The Playboy of the Western World: The Subversion of a Traditional Conception of Irishness?

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Summary

This paper aims to reveal some of the reasons why such a phenomenon as the Abbey Theatre turned out to be more than a chance dramatic failure in the recent history of Ireland. Many of the plays performed there frequently embodied an inversion of the most sacred values of a very restrictive ideological construct that would be known as the Irish nation by the political nationalists. John Millington Synge's linguistic representation of the Irish woman in a comedy like *The Playboy of the Western World* surprised the audience at every turn. The linguistically impolite behaviour of those female characters was impolitely answered by the so-called "Playboy Riots".

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel beoog om sommige van die redes aan die lig te bring waarom 'n fenomeen soos die Abbey-teater meer was as 'n toevallige dramatiese mislukking in die onlangse geskiedenis van Ierland. Baie van die dramas wat daar opgevoer is het dikwels 'n omkering vergestalt van die heiligste waardes binne 'n baie streng ideologiese konstruksie, wat onder politiese nasionaliste bekend sou staan as die Ierse nasie. John Millington Synge se linguistiese representasie van die Ierse vrou in 'n komedie soos die *The Playboy of the Western World* het die gehoor telkens verras. Die linguistiese ongepoetste gedrag van daardie vroulike karakters is grof beantwoord deur die sogenaamde "Playboy Riots".

Keywords: reception theory; linguistic criticism; discourse analysis; gender studies; principle of politeness; deviation from stereotype; Anglo-Irish literature; Abbey Theatre; J.M. Synge.

Introduction

Synge is one of the most outstanding figures of the Abbey Theatre. By the beginning of the twentieth century, he had shaken the very foundations of Irish

society, Irish culture, and a rhetorically Irish presentation of reality. His women were repeatedly said to constitute a libel on Irish womanhood (Casey 1988); they should have been the symbol of Ireland's virtues, but did not fit the stereotype. They were the metaphorical enthronement of excess, abnormality, and marginality. They clashed with a prototypical concept of femininity, linguistically and socially established (Krause 1971; Kane 1982; Saddlemyer 1983). Furthermore, by violating certain pragmalinguistic conventions, in particular the Principle of Politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987), they were thought to behave subversively and became the sign of an act of betrayal. The audience had to reject that provocation. They could not tolerate the fact that the protagonists on the stage did not play the same role as their revered Cathleen Ni Houlihan.

The history of the Abbey was marked by several violent events; these were audience responses to certain plays that were not regarded as suitable models for Ireland's national theatre. They had called into question the principles and intentions of this cultural institution. The Abbey Theatre Society, a heterogeneous group of people, culturally, socially, and ideologically speaking, was expected to operate as a unified voice of the perceived Irish culture; nevertheless, almost all their productions would break the audience's horizon of expectations (cf. Jauss 1967).

In my study, in order to approach the interpretation of so complex a phenomenon, I attempted the integration of various insights from linguistic theory, pragmatics, literary linguistics, communication theory, sociolinguistics and cultural semiotics. Undoubtedly, the Abbey Theatre must be dealt with as a literary, communicative, sociological and cultural event of very meaningful consequences in the convulsive situation of Irish politics and culture at the end of the nineteenth century. My starting point was the notion of "context". This implied the identification of any text with an ideological product and a linguistic manifestation of a very specific community (Alcaraz Varó 1990). I believe that going from the context to the text is the best way to discern reality as textualised events, as a series of interwoven elements with mutual influence. The text, transformed into discourse, fulfils an important function in the social structure to which it belongs as the product of an agent and as an object for other agents. The dialogical process promoted by each performance in the Abbey Theatre can be understood through such a conception, initially introduced by Jakobson's (1960) model of communication. It could be said that what had happened between the Abbey playwrights and the Irish audience was a sort of faulty communicative process (Hidalgo Tenorio 1997). To explain it, I tried to draw on a series of manuals of cultural-semiotic, literary and linguistic studies, whose special relationship cannot be solved by simply mingling some of their

constructs and hypotheses. Therefore, I started from the assumption that a sociosemiotics of theatre (De Toro 1988) is an excellent point upon which to integrate the principles of speech-act theory, reception theory, mental models theory and discourse analysis.

The first thing I wished to show is that the Abbey Theatre cannot be regarded as a phenomenon divorced from both its historical and sociological contexts. It can only be understood as the result of their union, the bases of which are the multiple concepts of nation and nationalism of that period. The explanation of this movement's failure and the explanation why it was taken as an attack against the very same society that had inspired it could be reduced to one simple circumstance (i.e. the preferences of the audience). It is, however, a more complex matter. The disagreement between the members of that dramatic institution (originally only a literary association) was obvious. Their purposes were either explicitly political or mainly artistic. Their literary tastes were either European or Irish. Their methods were either sophisticated or impulsive. Subsequently, their concepts of a national theatre were different; nevertheless, all of them aimed to build up a new cultural tradition on whose foundations they could create a new ideological image of the Irish nation.

Secondly, I considered the performance of some Abbey Theatre plays in terms of Van Dijk's (1977) concept of "macro-speech act". Each of them can be taken as an act of communication similar to the production of different speech acts with their own illocutionary forces, expressed by the plays themselves and the manifestos published in their defence. Their perlocutionary forces did not fit those expected by the playwrights. The reactions that followed the performances of Yeats's *Countess Cathleen* (1989) in 1899 or of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1986) in 1907 must be described as a failure in the emission of such macrodiscursive units. Such a debacle was due to the fact that the audience's and the playwrights' *maxims of conversation* were out of phase. In other words, the negative response from the audience was caused by the playwrights' failure to comply with the maxims chosen by the audience for that type of communicative process.

Furthermore, by taking into account three different hypotheses intrinsically connected, it is possible to go more deeply into this matter: (1) the point of departure of the audience's reaction was a horizon of expectations unlike that of the dramatists'; (2) there also occurred a clash of mental models within the same, albeit not unified, cultural model; and (3) the public rejected the deviation from the norm that those creations implied.

It is a fact that the members of the Abbey intended to satisfy the needs of an audience that had been transfigured through literature, but they were not able to admit that such an audience was an ideal. The Abbey Theatre writers were

not prepared to understand that their own expectations surpassed those of the real audience, who did not clap but hissed. The type of play the real audience was used to was melodrama. A typically Irish atmosphere always enveloped its main character, a ridiculous pathetic clown, the so-called "Stage Irishman". The best depiction of this figure, continually used in some of Dion Boucicault's plays, such as *The Colleen Bawn* (1987) (first performed in 1870) or *The Shaughraun* (first performed in 1874), is by Maurice Bourgeois:

> The stage Irishman ... has an atrocious Irish brogue, makes perpetual jokes, blunders and bulls in speaking, and never fails to utter, by way of Hibernian seasoning, some wild screech or oath of Gaelic origin at every third word; he has an unsurpassable gift of "blarney" and cadges for tips and free drinks .... His face is one of simian bestiality .... In his right hand he brandishes a stout blackthorn ... and threatens to belabour therewith the daring person who will "tread on the tails of his coat". For his main characteristics ... are his swagger, his boisterousness and his pugnacity.
>
> (Bourgeois 1913: 109-110)

While English audiences had watched this parodic representation with relish, Dubliners were against that insulting intrusion into the image of their historical conscience. They knew that it was necessary to break that horizon of expectations. In its place, they preferred another (one that would have nothing to do with the previous one). The conflict arose when at least two different visions were introduced: both violated that initial horizon of expectations, but due to their lack of unification, they opposed each other and created cognitive dissonance. On the one hand, the politicians wanted Boucicault's pantomime to be transformed into the portrait of virtue itself: the image of a most credible independent Irish Estate. The playwrights, on the other hand, chose to stay away from political interests. All of them agreed on the idea of reconstructing their cultural tradition, but disagreed on their means of doing this. The nationalists were for heroes to admire; the artists for simple human beings. Their different symbolic worlds clashed when they participated in the same cultural event; the mental models of the audience were jarred in the process of interpretation of every performance (cf. Johnson-Laird 1983; Garnham 1987).

Moreover, this failure can be further explained in textual terms. Those performances were the beginning of the questioning of some old archetypes. The Abbey was attacking a certain literary tradition imposed by a minority, while rejecting the false homogeneity of some other types. In the fictional world created by Synge, the female figure disintegrates. His linguistic presentation of her opposes the politicians' attempt to turn the Irish into a heroic people. This imaginary construct breaks social and verbal norms. It does not resemble the

feminine as a prototypically universal concept; and, at the same time, it casts doubt on another concept, a presumed *female language*, unconsciously adhering to an essentialist conception of verbal behaviour (Davis 1996).

A review of the best-known studies of language and gender shows that most of their conclusions call for revision of earlier assumptions (Hidalgo Tenorio 1996). Thus, Janet Holmes's work (1995) is of relevance here. This linguist defines two types of conversational style: a *co-operative style* and a *competitive style* (Tannen 1990). Together with Brown and Levinson's *Principle of Politeness* (1987), they form the basis for establishing a taxonomy of male and female verbal behaviours. According to Holmes, the women in her research tend to be more positively polite than men do because of their concern with making conversation a process of balanced interaction. By applying this hypothesis to some of Synge's most problematic plays, it is possible to explain the failure in the relationship between the Abbey Theatre dramatists and their audience: practically all their fictional women violate stereotypical concepts of femininity linguistically expressed. In *The Shadow of the Glen*, *The Tinker's Wedding*, *The Well of the Saints* (Synge 1963) and *The Playboy*, there is a female type in blatant contradiction with that upheld by the nationalists. As I will demonstrate below, the female characters are not, linguistically speaking, submissive, while the male characters are more so than might be expected. These untypical women were a threat to the audience's idealised vision of Irish culture and civilisation. Small wonder, therefore, that misunderstanding and lack of communication ensued.

Language and Gender

The vast number of studies devoted to the analysis of "female language" in English linguistics, since the rather intuitive pioneering work by Robin Lakoff (1975), mostly boils down to the construction of a linguistic stereotype that has been adopted in the absence of any substantial empirical evidence. In view of such a situation, it is necessary to look through the theoretical basis of the description of women's linguistic behaviour. I have not overlooked the fact that sometimes this behaviour has been interpreted quite differently, depending on the analyst's assumptions (Holmes 1986: 17).

Any research on language and gender entails the study of the relationship between them in two distinctive ways. The first is concerned with how members of each gender interact and express themselves through a particular linguistic behaviour. The second deals with the way language "treats" each gender. Here, I will take into consideration only the first issue. Basically, how do men and

women use language? Are there meaningful differences between their uses? To which areas are they related? What explanations can be found? Some researchers have addressed these questions by relying on well-known stereotypes and prejudices, and the answers have been as stereotypical as the very sources of the problem. Sometimes, the problem has been the methodology, which reproduced the same errors that have been thought to have been identified. Finally, those studying people's real linguistic use have had the chance to ascertain or reject what had been taken as simply natural and normal (Buxó Rey 1988).

For the sake of accuracy, a distinction must be drawn between four main interrelated concepts in this area: *female* and *feminine*, and *male* and *masculine*. Male and female are concerned with biological conditions; masculine and feminine with cultural conditions. Very often, both components of these pairs have been regarded as equal. Biological conditions were assumed to determine the cultural ones, which for their part had been established by drawing upon an androcentric ideological project. They were thus categorised in groups ascribed to each gender, accepting those related to the male gender as the norm. This simplification has been continually repeated, and it has easily led to the idea that it was impossible to have the female without the feminine, or the male without the masculine. The exceptions only proved the rule in the past. Nowadays the rule works in some contexts and, perhaps, for some commercial reasons. Nevertheless, this should not imply that linguists, sociologists, or politicians should take for granted that the terms match each other, as Lakoff (1975) did when analysing the language used by women.

After having studied some of the most relevant investigations concerning language and gender, my main conclusions are the following:

1. Although many linguists have based their research on an a priori belief in the existence of a male and a female language, clearly language is neither male nor female; rather, language is used by men and women.

2. Although it has been suggested that phonology, syntax and vocabulary are the main fields in which it is possible to identify the features of a supposed female language, it is obvious that they are neither so specifically nor so markedly female. It is evident that these features have been used not only to explain a certain state of affairs, but also to justify many unfair institutionalised behaviours. Consequently, the best means to obtain reliable data and establish factual conclusions is through field studies of real cases.

3. The object of study of many analysts is a stereotyped male or female use of language. Fiction and mass media are good tools for the establishment of

gender differences at every level. It is in this sense that these two varieties do exist, and it is also in this way that we can understand the articulation and expansion of a biology-based sexist discourse used to maintain discrimination, or a feminist discourse which attempts to put an end to the former.

4. Although every society develops its own stereotypes and reinforces them through language, it is obvious that some linguists, when verifying how true these stereotypes are, accept the existence of differences which have not always been scientifically assessed. Many works on this topic are the result of bias and overgeneralisation, their corpora are very limited; and their conclusions not categorical at all (Togeby 1992).

The so-called "female language" is evidence of an interesting situation. This specific type of language exists only as a trait shared by several human groups under the same unequal social conditions. In short, my research leads me to conclude that it is possible to opt for a hypothesis defending the existence of a language typical of a specific group. This will be characterised by its functioning within a specific community, and will be defined in terms of the social roles of its members. Within these groups, the feature "gender" is only one more feature to take into account. Then, one can speak about the "language of bosses", the "language of secretaries", the "language of teachers", the "language of students", etc.. Bearing this in mind, it would be appropriate to see whether sex and gender have a considerable bearing on how people use these linguistic varieties.

The Principles of Politeness

Since to date I know of no research which has attempted the type of approach mentioned above, and a full-fledged description of the way gender, register, or social roles influence people's use of language does not seem to exist, I have drawn on one of the most comprehensive theories concerning this topic: Janet Holmes's *Women, Men and Politeness* (1995).

Noticeably, the concept of femininity developed by Synge is quite specific. His women are inhabitants of a fictional world in which the reversal of some apparently unquestionable values of the Irish nation's idiosyncrasy sets them apart from tradition. The most recurrent criticism levelled against Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1986) was that it was meant to be a libel on Irish womanhood; and the spectators, some of whom were Sinn Féin howlers, were not altogether off the mark. The play represented a clash of form and content, and resulted in an aggressive reception by the audience that had to face

the author's demystified presentation of the Irish peasantry. The audience found it hard to identify with that image of Irishness; in fact, they shied away from it, for it would have called into question their concept of morality, associated with their idea of femaleness. The notion of woman the Irish audience clung to was the one described by Reynolds as follows: "The sentimental, nineteenth-century notion of the Irish colleen, the gentle modest creature, with the shawl over her head and the limpid ... eyes [and] an older Irish woman - the benign, silver-haired lady, framed in an archway of roses" (1983: 12).

Synge's characters stand on the margins of convention. They are extraordinary. They build up a new and "abnormal" order, shaking the solid foundations of the fallacy of myth (cf. Gerstenberger 1990). A cursory glance at their conversational exchanges reveals that the linguistic construction of Synge's women is a challenge. On 2 February 1907, the editor of the *Sinn Féin* stated that

> Mr. Synge's play as a play is one of the worst constructed we have witnessed. As a presentation on the public stage it is a vile and inhuman story told in the foulest language we have ever listened to from a public platform .... This hideous story is told in language much of which is too coarse to be printed .... No man of ordinary decency would use it, and certainly no man ... would use it in the presence of a woman.
>
> (Kilroy 1971: 66-67)

That construction spelled the dissolution of old idealised types from one single Irish tradition such as is found embodied in poems, novels, and drama (e.g. Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*). It implied a confrontation with certain social norms imposed by a widespread concept of righteousness. Its manifestation was not only what characters did on the stage but, especially, what they said on the stage.

Taking the above into account, I will now detail my process of analysis. Firstly, I was aware that the question of gender was of paramount importance for an understanding of the apparent failure of Synge's theatre, given that the audience's main complaint about his plays presupposed a rejection of their female characters' attitudes. Consequently, I tried to trace all the possible linguistic features that were specific to these characters. I observed, however, that there was nothing like a female morphology, a female syntax or a female vocabulary. In fact, all of them, whether male or female, speak Anglo-Irish.

Secondly, I tried to identify any elements that would help understand Dublin's open refusal of Synge's women. I discovered that in their linguistic behaviour there was a certain recurrence of asymmetric conversational patterns. Interlocutors participate in unequal communicative processes in which the co-operative

principle is blatantly flouted; in which every linguistic resource is employed in order to establish social, emotional and/or psychological distance; or in which there is an increasing highlighting of those speech acts implying discursive control, and other verbal status-consolidation mechanisms that transform conversation into the opposite of a gesture of solidarity. This final point is related to one of the conversational styles described as "competitive style". This style is in contrast to a "co-operative style" that Holmes ascribes to women's usage. The problem here was that this form of interaction was not enacted by the people this author suggests. In these plays, there is a reversal of rules and patterns of conversation, and this reversal is most evident in the roles played by women.

Synge dissociates his characters from the traditional discursive realisations embodied in the masculine and feminine stereotypes of a simplified concept of Irish culture. In this way, he caught his audience by surprise and challenged them to overthrow all the possible networks of canonical relationships. The conversational exchanges reflect the new social order imposed by Synge's creation. In this new social order, women break all kinds of bounds. When they face creatures like the "Stage Irishman" or the "wild Irish girl" (cf. Eagleton 1995: 179), they stand against a reductionist schematic image that typifies the scenic conventions and the nationalist premises of that period. Synge invests these characters with an air of superiority, either physical or verbal. Such verbal superiority is translated into the use of any device that may facilitate the explicit control of dialogue. Thus, women tend to interrupt, to ask questions, or to order more frequently. They are more direct on more occasions and dismiss any rules of co-operation. They threaten their interlocutors' "face" more often (cf. Goffman 1967). These women build up a communication model in which they are the beginning and the end of the conversation. They stand quite apart from any concept, contemporary or not, of femininity; and the most outstanding feature that makes them so different from the audience's expectations is their disregard for the conventions of politeness.

The "Principle of Politeness" can be defined in at least three ways: (1) as the set of strategies for controlling the speakers' face (Brown & Levinson 1987); (2) as one component of the conversational contract (Fraser 1990); and (3) as a functional adjustment (Meier 1995). According to Leech (1983), it is the main instrument for social equilibrium and co-operation. Brown and Levinson's (1987) point of departure is Goffman's notion of "face" in his analysis of face-to-face interaction. In his words, "*face* may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (1967: 5).

Brown and Levinson talk about both a positive face (i.e. the desire that one's wishes be attractive to others) and a negative face (i.e. the desire that one's actions not be stopped by others). Although every interlocutor intends to maintain her/his self-image, one commonly finds that speakers threaten that image by using face-threatening acts (FTAs). These can be realised in several ways: (1) explicitly; (2) implicitly; (3) with positive politeness; and (4) with negative politeness. The conditions ruling their use are related to social status, relative power, and degree of imposition of the act in a given society. The most frequent strategy of explicit FTA is the imperative. The rest are as follows: "Positive politeness" is used when the speaker (S) intends to support the positive face of the listener (H). The function of the linguistic strategies employed is threefold: (1) to confirm, on the speaker's part, that S and H share a common topic; (2) to convey that both are co-operators and work to obtain some specific aims; and (3) to fulfil the H's want (cf. Fig. 1).

Speaker's Want	**Linguistic Strategies**
Claim common ground.	1. Notice, attend to H (interests, wants, needs, goods). 2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H). 3. Intensify interest to H. 4. Use in-group identity markers. 5. Seek agreement. 6. Avoid disagreement. 7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground. 8. Joke.
Convey that S and H are co-operators.	9. Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants. 10. Offer, promise. 11. Be optimistic. 12. Include both S and H in the activity.
	13. Give (or ask) for reasons. 14. Assume or assert reciprocity.
Fulfil H's want (for some X).	Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, co-operation).

Fig. 1. Chart of Strategies. Positive Politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987:102)

"Negative politeness" is a redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face. It performs the function of minimising the particular imposition that the FTA unavoidably effects (cf. Fig. 2).

Speaker's Want	**Linguistic Strategies**
Be direct. Don't coerce H (where X involves H doing A).	1. Be conventionally indirect. Don't assume. 2. Question, hedge. 3. Be pessimistic.
Minimize threat.	4. Minimize the imposition, R_x 5. Give defence.
Communicate S's want to not impinge on H.	6. Apologize.
Dissociate S, H from the particular infringement.	7. Impersonalize S and H: Avoid "I" and "you". 8. State the FTA as a general rule. 9. Nominalize.
Redress other wants of H's, derivative from negative face.	10. Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H.

Fig. 2. Chart of Strategies. Negative Politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987: 131)

Finally, a communicative act is done "off record" if it is done in such a way that it is impossible to ascribe one clear intention to the act. In the case an S wants to do an FTA, but wants to avoid the responsibility for doing it, he or she can do it off record and leave it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret it (cf. Fig. 3).

Speaker's Want	**Linguistic Strategies**
Violate relevance maxim.	1. Give hints (motives for doing A, conditions for A). 2. Give association clues. 3. Presuppose.
Violate quantity maxim.	4. Understate. 5. Overstate. 6. Use tautologies.

Speaker's Want	Linguistic Strategies
Violate quality maxim.	7. Use contradictions. 8. Be ironic. 9. Use metaphors. 10. Use rhetorical questions.
Violate manner maxim.	11. Be ambiguous. 12. Be vague. 13. Over-generalize. 14. Displace H. 15. Be incomplete, use ellipsis.

Fig. 3. Chart of Strategies: Off Record (Brown & Levinson 1987: 214)

Although Brown and Levinson's approach to politeness has been perhaps the most influential, other models such as Fraser's (1990) and Meier's (1995) are also quite useful since they attempt to resolve some of the limitations of the former, for instance, the false distinction between inherently polite and inherently impolite speech acts, the lack of interest in context, or the subjective quantification of politeness (Martínez-Cabeza 1997). Nonetheless, in the next section, I will use Brown and Levinson's principles as the general framework for my analysis, because of their very detailed taxonomy and solid empirical base.

Analysing Synge's Impolite Characters

As already pointed out, the main feature of exchanges in Synge's plays is the lack of any sign of politeness. His characters reject any rules of conversational co-operation, a verbal behaviour that is supported by their social behaviour: direct, threatening, demanding, violent, cynical, domineering, in other words, quite inappropriate and impolite. There are but a few instances in which this pattern of cut and thrust is not followed. One of these appears in *The Playboy of the Western World.*

The story in which Christy Mahon, Pegeen Mike and the rest of the inhabitants of a village on the wild coast of Mayo are involved is odd and hard to give credence to when seen against the background of the conservative moral

values of the period. However, it is by no means extreme when compared with the events from which Celtic mythology and the Irish collective memory were drawn. Christy, a young man, boasts about having murdered his own father three times. A community eager for new adventures and emotions decides to believe him. Meanwhile, he has become a heroic figure. Correspondingly, his relationship with the people there has changed. A beautiful example of this is the conversation about love between Pegeen and Christy. For a little space of time, the woman abandons her usual model of conversation, makes an effort to establish personal links with the hearer, and shows respect to him by employing a variety of positive politeness strategies.

The following excerpt (Fig. 4) from the third act shows this quite clearly. Both interlocutors tend to make use of linguistic strategies conveying a sense of intimacy. Moreover, other off-record strategies emerge that, in a very restrained way, are useful for raising doubts about the truth-value of the propositional content of some of Christy's utterances, especially when his social success should be taken to imply more social distance (3, 7, 11, and 15).

+Polite	-Polite	Off Record	
2 3 7 11			P: Well, you're the lad, and you'll have great times from this out when you could win that wealth of prizes, and you sweating in the heat of noon! (1)
2 5 10		12	C: I'll have great times if I win the crowning prize I'm seeking now, ... your promise that you'll wed me in a fortnight, when our banns is called. (Indirect request) (2)
		13 3	P: You've right daring to go ask me that, when all knows you'll be starting to some girl in your own town-land, when your father's rotten in four months, or five. (Indirect refusal) (3)

+Polite	-Polite	Off Record	
6 12 14 10			C: Starting from you, is it? I will not, then, and when the airs is warming, in four months or five, it's then yourself and me should be pacing Neifin in the dews of night, the times sweet smells do be rising, and you'd see a little, shiny new moon, maybe sinking on the hills. (4)
4		8	P: And it's that kind of a poacher's love you'd make, Christy Mahon, on the sides of Neifin, when the night is down? (FTA) (5)
10 2			C: It's little you'll think if my love's a poacher's, or an earl's itself, when you'll feel my two hands stretched around you, and I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips, till I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in His golden chair. (6)
15 3 2 4		13	P: That'll be right fun, Christy Mahon, and any girl would walk her heart out before she'd meet a young man was your like for eloquence, or talk at all.(7)
12 14 10		3	C: Let you wait, to hear me talking, till we're astray in Erris, when Good Friday's by, drinking a sup from a well, and making mighty kisses with our wetted mouths, or gaming in a gap of sunshine, with yourself stretched back unto your necklace, in the flowers of the earth. (8)
15			P: I'd be nice so, is it? (9)
10 1 2 3			C: If the mitred bishops seen you that time, they'd be the like of the holy prophets, I'm thinking, do be straining the bars of Paradise to lay eyes on the Lady Helen of Troy, and she abroad, pacing back and forward, with a nosegay in her golden shawl. (10)
		10	P: And what is it I have, Christy Mahon, to make me fitting entertainment for the like of you, that has such poet's talking, and such bravery of heart? (11)
		10 5 9	C: Isn't there the light of seven heavens in your heart alone, the way you'll be an angel's lamp to me from this out, and I abroad in the darkness, spearing salmons in the Owen of the Carrowmore? (12)

+Polite	-Polite	Off Record	
10 4			P: If I was your wife I'd be along with you those nights, Christy Mahon, the way you'd see I was a great hand at coaxing bailiffs, or coining funny nicknames for the stars of night.(13)
	3		C: You, is it? Taking your death in the hailstones, or in the fogs of dawn. (14)
12 11 14	3	1 3	P: Yourself and me would shelter easy in a narrow bush, but we're only talking, maybe, for this would be a poor, thatched place to hold a fine lad is the like of you.(15)
10 2 9			C: If I wasn't a good Christian, it's on my naked knees I'd be saying my prayers and paters to every jackstraw you have roofing your head, and every stony pebble is paving the laneway to your door.(16)
10 15			P: If that's the truth I'll be burning candles from this out to the miracles of God that have brought you from the south today, and I with my gowns bought ready, the way that I can wed you, and not wait at all.(17)

Fig. 4. Politeness Strategies between Pegeen Mike (P) and Christy Mahon (C) (Synge 1986: 95-97)

A signal of the contradiction Pegeen herself embodies is the fact that she ridicules (5) both the type of love experience Christy is handing her on a plate and the kind of unselfish offer he is making, which is apparently of no interest to the young woman. Distinguished member of the community that Pegeen is, Christy's candid and impassioned assertion (4) must have sounded childish to her. She is also an individual who has great aspirations that differ from those belonging to an indolent society. Hence, his proposal is the best she could ever have wished for. Nonetheless, her sudden acceptance would have been considered too hasty in the context Synge recreates. Furthermore, Pegeen asks a rhetorical question (11), which functions as a mild self-humiliation, showing her lack of confidence in her worth, in contrast with the young male winner's. This strategy has two objectives: to flatter the hearer explicitly, while Pegeen endangers her positive face; and to abet, implicitly, a more flattering and favourable answer on his part, if such a thing be possible, which may satisfy her

previously offended positive face.

Christy Mahon has been transformed by popular acclaim into a powerful human being. From Pegeen's perspective, this man, who up to that moment was thought to deserve the use of linguistic strategies of conversational control (e.g. imperative, interrogative) is now beyond easy taming. In other words, this woman has learnt that a change in his status means a change in her relationship towards him. That is why she pretends to call into doubt his exaggeratedly generous and laudatory proposal (5 and 15). She knows quite well that any person who is socially above everyone else need not soften the force of her/his speech acts. On the contrary, that is the best position from which to impose one's desires. The prudence of a rather imprudent and despotic Pegeen is only due to her wish to check Christy's sincerity at a moment when his authority entitles him to take the initiative (3). Consequently, she will assume what the hearer wants, violating the relevance maxim (15); or else she will express her opinion in a very general way about what she would regard as the appropriate behaviour of a man like Christy, thereby violating the manner maxim (3 and 7). Again, she will also use a strategy of negative politeness (i.e. to be pessimistic) in order to avoid any possible sign of enthusiasm about his act of marriage proposal, which in her own view may be undeserved, groundless and altogether suspicious (15). In this way, she merely intends to demonstrate that the hearer is under no obligation to carry out the act.

This social and linguistic asymmetry, particularly well accepted and assumed by Pegeen, dissolves into thin air when Christy takes his turns, his promises here being the expression of his co-operation with the lady (4, 6, 8, 10 and 16). He listens carefully to her (10), tries to restore her positive face, strengthens the idea of the similarities of their aims, and reaffirms a relation of reciprocity between the two of them (4 and 8). Later, life itself will change this when the secret of the real impossibility of killing his procreator is revealed. Christy's only face-threatening act is a response to the emotion with which he fills his passionate speech (8). In fact, this is a tool to reinforce his artlessness. To finish his first genuine conversation with a real woman, the young man's succeeding turns bear such a poetic flavour that, in the end, his talk is given quite a suggestive and indirect tone. At its height, this entails the assertion of a feeling they both shared: their wish to be one and the same person (12).

As their conversation continues, Christy's and Pegeen's effort to co-operate verbally and socially is put to the test. The best proof is granted by her when she

accepts his marriage proposal (17). Thus, Pegeen's postponed answer to Christy's deliciously unsophisticated offer becomes the last point in a unique interaction. Her acceptance conveys her will to keep on communicating with the hearer, and her compromise to establish a relationship of solidarity, in which words and facts are identified (15). Such a harmonious situation does not last for long. The revelation of the truth (i.e the fact that he had not finally murdered his father, that Old Mahon was alive and kicking) smashes Christy's fantasies for a while, and deprives Pegeen's promise of any value forever. From then on, she adopts her original style of conversation founded on intransigence, display of power, and the imposition of her desires without any concession to the hearer, irrespective of status, age or sex.

Obviously, the excerpt analysed above is just an exception. On the whole, women in Synge's plays stand out for their abnormal behaviour. In *The Aran Islands* he said that "[t]he women of this island are before conventionality" (1907: 132). They are endowed with physical strength and its verbal counterpart; all of them go beyond the limits of Irish womanhood as defined in that period. Their language was a manifestation of a kind of behavioural "abnormality" which was severely rejected by the audience.

According to Holmes (1995: 2), most women "use language to establish, nurture and develop personal relationships", while men "tend to see language as a tool for obtaining and conveying information". This hypothesis, based on very specific empirical evidence (white Western-educated middle-class women's and men's modes of speech collected during several years) suggests that, whenever there are differences of gender, there must be differences in the use of language.

Holmes intends to determine which linguistic means are employed by men and women when engaged in conversational interaction, especially those linguistic strategies related to politeness. Initially, she postulates that this principle is a culturally-bounded construct, and that "gender is just one social variable which intersects with other social categories and groups that people belong to" (1995: 10). Her main thesis is that in the West, polite people tend to use considerate speech acts, to give positive answers, to praise or express their positive feelings towards the hearer, and to avoid directness, peremptory orders, interruption, or not apologising. Holmes's conclusion is that women are more polite than men are. They have been brought up to be negatively polite in public, "not intruding or imposing oneself", and positively polite in private, "taking responsibility for the interaction and ensuring that others are conversationally comfortable" (p. 220).

Her corpus seems to bear out this view. My own corpus, on the other hand, will show that the verbal behaviour of the female characters in Synge's plays does not square with the stereotypical image the audience of the Abbey Theatre expected. Synge's woman is a construct built upon the concepts of challenge, explicit disagreement and interruption, and hence, is nearly identical to the male type described by Holmes as "more direct, informational, and action-oriented" (p. 217). In other words, in Synge's plays, there is an inversion of most values, and its reflection in language usage is obvious. Synge's women could be described as *masculine*, *unwomanly*, *manly*, or *virile women* (Clark 1985; Laity 1985: 626; Scott 1988: 174; Stanley 1990: 156). They are not "typically" feminine, or at least as the cultural expectations dictated. They cannot be identified with the most outstanding features of the group to which tradition had ascribed them. They clash with the traditionally-accepted concept of Irish womanhood. This fictional creature is linguistically unlike the melodramatic figure of that period.

In Templeton's words, the female characters of the most important playwrights of the Abbey Theatre were as follows:

> Yeats' pallid ladies of the Celtic twilight ... seem to have little in common with the real and robust women of Joyce and O'Casey. Yet, Yeats' Cathleen, pre-Raphaelite Countess that she is, is as much a saviour of her people as the proletarian heroines of O'Casey .... Synge wrote of trapped women .... Drawing on the traditional image of Ireland as struggling woman, Synge combines this with the double standard of his day to form a gallery of heroines whose plight is allegorical.
>
> (Templeton 1980: 91-92, 96-97)

Synge's women are the most extraordinary example of norm breaking (Ward 1983), since they produce features that are usually associated with masculine speech, such as conversational control, interruption, lack of attenuation, violence, intimidation, superiority, or self-imposition. Pegeen and the Widow behave like that; and so do Sarah Casey and Mary Byrne in *The Tinker's Wedding*, or Mary Doul and Molly Byrne in *The Well of the Saints*. It is because of this that they turn men into weak, indecisive, and incomplete creatures. Both males and females subvert and challenge tradition.

In arriving at this conclusion, I have applied to these plays basic principles of discourse analysis (Burton 1980). Thus, I divided every act into its minimal

units (i.e. transactions, exchanges, and conversational turns) (Sacks, Schlegloff & Jefferson 1974), and also paid attention to adjacency pairs (Schegloff & Sacks 1973).

The criteria underlying the analysis of every exchange were the presence (active or passive) of the same characters, and its thematic cohesion, that is, the clear existence of a beginning and an end. Then, I enumerated all turns, and attended particularly to any clues implying power and control. Subsequently, I unified all the theoretical principles mentioned above along with speech-act theory and analysed each turn into its components, pointing out the type of speech act it constitutes, as well as all its mechanisms of disagreement. Thus, starting with the distinction between type of sentence and modality of sentence, I described in full every interaction in *The Playboy of the Western World.* There, the first essential piece of information is concerned with the type of sentence involved, the locutionary force of the speech act, and its degree of adjustment (i.e. Indirect Speech Act). Other points were taken into consideration, such as those related to the function of the turn with respect to the preceding turn of another speaker (i.e. support, disagreement, refusal), and the previous turn of the same speaker (i.e. confirmation, clarification, completion), including an account of interruptions of speaker or introduction of new topic. Next, I also looked at other pragmalinguistic devices modifying the illocutionary force of the speech act, such as question tags, floor holders, boosters, and minimisers. Finally, I took into consideration the use of terms of address as pragmatic devices that establish different levels of authority, dominance and solidarity. These devices help to point up the model of conversation present in these plays. The fight to control the development of events is the reason why each female character intends to impose her will by challenging the content of the preceding turn, preventing other characters from taking their turns, protracting her interventions, or attacking with a threatening tone. In this way, she succeeds in intimidating her interlocutor.

In the following chart (Fig. 5) are shown in a quantitative analysis the most relevant features appearing in the interventions of the characters identified with a proper name in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World.* They are Shawn Keogh (Sh), Pegeen Mike (Pe), Michael James Flaherty (Mi), Christy Mahon (Ch), Widow Quin (Wi), Old Mahon (Ma), Sara Tansey (Sa), Nelly (Ne), Susan Brady (S), Honor Blake (H), Philly Cullen (P), and Jimmy Farrell (J). The labels used stand for the following devices: **int** (interrogative mode), **ptd**

(previous turn disagreement), **dir** (imperative mode), **plea, offer, ISA** (indirect speech act), **warn, refusal** (non-co-operative style), **threat, intrr** (interrupted speaker), **apology, condit** (modality), **introd** (topic selection), **advice, request, support** (previous turn agreement), **accept, flout, challenge, tag, suggest, instruct, no answer, voc** (term of address), **thank, diminish** (minimiser), **praise, inter** (interrupting speaker), and **accuse.**

Figure 5

	Sh	Pe	Mi	Ch	Wi	Ma	Sa	N	S	H	P	J
Int	2.7%	20.3%	14.8%	24.7%	15.9%	11.5%	3.2%	0.5%	0.5%		4.4%	2.7%
Ptd	6.5%	32.8%	8.2%	14.8%	11.5%	14.8%					4.9%	6.5%
Dir	10%	35.7%	8.6%	10%	19.3%	8.6%	2.1%		1.4%	2.1%	2.1%	
Plea	56.3%			37.5%	6.3%							
Offer	41.6%	16.6%		12.5%	25%						4.2%	
ISA	12.9%	22.1%	13%	13.6%	24.3%	3.6%	3.6%	0.7%	1.4%	0.7%	2.1%	2.1%
Warn	8.3%		16.6%		58.3%	8.3%					5.3%	
Refusal	13.4%	30.5%	4.9%	25.6%	18.3%	3.7%	1.2%				2.4%	
Threat	12.1%	39.4%		33.3%	12.1%	3%						
Intrr	41.6%			50%	8.3%							
Apology	50%		50%									
Condit	10.2%	20.4%	16.3%	26.5%	16.3%	4.1%	2%				2%	2%
Introd	5.5%	37.6%	3.7%	12.9%	24%	9.3%	3.7%		1.9%		1.9%	
Advice	15.8%	15.8%	5.3%		47.4%	5.3%	5.3%				5.3%	
Request	25%			43.8%	6.3%	18.7%	6.3%					

	Sh	Pe	Mi	Ch	Wi	Ma	Sa	N	S	H	P	J
Support	2.3%	13.6%	1.2%	25%	16%	1.2%	6.8%	2.3%	2.3%	1.2%	2.3%	16%
Accept	5.1%	10.3%	5.1%	41%	23%	12.8%						2.6%
Flout	1.8%	13.2%	5.6%	35.8%	15.1%	7.6%	7.6%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	5.6%	1.8%
Challenge	5%	40%	5%	35%	15%							
Tag	7.1%	21.4%	3.5%	32%	14.3%	17.9%				3.5%		
Suggest		28%	8%		8%		28%	4%			16%	8%
Instruct					100%							
No answer				50%	16.6%	33.3%						
Voc	16%	25%	12%	9%	17%		4%	1%	5%	2%	5%	4%
Thank		14.3%		71.4%		14.3%						
Diminish	10.1%	14.6%	14.6%	26.9%	10.1%	6.7%	1.1%		3.4%		5.6%	6.8%
Praise		18.9%	2.7%	18.9%	14%	8.1%	5.4%	5.4%	8.1%	5.4%		14%
Inter		30.7%		7.7%	23.1%	15.4%	2.7%		7.7%	7.7%		
Accuse		81.3%				12.5%					6.3%	

Fig. 5. Percentage of Conversational Markers in *The Playboy of the Western World*

The analysis undertaken leads to the conclusion that the female characters in *The Playboy of the Western World* are not conventional women if compared to a default norm, namely, the social expectations of that period, the theatre conventions of that moment, or even the linguistic norms described by Lakoff (1975).

Christy is the only male character who surpasses Pegeen in the use of interrogation **(int)** as a means of control (24.7% vs. 20.3%):

Pegeen: What's that? Is it a man you seen?
Shawn: I couldn't see him at all; but I heard him groaning out, and making his heart. It should have been a young man from his words speaking.
Pegeen: And you never went near to see was he hurted or what ailed him at all?
Shawn: I did not, Pegeen Mike. It was a dark, lonesome place to be hearing the like of him.
Pegeen: Well, you're a daring fellow, and if they find his corpse stretched above in the dews of dawn, what'll you say then to the peelers, or the Justice of the Peace?
Shawn: I wasn't thinking of that. (First act, first transaction, turns 20-25, p. 44)

It is Pegeen who evinces the highest frequency of acts of calling into question the previous speaker's turn **(ptd)** (32.8%):

Christy: I never left my own parish till Tuesday was a week.
Pegeen: He's done nothing, so. If you didn't commit murder or a bad, nasty thing; or false coining, or robbery, or butchery, or the like of them, there isn't anything that would be worth your troubling for to run from now. You did nothing at all.
Christy: That's an unkindly thing to be saying to a poor orphaned traveller, has a prison behind him, and hanging before, and hell's gap gaping below.
Pegeen: 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: You're not speaking the truth.
Pegeen: Not speaking the truth, is it? (First act, third transaction, turns 34-39, pp. 50-51)

Likewise, she is the character who uses the imperative on a lot of occasions **(dir)** in order to get the hearer to do what she wants (35.7%); so does Widow

Quin (19.3%). The directive speech act as order or command is their most common means of immediate control:

Shawn: Are you wanting me to stop along with you and keep you from harm?
Pegeen: Didn't you say you were fearing Father Reilly?
Shawn: There'd be no harm staying now, I'm thinking, and himself in it too.
Pegeen: You wouldn't stay when there was need for you, and let you step off nimble the time when there's none.
Shawn: Didn't I say it was Father Reilly ....
Pegeen: Go on, then, to Father Reilly, and let him put you in the holy brotherhoods, and leave that lad to me.
Shawn: If I meet the Widow Quin ....
Pegeen: Go on, I'm saying, and don't be waking this place with your noise. (First act, sixth transaction, turns 1-8, pp. 54-55)

Furthermore, Pegeen tends to interrupt (**inter**) (30.7%), like the Widow (23.1%), almost all her interlocutors, especially when the interlocutor is a man, such as Shawn Keogh (**intrr**) (41.6%) and Christy Mahon (50%):

Pegeen: Fling out that rubbish and put them cups away. Shove in the bench by the wall. And hang that glass on the nail. What disturbed it at all?
Christy: I was making myself decent only, and this a fine country for young lovely girls.
Pegeen: Whisht your talking of girls.
Christy: Wouldn't any wish to be decent in a place ....
Pegeen: Whisht, I'm saying. (Second act, second transaction, turns 10-13, p. 71)

An appropriate reflex of this type of behaviour, characterised by a non-co-operative style, is an attitude of rejection or refusal of what the speaker asks for, suggests, comments on, demands or confesses. In this, Christy and the Widow are close to the level of Pegeen (25.6% and 18.3% vs. 30.5%, respectively):

Pegeen: Is it the truth the dispensation's come?
Michael: Father Reilly's after reading it in gallous Latin, and "It's come in the nick of time", says he; "so I'll wed them in a hurry, dreading that young gaffer who'd capsize the stars".
Pegeen: He's missed his nick of time, for it's that lad, Christy Mahon, that I'm wedding now. (Third act, third transaction, turns 8-12, p. 99)

One might also note how these women's decisions over the development of the course of the conversation bear on the selection of topic (**introd**). Although they are not the only ones, Pegeen and the Widow (37.6% vs. 24%) are the characters leading the use of this strategy of conversational control:

Michael: Have you not a word to aid me, Shaneen? Are you not jealous at all?
Shawn: I'd be afeard to be jealous of a man did slay his da.
Pegeen: Well, it'd be a poor thing to go marrying your like. I'm seeing there's a world of peril for an orphan girl, and isn't it a great blessing I didn't wed you before himself came walking from the west or south? (Third act, third transaction, turns 13-15, pp. 99-100)

Likewise, the women's tendency to make difficult the fulfilment of any conversation by means of another two strategies is very interesting. They are inclined to challenge the content of their interlocutors' turns (**challenge**), and so to challenge their very interlocutors (Pegeen 40%, Christy 35% and Widow Quin 15%). They also generally tend to flout some of Grice's (1975) maxims (**flout**):

Pegeen: ... and I was down this morning looking on the papers the post-boy does have in his bag. For there was great news this day, Christopher Mahon.
Christy: Is it news of my murder?
Pegeen: Murder, indeed. (**Flout quantity**)
Christy: A murdered da?
Pegeen: There was not, but a story filled half a page of the hanging of a man. (**Flout quantity** and **relation**) (Second act, second transaction, turns 19-23, pp. 71-72)
Michael: Is it yourself is fearing the polis? You're wanting, maybe?
Christy: There's many wanting. (**Flout relation**) (First act, third transaction, turns 4-11, p. 48)

Clearly, Pegeen and Widow Quin are not exceptions in a world verbally controlled by men; on the contrary, they contest the men's privileged position by employing the same linguistic means as they do. This is shown by the similarity of the conversational style, and by the avoidance of stereotypically feminine features, the men sometimes surpassing the women in the use of some discursive mechanisms normally accepted as feminine. Thus, I found that men,

not women, come first in the frequency of acts of apology (Shawn 50%, Michael 50%):

> Christy: And you'd be using bribery for to banish me?
> Shawn: Let you not take it badly, mister honey ... (Second act, third transaction, turns 6-7, p. 76)

Again, it is men, not women, who tend to comply with the ritual of gratitude (**thank**) (14.3% vs. 71.4% of Christy) or of compliment (**praise**):

> Pegeen: There's your bed now. I've put a quilt upon you I'm after quilting a while since with my own two hands, and you'd best stretch out now for your sleep, and may God give you a good rest till I call you in the morning when the cocks will crow.
> Christy: May God and Mary and St. Patrick bless you and reward you for your kindly talk. (First act, seventh transaction, turns 41-42, p. 63)

Similarly, women rarely try to diminish the strength of their interventions by using pragmatic devices (**diminish**) to that end, introducing a certain tone of uncertainty or some degree of solidarity, or simply a note of affection and complicity that may make the interlocutor indirectly responsible for carrying the conversation forward. Christy (26.9%) is the best example of this type of verbal behaviour. He uses direct speech acts, the verbal filler "I'm thinking", confirmation tags (32%), modality devices (e.g. "maybe"), and conditionals (**condit**) (26.5%). He tries to transform his turns into not too affirmative speech acts, at a moment when his audience is calling everything into question:

> Pegeen: You've right daring to go ask me that, when all knows you'll be starting to some girl in your own townland, when your father's rotten in four months, or five.
> Christy: Starting from you, is it? I will not, then, and when the airs is warming, in four months or five, it's then yourself and me should be pacing Neifin in the dews of night, the times sweet smells do be rising, and you'd see a little, shiny new moon, maybe sinking on the hills. (Third act, second transaction, turns 10-11, p. 95)

According to these data, in general terms, these creatures are very distant from the model figures supported by the ideological collective unconscious of a

shared memory inherited through Ireland's history. Small wonder, they seem to make a spectacle for themselves; they always stand out from the old stereotype. Pegeen threatens her interlocutors on more occasions (39.4%) than anyone else, she is apt to give more suggestions (28%), and she also accuses people more frequently (81.3%):

Pegeen: Wait till morning, Christy Mahon. Wait till you lay eyes on her leaky thatch is growing more pasture for her buck goat than her square of fields, and she without a tramp itself to keep in order her place at all. (First act, seventh transaction, turn 24, p. 61)

Pegeen: And to think of the coaxing glory we had given him, and he after doing nothing but hitting a soft blow and chasing northward in a sweat of fear. Quit off from this ....Take him on from this or I'll set the young lads to destroy him here. (Third act, fourth transaction, turns 10 and 24, pp. 103-104)

The Widow, on her part, warns her interlocutors more often (58.3%), gives more pieces of advice (47.4%), and gives more instructions (100%). No doubt, she comes through as a matron-like figure:

Widow Quin: It's true for him, and you'd best quit off and not have that poor girl setting her mind on you, for there's Shaneen thinks she wouldn't suit you, though all is saying she'll wed you now. (Second act, third transaction, turn 8, p. 76)

Mahon: Could I pull up on him now?

Widow Quin: If you'll cross the sands below where the tide is out, you'll be in it as soon as himself, for he had to go round ten miles by the top of the bay. Strike down by the head beyond and then follow on the railway to the north and east. (Second act, fourth transaction, turns 34-35, p. 82)

In contrast, Christy is more pliable with his interlocutors. He tends to accept what he is offered or asked for more often (41%), and he shows his agreement with the previous turn on more occasions (**support**) (25%). Nonetheless, his communicative co-operation is not without limits; now and then, he does not give any answer to what his hearer may have requested from him (50%):

Christy: They're coming! Will you swear to aid me and save me, for the love of Christ?

Widow Quin: If I aid you, will you swear to give me a right of way I want, and a mountainy ram, and a load of dung at Michaelmas, the time that you'll be master here?

Christy: I will, by the elements and stars of night. (Second act, fifth transaction, turns 22-24, p. 84)

Pegeen: Let you stretch out now by the fire, young fellow. You should be destroyed by travelling.

Christy: I'm tired surely, walking wild eleven days, and walking fearful in the night.

Pegeen: You should have had great people in your family, I'm thinking, with the little, small feet you have, and you with a kind of a quality name, the like of what you'd find on the great powers and potentates of France and Spain.

Christy: We were great, surely, with wide and windy acres of rich Munster land. (First act, sixth transaction, turns 8-11, p. 55)

Male characters sometimes make use of strategies that seem more natural if the stereotypical concept of woman is appealed to. Whenever the situation demands it, Shawn and Christy never hesitate to beg their interlocutors (**plea**) (56.3% and 37.5%, respectively), or to request something even when this could put their negative face at risk (Shawn 25%, Christy 43.8%):

Widow Quin: It's the young girls, I'm thinking, coming to bring you to the sports below, and what is it you'll have me to tell them now?

Christy: Aid me to win Pegeen. It's herself only that I'm seeking now. Aid me to win her, and I'll be asking God to stretch a hand to you in the hour of death, and lead you short cuts through the Meadows of Ease, and up the floor of heaven to the Footstool of the Virgin's Son. (Second act, fifth transaction, turns 18-19, p. 84)

They only maintain their verbal composure when it comes to the use of indirect speech acts (**ISA**) and terms of address (**voc**). On the one hand, Widow Quin (24.3%) and Pegeen Mike (22.1%) make use of conversational implicature with a higher frequency than Christy, Michael and Shawn (13.6%, 13% and 12.9%, respectively). Their aim is either to assert their authority in order to have things their way, or to attack their interlocutors, to offend them, to show them as simple as they are, to question their acts, and to hold their aspirations to ridicule:

Michael: Well, there's the coat of a Christian man. Oh, there's sainted glory this day in the lonesome west; and by the will of God I've got you a decent man, Pegeen, you'll have no call to be spying after if you've a score of young girls, maybe, weeding in your fields.

Pegeen: What right have you to be making game of a poor fellow for minding the priest, when it's your own the fault is, not paying a penny pot-boy to stand along with me and give me courage in the doing of my work. (First act, second transaction, turns 21-22, p. 47)

Pegeen: He'll not stir. He's pot-boy in this place, and I'll not have him stolen off and kidnapped while himself's abroad.

Widow Quin: It'd be a crazy pot-boy'd lodge him in the shebeen where he works by day, so you'd have a right to come on, young fellow, till you see my little houseen, a perch off on the rising hill. (First act, seventh transaction, turns 22-23, p. 61)

On the other hand, although Pegeen (25%) and Widow Quin (17%) address their interlocutors with a specific term of address (so that there cannot be the slightest doubt about the type of verbal relationship established between speaker and hearer), it is true that the men evince a more interesting pattern of usage. Pegeen employs the structures **Full Name** and **Noun + Qualifier**. This is barely distinctive in everyday Gaelic usage. Only on one occasion does she use a diminutive, a familiarity marker that in the mouth of Shawn's cousin and fiancée helps draw attention to the fact that the truth-value of this man's assertion is not so clear. She knows that this will throw him off balance:

Pegeen: Were you never slapped in school, young fellow, that you don't know the name of your deed? (First act, third transaction, turn 14, p. 49)

Pegeen: ... Isn't it long the nights are now, Shawn Keogh, to be leaving a poor girl with her own self counting the hours to the dawn of day?

Shawn: If it is, when we're wedded in a short while you'll have no call to complain, for I've little will to be walking off to wakes or weddings in the darkness of the night.

Pegeen: You're making mighty certain, Shaneen, that I'll wed you now. (First act, first transaction, turns 8-10, p. 42)

In contrast, Michael, Christy and Shawn try to emphasise between themselves and their interlocutors their social status or their personal consideration. Therefore, their talk abounds with tokens of respect, as well as diminutives and pejorative noun phrases. Old Mahon, who despises this type of social convention, never uses them:

> Michael: And what way weren't you hanged, mister? Did you bury him then? .... And where was it, mister honey, that you did the deed?
> Christy: Oh, a distant place, master of the house, a windy corner of high, distant hills. (First act, fourth transaction, turns 9 and 14-15, p. 52)
> Michael: You'd be going, is it?
> Shawn: Leave me go, Michael James, leave me go, you old Pagan, leave me go, or I'll get the curse of the priests on you .... (First act, second transaction, turn 20, p. 47)
> Shawn: ... Strike him down, Michael James, or you'll lose my drift of heifers and my blue bull from Sneem.
> Michael: Is it me fight him, when it's father-slaying he's bred to now? Go on, you fool, and fight him now. (Third act, third transaction, turns 23-24, p. 101)

Final Remarks

Discussed above are the most significant linguistic features of Synge's characters. The analysis shows a peculiar image of the types that inhabit this author's fictional world and with which he crowds the Irish stage. Pegeen Mike and Widow Quin differ from the stereotype; likewise, Shawn Keogh and Christy Mahon do not live up to the stereotypical expectations. An impression could thus be given of unfeminine women and linguistically effeminate men. The response to this provocative artistic experiment, which violated conventions and norms, was misunderstanding and polemics. The display of verbal impoliteness by the characters provoked the impolite reaction of the audience. During the weeks this comedy by Synge was first performed in the Abbey Theatre, something unexpected took place: the so-called "Playboy Riots" (cf. Kilroy 1971). In January 1907, members of the audience were ejected or arrested for crying out against what they described as an immoral play; editorials protested an alleged libel on Ireland; and authors had to defend their artistic freedom

publicly at the top of their voices. Many people then spent their money only to boo, stamp their feet, and prevent anyone else from hearing a word of this intentionally simple comedy. The riots were the symptom of that society's malady: an inability to replace old cultural models with new, rhetorically alien, perspectives.

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