>89</sup> Changelings varied in size and were known for their fiendishness (characteristics of the Solitary fairies) but they rarely impinged on human existence and were only encountered when they required human agency (characteristics of the Homely Trooping fairies). Irish folk culture interacted with fairy changelings through *seanchaís* (story tellers) that told *síscéalta* (fairy stories) and while presumably not all listeners to the stories actually believed the narrative, over time, credibility was attached to the fairy changeling, which afforded folklore and superstition cultural capital. While to disbelievers the changeling was indexical of the extraordinary, in folk belief changelings could be made to exist if something extra to the ordinary warranted their existence. As Angela Bourke explains: ‘Viewed as a system of interlocking units of narrative, practice and belief, fairy-legend can be compared to a database: a pre-modern culture’s way of storing and retrieving information and knowledge of every kind’.<sup>90</sup> Folk culture in *fin-de-siècle* Ireland, then, was more inclined to go away with the fairies, than actually send the fairies away as the detritus of residual culture.

In the Ireland of Synge’s time fairy changelings were an acute cultural concern to the extent that the British House of Commons deliberated over the

countless Irish accounts of, ‘deaths produced by cruel endeavours to cure children and young persons of such maladies generally attempted by quacks and those termed “fairy men” and “fairy women”’.<sup>91</sup> Deaths as a result of the identification of fairy changelings were frequent in Ireland although they were rarely reported publicly, but when they were, the report was particularly alarming. In 1826 in Tralee, County Kerry, Anne Roche acting under the ‘delusion of the grossest of superstitions’ believed that four-year old Michael Leahy was a fairy changeling and with an accomplice, Mary Clifford, she exorcised the changeling by drowning it in the River Flesk. When asked: ‘How can you ever hope to see God after this?’, Roche and Clifford pointed out that they were merely putting ‘the fairy out of [the child]’.<sup>92</sup> Whereas the British Empire regarded folklore with a modernist gaze, the habitations of Catholic modernity viewed folklore through a Romantic lens. With the establishment of the discourse of comparative social science the Empire felt that it was better equipped to understand the actions of those members of the Irish populace, such as Roche and Clifford, that gave cultural credence to the fairy changeling; comparative social science snipped the Romantic umbilical cord that linked folklore and folk culture to bourgeois modernity. Catholic Ireland was not averse to a science of folklore as long as it benefitted state-orientated nationalism. The problem was that the science that was being applied to fairy folklore was far from beneficial; according to comparative social science, those that believed in the fairies were mentally ill or, even worse, backward and unable to evolve.

Synge, the Modernist, did not view folklore Romantically. Folklore and comparative social science lay cheek by jowl in Synge’s mind and the application of science separated him from his Revivalist colleagues, which is why, in his notebook, the dramatist concluded:

Blake taught that true imagination was a view of the eternal symbols of Being, but who may know in his own mind or that of others these symbols from *mere hallucinations*. I am driven back on science of all the names most abused. If science is a learning of the truth [of] natural being, and imagination the two when perfect will coincide. The law of evolution is one understood by a force of imagination ~~and~~ a few more such effort and man will be as god. This then is the task of all.<sup>93</sup>

Yeats maintained that if he had ‘not made magic [his] constant study [he] could not have written [his] Blake book nor would “The Countess Kathleen” have ever come to exist. The mystical life is the centre of all that I do & all that I think & all that I write’.<sup>94</sup> For Yeats, as it was for William Blake, magic, mystery and metaphysics summoned the very kernel of artistic integrity from the dark corridors of the subconscious. But in Synge’s terse notebook entry, it is possible to understand the extent to which Synge’s conception of the concomitance of art and science differed from Yeats’s. John Wilson Foster has suggested that in the Revival ‘three kinds of writers engaged themselves with the folktale: the popularizer, the scholar, and the artist’.<sup>95</sup> Synge certainly wasn’t a populariser, but he was a scholar and an artist and his aesthetic was underpinned by science; as Declan Kiberd points out, *The Playboy* ‘is a tribute to Synge’s ability to assimilate so many folk themes and techniques without ever becoming patronising or “folksy”’.<sup>96</sup>

Synge was introduced to the applicable uses of the changeling belief on Aran in May 1898, when Old Mourteen (Máirtín Ó Conghalile) recounted how the fairies attempted to snatch his child:

[...] for three nights the house was filled with noises. “I never wear a shirt at night,” he said, “but I got up out of bed, all naked as I was, when I heard the noises in the house, and lighted a light, but there was nothing in it.” Then a dummy came and made signs of hammering nails in a coffin. The next day the seed potatoes were full of blood, and the child told his mother that he was going to America. That night it died, and “Believe me,” said the old man, “the fairies were in it”.<sup>97</sup>

In this scenario Old Mourteen understands that his child is a changeling because the precepts of the belief maintain that when the fairies snatch a child, they leave an identical child with abnormal habits in its place. Quite quickly the changeling child becomes wizened before a sudden death, which is an index for the irreversible substitution of the human child. Before the changeling dies it must be banished and this belief held cultural currency on Aran as late as 1960.<sup>98</sup> But were the fairies really to blame for the child’s death? Or was it that the child’s death was made sensible by the rationale of the fairy faith? Throughout *The Aran Islands* Synge is careful to document how the islanders used the fairies in order to explain the unexplainable, be that bloody potatoes, horses that galloped across the island at night, or indeed, the sudden death of children; on Aran the fairies were consummate scapegoats. Later, upon reading a draft of Synge’s *The Aran Islands*, Lady Gregory would complain to Synge that *The Aran Islands* ‘would be greatly improved by the addition of some more fairy belief’.<sup>99</sup> Gregory had penned this note to Synge in October 1901 after she had read (aloud) the first three parts of *The Aran Islands* to Yeats in Coole Park; Synge had left the manuscript as he departed for *Inis Méain* on 20 September. Gregory’s advice was duly noted, which is contrary to Greene and Stephens’s

supposition that ‘Synge did not take the advice’.<sup>100</sup> Synge did indeed take the advice; section four of *The Aran Islands* is replete with ‘talk of the music of the fairies’<sup>101</sup> that includes, but is not limited to, talking rabbits and, quite significantly, fairy changelings:

I asked if he ever heard the fairy music on the island. [...] “...One time three men were out at night in a curragh, and they saw a big ship coming down on them. They were frightened at it, and they tried to get away, but it came on nearer them, till one of the men turned round and made the sign of the cross, and they didn’t see it any more.” Then he went on in answer to another question: “We do often see the people who do be away with them. There was a young man died a year ago, and he used to come to the window of the house where his brothers slept, and be talking to them in the night.”<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, Synge was recalcitrant towards what he classified as an ‘unmodern [...] Cuchulainoid National Theatre’<sup>103</sup> and instead of fetishising the fairy faith, he would use his ethnographic field notes in order to create a Modernist dramaturgy that was predicated upon comparative social science.

#### **‘NEITHER A SAFE NOR PROPER BOOK’<sup>104</sup>**

*The Golden Bough* appraised fairy changelings as a narrative facet that was indexical of belief in primitive religion, which was characterised by a credal interchange between magical and religious belief. In June 1898, Synge returned to Dublin from

the Aran Islands and started to juxtapose the changeling folklore he had collected on Aran with *The Golden Bough* at the request of Yeats, who had just finished reading Frazer's work while he was drafting *The Wind Among The Reeds*.<sup>105</sup> It is true that Yeats had been told of changeling belief when he visited Aran to collect folklore for *The Speckled Bird*, in the summer of 1896, and in that unfinished work, the character called Roche wishes 'to write a book to reconcile Catholicism and modern science',<sup>106</sup> but what differentiates Synge's understanding of such a proposed reconciliation is that for Synge the reconciliation was unachievable. Ostensibly, for Synge, Catholicism was incompatible with comparative social science and unlike Yeats he would use comparative social science's critique of changeling belief in order to renegotiate the hegemony of Catholic progressive history; as Anthony Roche points out, 'Synge [did] not record fairy lore for its own sake'.<sup>107</sup> Synge's notes on Frazer's schema of primitive religiosity suggest that primitive religion could be found in communities where rituals are 'magical rather than propitiatory,' because there is 'no Priest proper'<sup>108</sup> to guide communal life. Frazer taught Synge that religion was only found in 'those higher intelligences who have breadth of view enough to comprehend the vastness of the universe and littleness of man. Small minds cannot grasp great ideas [...] Such minds hardly rise into religion at all.'<sup>109</sup> Sensibilities that could not rise to religion could be found lingering between magic and religion and Synge sedulously replicated Frazer's scientific schema of pseudo-priests and magical rites in *The Playboy*.

Throughout *The Playboy* the absence of Father Reilly is his presence (Brian Brady, who directed *The Playboy* at the Abbey in 1995 had a mute Father Reilly on stage to highlight his impotence) and it quickly transpires that he is not a priest proper because he neglects his pastoral responsibilities. Frazer argued that communities that

supplicated to primitive religion would characterise the credal interchange between magic and religious belief in a figure that would be betwixt and between a Christian priest and what Frazer classified as a 'primitive philosopher'.<sup>110</sup> Like the Saint in *The Well of the Saints*, this figure would be unable to take on the pastoral responsibility of a priest. Likewise he would not be solely dependent on 'that sovereignty over nature which he had reluctantly abdicated'.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, in communities that privileged primitive religiosity there would be a priest, but it would not be a proper priest in the Christian sense. The Mayo community is in desperate need of pastoral care; Sara Tansey freely admits that 'you'd be ashamed this place, going up winter and summer with nothing worth while to confess at all',<sup>112</sup> but in admitting this she cheerfully ignores the 'savage violence'<sup>113</sup> that has recently occurred in the Mayo community, such as 'the way Jimmy Farrell hanged his dog from the licence and had it screeching and wriggling three hours at the butt of a string, and himself swearing it was a dead dog, and the peelers swearing it had life';<sup>114</sup> or the time when the Widow Quin attacked her husband 'with a worn pick, and the rusted poison did corrode his blood the way he never overed it and died after.'<sup>115</sup>

Father Reilly turns a blind eye to the valorisation of a communal totem, 'a foxy divil with a pitchpike on the flags of hell',<sup>116</sup> in his parish. The valorisation of a totem figure was, for Frazer, another signature element of primitive religiosity and he argued that religion is predicated on totemism found in primitive tribes where 'the rites consist of an imitation of the effect which the people desire to produce; in other words, their magic is homeopathic or imitative.'<sup>117</sup> It is this steadfast clinging to the elementary principles of primitive religiosity within the community, that legitimises the contention that Father Reilly is not a priest proper. The curate's physical absence suggests that the community is so far removed from the Good Shepherd that the 'Holy

Father' shouldn't even 'bother with this place' because the community consists of 'a queer lot these times to go troubling the Holy Father on his sacred seat.'<sup>118</sup> Shawn Keogh, Synge's personification of the Catholic bourgeoisie and a man that was described by one rioter as a 'priest-ridden fellow',<sup>119</sup> disseminates Father Reilly's Catholic doctrine in the community but his idle threats to the 'old Pagan',<sup>120</sup> Michael James Flaherty, of 'the curse of the priests' and 'the scarlet-coated bishops of the courts of Rome'<sup>121</sup> hold little jurisdiction because the members of the community are more interested in poisoning Connaught clergymen than returning to the fold. In Mountain Stage, County Kerry, Synge recorded a phrase he overheard about a 'woman [that] suckles lamb in which doctor detects the elements of a Christian in Cahirciveen'<sup>122</sup> and this is transposed into *The Playboy* as the Widow Quin nonchalantly accepts Pegeen's accusation that she used to indulge in gastronomic black magic in order to poison the Connaught clergy:

PEGEEN. [*with noisy scorn*]. It's true the Lord God formed you to contrive indeed! Doesn't the world know you reared a black ram at your breast, so that the Lord Bishop of Connaught felt the elements of a Christian, and he eating it after in a kidney stew.<sup>123</sup>

It is important to remember that the Mayo community is Catholic; the members of the community simply have trouble adhering to Roman orthodoxy and it is because there are no priests proper that the obligations of Catholicism are unobserved. Without this obligation the populace punctuate their lives with the fairy faith, the vestigial *sine qua non* of Irish pre-Christian sensibility.

Angela Bourke maintains that the fairies are commonly encountered 'in deserted or dangerous places: at the top of cliffs [and] on lonely roads' or at occasions

of social transition such as ‘between formal betrothal and marriage.’<sup>124</sup> Synge set *The Playboy* on a ‘scruff of a hill’ in a shebeen that was well off the beaten track and from the exposition, we learn that Pegeen Mike has been left alone on ‘a long night and with great darkness’<sup>125</sup> to plan her marriage to Shawn Keogh. According to Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, communities were particularly fearful of the fairies in ‘the evening [...] [because] the otherworld closed in and its dangers waited outside the front door.’<sup>126</sup> Indeed, Christy, the outsider, *is* waiting outside the front door and he joins the action in foul humour – an idiosyncrasy of the changeling.<sup>127</sup> Christy admits that he killed his father on a Tuesday and claims that since then he has been ‘walking wild for eleven days’,<sup>128</sup> which means that his ontology is possibly that of a changeling. Changeling folklore maintains that human beings are irrevocably changed into fairy changelings in ten days<sup>129</sup> and in the Clonmel horror those that witnessed the immolation said that the ritual happened after nine days of suspicion ‘[a]t about half past eleven [because] the question should be answered before 12 [midnight].’<sup>130</sup> And so if Christy has been walking for eleven days then, assuming he deserted the scene of the crime immediately, he arrives in the Mayo community on Friday night. Friday was the day that the fairies had the most power over humans,<sup>131</sup> which explains why the Mayo folk, with no priest to guide credal obligation, nonchalantly accept the outsider into their community. The acceptance of an outsider into a community may seem harmless but the fairy faith advocated strict codes of behaviour between outsiders and insiders, as Diarmuid Ó Giolláin suggests:

Anything which upset the natural order of the community tended to be linked to the disorderly world outside. The diagnosis of misfortune indentified the culprits as fairies [...] Various categories of outsiders

could be easily confused [as fairies] since the only important distinction was between insiders and outsiders.<sup>132</sup>

Once Christy has entered into the community all that is needed to postulate that he is a fairy changeling is enough circumstantial evidence to surpass reasonable doubt.

In 1902 W.G. Wood-Martin published his treatise on residual pre-Christian sensibilities in Ireland and concluded that the characteristic trait of a fairy changeling was that they could be ‘easily recognised by their tricky habits, and by constantly complaining and crying for food’.<sup>133</sup> This suggests why, when Christy enters the shebeen, ‘*[h]e goes over to the fire, sighing and moaning. Then he sits down putting his glass beside him and begins gnawing a turnip, too miserable to feel the others staring at him with curiosity.*’<sup>134</sup> Bourke points out that in Irish folk culture any ‘ill-treatment meted out to a changeling may be visited in revenge on the abducted human, so a suspected changeling is supposed to be treated with cautious respect’,<sup>135</sup> which is why Christy’s behaviour elicits the following response from Michael James Flaherty: ‘*[patronizingly]. Let you come up then to the fire. You’re looking famished with the cold.*’<sup>136</sup> Bourke also points out that changelings’ ‘behaviour is often intolerable’<sup>137</sup> and, indeed, Pegeen finds Christy’s behaviour insufferable:

PEGEEN. [*with a sign to the men to be quiet*]: You’re only saying it. You did nothing at all. A soft lad the like of you wouldn’t slit the wind-pipe of a screeching sow.

CHRISTY. [*offended*]: You’re not speaking the truth.

PEGEEN. [*in mock rage*]: Not speaking the truth, is it? Would you have me knock the head of you with the butt of the broom?

CHRISTY. [*twisting round on her with a sharp cry of horror*]: Don't strike me...I killed my poor father, Tuesday was a week, for doing the like of that.<sup>138</sup>

Changelings were said to be capable of awful deeds without remorse and were known to tell outlandish and heinous lies.<sup>139</sup> This would account for Christy's patricide with 'the help of God'<sup>140</sup> where he 'just riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skull, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack, and never let a grunt or groan from him at all'.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, those that are present in the shebeen cannot quite believe that Christy shows no remorse:

PHILLY. [*retreating with JIMMY*]: There's a daring fellow.

JIMMY. Oh, glory be to God!

MICHAEL. [*with great respect*]: That was a hanging crime, mister honey. You should have had a good reason for doing the like of that.<sup>142</sup>

With respect to changeling belief, the Catholic Church promoted the belief that 'the power of the priest was superior to that of the fairies and that the sign of the cross or touch of the priest's stole would put the fairies to flight'.<sup>143</sup> But Father Reilly, not a priest proper, never appears to exorcise the changeling of the western world.

However, he is certainly present because he sends his words of advice to Pegeen via the Widow Quin:

PEGEEN. [*pointing to* CHRISTY]. Look now, is he roaring, and he stretched out drowsy with his supper, and his mug of milk. Walk down and tell that to Father Reilly and to Shaneen Keogh.

WIDOW QUIN. [*coming forward*]. I'll not see them again, for I've their word to lead that lad forward for to lodge with me.

PEGEEN. [*in blank amazement*]. This night, is it?

WIDOW QUIN. [*going over*]. This night. 'It isn't fitting,' says the priesteen, 'to have his likeness lodging with an orphaned girl.' [*To* CHRISTY.] God save you, mister!<sup>144</sup>

Furthermore, in Act Two, Shawn Keogh entices Christy to leave the community with 'the blessing of Father Reilly itself'.<sup>145</sup> Changelings were also said to be 'witty and mentally precocious'<sup>146</sup> and this would also explain Christy's hyperbole and talismanic performance at the races where Christy is crowned as 'the champion of the world I tell you, and there isn't a hap'orth isn't falling lucky to his hands to-day.'<sup>147</sup> Séamas Mac Philib maintains that '[t]he most common way in which [a changeling] betrays his real identity is through some unusual behaviour when he has been left alone and thinks himself unobserved'<sup>148</sup> and indeed, when Christy is left alone in the shebeen he adopts some peculiar behaviour that the Mayo girls have 'never seen to this day'.<sup>149</sup> Behaviour such as taking '*the looking-glass from the wall and [putting] it on the back of a chair; then [sitting] down in front of it*' and congratulating how he will 'be growing fine from this day, the way [he'll] have a soft lovely skin on [him]

and won't be the like of the clumsy young fellows do be ploughing all times in the earth and dung.'<sup>150</sup> Matters are made worse by the appearance of Christy's father, Old Mahon. As far as the community is aware, Old Mahon died eleven days ago when Christy 'turned around with [his] back to the north, and [he] hit a blow on the ridge of his skull, laid him stretched out, and he split to the knob of his gullet'.<sup>151</sup> Mahon's return from the dead was an act that only the fairies could accomplish. In Irish folk culture, the fairies were known to return from the Otherworld in order to take humans away with them, just as Michael returned to take Bartley away in *Riders to the Sea*. Thus, even if Christy hasn't been identified at this point, the appearance of his father adds further weight to the hypothesis that Christy is a fairy and as the community begins to lose its grip on reality, a narrative structure is immediately applied in order to rationalise communal anxiety, and Christy measures appositely against the elementary principles of changeling folklore. The community resorts to the fairy faith because, as Bourke suggests, belief in the fairies is not 'controlled by a two-way switch' but rather it is 'much more like a sliding switch than one with on/off settings'.<sup>152</sup> With no priest proper to offer pastoral guidance the community implicitly turns to changeling belief in order to make sense of the entrance of 'a young gaffer who'd capsize the stars.'<sup>153</sup> And as Christy's lies are uncovered, the community decides to exorcise what its members are forced to consider as a changeling in their midst. Therefore, the second signature of primitive religiosity that Synge recorded from *The Golden Bough*, magical rituals, were an immediate and very reasonable corollary to the community. But as Synge was well aware, they were also a reasonable corollary to an insular community near Clonmel, South Tipperary.

**'WHATEVER FLAMES UPON THE NIGHT'**<sup>154</sup>

Yeats desperately wanted his spectator to give credence to the literal existence of the fairies, even though he was aware that he was trying ‘to bring back a little of the old dead beautiful world of romance into this century of great engines’.<sup>155</sup> Nevertheless, Yeats valiantly defended the fairy faith, claiming that ‘the Irish peasantry still believe in fairies’<sup>156</sup> and furthermore, that the fairies were talismans for ‘some fibrous darkness’.<sup>157</sup> Yeats’s staunch belief in the existence of the fairies was diametrically opposed to that of the Catholic middle classes who tried to kill the fairies with kindness: ‘We doubt if the peasant ever believed in [the fairies] at all. He believed in stories; for they fed his imagination, but it is a long time since the peasants believed in fairies or ghosts as beings having power and influence over his life.’<sup>158</sup> The Catholic middle classes came to this conclusion because they maintained that the fairy faith was indexical of an uncivilised consciousness. Yeats was particularly sensitive to this attack from Catholic Ireland: ‘Perhaps the fairies exist’, Yeats admitted, but ‘an assumption of their existence is the only fit theory to build a selection of fairy tales on’.<sup>159</sup> Yeats wrote this in 1889 to Dr. George Coffey, Keeper of Antiquities in the Irish National Museum and he signed off with a patronising comment on those committed to the scientific enquiry of Irish folklore: ‘Oh these scientists [...] There is not much difference in the *substance* which a scientist understands; in the *mood* of the story teller there is the most extraordinary difference. The mood belongs to literature.’<sup>160</sup> The occurrence of the Clonmel horror proved that the fairies were an ideological persuasion that was functionally constituted as ‘power and influence over [the folk’s] life’.<sup>161</sup> Comparative social scientists such as Andrew Lang believed that the events of the Clonmel horror had ‘not only pained and grieved all readers, but have astonished the student of popular belief.’<sup>162</sup> And so, in the wake of the Clonmel

horror, the darkness that surrounded Yeats's writing table in March 1895 irrevocably altered not only the substance of the fairy tales but also, and perhaps more importantly, the mood of the fairy tale. For Yeats, the student of popular belief, the Romantic days of the fairy tale were numbered.

Scholars of the Clonmel horror are generally agreed that what precipitated the ritual immolation was the community's belief that Bridget was a fairy changeling. However, Hubert Butler postulates an alternative book, citing claims of infidelity between Bridget and the local eggman. The eggman, who remains nameless to the archive, used to collect eggs from Bridget and sell them to a wholesale distributor in Clonmel. Butler suggests that Michael Cleary 'suspected his wife of a tenderness for the eggman and just as a grain of grit will provoke an oyster to secrete a pearl, so the eggman from Clonmel unlocked the door to fairyland'.<sup>163</sup> Bourke also suggests that Bridget might have been unfaithful to Michael with the emergencyman, William Simpson, pointing out that for 'the pretty young dressmaker, the emergencyman, with his neatly trimmed moustache and wing-collar he wore on formal occasions, may have been more attractive than her cooper husband'.<sup>164</sup> Certainly, Tom Mac Intyre's *What Happened Bridgie Cleary* (2005) dramatised a twisted love triangle between the Cleary couple and William Simpson and within the confines of Mac Intyre's play, Simpson asks Bridget why they never eloped, to which Bridgie replies: 'That cudent have happened, William – we cudent have gone away together'.<sup>165</sup> The parallels to Michael Cleary's marital shame are striking when one looks at *The Playboy*. Within the context of the Clonmel horror, if Bridget was considered a changeling because she may have had an amorous connection with the eggman and/or Simpson, then it is important to remember that fairies were known to induce female mortals into being *leannán sí* (fairy lovers) so that they could take women to the Otherworld as

midwives.<sup>166</sup> Pegeen, who has an amorous connection with Christy, claims (in an earlier draft) that she has been ‘dropped to Hell’ when ‘the like of his love the flower of the world’<sup>167</sup> suddenly disappears. The connection to hell is common in changeling belief; the fairies took humans away to the Otherworld, where the fairies would keep them captive. In its attempts to implement Roman orthodoxy in Ireland, the Church weaned Irish folk culture off its belief in the fairies by equating the Otherworld with hell. In *The Playboy*, Shawn uses hell to question Christy’s ontology: ‘Oh, isn’t he a holy terror’ and then likens Christy to the devil: ‘I’m thinking Satan hasn’t many have killed their da in Kerry and in Mayo too’.<sup>168</sup> According to folklore accounts, the changeling was perceived to be Satan incarnate, a lore that Synge was fully aware of after spending time on Aran with Old Mourteen (Máirtín Ó Conghaile), who taught Synge about ‘the Catholic theory of the fairies’:<sup>169</sup>

When Lucifer saw himself in the glass he thought himself equal with God. Then the lord threw him out of Heaven, and all the angels that belonged to him. While He was ‘chucking them out,’ an archangel asked Him to spare some of them, and those that were falling are in the air still and have power to wreck ships, and to work evil in the world.<sup>170</sup>

If Synge identified Molly as a changeling because of the threat of her infidelity, then Michael Cleary and Shawn Keogh respectively maintained the same supposition over Bridget and Pegeen’s infidelity; in *The Playboy* Christy emerges as a fairy because of his ability to seduce Pegeen but after Christy admits that he has been ‘walking wild for eleven days’,<sup>171</sup> the populace are able to postulate that his traits are characteristic

of changelings. Bourke reminds us, ‘those who were said to consort with the fairies were usually marginal, transitional or eccentric, and unable to have children’<sup>172</sup> and, furthermore, with respect to the fairy faith, a ‘woman’s sexuality, when not controlled within the orderly progressions of marriage and pregnancy, was seen as horrifically powerful’.<sup>173</sup> Pegeen, a woman that would ‘go helter-skeltering after any man would let you a wink upon the road’<sup>174</sup> allows herself to consort with Christy even though she is waiting ‘on a sheep-skin parchment to be with Shawn Keogh of Killakeen’<sup>175</sup> and therefore, as far as Shawn is concerned, Christy Mahon with ‘a score of divils in him’,<sup>176</sup> seems to be a fairy because of his ability to lure Pegeen away from him. But with the amount of evidence amassed, Shawn implicitly conjectures that Christy’s ontology is that of a fairy changeling; when Shawn enters the shebeen he maintains that he heard a man ‘groaning wicked like a maddening dog’ outside.<sup>177</sup> Fairy changelings were invariably found sick and crying and when Christy joins the action, he is repeatedly described by Shawn as being ‘queer,’ ‘fearless,’ ‘dirty,’ ‘savage’ and ‘wicked’;<sup>178</sup> all the adjectives that are used to describe fairy changelings. And while the application of the fairy faith by the community in both Mayo and Clonmel ‘was a currency, neutral in itself’, it was certainly ‘capable of facilitating important interventions’.<sup>179</sup>

Changeling belief in both the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* necessarily invites the contemporaneity of savage sex, violence and paganism. To return to Synge’s unpublished prose essay, “On Literary and Popular Poetry,” the dramatist admits his admiration for folk culture because such culture was ‘indifferent to mere rules which tend to hamper the direct expression of emotion.’<sup>180</sup> The Clonmel horror demonstrated Irish folk culture’s indifference to the normative rules of society (i.e. do not murder), but Synge understood why the community of the Clonmel horror was

indifferent to the rules because Frazer had taught him that primitive communities were prone to the ‘transference of evil misfortune [which is] laid upon...Scapegoats, Sin eaters[.] Expulsion of evil spirits becomes periodic scourging.’<sup>181</sup> The Mayo community makes a solipsistic retreat to changeling belief in order to exorcise the evil spirit: the changeling of the western world. As far as this analysis is concerned, the postulation that Christy is the gender-inverted image of Bridget is necessarily reductive. However, the conjecture that Synge appropriated the homeopathic magical ritual that was concomitant with changeling belief is entirely plausible. Synge worked hard to get the tone of the immolation just right. In previous drafts, he had written menacing lines such as: ‘[*fiercely*]. Burn him will you. Don’t be afraid’ and others: ‘Lift a coal of fire Pegeen and scorch his leg’.<sup>182</sup> Throughout *The Playboy* drafts the dramatist consistently insists upon ‘*a large open fire-place, with turf fire*’,<sup>183</sup> on stage, just like ‘the fairy house’<sup>184</sup> of the Clonmel horror where there was a fireplace big enough to fit the whole of Bridget Cleary across the grate.<sup>185</sup> In the Clonmel horror Michael Cleary ‘got a red stump and told [Bridget] he would put it down her mouth’,<sup>186</sup> and in *The Playboy* Synge decides upon a similar torture scene:

SHAWN. I’m afeard of him. [*to Pegeen*] Lift a lighted sod will you and scorch his leg.

PEGEEN: [*blowing the fire with a bellows*]. Leave go now young fellow or I’ll scorch your shins.

CHRISTY. You’re blowing for to torture me? [*His voice rising and growing stronger.*] That’s your kind, is it? Then let the lot of you be

wary, for if I've to face the gallows I'll have a gay march down, I tell you, and shed the blood of some of you before I die.

[...]

MEN. [*to Pegeen*] Bring the sod, will you.

PEGEEN. [*coming over*] God help him so. [*Burns his leg*].

CHRISTY. [*kicking and screaming*] Oh, glory be to God!<sup>187</sup>

Frazer taught Synge that 'the consideration of human suffering is not one which enters into the calculations of primitive man'.<sup>188</sup> In both the exorcisms in Mayo and Clonmel, the changelings are fully aware that the community is using the fairies as a cover for heinous crimes, hence why Bridget confided in her cousin, Mary Kennedy, that her husband was 'making a fairy of me now',<sup>189</sup> and in a similar fashion Christy exclaims: 'You're blowing for to torture me? [*His voice rising and growing stronger.*] That's your kind, is it?'<sup>190</sup> Séan McMahon has argued that 'what Synge ignored or failed to notice, or deliberately suppressed, was that his characters were Irish Catholics whose religion, puritanical and pallid [...] was a part of their lives.'<sup>191</sup> However, Bridget and Christy were burnt because both communities were desperately looking for a narrative structure to rationalise their immediate reality and as Bourke advocates, belief in fairy changelings 'afforded a way for people driven to desperate remedies to rationalize their actions and live with the consequences.'<sup>192</sup> The communal application of changeling belief is, however, permeated with Catholic

belief; God is invoked during the ritual immolation of Christy and during the Clonmel horror the rosary was recited, as Bridget was burnt alive.<sup>193</sup> If Louis Althusser maintained that ideologies ‘are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them’<sup>194</sup> then what McMahon has ignored, or failed to notice, is that while Synge’s Mayo folk are Catholics in the normative sense of the word, their application of changeling belief, in keeping with the hallmarks of primitive religiosity (a credal interchange between magic and religion), problematises their Catholic understanding of Roman orthodoxy. Changeling belief is not merely an ideological construct but an ideological perspective that necessitates action; changelings are not an index of passive ideology but rather an ideology that necessitates the functionalism of homeopathic magical ritual. If the functionalist understanding of ritual maintains that the performance of ritualised behaviour is concerned with communal regulation, then the changeling in Mayo and South Tipperary was immolated in a desperate attempt to harmonise the social structure that had rapidly developed an anti-structure. However, if we recall Frazer’s supposition that homeopathic magic/magical ritual necessitates that ‘the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it’,<sup>195</sup> then the burning of the fairy changeling is a ritual that is fundamentally flawed because the very act of burning the changeling means that the human that has been taken away with the fairies will be burnt too, which is why John C. Messenger’s ethnographic field notes on changeling belief contain informants ‘who bear scars from being burned when their souls were rescued by this expediency’.<sup>196</sup> However, in both the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* the burning of the changeling fails and because of this an alternative postulation must be drawn on the efficacy of changeling belief; a postulation that reveals the significance of savage sexuality and violence.

With respect to the Clonmel horror contemporaneous anthropological discourse in Synge's Ireland concluded that there was malice aforethought. Again, we return to suppositions on the 'savage paganism'<sup>197</sup> of changeling belief as a corollary of 'savage sexuality' and 'savage violence'.<sup>198</sup> Alfred Nutt equated the Clonmel horror with 'the antique conception of life and sacrifice'<sup>199</sup> and after reading *The Golden Bough* Synge was familiar with the provenance of changeling belief in sacrificial rituals where,

the employment of a divine man or animal as a scapegoat is especially to be noted; indeed, we are here directly concerned with the custom of banishing evils only in so far as these evils are believed to be transferred to a god who is afterwards slain. For, as already has been pointed out, the custom of killing a god dates from so early a period of human history that in later ages, even when the custom continues to be practised, it is liable to be misinterpreted. The divine character of the animal or man is forgotten, and he comes to be regarded merely as an ordinary victim [...] For when a nation becomes civilised, if it does not drop human sacrifices altogether, it at least selects as victims only such wretches as would be put to death at any rate. Thus the killing of a god may sometimes come to be confounded with the execution of a criminal.<sup>200</sup>

The diligent student paraphrased Frazer's analysis of primitive religion: 'the custom of the peasant probably a survival of human sacrifice'.<sup>201</sup> In years to come, René Girard would categorise sacrificial rituals as the symbolic expression of communal violence that is channelled into a rite in order to stop a community from cannibalising itself.<sup>202</sup> From this perspective the god-like Christ(y) is tortured on the premise that he is a fairy changeling, but his changeling ontology holds its provenance within the cathartic release of communal violence, which up until this point had been focussed on hanging dogs from trees and walking miles on end to see a lady with half a nose: Mrs. MacDonnell.<sup>203</sup> Edward Clodd and Andrew Lang were far more direct with their suppositions than Nutt was. In discussing 'the late melancholy events in a peasant family in Tipperary', Andrew Lang concluded that 'it is not unlikely that the unfortunate woman really had developed some hysterical change in character. But she did not wholly disappear into fairyland'.<sup>204</sup> In a similar line of thought, Clodd maintained that although the 'evidence goes to show that the belief in changelings prevails among the Irish peasantry, and has often led to inhuman acts, it seems clear that other and baser motives prompted the foul deed.'<sup>205</sup> According to anthropological discourse, Bridget was never away with the fairies but rather, the fairies were a scapegoat for the mental instability that ultimately precipitated her immolation and the same conjecture can be substantiated in *The Playboy*. Suppositions such as these that not only belied the jingoistic claptrap of the Yeatsian fairy faith but also struck fear into the very heart of the Catholic bourgeoisie, because as Carole G. Silver has suggested, in 'both fantasy and reality, changelings were increasingly associated with the Darwinian notion of groups or races that had not ultimately triumphed.'<sup>206</sup>

#### **DISTURBANCES IN THE DRAWING ROOM**

As *The Playboy* reached its final stages of rehearsal, Willie Fay ‘begged’ Synge ‘to take out the torture scene in the last act, where the peasants burn Christy with lit turf’ but it was easier to ‘move the Hill of Howth’<sup>207</sup> than change Synge’s mind over his implicit appropriation of changeling exorcism, which the dramatist had drafted over thirteen times. Lady Gregory was quick to warn Yeats of the approaching catastrophe and an ominous tone can be detected in her letter: ‘You never looked like a tiger with its cub as Synge did last night with *Playboy*.’<sup>208</sup> Suspecting the worst, Yeats did not attend the opening night of *The Playboy* because, in Holloway’s opinion, Yeats refused ‘to be associated with Synge’s Comedy in [...] bad language & glorification of murder.’<sup>209</sup> The abandonment of the golden galleon of fairy folklore freed Yeats to attend a reception with Professor Herbert Grierson in Aberdeen, where he did champion *The Playboy*.<sup>210</sup> But behind closed doors, Grierson suspected something was wrong with Yeats, citing Yeats’s loquacity, which suggested his nervous disposition: ‘he began to talk and so far as I know he has continued to do so ever since’,<sup>211</sup> remarked a confused Grierson after Yeats left. During the reception with Grierson Yeats rambled on and on about *The Playboy* and in turn Grierson may have discussed the fairies with Yeats. Grierson would later publish an essay in *The Dublin Review* (April 1911)<sup>212</sup> concerning Yeats’s knowledge of the fairies, and although Grierson wouldn’t have known it at the time, the praise he no doubt bestowed upon Yeats at his reception in January 1907 was thoroughly welcome; on the eve of the battle, assurance in the fairy faith was needed.

Freddie Rokem has suggested that to perform history often invites the spectator into ‘a painful recognition of a routine which must be repeated over and over again’.<sup>213</sup> History, for Rokem ‘can only be perceived as such when it becomes

recapitulated, when we create some form of discourse [...] [that situates] the chaotic torrents of the past within an aesthetic frame.’<sup>214</sup> The performance of history is dependent upon the actor as a hyper-historian<sup>215</sup> in that he/she is able to articulate past events within the present and, from the perspective of cultural materialism, the arrestment of progressive history is made possible by an action that interrupts the progressive framework of history by presenting the discontents of historical time within the present. The burning of Christy’s leg must be considered as a nodal action that brings the discontents of historical time into the historical present. For if the *Times* considered the Clonmel horror to be a ‘shocking occurrence recalling the barbarities practised in the Middle Ages upon prisoners charged with witchcraft’<sup>216</sup> then Synge’s implicit dramatisation of changeling belief in *The Playboy* necessitates a critique of Catholic progressive history because it critiques the very essence of contemporaneity. Synge would have read such an argument in *The Golden Bough* where Frazer discussed how,

the growing influence of rationalism discredited the belief in witchcraft and put a stop to the custom of burning witches. On this view the Christian Church in its dealings with the black art merely carried out the traditional policy of Druidism, and it might be a nice question to decide which of the two, in pursuance of that policy, exterminated the larger number of innocent men and women.<sup>217</sup>

If historicism understands the past to be replete with historical events that cannot exist within the present then the immolation of Christy in *The Playboy* suggests that changeling belief was not simply a relic from the past that punctuated the progressive history of the present but a relic of lived experience that testified to subterranean historical processes.

It only took two performances of *The Playboy* before Synge's scientific dramatisation of changeling belief was detected. In 1910, when Yeats sat down to recall the disturbances, he remembered how 'Synge came and stood beside me, and said, "A young doctor has just told me that he can hardly keep himself from jumping on to a seat, and pointing out in that howling mob those whom he is treating for venereal disease."' <sup>218</sup> This young medic was Daniel Sheehan, a friend of James Joyce, and it seems that the episode in which Christy was attacked and burnt had a peculiar resonance with the self-assured Kerryman who was, on this particular evening, far from reticent with his sentiments. Sheehan had been picking up on Synge's subtle appropriation of changeling folklore all evening, and when his bourgeois brothers in arms began rioting, Sheehan offered his own performance analysis: 'What about Mullinahone and the witch burning?' <sup>219</sup> The response from Catholic bourgeois Ireland: 'emphatic execrations'. <sup>220</sup> Sheehan's conjecture was painfully obvious; Bridget Cleary was burnt alive in Ballyvadlea, 'a remoted [sic] and isolated district a short distance...[from] Mullinahone', <sup>221</sup> which was just a stone's throw away from Clonmel.

For Catholic bourgeois Ireland the memory of the Clonmel horror was a trauma. 'When trauma recedes into memory' Emilie Pine has argued, 'a boundary is created between the past and the present'. <sup>222</sup> *The Playboy* obliterated this boundary. Spectators of *The Playboy* were not attending a performance of text as object, but

rather, an performative event that allowed the spectator to engage in disruptive, violent and to a certain extent, criminal acts. On the same night that Sheehan attended the play (Monday 28 January), an inebriated gentleman – operating under the alter-ego of “Napoleon” – travelled from Galway to Dublin so that he could meet ‘Mr. Synge, who promptly made his appearance. The gentleman, having exchanged courtesies with the author’<sup>223</sup> then decided to offer ‘a challenge to any man in the pit to fight him’.<sup>224</sup> Napoleon’s behaviour is symptomatic of a plethora of violence that instigated arrests and court cases where defendants claimed their actions were completely justifiable. Similarly, when those accused of the Clonmel horror were brought to trial, the riotous behavior of the gallery spectators inside the courtroom anticipated the behaviour of those who would attend *The Playboy*. The *Irish Times* reported on the Clonmel horror trial that ‘the proceedings attracted a very large crowd to the courthouse. The building was filled to its utmost capacity long before the hearing of the case was proceeded with and the prisoners were subjected to a good deal of unfavorable comment [...] the people indulging in fierce hissing and booing.’<sup>225</sup> Just like *The Playboy* rioters, those accused of the Clonmel horror maintained that their actions were reasonable. Crown Solicitor, Mr. Michael Gleeson advocated that Michael Cleary et al. had simply been acting in accordance with the fairy faith, and so a charge of manslaughter was ushered into proceedings instead of murder in the first degree. Similarly, when Anne Roche was brought to trial for murdering Michael Leahy, she was found not guilty by the jury, leaving the judge, Baron Pennefather, to conclude that members of the community were not ‘safe in convicting the prisoner of murder, however strong their suspicions might be.’<sup>226</sup> Such cultural credence given to changeling belief afforded Gleeson legal precedent to shift the blame onto the Catholic Church which, according to Gleeson, turned ‘a blind eye

to pagan rituals practised by the peasantry all the while unofficially allowing them to continue'.<sup>227</sup>

Writing from Rome, James Joyce, an author who took pride in detecting moribund aspects of Irish culture, wanted a piece of the action that his friend, Sheehan, had. Having fallen out with Synge in Paris over *Riders to the Sea*, the author in exile wrote to his brother, Stanislaus, maintaining that he felt 'like a man in a house who hears a row in the street and voices he knows shouting but can't get out to see what the hell is going on.'<sup>228</sup> As Yeats steeled himself for what Lady Gregory appositely termed 'the fight for our lives',<sup>229</sup> her Ladyship was left to defend the fort while she waited for the impresario to return from Aberdeen. Synge was nowhere to be found: 'I am afraid the "Playboy" has injured us a good deal', Gregory wrote to Wilfred Blunt, 'I am the real sufferer, for at the first attack Synge who is not fond of fighting his own battles kept in background & Yeats was away and I had to take responsibility.'<sup>230</sup> The responsibility was sizeable. Nevertheless, Yeats arrived in Dublin from Aberdeen on Monday (28 January) to watch Sheehan offer his performance analysis. As George Roberts recalled, 'just as the play was over Yeats arrived. He burst into the Green Room where the company were assembled, with the gleam of battle in his eyes. "This is the best thing that ever happened in my life," said he.'<sup>231</sup> But as the battle raged and the situation went from bad to worse, Yeats became increasingly withdrawn. Evasive action was needed because a consummate defence of Synge's dramatisation of changeling belief was always going to be a tall order for Yeats, and by now even his own colleagues were calling for Synge's head. George Moore protested against 'the burning of Christy's legs with the coal' because it was 'quite intolerable and wouldn't be acceptable to any audience.'<sup>232</sup> In response, an ailing Yeats attempted to defend the immolation of Christy 'on the ground that an

artist need but make his characters self-consistent,' but privately he admitted that 'that too was observation.'<sup>233</sup>

Deciding to rally, Yeats proceeded to defend Synge's slur on changeling belief through flippant newspaper interviews that must have given him an acute case of *déjà vu*. When the Clonmel horror made headline news Yeats was called upon to defend changeling folklore, which was harmless, as long as it was kept within his exotic *oeuvre*. The *Cork Examiner* spearheaded the attacks on Yeats by pointing out that although 'Mr. Yeats' was 'the most ardent folklorist amongst us,' he could not defend the Clonmel horror.<sup>234</sup> Yeats maintained that the 'imaginative impulse – the quintessence of life – is our great need from folklore',<sup>235</sup> but now the hangover from pre-Christian Ireland had turned his imaginative impulse into savage reality, which ultimately meant that the *Cork Examiner* held the impresario of the Abbey Theatre in checkmate. An anonymous Irishwoman who wrote in earnest to the *Irish Times* neatly summarised the predicament that the *Cork Examiner* had placed Yeats in:

That superstition of various kinds is widespread, we all know; but hitherto we have believed that it took only gentle forms and have been tender to it, hoping, indeed, that the Catholic priests in Ireland would not be too zealous to root it out. Its manifestations we looked upon with something of the same tenderness with which we regard the exquisite legends that have sprung up everywhere about the footsteps of the saints, and would have said that the world from which the peasant superstitions had disappeared was a baser, uglier, more unlovable world. [...] [We] had no conception of the horror lurking in darkness in such minds as those of Bridget Cleary's torturers [...] To

hold the changeling above the fire on a shovel, or to thrust a red stick down its throat, is the drastic method proposed in the old stories of changelings [...] The Clonmel horror for the moment makes our innocent superstitions guilty. Are we, then, to do away with our fairies, our banshees, our leprechauns? [...] Are we to lose all the pretty host because there are savages in Clonmel?<sup>236</sup>

Yeats felt compelled to prove the innocence of changeling belief and at first he discussed the case at length with Edward Clodd, but anthropological discourse only accentuated the Darwinian savagery that Yeats staunchly avoided.<sup>237</sup> In a panic, Yeats scrambled to the folk and discussed the case with his uncle's clairvoyant servant, Mary Battle, who was 'very angry with the Tipperary countryman who burned his wife,' because his actions were a result of surplus superstition.<sup>238</sup> Triumphant, Yeats returned to his writing table and published his authoritative defence of changeling folklore: 'The Tipperary witch-burner only half knew his own belief.'<sup>239</sup> Or was it that Yeats only half knew his own belief? Privately, Yeats knew that his knowledge of the fairies exchanged 'scientific curiosity [for] wisdom, peace, and a communion with the people'.<sup>240</sup> Nevertheless, he would read Frazer *contra* Frazer so that anthropological discourse became, for Yeats, syncretic rather than comparative. Yeats did this to try and become closer with his informants, all the while substantiating his own quest for that which was primeval and holistic, maintaining that it was simply human nature to long to be with '[w]hatever flames upon the night.'<sup>241</sup> But this wasn't what Frazer had concluded; it was Frazer's supposition that mankind had evolved from primeval magical practices, and he argued that people who believed in magic were akin to 'the lowest savages surviving in the remotest corners of the world'.<sup>242</sup>

Frazer was quick to point out that a woman's being 'slowly roasted to death as a witch in Ireland' merely demonstrated the 'inefficacy of magic' and constituted a 'confession of human ignorance and weakness.'<sup>243</sup> For Frazer, whatever flamed upon the night in South Tipperary smacked of Darwinism. And although Darwinism was something that Synge played hide and seek with all his life, it was a discourse that he could easily find should he need to, and in *The Playboy*, Darwinism was brought to play on Yeats's stage of national-popular sovereignty. Alarm bells were ringing.

#### **SURVIVING WITH THE UNFIT**

In 1871, the year of Synge's birth, Charles Darwin published *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, a book which suggested that 'man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin'.<sup>244</sup> If *On the Origin of Species* had assaulted Victorian integrity, then *The Descent of Man* obliterated it; Darwin had proof positive that the genealogy of man was fundamentally simian. The tremors from Darwin's evolutionary science were seismic and although the widowed Mrs. Synge raised her son on a diet of Protestant evangelicalism that carefully avoided all Darwinian questions of evolution, the tremors produced hairline cracks that matured with Synge. The dramatist claims that he first read *On the Origins of Species* as a teenager:

When I was about fourteen I obtained a book of Darwin's. It opened in my hands at a passage, where he asks how can we explain the similarity between a man's hand and a bird's or bat's wings except by

evolution. I flung the book aside and rushed out into the open air – it was summer and we were in the country – the sky seemed to have lost its blue and the grass its green.<sup>245</sup>

This, however, is incorrect. Synge, in fact, began reading *On the Origins of Species* in October of 1895 (at the age of twenty-four), i.e. 6 months after the Clonmel horror made headline news.<sup>246</sup> After reading Darwin's seminal work, Synge immediately 'writhed in an agony of doubt' over 'the important service' that Darwin had paid him.<sup>247</sup> It was not long before he launched himself into Darwin's treatise on the evolution of humankind, *The Descent of Man*, finishing it on 12 October.<sup>248</sup> Synge was fascinated by Darwin, even though he had come to his works in reverse; comparative anthropology and indeed, Frazer's *The Golden Bough* were inspired by Darwinian principles; Frazer's analysis of the Clonmel horror, which suggested that 'the polite world' was 'startled'<sup>249</sup> over Bridget's death is explicitly Darwinist in its tone. If Frazer's comparative anthropology had helped Synge to understand changeling belief by establishing the concepts of primitive religion, Synge wanted to understand what these concepts were predicated upon and within Social Darwinism the dramatist found his answer. Drifting around the National Library of Ireland Synge complemented his reading of Darwin by searching for articles that considered comparative sociology, finally settling for the work of Herbert Spencer, the scholar that coined the phrase: "the survival of the fittest".

Darwin's suppositions on what would later be classified as Social Darwinism explained society as being a collection of heterogeneous social groups that established codes of behaviour in order to accommodate each other's existence. These codes of behaviour are conducive towards evolutionary progress because they regulate natural

conflicts between social groups; the fittest of these social groups do not just survive this conflict but they adapt in accordance with the theory of natural selection and, in turn, this naturally raises the evolution of society. Darwin believed that societies evolved at the behest of a leading social group and those that were in the throes of evolution were left to languish. Darwin advocated that ‘nearly the whole civilised world, were once in barbarous condition’ but ‘some savages have recently improved in some of their simpler arts’.<sup>250</sup> But some savages had failed to evolve at all. Like Synge, Yeats was fascinated by Social Darwinism and in the privacy of his own diary he would use Social Darwinism to demean new acquaintances like George Moore, whom Yeats met just after the Clonmel horror:

I have been told that the crudity common to all the Moores came from the mother’s family, Mayo squireens, probably half-peasants in education and occupation, for his father was a man of education and power and old descent. His mother’s blood seems to have affected him and his brother as the peasant strain has affected Edward Martyn. There has been a union of incompatibles and consequent sterility [...] Both men are examples of the way Irish civilization is held back by the lack of education of Irish Catholic women.<sup>251</sup>

However, unlike Synge, Yeats could not bring himself to juxtapose Social Darwinism with those aspects of Irish culture, such as the fairies, that were perfectly suited to a Social Darwinist reading. It can be argued that Yeats steered clear of such scientific readings of the fairies because it likened his praxis to the fetishisation of savages – a discourse that had perennially orbited Irish culture under British rule. When *The*

*Playboy* went into performance, the stock image of the Irish peasant in Britain was that of the ape, or what Charles Kingsley's memoirs termed as the human chimpanzee.<sup>252</sup> Thus, Yeats bitterly complained when he found that:

[...] some folk-lorist [sic] is merely scientific, [because] he lacks the needful subtle imaginative sympathy to tell his stories well. There are innumerable little turns of expression and quaint phrases that in the mouth of a peasant give half the meaning, and often the whole charm. The man of science is too often a person who has exchanged his soul for a formula; and when he captures a folk-tale, nothing remains with him for all his trouble but a wretched lifeless thing with the down rubbed off and a pin thrust through its once all-living body. I object to the "honest folk-lorist," not because his versions are accurate, but because they are inaccurate, or rather incomplete.<sup>253</sup>

Synge's dramatisation of changeling belief was certainly scientific in its formula. Nevertheless, Synge conceals this scientific formula with his soulful and idiosyncratic Anglo-Irish idiom and this poetic code dovetails with his scientific reading of folklore. In turn this not only gives his drama the 'certain brusqueness of attack'<sup>254</sup> of folk poetry, it also means that this attack is particularly poignant due to its provenance in comparative social science. Synge had no problem with the application of science to folklore and neither did Sheehan. And just when Yeats thought he had saved changeling belief from complete degradation, the young medic had something else to say about Synge's dramaturgical content.

## THE FREEDOM OF THE THEATRE

‘Yeats is an impossible creature to head a theatre’ Frank Fay once wrote to Máire Garvey because Yeats ‘had this impish faculty for making mischief in a small place like Dublin’.<sup>255</sup> When Yeats arrived back from Aberdeen, the critic of Catholic progressivism, W.P. Ryan, wrote to the Abbey’s Secretary, W.A. Henderson, claiming that ‘with the coming of Yeats I knew that the trouble would be aggravated.’<sup>256</sup> Ryan was correct and although Yeats had become increasingly withdrawn he now attempted to save face by organising an imperious debate concerning “The Freedom of the Theatre” on the Monday night (4 February) after *The Playboy* finished its run. Conveniently citing illness, Synge chose not to attend; in any case he thought it was pointless trying to reason with ‘low ruffians [who are] not men of intellect and honesty’.<sup>257</sup> But Yeats could not be dissuaded and, sensing his chance to hone his innate ability to pontificate, he dropped admission to half price and donned a bespoke dinner suit, all before taking to the Abbey stage with acute intellectual bravado. Yeats called upon those mutineers to put their money where their mouths were by inviting them to engage in ‘the most free discussion [so] that we may get at last some kind of sound criticism in this country.’<sup>258</sup> Skulking in the shadows during all of this was Holloway and he noted in his diary that ‘the Cecilia Street Medical Students formed part of the clique’<sup>259</sup> that attended the debate. Sheehan was back. After Yeats had finished his formal address, the chair of the debate, Patrick Kenny, a man who had little sentiment for the Catholic Church’s romanticisation of Gaelic culture, brushed off Ellen Duncan’s (the journalist who coined the phrase ‘the drama of the drawingroom’<sup>260</sup>) request to speak because he ‘was not going to be put off his purpose’.<sup>261</sup> Instead, Kenny invited Sheehan to take the stand whereupon the

trainee doctor ‘claimed his right to speak as a medical student’<sup>262</sup> and amidst an onslaught of catcalling he congratulated Synge’s dramaturgical praxis because it depicted characters ‘that ever since he studied any science he had paid strong attention to.’<sup>263</sup> And then Sheehan let slip the dogs of war by offering his *coup de grâce*: ‘[I have] never seen the doctrine of survival of the fittest treated with such living force as by Mr. Synge.’<sup>264</sup> Sheehan’s sucker punch sent Yeats reeling; the little boat of science was back, and at her helm stood Darwin with Synge as first mate. This is why Synge wrote in his notebook that, ‘WBY’s idea of saving W[orld] by Ireland [is] like decorating cabin when ship is sinking’.<sup>265</sup>

Just like the Clonmel horror, *The Playboy* disturbances were reported to the Irish populace as a metanarrative that concerned Irish cultural and social malaise. Social Darwinism was repeatedly invoked during the trial that followed in the wake of the Clonmel horror as changeling belief was utilised in order to draw analogies between African and Irish civilization.<sup>266</sup> E.F. Benson speculated on the Clonmel horror in that respectable periodical of the London literati, *The Nineteenth Century*, by drawing analogies between the Clonmel community and Hottentots, such as the Zulus, that believed in primitive superstition. In doing so, Benson reminded his readers that the Irish race had carried civilization ‘back to a stratum of belief belonging altogether to a primitive and savage era.’<sup>267</sup> In *The Playboy* Synge follows Benson’s trajectory of going back to the future with his Mayo community, which caused spectators to draw analogies between the Irish and African civilizations, as recalled by a shocked Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh: ““Enough!” howled one man in an excess of self-righteousness indignation, “the hideous caricature would be slanderous of a Kaffir kraal!””<sup>268</sup> The *Irish Independent* attempted to critique *The Playboy* because the folk did not behave ‘like omadhauns [and they] don’t suddenly develop a

passion for killing their fathers',<sup>269</sup> but as *The Playboy* advocates, suppositions such as these were spurious because both communities in Clonmel and Mayo did act like "Hottentots" and their passion for torturing members of the community developed at an alarming pace once Bridget and Christy were associated with the fairy changeling. What emerges from the public discourse across print media contradicts Jeremy Bentham's postulation that the daily newspaper made Victorian culture quintessentially modern because it erased any lingering attachment to backward and superstitious beliefs. In this equation Bentham valued print media because 'before this talisman, not only devils, but ghosts, vampires, witches, and all their kindred tribes, are driven out of the land, never to return again: the touch of holy water is not so intolerable to them as the bare smell of printers' ink.'<sup>270</sup> Print media may be conducive towards the imagined community of nationalism<sup>271</sup> but with respect to the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy*, the daily newspaper did not so much erase superstition as afford the residual culture from pre-Christian Ireland a symbolic enfranchisement.

The Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* encouraged a counterpublic discourse as the Catholic middle classes closed ranks and attempted to sniff out those changelings within their own class, thus negating any imagined community of Irish nationalism. These changelings needed to be promptly identified because according to comparative social scientists, if a changeling survived to maturity it would be akin to those savages that did not have the requisite etiquette to belong in polite society. As Carole G. Silver has suggested, for the Catholic middle classes, fairy changelings were the 'products of every sort of underclass', and so they represented 'the horrible possibilities of the behaviour of such classes.'<sup>272</sup> The changeling, then, was not just concomitant with racial concerns; it was also indexical of anxiety over middle-class rectitude and

etiquette and it is not without significance that Synge mobilised these two anxieties in *The Playboy*. The fact that the middle classes acted like Hottentots could not have surprised Synge after he had read the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer, who presented the dramatist with an alternative but equally alarming hypothesis. In *The Principles of Sociology* Spencer maintained that primitive peoples had degenerated from an advanced state of existence; evolution wasn't fixed and it could operate on a sliding scale. In his diary, the dramatist gave a précis of Spencer's theory of evolution:

*Dec. 1.* I have been reading Herbert Spencer and my creed is now very simple. Humanity has evolved from the conditions of the world, and will return to the nothing it has come from. Each separate life is but a ripple on the waves, - a blade of grass on the roadside. For those who fail, there is no hope.<sup>273</sup>

After reading Spencer, Synge understood that those races that were inclined to devolve were likely to pass on their genetics to the next generation. For Synge, the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* disturbances were symptomatic of the evolutionary decline of Catholic Ireland and, as Silver suggests, the changeling was 'a fantasy image that both displaced and conveyed the anxiety of [the] educated middle-class'<sup>274</sup> and so the changeling was an index for the 'loss of security, of power, and of hope for the future'<sup>275</sup> of a newly enfranchised class. What these classes needed was strong leaders (another prerequisite of Spencer's theory of social evolution) and for Synge there was little dispute over who was the fittest to survive. Synge, like Darwin, was unsentimental about extinction.

**‘A DEPOSIT OF EVIL’<sup>276</sup>**

In 1905 Synge toured the Congested Districts of Ireland (areas on the eastern and southern seaboard that did not have enough land for common pasturage) with J.B. Yeats for the *Manchester Guardian* and he made the conscious decision not to lift ‘the rags from my mother country for to tickle the sentiments of Manchester.’<sup>277</sup> But two years later he had lifted every single rag and in that same year he decided to debunk the fairy faith in his poem, “The Passing of the Shée”. The poem takes its impetus from George Russell’s (who declined to comment on Synge’s dramatisation of changeling belief at the Freedom of the Theatre debate)<sup>278</sup> pictorial representation of the fairies:

Adieu, sweet Angus, Maeve and Fand,  
Ye plummed yet skinny Shée,  
That poets played with hand in hand  
To learn their ecstasy.

We’ll search in Red Dan Sally’s ditch,  
And drink in Tubber fair,  
Or poach with Red Dan Philly’s bitch  
The badger and the hare.<sup>279</sup>

Synge’s reference to poets playing with the fairies ‘hand in hand’<sup>280</sup> is index for Yeats’s poem, “The Stolen Child,” in which the speaker summons the efficacy of

changeling belief: ‘Come away, O human child! / To the waters and the wild / With a faery, hand in hand’[...].<sup>281</sup> Synge, however, prefers the simplified materialism of folk culture, involving fairs and the poaching of game, to the Romantic idealism that manifests itself in Yeats’s version of the fairy faith. And so, if Synge believed the fairies to be culturally redundant then, at this juncture, it is pertinent to question Synge’s ethics when staging changeling belief. In his first two productions (*In the Shadow of the Glen* and *Riders to the Sea*) Synge was careful to dramatise the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland with sentiment and aptitude but now, in *The Playboy*, Synge was destroying what he had tried to enfranchise, for the sake of seeking revenge on the ‘scurrility and ignorance and treachery’<sup>282</sup> of Catholic bourgeois critics such as Padraig Pearse, who could not but help invoking evolutionary theory in his critique of *The Playboy*: ‘he is using the stage for the propagation of a monstrous gospel of animalism, or revolt against sane and sweet ideals, of bitter contempt for all that is fine and worthy, not merely in Christian morality, but in human nature itself’.<sup>283</sup> Synge advocated that medical students were inclined to have ‘scurrilous thoughts’<sup>284</sup> but just for once he must have welcomed Sheehan’s seditious comment, which resuscitated all of those uncomfortable memories concerning the Clonmel horror.

The Clonmel horror’s resonance with *The Playboy* created a disjunctive cultural constellation where the past and the present offered Synge’s spectator an experience with the past instead of an experience of the past. The experience *with* the collective memory of the Clonmel horror allowed the past to sit uncomfortably within the present, whereas an experience *of* the memory of the Clonmel horror was conducive to treating the past as history and memory as myth; as Benjamin suggests, meaningful historiography ‘leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called

“Once upon a time” in historicism’s bordello.’<sup>285</sup> Silver points out that ‘changeling episodes usually occurred in rural places and among poor or working-class Roman Catholic’<sup>286</sup> communities and what made matters worse for Synge’s Catholic bourgeois spectator was the fact that the Clearys were not members of the rural working class but rather, they were upwardly mobile mercantile Catholics that lived in a slate-roofed cottage, with ‘three rooms, a kitchen and two bed-rooms [sic]’,<sup>287</sup> and owned a Singer sewing machine. As Hubert Butler points out, nothing about the Clearys’ life was an indication of ‘mystery, remoteness [or] primeval superstition’<sup>288</sup>; no Darwinian apes from the pages of *Punch* could be found here. Essentially Sheehan was reminding the Catholic bourgeoisie of their sentimental attachment to the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland, which constantly threatened to discredit Catholic cultural hegemony. At every turn, the fairies made themselves known to the Catholic middle classes; Sir William Wilde observed that ‘fairy doctors of repute [live] but a few miles from the metropolis [...] [on] the circular road of Dublin’.<sup>289</sup> As the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* demonstrated, when the fairies did make a guest appearance, they could be mobilised to substantiate the supposition that the Catholic middle classes were not as pious as they postulated. In both *The Playboy* and the Clonmel horror, changeling folklore, whether believed or disbelieved, was used to explain the cultural anxiety of the Catholic bourgeoisie, thus reinforcing that they still embodied a backward and pre-political consciousness which was, as the *Irish Times* pointed out, indexical of ‘a deposit of evil.’<sup>290</sup> Synge’s dramatisation of changeling belief can be seen as a codified rearguard defence of Anglo-Irish sovereignty across a familiar ideological battleground. The dramatist’s conjecture was clear and Sheehan merely made it public: the Clonmel horror wasn’t just a one-off occurrence, and it

was still possible to find believers in changelings amongst the Catholic middle classes.

The resonance of changeling belief in *The Playboy*, which emerges in order to privilege the Anglo-Irish battle for socio-political hegemony, is in a curious dialogue with Synge's studies in Celtology. After studying with Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, Synge was aware that the fairies were the descendants of the *Tuatha Dé Danaan* (People of the Goddess Danu) that were forced into the underworld by the Sons of Mil, who were said to be genealogically linked to the incumbent Irish populace. And while Synge's notes from de Jubainville's lectures concluded that the 'Tutatha de Danann [are] the representations of principal light, life, knowledge',<sup>291</sup> Synge was content to consider the fairies as an innate Irish race that had been displaced because they could not survive with the fittest. For Synge, the parallels to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy's displacement of Catholic Ireland would have been clear. By this symbolic logic the fairies were indexical of the Catholic middle classes, whose battle for state-orientated nationalism was severely discredited in the wake of the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* disturbances; after all, it was these class formations that identified the fairy changeling. In *The Playboy* changeling belief is caught within the kaleidoscope of Synge's Ascendancy gaze and in the process a peculiar dialectic of class insecurity and Social Darwinism emerges from the fairy faith. As Yeats demonstrated in *On the Boiler*, Social Darwinism could be used to promote the science of eugenics, which, in turn, could be made to appease Anglo-Irish class insecurity; with respect to 'the uneducatable masses' Yeats believed that 'it will become the duty of the educated classes to seize and control' the modes of production so that the 'docile masses may submit'.<sup>292</sup> For Yeats, intelligence is consistent with class background and 'sooner or later we must limit the families of the unintelligent

classes'.<sup>293</sup> If Social Darwinism promoted the creation of a social elite that could displace inferior groups, then after reading Darwin and Spencer, Synge knew that societies were dependent on social elites in order to bring those struggling with evolution out of the benighted shadows. However, even though the elite would try its best to raise the standard of evolution, certain classes were simply unable to evolve and for Spencer this is why societies are heterogeneous. In his notebook, Synge recorded Spencer's evolutionary theory on the creation of heterogeneous societies: 'Formula of evolution = Evolution interpretation of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion, during which the matter ~~become~~ passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity.'<sup>294</sup> The Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* must have proven to Synge that Catholic bourgeois Ireland was unable to evolve and, in one deft move, Synge had appropriated the Social Darwinian subtext of changeling folklore and was now applying it to the Catholic bourgeoisie that competed with the Anglo-Irish for socio-political hegemony.

Synge's Social Darwinist reading of changeling belief and witchcraft in South Tipperary placed Yeats on very thin ice because in *The Playboy* Synge had privileged the savage sexuality, violence and paganism that was a corollary of changeling belief. However, Synge had, in fact, offered Yeats a golden opportunity. In Yeats's famous speech to Seanad Éireann (Senate of Ireland) on 11 June 1925, he rebutted the question posed by *An Cathaoirleach* (the chairman) who criticised Yeats's invocation of Parnell's infidelity with Katharine O'Shea as a means to criticise a proposed bill of divorce, and then stirring moved onto a defence of the Ascendancy:

DR. YEATS: [...] We had a good deal of trouble about Parnell when he married a woman who became thereby Mrs. Parnell.

AN CATHAOIRLEACH: Do you not think we might leave the dead alone?

DR YEATS: I am passing on. I would hate to leave the dead alone. [...] I am proud to consider myself a typical man of that minority. We against whom you have done this thing are no petty people. We are one of the great stocks of Europe. We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan; we are the people of Swift, the people of Emmet, the people of Parnell. We have created most of the modern literature of this country. We have created the best of its political intelligence.<sup>295</sup>

*The Playboy* presenting Yeats with his golden opportunity as he proceeded to don full evening regalia and stride forth upon the Abbey stage, whereupon he began to lecture the Catholic bourgeoisie on the efficacy of Synge's consciousness and, by corollary, the efficacy of the Anglo-Irish consciousness; to Yeats it seemed to matter not that Synge was setting the fairy faith within evolutionary theory. What is significant about Synge's Social Darwinist reading of Catholic Ireland's morbid fascination with changeling belief is that it mirrors the critical and cultural discourse of his time. Far away from the boards of the Abbey, Horace Plunkett argued that the 'defect in the industrial character of Roman Catholics'<sup>296</sup> was due to the fact that Irish Catholicism was far from liturgically orthodox because it was punctuated by vernacular custom and tradition. Therefore, according to Plunkett, the Catholic bourgeoisie should follow the example set by the Anglo-Irish because it was what 'we Protestants conceive to be a simpler Christianity',<sup>297</sup> which is why 'Protestants have given and continue to give, a fine example of thrift and industry to the rest of the nation.'<sup>298</sup> In

his riposte to Plunkett, Rev. M. O’Riordan attempted to defend the Catholic populace’s lingering sentiment to the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland and, in doing so, he was forced to defend the Clonmel horror:

those superstitions which [Plunkett] tells us play such moral havoc in backward districts, would likewise cease to be superstitions; because those poor folk to whom he alludes are no doubt quite sincere as to the righteousness of their beliefs or customs. He does not specify what those “survivals of superstition” are, and he therefore precludes me from discussing them on their merits. Does he allude to the notorious Tipperary witch case? Prescinding from the question whether the chief actor in that tragedy was a lunatic, or not – and religious maniacs are to be found everywhere, that his was a singular case appears from the fact, carefully concealed by our traducers, that he was hooted by his neighbours whose moral instincts were shocked by his action. We are supposed to be always on the defence, making apologies for our beliefs and customs; even held responsible for the conduct of fanatics or fools. But the home of the “simpler Christianity” across the Chanel has been the home of superstition and fanaticism from the days of the Lancashire witches and Johanna Southcote down to the faith-healers, the spirit-rappers [and] the crystal gazers.<sup>299</sup>

If O’Riordan correctly argued that traducers such as Plunkett failed to consider that Michael Cleary was ‘hooted by his neighbours whose moral instincts were shocked by his action’,<sup>300</sup> then the community in *The Playboy* failed to inform the authorities

of their 'savage violence'<sup>301</sup> because 'savage sexuality'<sup>302</sup> and 'savage paganism'<sup>303</sup> were naturalised in material conditions. There is, then, a 'great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed',<sup>304</sup> and the homeopathic magical ritual that changeling exorcism necessitated in both the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* appears, in the final analysis, as a rationalising tenet that was mobilised by Catholic Ireland. According to Patricia Lysaght, 'the changeling belief could have arisen to account for the sudden or unexpected return to normality',<sup>305</sup> which is why Father Ryan watched Michael Cleary 'tearing his hair and behaving like a madman'<sup>306</sup> outside the parish church in Drangan as he proceeded to ask for confession and, similarly, after Christy's exit Pegeen Mike laments how she 'lost the only playboy of the western world'.<sup>307</sup> But, in truth, changeling belief as a rationalising tenet was also a perfect narrative structure for Synge, who could use the critique of comparative social science in order to defend his own class insecurity. And just as for Michael Cleary and Pegeen Mike, the sudden return to normality after changeling belief had been mobilised in *The Playboy* was far from comfortable; Synge's pyrrhic victory effectively ended the Ascendancy's battle for hegemony as the fervour for Catholic bourgeois nationalism increased palpably.

#### **'GIVE CHURCH AND STATE THE LIE'<sup>308</sup>**

While it is perhaps a little farfetched to postulate that the disturbances were exclusively caused by *The Playboy*'s resonance with the Clonmel horror, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that Sheehan's comments catalysed the disturbances. For whichever way the disturbances are considered, Sheehan's likening of the events in *The Playboy* to the Clonmel horror unleashed the shame and humiliation of the vast

majority of Catholic, bourgeois Ireland. Synge gave the Catholic middle classes the religious discontents of Catholic Ireland, which was, by his analysis, a subculture that was neatly brushed underneath the carpet by Catholic hegemony. However, although Synge realised that he could use the evolutionary stigma that surrounded changeling belief in order to seek revenge on his Catholic critics, he does this at the expense of betraying a subterranean culture that he once tried to enfranchise. As Synge learnt about the fairies on Aran he was warned against ‘Protestants who don’t believe in any of these things and [they] do be making fun of us’.<sup>309</sup> Synge had succeeded in doing just that.

The supposition that Synge had planned his revenge on Catholic Ireland in order to promote the struggle for Anglo-Irish hegemony is substantiated by his self-reflexive missive under J.B. Yeats’s portrait of the dramatist in rehearsals for *The Playboy*: ‘If Church and State reply / Give Church and State the lie.’<sup>310</sup> When the *Dublin Evening Mail* led the cannonade of complaints by pointing out that if Synge was ‘stupid enough to suggest that the Irish people are cannibals or gorillas, [then the reviewer’s] hand will not fumble for the sword-hilt’,<sup>311</sup> Synge, true to his memorandum, told the *Evening Mail* that his play was just ‘a comedy, an extravaganza, made to amuse’.<sup>312</sup> Seven years ago, Moran would scorn Anglo-Irish literature: “stately verse of the Protestant Primate of Ireland” – what interest has it for us?’<sup>313</sup> Seven years later Synge had made it Moran’s interest. And Patrick Kenny, that critic of Catholic progressivism who invited Sheehan to the soapbox, wasn’t easily fooled by the dramatist’s facile remarks on comedy. Kenny, who was in the ‘industry’ of ‘telling the truth’ and making ‘many things quite stirringly articulate’<sup>314</sup> praised Synge for his Darwinian account of Irish culture, wherein ‘the survival of the unfittest is the established law of life.’<sup>315</sup> It was, Kenny added, as if ‘human specimens most

calculated to bring the race lower and lower' populated *The Playboy*. John Butler Yeats was of a similar persuasion: 'in holes and corners and in whispered colloquies these disturbers would admit that Synge's picture was a true rendering; that the facts were true but should not be revealed to the world. Again, ~~with~~ under the curse of subjection we feared the truth'.<sup>316</sup> Just like the communities in South Tipperary and Mayo, on realising a changeling may have been in their midst, the rioting Catholic bourgeoisie had a similar reaction: 'we fear to face the thing' Kenny admitted, 'we scream.'<sup>317</sup> The dramatist concurred. 'I am glad', Synge said, that Kenny realised there are 'several sides' to *The Playboy* and there 'may still be others if anyone cares to look for them.'<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, 73. For a full account of why Nic Shiubhlaigh decided to leave the company see, Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, 71-74. Also see, Adrian Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman and The Struggle for the Abbey Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 121-28.

<sup>2</sup> Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, 71.

<sup>3</sup> Fay concluded that: 'the great majority, thinking of religion and themselves, abominated the play on both counts. It had bad press and we lost money and audience over it'. See, Fay and Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, 169. Similarly, George Roberts remembered that 'the play was not at all popular on its first performance. At that time we were not accustomed to very large audiences, but there was an exceptionally small audience for the first performance of "The Well of the Saints." The second and third performances were even worse. I remember counting the people in the house on one of these nights and there were less than 20 present'. See, George Roberts, "Memoirs of George Roberts," *Irish Times*, 2 August, 1955, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Fay and Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, 212.

<sup>5</sup> Fay and Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, 211.

<sup>6</sup> Fay and Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, 213. Emphasis in original. Also see, Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, 81.

<sup>7</sup> James P. Conway, *For and Against the Irish Players: From a Public Debate by Irishmen Before Irishmen and Irish Women* (New York, 1911), 4. Conway's article appears in a pamphlet and does not indicate a publishing house. This material was accessed in NYPL: Berg Coll MSS Synge.

<sup>8</sup> NLI MS: 1805, Vol. 1, January 26, 1907, ff.63-64.

<sup>9</sup> Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993), xvi.

<sup>10</sup> "The Playboy of the West," *Irish Times*, 2 February, 1907, 13.

<sup>11</sup> "Police In," *Irish Independent*, 29 January, 1907, 5.

<sup>12</sup> "The Playboy of the West," *Irish Times*, 2 February, 1907, 13.

<sup>13</sup> "Abbey Theatre Scene," *Evening Telegraph*, 29 January, 1907, 4.

<sup>14</sup> The precursor to the Abbey Theatre was the Irish Literary Theatre that Yeats founded with Lady Gregory, George Moore and Edward Martyn. It was founded in 1899 and it transformed into the Abbey Theatre in 1904.

<sup>15</sup> Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 173.

<sup>16</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173. Garrigan Mattar extrapolates these three defining features from several of le Braz's works, with which Synge was familiar. However,

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these defining features are given significant treatment in Anatole le Braz, *Le Théâtre Celtique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1905).

<sup>17</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.

<sup>18</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 95.

<sup>19</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.

<sup>20</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 97.

<sup>21</sup> Mrs. MacDonnell, quoted in James Carney, *The Playboy and The Yellow Lady* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1986), 5.

<sup>22</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.

<sup>23</sup> For more on this subject see, Maria Leach and Jerome Fried, "Changeling," in *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, ed. Maria Leach and Jerome Fried (London: New English Library, 1972), 208-209.

<sup>24</sup> "The Burning of the Woman Cleary," *Irish Times*, 28 March, 1895, 5. For an objective and expedited account of how Bridget was burnt alive see, "The 'Witch-Burning' at Clonmel," *Folklore* 6, no. 4 (1895): 373-84.

<sup>25</sup> "Ireland," *Times*, 26 March, 1895, 8.

<sup>26</sup> "The Burning of the Woman Cleary," 5.

<sup>27</sup> "The Burning of the Woman Cleary," 5. It should be pointed out that the reference to 'sensation' in this quote is in reference to those present in the Clonmel Magistrates' Court; the *Irish Times* published a verbatim account of Burke's testimony that was made on 27 March.

<sup>28</sup> Angela Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 30.

<sup>29</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 112.

<sup>30</sup> "Tipperary Horror," *Cork Examiner*, 29 March, 1895, 5.

<sup>31</sup> "Tipperary Horror," *Cork Examiner*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> "Tipperary Horror," 5.

<sup>33</sup> See, "The Tipperary Wife Burning," *United Ireland*, 13 April, 1895, 3. See, "The Oscar Wilde Scandal," *United Ireland*, 13 April, 1895, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Angela Bourke, "Hunting Out the Fairies: E.F. Benson, Oscar Wilde and the Burning of Bridget Cleary," in *Wilde the Irishman*, ed. Jerusha McCormack (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 43.

<sup>35</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 199.

<sup>36</sup> "The Tipperary Horror," *Dublin Evening Mail*, 27 March, 1895, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> "The Tipperary Horror," *Cork Examiner*, 28 March, 1895, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.

<sup>40</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.

<sup>41</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 59, 56.

<sup>42</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 80.

<sup>43</sup> J.M. Synge, quoted in A.F., "I Don't Care a Rap," *Dublin Evening Mail*, 29 January, 1907, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Oliver St. John Gogarty, *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street: A Phantasy in Fact* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1937), 282.

<sup>45</sup> Gogarty, *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street*, 282.

<sup>46</sup> *CL*, vol. 1: 333. J.M. Synge to Stephen MacKenna, 17 April, 1907. Emphasis in original. In an earlier draft of *The Playboy*, Synge directly references the Lynchehaun case (*CW*, vol. 4: 311) case and in an interview with *Freeman's Journal* he explicitly refers to the case. See, "Abbey Theatre Scenes," *Freeman's Journal*, 30 January, 1907, 8. See also, Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, 82.

<sup>47</sup> *CW*, vol. 3: 19.

<sup>48</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, vol. 1, ed. John P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970), 284.

<sup>49</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 5.

<sup>50</sup> Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2: 213. W.B. Yeats to William Sharp, 4 July, 1898.

<sup>51</sup> Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2: 359. W.B. Yeats to Lady Gregory, 14 February, 1899.

<sup>52</sup> Valeska von Eicken, quoted in Greene and Stephens, *J.M. Synge: 1871-1909*, 38. Valeska Von Eicken to J.M. Synge, 1 March, 1894.

<sup>53</sup> NYPL MS: Berg Collection.

<sup>54</sup> Éilís ní Dhuibhne-Almqvist, "Synge's use of Popular Material in *The Shadow of the Glen*," *Béaloideas: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 58 (1990): 167.

<sup>55</sup> J.B. Yeats, *Letters To His Son: W.B. Yeats and Others*, 1869-1922, ed. Joseph Hone (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), 169. J.B. Yeats to W.B. Yeats, 25 December, 1913.

- <sup>56</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 53.
- <sup>57</sup> Anatole le Braz, *Essai Sur L'Histoire du Théâtre Celtique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1904), 46-47.
- <sup>58</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 107.
- <sup>59</sup> TCD MS: 4382, f.51v.
- <sup>60</sup> TCD MS: 4382, f.51v.
- <sup>61</sup> TCD MS: 4382, f.51v.
- <sup>62</sup> *CW*, vol. 1: xxxvi.
- <sup>63</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 53.
- <sup>64</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Letters to the New Island*, ed. Horace Reynolds (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1934), 204.
- <sup>65</sup> TCD MS: 4413, 17r. Synge read this on 15 April, 1892.
- <sup>66</sup> TCD MS: 4413, 3r. Synge read this on 18 March, 1892.
- <sup>67</sup> TCD: MS 4419, f.94r. Synge read this on 12 September, 1898.
- <sup>68</sup> TCD MS: 4419, f.98v. Synge first read this on 21 September, 1898.
- <sup>69</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 128.
- <sup>70</sup> Alfred Nutt, "An Essay upon the Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld and the Celtic Doctrine of Re-birth," in *The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal, To The Land of The Living: An Old Irish Saga*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Kuno Meyer (London: David Nutt, 1897), 232n.
- <sup>71</sup> J.M. Synge, *Letters to Molly: John Millington Synge to Maire O'Neill, 1906-1909*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 1971), 225. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 4 December, 1907. Emphasis in original.
- <sup>72</sup> Synge, *Letters to Molly*, 6. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 20 July, 1906.
- <sup>73</sup> Edward Hutchinson Synge, quoted in McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 128.
- <sup>74</sup> Angela Bourke, "Hunting Out the Fairies," 38.
- <sup>75</sup> Ellen Duncan, "The Playboy," *Irish Times*, 31 January, 1907, 5.
- <sup>76</sup> "Mr. Synge's New Play," *Dublin Evening Herald*, 6 February, 1905, 3.
- <sup>77</sup> Deborah Fleming, "*A Man Who Does Not Exist*": *The Irish Peasant in the Work of W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 78. For similar conclusions see, for example, Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Cork: Mercier, 1966), 117; like Fleming, Corkery posits that 'for the fairy religion, [Synge] had only little feeling'.
- <sup>78</sup> Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 531.
- <sup>79</sup> M, "Fairies and Folk-Lore," *All Ireland Review* 1, no. 42 (1900): 3.
- <sup>80</sup> M, "Fairies and Folk-Lore," 3.
- <sup>81</sup> Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 14.
- <sup>82</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 360.
- <sup>83</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 34.
- <sup>84</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 102.
- <sup>85</sup> Within the archives of the IFC there are many informants who testify to the Catholic clergy's belief in the fairies in the Ireland of Synge's time. See, for example, Seán Ó Flannagáin, "Conveying the Priest," IFC MS: 433, ff.35-36, County Clare; Michael Keenan, "Fourth Story by M. Keenan," IFC MS: 815, f.25, County Cavan. Also see, Pádraig Ó Héalaí, "Priest Versus Healer: The Legend of the Priest's Stricken Horse," *Béaloides: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 62, no. 3 (1994): 171-88.
- <sup>86</sup> K.M. Briggs, "The English Fairies," *Folklore* 68, no. 1 (1957): 271. While the title of Briggs's article concerns English fairies she begins the discussion with the types of fairies that are peculiar to Great Britain and Ireland.
- <sup>87</sup> Briggs, "The English Fairies," 270-71.
- <sup>88</sup> Briggs, "The English Fairies," 271.
- <sup>89</sup> Briggs, "The English Fairies," 271.
- <sup>90</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 29.
- <sup>91</sup> *The Census of Ireland for The Year 1861*, Part III, *Vital Statistics*, vol. 2, *Reports and Tables Relating to Deaths* (Dublin: Alexander Thom, 1864), 36.
- <sup>92</sup> "Superstition," *Examiner*, 6 August, 1826, 12.
- <sup>93</sup> TCD: MS 4350, f.59v. Emphasis added.
- <sup>94</sup> W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 1, 1865-1895, ed. John Kelly (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 303. W.B. Yeats to John O'Leary, 23 July, 1892.
- <sup>95</sup> John Wilson Foster, *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival: A Changeling Art* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), 206.

- <sup>96</sup> Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 162.
- <sup>97</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 51.
- <sup>98</sup> Messenger, *Inis Beag*, 99.
- <sup>99</sup> Lady Gregory, quoted in *J.M. Synge: 1871-1909*, ed. David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 121.
- <sup>100</sup> Green and Stephens, *J.M. Synge: 1871-1909*, 121.
- <sup>101</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 156.
- <sup>102</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 165.
- <sup>103</sup> *CL*, vol. 1: 74. J.M. Synge to Stephen MacKenna, 28 January, 1904.
- <sup>104</sup> Robert Frazer, "Introduction," in Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, ix.
- <sup>105</sup> For Yeats's insistence that Synge should read *The Golden Bough*, see, Deirdre Toomey, "Killing the Da: Synge and The Golden Bough," in *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination*, ed. Robert Frazer (London: Macmillan, 1990), 157.
- <sup>106</sup> W.B. Yeats, "The Speckled Bird: A Novel by Mr. W.B. Yeats, A Section From The Novel with a note by Curtis Bradford," *Irish Writing* 31 (1955): 18.
- <sup>107</sup> Roche, "The Otherworld Drama of John Millington Synge," 51.
- <sup>108</sup> TCD MS: 4378, f.52v.
- <sup>109</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 57.
- <sup>110</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 56.
- <sup>111</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 56.
- <sup>112</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 97.
- <sup>113</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
- <sup>114</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 73.
- <sup>115</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 89.
- <sup>116</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 75.
- <sup>117</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 31.
- <sup>118</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 59.
- <sup>119</sup> "The Playboy of the West," *Irish Times*, 2 February, 1907, 13.
- <sup>120</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 65.
- <sup>121</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 65.
- <sup>122</sup> TCD MS: 4401, f.6r. Synge recorded this in September 1905.
- <sup>123</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 89.
- <sup>124</sup> Angela Bourke, "The Virtual Reality of Irish Fairy Legend," *Éire-Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Irish Studies* 31: no. 1-2 (1996): 10, 12.
- <sup>125</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 61.
- <sup>126</sup> Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, "The Fairy Belief and Official Religion in Ireland," in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 201.
- <sup>127</sup> W.G. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland, a Folklore Sketch: A Handbook of Irish pre-Christian Traditions*, vol. 2 (New York: Kennikat, 1970), 14.
- <sup>128</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 73, 79.
- <sup>129</sup> Hoff and Yeates, *The Cooper's Wife is Missing*, 166.
- <sup>130</sup> "The Tipperary Burning Case," *Irish Times*, 2 April, 1895, 5. Bridget Cleary was immolated on 14 March, but Bourke concludes that her death would have been in the very early minutes of 15 March. Thus, if Bridget was immolated on the 14 March, then nine days previously would have been 6 March. Bourke concludes that on 13 March, 'Michael Cleary and his father-in-law, with help from Mary Kennedy and Johanna Burke, had nursed the feverish Bridget for over a week, watching her conditions deteriorate' (Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 75. Emphasis added). Thus, Bridget would have ostensibly fallen into fever on 6 March.
- <sup>131</sup> Katherine Briggs, *The Fairies in English Tradition and Literature* (London: Bellew, 1989), 106. Although Briggs's analysis pertains towards English fairies she regularly discusses Irish fairies and traditions. For example: 'The Irish fairy beliefs are the most explicit and generally held, and here and there are many strands and varieties of belief. The fairies are of all sizes and various characters. [...] There is a close connection between them and the dead' (Briggs, *The Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 87-88).
- <sup>132</sup> Ó Giolláin, "The Fairy Belief and Official Religion in Ireland," 203.
- <sup>133</sup> Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland*, vol. 2: 14.
- <sup>134</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 67.
- <sup>135</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 30.
- <sup>136</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 67.

- <sup>137</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 30.
- <sup>138</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 71-73.
- <sup>139</sup> Carole G. Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 60.
- <sup>140</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 73.
- <sup>141</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 73.
- <sup>142</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 73.
- <sup>143</sup> Joan Hoff and Marian Yeates, *The Cooper's Wife is Missing: The Trials of Bridget Cleary* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 105.
- <sup>144</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 87.
- <sup>145</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 115.
- <sup>146</sup> Séamas Mac Philib, "The Changeling: Irish Versions of a Migratory Legend in their International Context," *Béaloides: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 59 (1991): 125.
- <sup>147</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 139.
- <sup>148</sup> Mac Philib, "The Changeling: Irish Versions of a Migratory Legend in their International Context," 125.
- <sup>149</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 99.
- <sup>150</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 95.
- <sup>151</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 103.
- <sup>152</sup> Angela Bourke, "Reading a Woman's Death: Colonial Text and Oral Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," *Feminist Studies* 21, no. 3 (1995): 580.
- <sup>153</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 153.
- <sup>154</sup> W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Russell K. Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1965), 931.
- <sup>155</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Prefaces and Introductions: Uncollected Prefaces and Introductions by Yeats to Works by Other Authors, and to Anthologies*, ed. William H. O'Donnell (London: Macmillan, 1988), 58.
- <sup>156</sup> Yeats, *Prefaces and Introductions*, 58.
- <sup>157</sup> Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 429.
- <sup>158</sup> M, "Fairies and Folk-Lore," 3.
- <sup>159</sup> Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 1: 146. W.B. Yeats to George Coffey, 14 February, 1889.
- <sup>160</sup> Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 1: 146. W.B. Yeats to George Coffey, 14 February, 1889. Emphasis in original.
- <sup>161</sup> M, "Fairies and Folk-Lore," 3.
- <sup>162</sup> Andrew Lang, "Changelings," *Illustrated London News*, 25 May, 1895, 651.
- <sup>163</sup> Hubert Butler, *Escape from the Anthill* (Mullingar: Lilliput, 1986), 65.
- <sup>164</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 86.
- <sup>165</sup> Tom Mac Intyre, *What Happened Bridgie Cleary* (Dublin: New Island, 2005), 92.
- <sup>166</sup> Briggs, *The Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 115.
- <sup>167</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 175.
- <sup>168</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 171.
- <sup>169</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 56. However, de Jubainville had informed Synge about this theory in March, 1898 as his notes from de Jubainville's lectures testify: 'The Tuatha D came directly from Heaven' (TCD MS: 4378, f.65r).
- <sup>170</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 56.
- <sup>171</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 73, 79.
- <sup>172</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 93.
- <sup>173</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 93. Interestingly, Carlo Gébler's novel on the Clonmel horror, *The Cure*, interrogated the sexual relationship between Michael and Bridget Cleary. Within the confines of prose fiction Bridget's method of appeasing her husband's anger at her inability to become pregnant was 'to make love more passionately and more often' (Carlo Gébler, *The Cure* [London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994], 32).
- <sup>174</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 89.
- <sup>175</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 91.
- <sup>176</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 17.
- <sup>177</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 117, 61.
- <sup>178</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 75, 115, 155, 167.
- <sup>179</sup> Angela Bourke and Patricia Lysaght, "Legends of the Supernatural," in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 4, *Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Angela Bourke, Siobhán Kilfeather,

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Maria Luddy, Margaret Mac Curtain, Gerardine Meaney, Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Mary O'Dowd and Clair Wills (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 1285.

<sup>180</sup> TCD: MS 4378, f.50v.

<sup>181</sup> TCD: MS 4378, f.56v.

<sup>182</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 170, 172.

<sup>183</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 57.

<sup>184</sup> Melissa Sihra, interviewed by Christopher Collins. Dublin, Ireland. 5 July, 2010. Dr. Sihra, who visited the Cleary's house in Ballyvadlea, South Tipperary on 2 August, 2005, asked for directions to the house, which informants referred to the house as 'the fairy house'.

<sup>185</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 82.

<sup>186</sup> "The Burning of the Woman Cleary," *Irish Times*, 28 March, 1895, 5.

<sup>187</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 169, 171.

<sup>188</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 744.

<sup>189</sup> Butler, *Escape from the Anthill*, 64.

<sup>190</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 169.

<sup>191</sup> Séan McMahon, "'Leave Troubling The Lord God': A Note on Synge and Religion," *Éire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* 11, no. 1 (1976): 134.

<sup>192</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 30.

<sup>193</sup> "The 'Witch-Burning' at Clonmel," 382.

<sup>194</sup> Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1977), 233.

<sup>195</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 26.

<sup>196</sup> John C. Messenger, *Inis Beag: Isle of Ireland* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 101.

<sup>197</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.

<sup>198</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.

<sup>199</sup> Nutt, "An Essay upon the Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld," 232.

<sup>200</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 588-9.

<sup>201</sup> TCD MS: 4378, f.56v.

<sup>202</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (London: Athlone, 1988), 8.

<sup>203</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 73, 97.

<sup>204</sup> Lang, "Changelings," 651.

<sup>205</sup> Edward Clodd, "The Witch-Burning Case in Ireland," *Times*, 1 August, 1895, 5.

<sup>206</sup> Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, 85.

<sup>207</sup> Fay and Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, 212.

<sup>208</sup> Lady Gregory, quoted in Ann Saddlemyer, ed., *Theatre Business: The Correspondence of the First Abbey Theatre Directors: William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge*, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982), 205n. Lady Gregory to W.B. Yeats, 12 January, 1907.

<sup>209</sup> Joseph Holloway, NLI MS: 1805, 26 January, 1907, f.64.

<sup>210</sup> R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1, *The Apprentice Mage: 1865-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 360.

<sup>211</sup> Herbert Grierson, quoted in Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1: 360.

<sup>212</sup> See, W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 4, *1905-1907*, ed. John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 308n.

<sup>213</sup> Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2000), ix.

<sup>214</sup> Rokem, *Performing History*, ix.

<sup>215</sup> Rokem, *Performing History*, 13.

<sup>216</sup> "Ireland," 8.

<sup>217</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 748-9.

<sup>218</sup> Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 312.

<sup>219</sup> "The Abbey Theatre," *Freeman's Journal*, 29 January, 1907, 7. *Irish Independent* reports this slightly differently: 'What about Tipperary where the witch was burned' ("Police In," 5.) It is not categorically clear that Daniel Sheehan was responsible for this comment. But Sheehan, who was known to be present, does seem to be the most likely transgressor. In *The Silence of Barbara Synge*, W.J. McCormack conjectures that the comment was indeed 'the view of young Daniel Sheehan' and that the 'trainee doctor taunted the rioters with the cry, "What about Mullinahone and the witch burning?"' See, W.J. McCormack, *The Silence of Barbara Synge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 226-27. R.F. Foster corroborates McCormack's conjecture. See, Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1: 360.

<sup>220</sup> "The Abbey Theatre," 7.

- <sup>221</sup> "Dreadful Occurrence in Country Tipperary," *Irish Times*, 30 March, 1895, 5.
- <sup>222</sup> Emilie Pine, *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 11.
- <sup>223</sup> "Abbey Theatre Scenes," 7.
- For a full account of Napoleon's evening at *The Playboy*, see, *The Abbey Row: Not Edited by W.B. Yeats* (Dublin: Maunsell, 1907), 1-9.
- <sup>224</sup> "Abbey Theatre Scenes," 7.
- <sup>225</sup> "The Tipperary Burning Case," *Irish Times*, 2 April, 1895, 5.
- <sup>226</sup> "Superstition," 12.
- <sup>227</sup> Hoff and Yeates, *The Cooper's Wife is Missing*, 276.
- <sup>228</sup> James Joyce, *The Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 148. James Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 11 February, 1907.
- <sup>229</sup> Lady Gregory, quoted in ed. Ann Saddlemyer, *Theatre Business: The Correspondence of the First Abbey Theatre Directors: William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982), 205. Lady Gregory to J.M. Synge, 13 January, 1907.
- <sup>230</sup> NYPL MS: Berg Collection. Lady Gregory to Wilfred Blunt, 20 April, 1907.
- <sup>231</sup> George Roberts, "Memoirs of George Roberts," *Irish Times*, 14 September, 1955, 5.
- <sup>232</sup> George Moore, quoted in Robin Skelton, *The Writings of J.M. Synge* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 118.
- <sup>233</sup> Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 326.
- <sup>234</sup> "The Tipperary Horror," *Cork Examiner*, 28 March, 1895, 5.
- <sup>235</sup> Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, vol. 1: 189.
- <sup>236</sup> "Irish Witches, Spells and Charms," *Irish Times*, 13 April, 1895, 4.
- <sup>237</sup> See, Edward Clodd, *Tom Tit Tot: An Essay on Savage Philosophy in Folk-Tale* (London: Duckworth, 1898), 83.
- <sup>238</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, vol. 2, ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (London: Macmillan, 1975), 277.
- <sup>239</sup> W.B. Yeats, "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places," in Lady Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1970), 360n.
- <sup>240</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Explorations: Selected by Mrs. W.B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 401.
- <sup>241</sup> W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Russell K. Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1966), 931.
- <sup>242</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 54.
- <sup>243</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 55.
- <sup>244</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin, 2004), 689.
- <sup>245</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 10.
- <sup>246</sup> TCD MS: 4416, f.129v. Synge's diary for 30 September 1895, simply reads 'Began the Origin of Species'.
- <sup>247</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 10.
- <sup>248</sup> Synge's diary for 4 October, 1895 reads 'Began the Descent of Man' (TCD: MS 4416, f.131v). He would read it for over a week and on 12 October, 1895 his diary reads 'Finished Descent of Man' (TCD: MS: 4416, f.135v). His notes can be found: TCD MS: 4379, ff. 82v-83r.
- <sup>249</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 54.
- <sup>250</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 171.
- <sup>251</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 270-71.
- <sup>252</sup> F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 12.
- <sup>253</sup> Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 1: 229. W.B. Yeats to the Editor of the *Academy*, 2 October, 1890.
- <sup>254</sup> TCD MS: 4382, f.51v.
- <sup>255</sup> NLI MS: 8320. Frank Fay to Máire Garvey, 26 April, 1909.
- <sup>256</sup> W.A. Henderson, NLI MS: POS 7271, f.92v.
- <sup>257</sup> *CL*, vol. 1: 289. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 5 February, 1907.
- <sup>258</sup> W.B. Yeats, quoted in W.A. Henderson, NLI MS: 1720. This speech was reprinted in *Arrow*. See, W.B. Yeats, "Mr. Yeats' Opening Speech At The Debate of February, 4<sup>th</sup>, At the Abbey Theatre," *Arrow*, 23 February, 1907, 6.
- <sup>259</sup> Holloway, NLI MS: 1805, 4 February, 1907, f.85.
- <sup>260</sup> Duncan, "The Playboy," 5.
- <sup>261</sup> "The Freedom of the Play," *Irish Times*, 5 February, 1907, 8.

- <sup>262</sup> James Kilroy, *The 'Playboy' Riots* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1971), 86.
- <sup>263</sup> Kilroy, *The 'Playboy' Riots*, 86.
- <sup>264</sup> Kilroy, *The 'Playboy' Riots*, 86.
- <sup>265</sup> TCD MS: 4396, f.62r.
- <sup>266</sup> Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 115.
- <sup>267</sup> E.F. Benson, *The Collected Ghost Stories of E.F. Benson*, ed. Richard Daly (London: Robinson, 1992), 619.
- <sup>268</sup> Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, 81-82. A Kaffir kraal is a Zulu village.
- <sup>269</sup> Jacques, "A Queer Hero In Mr. Synge's Play Produced at the Abbey Theatre," *Irish Independent*, 28 January, 1907, 4.
- <sup>270</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham: Published Under the Superintendence of His Executor, John Bowring*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843), 400.
- <sup>271</sup> See, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 37-46.
- <sup>272</sup> Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, 87.
- <sup>273</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 29.
- <sup>274</sup> Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, 8.
- <sup>275</sup> Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, 8.
- <sup>276</sup> "The Case of Witchcraft in Tipperary," *Irish Times*, 5 July, 1895, 5.
- <sup>277</sup> *CL*, vol. 1: 111. J.M. Synge to Stephen MacKenna, 30 May, 1905.
- <sup>278</sup> William M. Murphy, *Prodigal Father: The Life of John Butler Yeats, 1839-1922* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 316.
- <sup>279</sup> *CW*, vol. 1: 38.
- <sup>280</sup> *CW*, vol. 1: 38.
- <sup>281</sup> Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 45.
- <sup>282</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 283n.
- <sup>283</sup> P.H. Pearse, "The Passing of Anglo-Irish Drama," *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 9 February, 1907, 7.
- <sup>284</sup> Synge, *Letters to Molly*, 61. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 29 November, 1906.
- <sup>285</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 254.
- <sup>286</sup> Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, 67.
- <sup>287</sup> "Tipperary Horror," 5.
- <sup>288</sup> Butler, *Escape from the Anthill*, 63.
- <sup>289</sup> William Wilde, *Irish Popular Superstitions* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1979), 28.
- <sup>290</sup> "The Case of Witchcraft in Tipperary," 5.
- <sup>291</sup> TCD MS: 4379, f.65r.
- <sup>292</sup> W.B. Yeats, *On the Boiler* (Dublin: Cuala, 1939), 19.
- <sup>293</sup> Yeats, *On the Boiler*, 20.
- <sup>294</sup> TCD MS: 4379, f.92v.
- <sup>295</sup> W.B. Yeats, *The Senate Speeches of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Donald R. Pearce (London: Prendeville Publishing Limited, 2001), 87-88.
- <sup>296</sup> Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (London: John Murray, 1904), 101-102.
- <sup>297</sup> Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (London: John Murray, 1904), 103.
- <sup>298</sup> Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (London: John Murray, 1904), 120.
- <sup>299</sup> M. O'Riordan, *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland* (London: Keegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1905), 248.
- <sup>300</sup> O'Riordan, *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland*, 248. For details of how Michael Cleary was betrayed by the community see, Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 18-19.
- <sup>301</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
- <sup>302</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
- <sup>303</sup> Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
- <sup>304</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 169.
- <sup>305</sup> Patricia Lysaght, "Fairylore from the Midlands of Ireland," in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 35.
- <sup>306</sup> "The Tipperary Burning Case," 5.
- <sup>307</sup> *CW*, vol. 4: 173.
- <sup>308</sup> J.M. Synge, in Henderson, NLI MS: 1720.
- <sup>309</sup> *CW*, vol. 2: 180.
- <sup>310</sup> Synge, in Henderson, NLI MS: 1720.
- <sup>311</sup> H.S.D. "A Dramatic Freak," *Dublin Evening Mail*, 28 January, 1907, 2.

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- <sup>312</sup> Synge, quoted in A.F., "I Don't Care a Rap," 2.
- <sup>313</sup> D.P. Moran, "More Muddle," *Leader*, 22 December, 1900, 254.
- <sup>314</sup> Kenny, *The Sorrows of Ireland* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1907), 14.
- <sup>315</sup> Pat, "That Dreadful Play," *Irish Times*, 30 January, 1907, 9.
- <sup>316</sup> NYPL MS: Foster-Murphy Collection.
- <sup>317</sup> Pat, "That Dreadful Play," 9.
- <sup>318</sup> *CL*, vol. 1: 286. J.M. Synge to the Editor of the *Irish Times*, 30 January, 1907.