

The Playboy of the Western World

by

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Preface

In writing THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD, as in my other plays, I have used one or two words only that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland, or spoken in my own nursery before I could read the newspapers. A certain number of the phrases I employ I have heard also from herds and fishermen along the coast from Kerry to Mayo, or from beggar-women and balladsingers nearer Dublin; and I am glad to acknowledge how much I owe to the folk imagination of these fine people. Anyone who has lived in real intimacy with the Irish peasantry will know that the wildest sayings and ideas in this play are tame indeed, compared with the fancies one may hear in any little hillside cabin in Geesala, or Carraroe, or Dingle Bay. All art is a collaboration; and there is little doubt that in the happy ages of literature, striking and beautiful phrases were as ready to the story-teller's or the playwright's hand, as the rich cloaks and dresses of his time. It is probable that when the Elizabethan dramatist took his ink-horn and sat down to his work he used many phrases that he had just heard, as he sat at dinner, from his mother or his children. In Ireland, those of us who know the people have the same privilege. When I was writing "The Shadow of the Glen," some years ago, I got more aid than any learning could have given me from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen. This matter, I think, is of importance, for in countries where the imagination of the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form. In the modern literature of towns, however, richness is found only in sonnets, or prose poems, or in one or two elaborate books that are far away from the profound and common interests of life. One has, on one side, Mallarme and Huysmans producing this literature; and on the other, Ibsen and Zola dealing with the reality of life in joyless and pallid words. On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality. In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry. In Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of the local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks.

J. M. S.

January 21st, 1907.

Persons

CHRISTOPHER MAHON.

OLD MAHON, his father, a squatter.

MICHAEL JAMES FLAHERTY (called MICHAEL JAMES), a publican.

MARGARET FLAHERTY (called] PEGEEN MIKE), his daughter.

WIDOW QUIN, a woman of about thirty.

SHAWN KEOUGH, her cousin, a young farmer.

PHILLY CULLEN AND JIMMY FARRELL, small farmers.

SARA TANSEY, SUSAN BRADY, AND HONOR BLAKE, village girls.

A BELLMAN.

SOME PEASANTS.

The action takes place near a village, on a wild coast of Mayo. The first Act passes on an evening of autumn, the other two Acts on the following day.

ACT I

SCENE: [Country public-house or shebeen, very rough and untidy. There is a sort of counter on the right with shelves, holding many bottles and jugs, just seen above it. Empty barrels stand near the counter. At back, a little to left of counter, there is a door into the open air, then, more to the left, there is a settle with shelves above it, with more jugs, and a table beneath a window. At the left there is a large open fire-place, with turf fire, and a small door into inner room. Pegeen, a wild looking but fine girl, of about twenty, is writing at table. She is dressed in the usual peasant dress.]

PEGEEN -- [slowly as she writes.] -- Six yards of stuff for to make a yellow gown. A pair of lace boots with lengthy heels on them and brassy eyes. A hat is suited for a wedding-day. A fine tooth comb. To be sent with three barrels of porter in Jimmy Farrell's creel cart on the evening of the coming Fair to Mister Michael James Flaherty. With the best compliments of this season. Margaret Flaherty.

SHAWN KEOGH -- [a fat and fair young man comes in as she signs, looks round awkwardly, when he sees she is alone.] -- Where's himself?

PEGEEN -- [without looking at him.] -- He's coming. (She directs the letter.) To Mister Sheamus Mulroy, Wine and Spirit Dealer, Castlebar.

SHAWN -- [uneasily.] -- I didn't see him on the road.

PEGEEN. How would you see him (licks stamp and puts it on letter) and it dark night this half hour gone by?

SHAWN -- [turning towards the door again.] -- I stood a while outside wondering would I have a right to pass on or to walk in and see you, Pegeen Mike (comes to fire), and I could hear the cows breathing, and sighing in the stillness of the air, and not a step moving any place from this gate to the bridge.

PEGEEN -- [putting letter in envelope.] -- It's above at the cross-roads he is, meeting Philly Cullen; and a couple more are going along with him to Kate Cassidy's wake.

SHAWN -- [looking at her blankly.] -- And he's going that length in the dark night?

PEGEEN -- [impatiently.] He is surely, and leaving me lonesome on the scruff of the hill. (She gets up and puts envelope on dresser, then winds clock.) 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 -- [with awkward humour.] -- 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 -- [with rather scornful good humour.] -- You're making mighty certain, Shaneen, that I'll wed you now.

SHAWN. Aren't we after making a good bargain, the way we're only waiting these days on Father Reilly's dispensation from the bishops, or the Court of Rome.

PEGEEN -- [looking at him teasingly, washing up at dresser.] -- It's a wonder, Shaneen, the Holy Father'd be taking notice of the likes of you; for if I was him I wouldn't bother with this place where you'll meet none but Red Linahan, has a squint in his eye, 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.

SHAWN -- [scandalized.] If we are, we're as good this place as another, maybe, and as good these times as we were for ever.

PEGEEN -- [with scorn.] -- As good, is it? Where now will you meet the like of Daneen Sullivan knocked the eye from a peeler, or Marcus Quin, God rest him, got six months for maiming ewes, and he a great warrant to tell stories of holy Ireland till he'd have the old women shedding down tears about their feet. Where will you find the like of them, I'm saying?

SHAWN -- [timidly.] If you don't it's a good job, maybe; for (with peculiar emphasis on the words) Father Reilly has small conceit to have that kind walking around and talking to the girls.

PEGEEN -- [impatiently, throwing water from basin out of the door.] -- Stop tormenting me with Father Reilly (imitating his voice) when I'm asking only what way I'll pass these twelve hours of dark, and not take my death with the fear. [Looking out of door.]

SHAWN -- [timidly.] Would I fetch you the widow Quin, maybe?

PEGEEN. Is it the like of that murderer? You'll not, surely.

SHAWN -- [going to her, soothingly.] -- Then I'm thinking himself will stop along with you when he sees you taking on, for it'll be a long night-time with great darkness, and I'm after feeling a kind of fellow above in the furzy ditch, groaning wicked like a maddening dog, the way it's good cause you have, maybe, to be fearing now.

PEGEEN -- [turning on him sharply.] -- What's that? Is it a man you seen?

SHAWN -- [retreating.] I couldn't see him at all; but I heard him groaning out, and breaking his heart. It should have been a young man from his words speaking.

PEGEEN -- [going after him.] -- 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 -- [thunderstruck.] I wasn't thinking of that. For the love of God, Pegeen Mike, don't let on I was speaking of him. Don't tell your father and the men is coming above; for if they heard that story, they'd have great blabbing this night at the wake.

PEGEEN. I'll maybe tell them, and I'll maybe not.

SHAWN. They are coming at the door, Will you whisht, I'm saying?

PEGEEN. Whisht yourself.

[She goes behind counter. Michael James, fat jovial publican, comes in followed by Philly Cullen, who is thin and mistrusting, and Jimmy Farrell, who is fat and amorous, about forty-five.]

MEN -- [together.] -- God bless you. The blessing of God on this place.

PEGEEN. God bless you kindly.

MICHAEL -- [to men who go to the counter.] -- Sit down now, and take your rest. (Crosses to Shawn at the fire.) And how is it you are, Shawn Keogh? Are you coming over the sands to Kate Cassidy's wake?

SHAWN. I am not, Michael James. I'm going home the short cut to my bed.

PEGEEN -- [speaking across the counter.] -- He's right too, and have you no shame, Michael James, to be quitting off for the whole night, and leaving myself lonesome in the shop?

MICHAEL -- [good-humouredly.] Isn't it the same whether I go for the whole night or a part only? and I'm thinking it's a queer daughter you are if you'd have me crossing backward through the Stooks of the Dead Women, with a drop taken.

PEGEEN. If I am a queer daughter, it's a queer father'd be leaving me lonesome these twelve hours of dark, and I piling the turf with the dogs barking, and the calves mooing, and my own teeth rattling with the fear.

JIMMY -- [flatteringly.] -- What is there to hurt you, and you a fine, hardy girl would knock the head of any two men in the place?

PEGEEN -- [working herself up.] -- Isn't there the harvest boys with their tongues red for drink, and the ten tinkers is camped in the east glen, and the thousand militia -- bad cess to them! -- walking idle through the land. There's lots surely to hurt me, and I won't stop alone in it, let himself do what he will.

MICHAEL. If you're that afeard, let Shawn Keogh stop along with you. It's the will of God, I'm thinking, himself should be seeing to you now. [They all turn on Shawn.]

SHAWN -- [in horrified confusion.] -- I would and welcome, Michael James, but I'm afeard of Father Reilly; and what at all would the Holy Father and the Cardinals of Rome be saying if they heard I did the like of that?

MICHAEL -- [with contempt.] -- God help you! Can't you sit in by the hearth with the light lit and herself beyond in the room? You'll do that surely, for I've heard tell there's a queer fellow above, going mad or getting his death, maybe, in the gripe of the ditch, so she'd be safer this night with a person here.

SHAWN -- [with plaintive despair.] -- I'm afeard of Father Reilly, I'm saying. Let you not be tempting me, and we near married itself.

PHILLY -- [with cold contempt.] -- Lock him in the west room. He'll stay then and have no sin to be telling to the priest.

MICHAEL -- [to Shawn, getting between him and the door.] -- Go up now.

SHAWN -- [at the top of his voice.] -- Don't stop me, Michael James. Let me out of the door, I'm saying, for the love of the Almighty God. Let me out (trying to dodge past him). Let me out of it, and may God grant you His indulgence in the hour of need.

MICHAEL -- [loudly.] Stop your noising, and sit down by the hearth. [Gives him a push and goes to counter laughing.]

SHAWN -- [turning back, wringing his hands.] -- Oh, Father Reilly and the saints of God, where will I hide myself to-day? Oh, St. Joseph and St. Patrick and St. Brigid, and St. James, have mercy on me now! [Shawn turns round, sees door clear, and makes a rush for it.]

MICHAEL -- [catching him by the coattail.] -- You'd be going, is it?

SHAWN -- [screaming.] 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, and of the scarlet-coated bishops of the courts of Rome. [With a sudden movement he pulls himself out of his coat, and disappears out of the door, leaving his coat in Michael's hands.]

MICHAEL -- [turning round, and holding up coat.] -- 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 [taking up the defence of her property.] -- 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? [She snaps the coat away from him, and goes behind counter with it.]

MICHAEL -- [taken aback.] -- Where would I get a pot-boy? Would you have me send the bell-man screaming in the streets of Castlebar?

SHAWN -- [opening the door a chink and putting in his head, in a small voice.] -- Michael James!

MICHAEL -- [imitating him.] -- What ails you?

SHAWN. The queer dying fellow's beyond looking over the ditch. He's come up, I'm thinking, stealing your hens. (Looks over his shoulder.) God help me, he's following me now (he runs into room), and if he's heard what I said, he'll be having my life, and I going home lonesome in the darkness of the night. [For a perceptible moment they watch the door with curiosity. Some one coughs outside. Then Christy Mahon, a slight young man, comes in very tired and frightened and dirty.]

CHRISTY -- [in a small voice.] -- God save all here!

MEN. God save you kindly.

CHRISTY -- [going to the counter.] -- I'd trouble you for a glass of porter, woman of the house. [He puts down coin.]

PEGEEN -- [serving him.] -- You're one of the tinkers, young fellow, is beyond camped in the glen?

CHRISTY. I am not; but I'm destroyed walking.

MICHAEL -- [patronizingly.] Let you come up then to the fire. You're looking famished with the cold.

CHRISTY. God reward you. (He takes up his glass and goes a little way across to the left, then stops and looks about him.) Is it often the police do be coming into this place, master of the house?

MICHAEL. If you'd come in better hours, you'd have seen "Licensed for the sale of Beer and Spirits, to be consumed on the premises," written in white letters above the door, and what would the polis want spying on me, and not a decent house within four miles, the way every living Christian is a bona fide, saving one widow alone?

CHRISTY -- [with relief.] -- It's a safe house, so. [He 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.]

MICHAEL -- [going after him.] -- Is it yourself fearing the polis? You're wanting, maybe?

CHRISTY. There's many wanting.

MICHAEL. Many surely, with the broken harvest and the ended wars. (He picks up some stockings, etc., that are near the fire, and carries them away furtively.) It should be larceny, I'm thinking?

CHRISTY -- [dolefully.] I had it in my mind it was a different word and a bigger.

PEGEEN. There's a queer lad. Were you never slapped in school, young fellow, that you don't know the name of your deed?

CHRISTY -- [bashfully.] I'm slow at learning, a middling scholar only.

MICHAEL. If you're a dunce itself, you'd have a right to know that larceny's robbing and stealing. Is it for the like of that you're wanting?

CHRISTY -- [with a flash of family pride.] -- And I the son of a strong farmer (with a sudden qualm), God rest his soul, could have bought up the whole of your old house a while since, from the butt of his tailpocket, and not have missed the weight of it gone.

MICHAEL -- [impressed.] If it's not stealing, it's maybe something big.

CHRISTY -- [flattered.] Aye; it's maybe something big.

JIMMY. He's a wicked-looking young fellow. Maybe he followed after a young woman on a lonesome night.

CHRISTY -- [shocked.] Oh, the saints forbid, mister; I was all times a decent lad.

PHILLY -- [turning on Jimmy.] -- You're a silly man, Jimmy Farrell. He said his father was a farmer a while since, and there's himself now in a poor state. Maybe the land was grabbed from him, and he did what any decent man would do.

MICHAEL -- [to Christy, mysteriously.] -- Was it bailiffs?

CHRISTY. The divil a one.

MICHAEL. Agents?

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