

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 12 : 7 July 2012

ISSN 1930-2940

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## Cognitive Dissonance of the Cordite Mayoites in *The Playboy of The Western World*

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John Millington Synge 1871-1909

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## John Millington Synge

John Millington Synge is one of the greatest dramatists from Dublin. He is well known for his use of the native dialects in his plays. His play *The Playboy of the Western World* remains as a milestone of his achievement. It is a social satire which pictures the Irish characters. The simple theme and the effective construction of the plot around the chosen theme function as the pivotal point in the play. The play has Mayo, a small village in Western Ireland, as the major backdrop. The tragic comical instances which take place raise the satirical tone of the Mayo society. This article focuses on the dilemma of the Mayoites society, the cognitive dissonance and their shift in behavioural traits.

### Cognitive Dissonance in Mayo



<http://www.druidsynge.com/theplays/the-playboy-of-the-western-world>

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Cognitive dissonance represents the problems that arise in the mind because of the conflicting ideas. The article presents the conflicting ideas in Mayo on hearing and observing a fatal scene. *The Playboy of the Western World* starts at Mayo, where the people lead humdrum lives but search for joy in improper and false bravery.

Christy, the central protagonist of the play, comes to Mayo. At Munster, a small Irish village, he has given a fatal blow to his father with a spade. To escape the death punishment and to save himself he moves from Munster and reaches Mayo after eleven long days. He thinks that he has murdered his father which really has not happened at all.

In Mayo, Pegeen Mike, daughter of Michael James takes care of a country Shebeen. She is engaged to Shawn Keogh who is afraid of everything. Michael James wants to go to Kate Cassidy's wake to enjoy the night there with liquor. He experiences the cognitive dilemma at that stance whether to leave for the funeral or to accompany his daughter. But he finally comes to the conclusion to go for his own enjoyment. This is an instance that shows Mayo's choice of love for fantasy and fun. Synge satirizes the society packed with love for fun and fake at the cost of parental love.

[...] if I was him, I wouldn't bother with this place where you'll meet none, but Red Linahan, has a squint in his eyes, and Patcheen is lame in his heel, or the mad Mulrannies were driven from California and they lost in their wits. We're a queer lot these times to go troubling the Holy Father on his sacred seat. (PBWW Act I)

The above words of Pegeen express the Mayoites as extremists in Mayo. No other person from other countries will care for Mayoites as they are worst in their activities.

Shawn, the fiancé of Pegeen does not want to accompany her as it is an approved practice to stay with a girl before marriage. The appearance of Christy in the scene and his immediate appointment as Pot-boy of the Shebeen by Michael represent the unconditioned life of the people. When Christy expresses that he has murdered his father, everyone is thrilled. Michael, after knowing Christy as a murderer, accepts and appoints him to take care of Shebeen and Pegeen.

Christy's father Old Mohan is also represented as a drunkard who wanders naked in the garden at night. Synge satirizes the society's love for liquor and pleasure at the cost of self-discipline and responsibility.

### **The Dilemma of the Female Characters**

The female characters experience a dilemma in the play. Pegeen, who has Shawn as her fiancé, falls in love with Christy at first sight. She adorns Shawn for the deed of murdering his father. She describes his physique and praises him to grab his attention. She dismisses Shawn's presence immediately after Christy's appointment. Just as Cordite burst out when triggered, she throws Shawn as he does not possess the valor of a man.

### **Belief and Practice of Mayoites**

According to Mayoites, man must not belong to pre-conventional or conventional levels where individuals accept the societal norms and act as per the demands of the society. The

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Mayo's accept the post-conventional level of Kohlberg's theory where individuals become autonomous and take decisions on the basis of their own ideas. But the Mayo's believe that manliness represents mercilessness with cruelty and arrogance. The Mayoites thereby have a great attraction towards Christy's valour as Christy states to them that he cut his father from the head to the waist with a spade. As Christy is beyond the post-colonial level and acts as an extremist, they all love him. He is considered as a playboy as he is excellent in sports and becomes a dream boy to every village girl.

The village girls and farmers in Shebeen have got their own imagination of the way Christy has murdered his father in his beyond the post-conventional level.

You have hanged him, the way Jimmy Farewell hanged his dog from the license, 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. (PBWW Act I)

This is a good instance to show how the villagers like some astonishing deeds of man in their life. It must be a murder. They consider the murder of a man and an animal to be the same but they expect some sensational scenes in it. As Christy has catered to their feast, they started to love him.

### **The Widow Quin**

Another important character Widow Quin tries to get Christy. She has killed her husband and her flirting with Christy makes others feel irritated. She tries to convince Christy with the words that she will safeguard him from police by letting him inside her home and keeping him

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with her. When Old Mohan appears, Quin is in conflict whether to save Christy or to threaten him. Through any means she wants to get Christy. She misleads Old Mohan when he comes in to save Christy.

### **Christy's Dissonance**

Old Mohan realizes that his son has got the status of a playboy in Mayo. But he beats him in front of others for having hit him. The admiration of Mayoites for Christy gets shattered immediately after knowing that Christy has deceived them with the act of patricide. But Christy has a cognitive dissonance either to be happy for not being a murderer or to be regretful for the loss of the Mayoites' affection and admiration. But Christy decides to retain the latter. He attempts to murder Old Mohan again in front of Mayoites. This patricidal attempt remains as cold-blooded murder scene in their eyes and they cannot accept it. The Mayoites who admired Christy till then suddenly become furious. They begin to tie up Christy's hands and legs and started to scorch his legs. The dilemma of ideas whether to accept his falsified nature or to punish him resulted in the punishment.

### **Paternal Dilemma**

Old Mohan appears for the third time. He, who has been dead against his son's fatal deed of patricide, faces a dilemma at the sight of the intolerable punishment endured by his son. He has the dilemma whether to save his sinful son or to let him die in the hands of the Mayoites. At last, he decides and saves his son. Pegeen who is against Christy for his sinful deed at once becomes calm when Old Mohan appears for the third time. Christy at that moment undergoes

dissonance whether to go with his father who rescued him or to accept Pegeen's pretentious love. But finally he moves with his father to Munster leaving Pegeen and his love for her behind. He goes with his father on a conditional basis that he should not disturb him in his life thereafter.

## **To Conclude**

This article shows that each and every character in *The Playboy of the Western World* possesses some cognitive dissonance in their own ideas. In this play, out of the dissonance all the characters react violently. In some sense the author wanted to depict some of the trends in the Irish society of his times, but his depiction may not be wholly acceptable to our contemporary society. There were riots in Ireland when this play was first enacted. Over the years, there is greater appreciation of the content and presentation of the play even in Ireland.

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