
**Extravaganza (hilarious entertainment), a Farce, a Horseplay or a Serious Play –
Synge's The Playboy of the Western World: Ramifications in Contemporary India's
socio-cultural-political landscape**

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Abstract:

Extravaganza might refer to something very elaborate and spectacular theatrical production. It also can mean an unlimited expression of one's ideas, thoughts put in through an appropriate mix of style and structure more so by the elements of burlesque or parody. Similarly a horseplay is a type of rough play wherein people push and hit each or behave in a silly way while a farce is defined as something very absurd, ridiculous plots, exaggerated characters and over-the-top situations for comic effect. J.M. Synge's play *The playboy of the Western World* offers a fascinating insight into the above-mentioned elements along with the romanticization of heroism and violence.

The main purpose of this work is to look into these aspects in the contemporary Indian socio-cultural-political landscape where diverse forces are at work. Deploying some of the features of this Irish play, this study seeks to answer whether there were any 'playboys' in the Indian political scenario and if so, to what extent does it had an impact on the people. What are the significant horseplay type situations in the real life of Indians during the past decade? Were there any farcical type settings in the Indian context? Detailed probes over a long period of time in the Indian firmament revealed some intriguing aspects of extravaganza, farce and horseplay at work. On the flipside of it, one can find a surfeit of Christy Mahon's features personified via many people ranging from the Indian prime minister to perceived saints especially after 2014.

Keywords: Extravaganza, farce, horseplay, minority, romanticization.

Introduction:

The Playboy of the Western World (1907) is a play written by John Millington Synge. Certainly it is his masterpiece and brought him international fame and recognition. *The Playboy of the Western World* (TPWW) is a poetic drama par excellence wherein Synge reveals the richness of his imagination in the poetic imagery and description in character in the ironic interplay of fact and fantasy. The natural idioms and phrases of the people of the West of Ireland which Synge infuses into his play makes his prose poetic. He richly deserves his praise that he is "the only great poetic – dramatist of the Irish movement." Synge was one of the most prominent dramatists belonging to the Irish Dramatic Movement (which was itself a part of the great Irish Literary Revival), which gave to the world one of the finest poetic drama ever written. It was both unique and universal. Some of the other important members of this group were Sean O'Casey, W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, Samuel Beckett to name a few. Commenting on the title of the play – its significance, it can be said that the word "playboy" refers to the main character Christopher Mahon, also called Christy being "good at games," and the "western world" refers to Western Ireland, the setting of the play (enotes, 2020).

Being a three-act comedy play written by the Irish playwright J.M.Synge in 1907, it is rightly been called “a masterpiece of the literary Irish Renaissance” (Maxwell, 2020). Synge also wrote plays like *In the shadow of the Glen*, *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Well of the Saints* (1905), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), *Deidre of the Sorrows* (1910) and *The Tinker's Wedding*. These plays have a local habitation and a name but they are universal in theme and significance. Synge has enriched the plays with the rich Irish peasant language and the Gaelic culture and myth in which he was very proficient to that extent that he has used this as a raw material in most of his plays. Besides his understanding of the Irish peasantry and the power of observation which has contributed to generate the gentle ironic, but sympathetic attitude that he had developed towards his countrymen. Most of his plays are detached, ironic, non-political and very realistic. Amidst this backdrop, this article forays into an in-depth study of Synge's play TPWW and the significance that it connotes for some major socio-political events in and around the world and more particularly in the postcolonial Indian landscape.

Arguing further about this play being an extravaganza or a horseplay, this study also seeks to make inroads into some of the ramifications that it can encapsulate in the Indian literary terrain. Synge has written this play “with clever dialogue rich in Hiberno-English (dialects of English spoken in Ireland), this work is a satire delivered through the elements of farce” (Maxwell, 2020). Crystalizing this farcical inputs, this article makes a cross-cultural analysis of the playboys in the real western world and in the Indian subcontinent too trying to locate the elements of satire and farce in the Indian setting. Beginning with a definition of these two terms – extravaganza and horseplay, this research work focuses on the horseplay type situations witnessed in the real day-to-day life of Indians and if so whether it was constructive enough to usher in the progress of the nation. Was there any ‘playboys’ and who were they in the Indian socio-political-cultural landscape? What impact had they on the lives of the people? Has these impact led to any change in the society? Does the play concern itself only about its local or regional context and experience, or does it have a wider relevance? These are some of the questions that are to be explored in this article.

Extravaganza and Horseplay – Some perspectives

Extravaganza, from a layman point of view, it means something very big, glittery event, dazzling entertainment or glamorous celebration. However, from a literary perspective, extravaganza refers to “a literary or musical work marked by extreme freedom of style and structure and usually by elements of burlesque or parody, such as Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*. It may also refer to an elaborate and spectacular theatrical production” (Brittanica, 2024). Extravaganza is also a kind of hilarious entertainment but behind this, it is perfectly serious when looked at in a certain light. Even though horseplay could mean a rough, boisterous play, in literature, it can also signify “a rough play in which people push and hit each other or behave in a silly fashion” (Collinsdictionary, 2024). Grandiose in its designs, the play's settings are in a remote little corner of the west of Ireland – in the little primitive, hitherto undeveloped village called Mayo, and meanders throughout warping on the local inhabitants' blind ignorance, ready to believe, happy-go-lucky attitude, rather parochial in their approach, confused moral values and using all the elements of humor, farce, and satire to foreground the innocent life of the Irish peasantry, the Irish folk lore, and setting in pace the concept of Irish nationalism.

The play's significance is so complex and comprehensive that it has confused both the audience the critic alike from its first performance to the present day. Like all masterpieces, it lends itself to a variety of themes, meanings and interpretations. While the play itself was viewed as an allegory of Synge's own growth as an artist, it was considered a comic parody (imitation) of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. By foregrounding the character of Christy Mahon, the protagonist of the play who is also referred to as the playboy and who mistakenly believes that he has killed his father, Synge explores the comic possibilities of the Oedipal theme which involves both parricide (the killing of a parent) and incest. Besides this, TPWW shows a rampant use of extravaganza and horseplay by stressing more on the “ludicrously improbable” (Maxwell, 2020) situations like Christy Mahon overweening about killing his own father and the whole village involved in this conceited celebrations. Perhaps this is something unheard of in everyone's real life and this draws out the ingenuity of Synge in pulling farce, humor and

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wit under such state of affairs. Physical humor or more importantly, what is called, the horseplay steamrolls in many scenes like the female protagonist Pegeen and Widow Quin pulling the male protagonist Christy Mahon in opposite directions when they fight over him. Yet another instance of horseplay is the scene wherein the village women in an attempt to disguise Christy Mahon dress him in a female attire – petticoat and Christy biting Shawn's leg (Maxwell, 2020).

Exuding brilliance, this extravagant comedy exhibits tragic elements as Synge contrasts the world of dream or illusion (the Playboy's world) with the world of gross reality unredeemed by the imagination (the peasant's world). Hence this play TPWW explores the problem of how illusion and reality, fact and fantasy intertwine each other and how dream is successfully translated into reality. Christopher Mahon or simply called Christy Mahon, the male protagonist, is portrayed as being good at games – Gaelic games, to be more precise (enotes, 2020). But upon his arrival in the village Mayo and getting bolstered, flattered at the villagers' blind faith on his manliness, bravery of killing his own father, Christy Mahon keeps winning all the games and competitions in the village contest. Christy Mahon's recurring habit of winning impresses the local inhabitants and thereby bestow on him the title "playboy of the western world" in an apparent reference to Western Ireland, which seems to be the only world the people of Mayo knew (enotes, 2020). Christy Mahon refuses to see that this new glitz and glamour that has engulfed him presently is only momentary and the title that the villagers awarded might cost his reputation very dearly once the truth dawns on the villagers. This attitude only shows that Christy Mahon is nothing more than a large fish in the pond (enotes, 2020).

Christy Mahon's manner of telling his 'brave deed of hitting his father hitting hard on his father's skull, ripping it apart' effuses horseplay with physical humor. His imagination runs amok much to the extent that he turns a hero overnight with his glib tongued dialogues and in return Pegeen, the daughter of the local inn, Michael James, gets attracted to Christy Mahon. Much to Pegeen's chagrin, other girls in the village – Sara, Nelly, Susan and Honour – create a new self (hero) for Christy Mahon. These girls surround him with their gifts (eggs, butter, cake, a dead hen et al) as tokens of their admiration for a man who has killed his father. Christy could not but think highly of himself and is equally self-amused when he comes to know that he is a rival for Shawn Keogh – the cousin of Pegeen who is supposed to marry him. Harping on the parody of Christ's ministry and crucifixion, the play is a satire on Irish blarney – a smooth talk that flatters and deceives people – and love of a tall tale well told. Moreover, this play is a glittering example of metatheatre, wherein the characters acting in the play are aware, conscious of their own theatricality that they play a part, and illusion seems more real than reality itself. While viewing the play as a comedy, the play deals with only one kind of man – the peasant of the Western coast of Ireland. But through this peasant, Synge successfully portrays what is fundamental in the manners and motives of a whole nation. Hence the play is both local and universal, national and international too.

Synge's play, when it was first staged in Dublin in 1907, caused quite a lot of consternation and riots so much so that a small army of policemen had to be present at the theatre and this incident catapulted this play to go global (Kilberd, 2011). Perhaps this could be due to the fact that the play was considered an attack on the Irish people and their religion. Synge insisted that his plot was not to be taken as social realism. Rather it was an "extravaganza", a semi-abstract account of what he called "the psychic state of the locality". The word "shift", he pointed out, had been used without offence in *Love Songs of Connacht*, a best-selling collection edited by – of all people – the president of the Gaelic League. But then perhaps, he waspishly added, you could get away with things in Irish that you couldn't smuggle through in English. In similar mode, he once delighted a hospital doctor by saying as he emerged from an anaesthetic: "May God damn the bloody Anglo-Saxon language in which a man can't swear without being vulgar" (Kilberd, 2011). Extravaganza starts in the moment when Christy Mahon confesses his killing of his own father to Pegeen and immediately the villagers call him a 'daring fellow.' Celebration sets in and so Christy Mahon rises in their estimation.

Christy, the protagonist of this play "may be read as a heroic parody of Cuchulain, gain locate Synge's masterpiece in a vivid context of pre-Renaissance grotesquery and distinctive corporeal

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humour that runs through many of the old Irish sagas, and is consistent with Synge's deep interest in European Medieval and early Renaissance writers" (Butler, 236, 2012). Butler (2012) further goes on to remark that the striking aspect of Synge's playboy is about the "curious mixture of high and low, the emphasis on the grotesque body, the threat of dismemberment, the ambivalent laughter and the lewdness underlying many of the Irish tales, and indeed the impulse in Synge to parody their epic or serious side is, that they partake of a worldview which the Russian critic Bakhtin, in an extended study on Rabelais, has described as the carnivalesque." Perhaps one could conveniently say that Synge wrote this play as a piece of comedy and extravaganza just for amusement with a parody of Irish folk tales, mores and mannerisms. Locating through the postmodernist lens, it can be said that Synge's play defies a common understanding among most of the critics associating the play to be a modernist in that this play is a play of political and literary unrest.

Heroism and hero worship has become quite common nowadays. However, Synge set the ball rolling down with this play ridiculing the sensationalisation of love stories and innate feature of man to drag such issues and gain mileage out of it. He denounces it through farcical elements in this drama. One such incident is about the manner in which Christy (Christopher) Mahon after landing in Count Mayo sensationalizes it to the extent describing how he killed his father. He spins the story by weaving that he split the skull of his old father with a long and narrow spade used in Ireland – again typical of Irishness. Unperturbed in this sensationalism that he put forward, he goes berserk in the village sports and emerges victorious. Quite unfortunately almost every human falls a prey to such sensationalism and sometimes they like to toy with the title of playboy despite some of them know that is only short-lived. Hence, it can be said that, sensationalism is a part of extravaganza – projecting big but fail to live up to the expectations. Extravaganza and horseplay type situations are usually resorted to people with lesser degree of common sense or people who really needs instant popularity which is often short lived. Undoubtedly, this play falls into this category of people who revels in celebrity status even though it might fall one day.

The Playboy of the Western World - Analysis

"Whenever a country produces a man of genius, that man is never like the country's idea of Itself." (Kilberd, 2011).

From the title ('playboy') of this Irish drama, it appears that the title is suggestive of the fact that Synge creates a type of hero-myth syndrome centering on the main character – Christy Mahon, and then explode it in the face of the very same people who created him. In this context, Bernard Shaw's comment gains currency. He says the Playboy "was not about an Irish peculiarity, but about a universal weakness of mankind: the habit of admiring bold scoundrels." However, some hitches do prop up while attempting to grasp the play and it boils down to three issues: a) the status of the protagonist – whether Christy Mahon is a real hero or a charlatan b) the value of the play – whether it is a serious play with a significant theme or a mere extravaganza (a light hearted entertainment to delight the audience) and c) the genre of the play itself – whether it is a comedy, satire, farce, parody or what! Certainly it isn't didactic. Neither is it a comedy of ideas nor a problem play unlike George Bernard Shaw's *The Pygmalion* and not a propagandist play either. Irvine (1920) comments that Synge was in fact a "greater man than Yeats. His plays were better than Yeats' plays.... but Yeats is a greater poet than Synge was a dramatist." Irvine (1920) adds further that "Synge was a man of peculiar and interesting talent whose work smelt too strongly of the medicine bottle to be of supreme merit."

Being a great dramatist, Synge "brought a desirable elements of bitterness and acrid beauty into the sticky mess of self-satisfaction and sentimentalism which is known as Irish literature.... He shot his bolt when he wrote *The Playboy of the Western World*, the chief value of which lay in the fact that it ripped up the smugness of the Irish people, than whom there are no other people in the world so pleased with themselves on slender grounds" (Irvine, 1920). Some other representative reactions which prop up after going through the play are the play is incongruously called a comedy and the whole affair (play) is absolutely incomprehensible. Besides this, there is nothing in the play to show that the play is not serious. Notwithstanding this, one can argue that the play is a comedy, but its humour is so low and

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vulgar, debased that it disgusts, not amuses any man of refinement and good taste. "Synge portrayed the Irish people faithfully as he saw them; he put in the element of poetry in the Celtic character, but he also put in the element of cruelty; he put in the wit and generosity, but he also put in the dullness and the greed; he put in the gallantry, but he also put in the cowardice; he put in the nobility, but he also put in the gross brutality" (Irvine, 1920).

Synge pays meticulous attention to the various moods that he was evoking and foiling against one another (excitement, disappointment, admiration, scorn et al). And this only reveals that his purpose was to produce a complexity of tones (tragic, comic, farcical et al that would prove wrong the usual psychological or generic (genre – comedy, farce, satire, tragedy etc...) types. In fact, it is the play's great tonal complexity that contributes to the puzzlement the audience feels. Sooner, this play TPWW began to spread its wings far and wider after attaining the cult status of masterpiece, most notably it gained appeal about the treatment of the subject of parricide. The play is divided into three Acts and has very few episodes; it is a play of succession of conversations and narrations. Extravaganza can be related to carnival in that it is a spectacular dance festival intended for merry making, enjoyment, entertainment and during this process a reversal of role-play takes place accompanied by a mixture of high and low in every sense of the word. Özçeşmeci, 2013 notes that "the period in which Synge wrote his plays coincides with the times when the Irish nation was recovering from the effects of colonization, and nationalism was gaining momentum." With regard to the wit and humour, Synge was compared with George Bernard Shaw and Irvine (1920) has this to say "Take the wit from Shaw and the courage from Sheehy Skeffington, substitute for them a fractious sense of beauty, and the result isJohn Millington Synge."

The play TPWW can also be called a literature of protest dues to his stiff but growing opposition to both literary and social decadence (Hewitt, 2017). Hewitt (2017) adds that "This is one of the key areas in which his artistic and political sensibilities align, and thus his protest against decadence is both artistic and political." Synge makes this quite clear throughout the play that if Christy thinks of himself as a hero, it is not he who is responsible for it. Rather it is the people of Mayo who are "fantasy builders," and they have created the "hero-myth" out of an unlawful act of Christy. By encouraging him to tell the story, the whole population of Mayo has allowed its imagination to run riot. The dry, uneventful life of these people had gained colour atleast for a brief period of two days when Christy has been staying with them. When perceived in this light, Pegeen's apparent inconsistent behaviour towards Christy – first admiring him, then scorning him and towards the end she feels sad to have lost the only playboy of the western world – becomes psychologically convincing. Yet another apparent observation by Holder (1988) that this play can be "read on many levels: in the cacophony of interpretations it is seen variously as a mock-Christian tale, an Oedipal farce, an examination of the character of the artist, the story of a young man's coming of age, a study of the power of dreams, and a satire on Irish mores and manners."

Ambiguous characterization and complex psychology

Much of the difficulty in categorizing the play stems out of the ambiguity of the central characters and the complexity of their psychology. Is Christy being presented as a typical peasant or as a humorous exaggerated boastful figure? Are we seriously to believe that the women of his community would admire parricide? Are these women presented as types of the Irish peasant? As for Christy's psychology, because of the complexity of his psychological makeup, he seems to vacillate between cowering (fear) and bragging (boasting), and at the end of the play he seems different from what he was at the beginning. Both the vacillation and the change are necessary to the central theme of the young man's self-surprising growth under the influence of the people's expectation and admiration. In the early stages of the play Christy is merely a potential hero or a potential scoundrel and his attitude does waiver between fear and self-assertion. And at the play's end, he is quite different, because one of the potential selves (heroism) hidden within him has been evoked and realized. As for Pegeen's psychology, it is perhaps even more complicated than Christy's. She wavers continually in such a way that a viewer might be puzzled that Synge did not know that he was doing. But as Synge pointed out, there are simple characters and subtle characters, and the subtle ones create problems for both audiences and actors. The

unevenness of Pegeen's attitude towards Christy – first admiration and then scorn – expresses both her wish to find out how much a man she is dealing with, and her uncertainty about whether she wants to rule or be ruled over by her man. The harshness with which she treats him at the play's end expresses her deep disappointment when she concludes that he is much less of a man than she has thought, followed by her even deeper disappointment upon finding that he is worth having, but that she has allowed him to slip out of her hands. Viewed along these lines, nothing that she does seems psychologically incongruous.

Notwithstanding this, TPWW is a play whose complexity of theme and psychology, and whose tonal ambiguity, when coupled with racy peasant language and its toying with the sensitive subject of the Irish character, were almost certain to produce a dramatic and negative response from its original audience. Needless to say, this can be applicable in every human's daily life during his/her leisure time and far removed from its original circumstance, can view it more coolly and pronounce it a masterpiece, charting with pleasure its psychological complexities, and enjoying it rather than being stumped by the ambiguities of its genre and tone. However, the understanding of the modern man or the present generation does not invalidate the original response by an audience that felt it was deeply involved in it and that it was being made fun of. Synge, no doubt, demonstrates an perceived loyalty towards Irish language, Irish revivalism apart from being "an acute and careful commentator on modernisation" (Hewitt, 2017). "The culture shock is facilitated by the time-shock, and the presence of the old, seen as a 'survival' of modernisation, is recognized as pertaining to an entirely different culture from that of the Anglicised writer (Hewitt, 2017).

An avid reader while casually leafing through the pages of Synge's plays *Riders to the Sea*, *The Tinker's Wedding* and *The Playboy of the Western World* would find a deep rooted Irishness asserted in these plays coupled with the fact that the rural Irish characters are given prime importance (Özçeşmeci, 2013) besides the illustration of certain socio-cultural and political aspects of Ireland. However, the play which this article is centering on - *The Playboy of the Western World* throws focus on rural communities, peasants amidst a noticeable shift towards the contemporary period. Besides this, the notion of nationalism and national identity is also being discussed here (Özçeşmeci, 2013). Dwelling further, the characters are quite complicated demonstrating all the elements of aesthetics, Irish revivalism, modernism, peasant culture and pantheism to name a few (Hewitt, 2017). Synge found the perfect material for his drama in portraying the accounts of peasant life depicting a variety of characters revealing different aspects of the Irish country side. "He remained loyal to the local material he heard among the rural people and used it in his plays. He chose the ordinary people and their life for the drama" (Özçeşmeci, 2013). For Synge, depicting the culture and pathos of Irish peasants is of paramount importance as he paints them with a realistic touch effusing a sense of Irishness in this dramatic work. Irishness, here refers to the culture, language, their mental framework, their approach towards a particular life situation and above all the poetic language of the Irish people.

Playboy – Extravaganza/Horseplay, farce and satire in the Indian Psychic cosmos

Synthesizing the play TPWW and applying it into the Indian settings throws up some fascinating inputs. Proceeding further, it would be pertinent to encapsulate the story of the play in a nutshell. Locating the background in a country pub (shebeen) in the County Mayo of the west coast of Ireland, the play narrates the tale of a young man by name Christy Mahon who is the protagonist. He prides himself in the fact and goes on bragging that he had killed his father. However, quite unexpectedly, the locals of this small countryside rather than condemning his brutal nature are "intrigued by his story and enjoy his vile deed vicariously" (Maxwell, 2020). Furthermore, Christy's "bravery" wins the heart of the Pegeen, who happens to be the daughter of a local pub owner and also a widow Quin. But in a sudden twist of events when the truth comes out that Christy's father is still alive, the status of a "hero" comes down crashing like a nine-pin-ball. No wonder this story portends various meanings in the socio-political-cultural contexts like India wherein the geopolitical atmosphere is vastly diversified.

Quite undoubtedly the character of Christy Mahon found echo in many people who also have

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the tendency of brag and boast even a tiny incident, public's unflinching yearning to love sensational stories but finally turning into a farce. For instance, the TV reality show *Bigg Boss* started in 2006 and airing in seven different languages in the Indian subcontinent is a series bordering on an unabashed shame of peeping into the closed walls of people and discussing it in public thus making a farce out of the entire scenario. Ludicrously improbable situations, turn of events which are typical of horseplay are found to be adopted here. Penetrating further and tracing the genesis of such extravaganza and horseplay type circumstances in the Indian socio-cultural-political sites, it is often found that the media sensationalizes these happenings causing not much to the chagrin to the ruling dispensation in order to indulge in a quid pro quo basis settlement. Numerous instances can be cited here.

One of the biggest show took place in 2011 in the Indian capital city of New Delhi when a galaxy of personalities (although most of them unknown prior to this get together grouping) from all wakes of life met together in what may possibly be called a jamboree ostensibly to launch a campaign called "India Against Corruption." Quite similar to Christy Mahon's playboy mechanisms, this movement had all the ingredients of extravaganza orchestrated by playboys like Kisan Baburao Hazara popularly known as Anna Hazare, Aravind Kejriwal, Kiran Bedi, Manish Sisodia, Yogendra Yadav et al. Arundathi Roy in the newspaper the economic times (2011) says it is a

"it was an NGO driven movement by Kiran Bedi, (Arvind) Kejriwal and (Manish) Sisodia. Three of them run NGOs and all the three core team members are Magsaysay Award winners... World Bank and Ford Foundation fund the anti-corruption campaigns. This is copy book World agenda though they might not have meant it."

She further states that "Anna Hazare was picked up and propped up as a saint for the masses. He was not the brain behind the movement" (2011). Akin to the village sports competition in the Count of Mayo in this drama, this well drafted show soon struck the vital chord of the gullible Indians possibly with the media blitzkrieg that sensationalized it with screaming headlines. Strangely enough, the real playboys in this campaign, like Christy Mahon, later on went on to capture power. Arvind Kejriwal became the Chief Minister of Delhi, Kiran Bedi was awarded the posh gubernatorial post of Lieutenant Governor of Pondicherry, a union territory in the South of India while Anna Hazare is yet to come out of the Rip Van Winkle hibernation since 2011.

Following this farcical movement, yet another incident that captured the imagination of the people in the run-up to the 2014 general elections of India was the photoshop culture that permeated every segment of Indian population. By and large, almost every Indian stood spellbound with the photos showing the Indian state of Gujarat with breathtaking bridges, bullet trains, clean roads, and skyscrapers. Every media went berserk coupled with agog of the much touted 'Gujarat Model.' Soon, this was translated into a slogan and helped in the election engineering process. The ultra-nationalist party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) dubiously hijacked single-handedly the social media when it was unheard of by the others. Quite akin to the opening scenario in this play TPWW, wherein Christy Mahon got instant fame, here too, BJP's prime-ministerial candidate got a big boost due to the false propaganda. While Christy Mahon projected himself a hero, presumably, after 'killing' his father, in the real world, Narendra Modi was hailed as a superman who could solve all of India's perennial problems at one stroke. The corporatized media and the corporate robber barons who were always the defaulter to all governmental loans patronized Narendra Modi during this run-up to the election. *Achhe din aana walehain* (Good days are coming) was catapulted as the slogan of BJP for the 2014 general election only to be followed by another comical campaign called *Swachh Bharat Mission* (Clean India Mission). Empty promises, false propaganda and fake news were the order of the day.

Similar to Christy Mahon's puffery to the gullible people of County Mayo, Narendra Modi promised to all Indians, that if BJP is voted to power, he will bring back the black money of the rich who had stashed their ill-gotten wealth in the banks of tax-free haven countries. With this money retrieved, he would credit an amount of fifteen lakh Indian Rupees in every Indians' bank account. His other grandiloquence include providing two crore jobs every year, Indian currency rupee to gain strength in the international market, bringing down the diesel/petrol prices to forty rupees, Modi

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possessing 52 inch chest to fight all the enemies of India – Pakistan, China et al. He was the pied piper of Hamlyn personified with bulk of the Indian people getting carried away by such bounties announced on the eve of general elections 2014. Modi overshoot Christy Mahon in every encounter. His discourses on upholding the sanctity of marriage as an institution raised many an eye-brows. But the truth is he had deserted his wife decades ago. Fondly obsessed with costumes and photos, he trots the globe, which no prime minister of Independent India had ever undertaken. Narendra Modi creates his own coterie consisting of his admirers, photographers wherever he goes just like Christy Mahon who does everything to play up his situation enjoying his role as a local hero.

Displaying extravagant pompous and possessing a proclivity for luxury, Modi saunters along with world's most expensive suits, pens that he never writes, cars, sunglasses, and photoshoots to boost his larger than life image. While Christy Mahon knows that he is a coward deep inside his heart, yet when he gets to the Flaherty Pub, he exhibits a false bravado in order to water down his fears. Similar is the case with Narendra Modi, who is afraid of facing questions raised by opposition parties inside the Indian parliament. He is the only prime minister in the history of Independent India to remain inaccessible to common man. He parades before any event – national or international just to grab attention and convinces that his picture is taken carefully by his photographers. Christy Mahon's lies that he had killed his father. Every time he exaggerates this story and the locals (Irish) in County Mayo village get impressed and this makes him crave for attention. Quite analogous is with Narendra Modi who irrespective of his lies, suppresses his cowardice and charts a new path in order to divert the attention of the public. Neither accepting his mistakes nor showing any contriteness for all such volte-face, the prime minister remains undisturbed about the double-standards that he and his party has been preaching. Notwithstanding this, he displayed the attributes of being obliviousness to the conditions and daily lives of Indian people during COVID 19, when he declared lockdown without issuing any prior notice. People were stranded throughout the country as all forms of travel – air, buses, cars, and trains were cancelled suddenly and everything came to a stand-still. Millions of workers started walking to their homes in north India in this scorching heat, which left thousands dead.

Extravaganza, horseplay type situations with so much of fun and frolic engulfed the political atmosphere for the last ten years. Yet another non-serious activity took place in 2016 was *de-monetization*, with claims of tall orders that this master stroke will purge India of the perceived black money. No black money hoarder shall be left scot-free so cried another magniloquence from this 52 inch fake hero called Narendra Modi. However, much to everyone's chagrin, this mission turned out to be a man-made disaster and a classic epitome of organized plunder and loot of public money. Modi thundered at the beginning of this macabre drama called de-monetization that "give me 50 days over scrapped notes, punish me if problems persist" (Gandhi, 2016). A self-styled narcissistic personality man in Modi goes around adorning different attires, builds a new parliament building, buys a new aircraft for his travel worth two thousand crores of public money, eats mushroom worth 1.2 crore Indian rupees every month and so on. Clearly, it is a fit example of sky high promises but nothing in deliverance. He attained the feather in his cap when the *Times* magazine bestowed him with the title "India's divider-in Chief" (economicstimes, 2019).

Some other instances of extravaganza, horseplay and non-serious play from the Indian context includes god men getting arrested on charges of sexual misconduct on women and embezzlement of funds. Prominent names in this category includes Swami Nityanandha, who remains a fugitive till date and is yet to be captured by the Indian government, Swami Premanandha, God men Asram Babu, Ram Rahim to name a few. Other notorious heroes who have escaped the long arms of law are merchandising yoga gurus like Baba Ramdev, Jaggi Vasudevan alias Satguru and Sri Sri Sri Ravishankar, presumably with the blessings of the ruling dispensation. But unlike the earlier trio, the triumvirates of Baba Ramdev, Jaggi Vasudevan and Sri Sri Sri Ravishankar are the darlings of the ruling BJP government and have become the brand ambassadors for selling ayurvedic medicines, meditation, nature products and Yoga to the whole world. All these three are the Christy Mahons of India – fake heroes, whose credibility is always under suspicion. Despite having thousands of followers they go around harming

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nature, environment, usurping forest lands, and practicing everything contrary to what they preach, they command huge respect in the eyes of the innocent masses like the people of County Mayo. However, the reality is different – everybody is a coward and when they are caught they escape to foreign countries and ruel their organization extra-territorially. Besides this, another organization which has considerable amount of followers but gained disrepute due to murder of its own officer in the temple premises is Kanchi Kamokodi Mutt in Kanchipuram, Tamilnadu. Kanchi Kamokodi Mutt's reputation was tarnished by another sex scandal wherein women celebrities – artists, actresses and others were sexually exploited by the senior most saints occupying the top office. Subsequently the saints were imprisoned but managed to come out of incarceration using the loopholes in the Indian law and also influencing both the witnesses and government. Hence, in reality, India is a cowed bystander to all these Christy Mahons masquerading as game-changer in public life.

Conclusion

By and large, it can be said that extravaganza, horseplay type situations are found to be enacted both deliberately and consciously by the ruling dispensation or sometimes by the forces (possibly the corporate sector) that be with the blessings of the people in power to divert the real crisis that the people face during this time. Contemporary India is replete with plethora of Christy Mahon's so much so that for want of space, this article refrains from dwelling further into this arena of highlighting people other than those who have been discussed in this work. Parallels can be drawn between the Irish people at the beginning of the nineteenth century, who were largely ignorant because of being economically underdeveloped and the present day India who are still ill-informed and are also illiterate. Ireland, during the time when this play was written was smitten by struggles for independence and so remained politically isolated. But the socio-economic-politico turf was essentially the same in contemporary India and an early nineteenth century Ireland. Hence comic characters like this crop up to provide the public a comic relief. Being a win-win situation for the government too, it turns a Nelson's eye in this regard. Independent India has witnessed many an instance wherein such fake heroes who were given disproportionate space in the political sphere to deliver the promises that they uttered. But they failed to deliver even a single one. But the mute question is when will this show end? Can it go on indefinitely or will be it allowed to continue irrespective of any change in the governmental positions?

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