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VOICES OF MANIPUR



Eds.

Amitava Roy, Ronan Paterson,
Bryan Reynolds, Subir Dhar, Papia Mitra

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From the Editor's Desk:

In this issue of *International Journal of Cultural Studies and Social Sciences* Vol.-XVIII, No.-XXI the focus is Manipur in the North East. The various communities have a rich varied cultural history with their own literature, primarily oral. With the arrival of print culture, modern age saw the creation of written texts. However, not much is known about them to the world outside. This volume seeks to fill in that lacuna. Attention is also paid to how the use of dominant second language is reshaping ethnic identities. Therefore, except for six essays, the rest are devoted to the 'Seven Sisters.'

Dr. Tapu Biswas, alumni of the Department of English, Manipur University (First D. Litt. In Manipur University) compares the works of two writers of the modern age, Lorca and Synge. He studies the social and economic contexts in which they flourished pointing out that both knew financial hardships, were deeply influenced by the passionate song and ballad traditions of their motherland and love of music. Both were poets as well as dramatists. But Lorca gained international fame more swiftly as a result of his dramatic death in the hands of the fascist General Franco's firing squad while Synge as a poet remains relatively unknown though his plays are considered master-pieces. **Dr. Biswas** soberly analyses the lives and writing careers of the two and argues convincingly that both should be studied by their own merit in their historical setting rather than allowing any personal event of their lives to overshadow their actual literary merit.

Thingbaijam Nitai Singh focuses on R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends*. He traces the clash of contradictory ideologies of tradition and modernity, Indian religion and English education in the social atmosphere of the times, and how the identity crisis the conflicts created reverberates through the novel. The personal life of the characters blend in with the greater cultural currents of the time. Singh points out that Narayan however does not delve into the social and economic structure as the Marxist writers did; his characters after a quest for identity reconciles themselves with the status quo.

Dr. Sundari Irengbam critically appraises the main themes in Saul Bellow's novel *Herzog*. She points out how the protagonist searches for stability in a world where everything is elusive and his own place in reality seem doubtful. Sanity in the modern world with its fast technological progress had become elusive. Irengbam shows how in the novel sanity, stability, identity, love and creativity are all bound up together. *Herzog* struggles to understand his own existence in the face of the modern world and thus Bellow brings out the tapestry that defines our being,

Udatraj Pukhram discusses the complexity of languages in Northeast India. India itself is a multilingual country in Northeast there are several ethnic communities each with their distinctive languages which have shaped their culture. In modern times they are shifting from oral patterns to the written form and this influences their linguistic identity and becomes a site for political contention. Pukhram traces the evolution of National language policy, the conflict and intertwining among the varied communities, the pull towards one's mother-tongue, and observes how national framework must accommodate plural languages.

Atit Thomma and N. Pramodini Devi focus on entirely new research on how English used by Thai students are influenced by how they are accustomed to speak their mother tongue. In common with many students from non-English language communities, the Thai students find it difficult to master English consonants in a way a native can. This hampers their communication skills. Thomma and Pramodini Devi suggest that this is a field worth further research to solve the problem.

Jangsingam Gonmei discusses the viability of adapting oral folktales to the screen. He chooses as his subject *Nakamh-Riangsuanneic*, a folktale of the Rongmei Naga tribe which had been turned into a feature film. The film faithfully depicts the old traditional practices that the tribe are now losing in the modern world. In the past the stories from Rongmei Nagas were confined to a few printed pages. But bringing them to the audio-visual medium had made them more colourful and realistic and memorable. Gonmei feels that this medium holds out hope of cultural continuity for Rongmei Naga posterity.

Hosea Lalremruot focuses on how Hmar ethnic society is transitioning to a more modern society disrupting traditional patterns. He particularly focuses on *tlawmngaina*, a word denoting a particular code of conduct that is not properly translatable. He discusses the various shades of

meaning associated with the word and why practicing *tlawmngaina* grants status and respect to the practitioner. It is both a religious obligation and the foundation of society. Lalremruot concludes that this concept had helped the tribe to sustain itself through the centuries and is relevant today as well and therefore to understand the culture it is necessary to grasp the nuances of this term.

Dr. Pangeijam Sanjeev dissects *The Manipur Trilogy* by Ratan Thiyam. Though they have been discussed by literary critics before Sanjeev critiques it through postmodernist lens. The Trilogy spans the vastness of cosmic history describing the creation the universe and man according to Meitei myths, the development of civilization and accompanying horrors of war, the barrenness of modern life which makes man anxious to find spiritual solace and the writing of a book containing all wisdom necessary for man. The emphasis is on remembering and guarding the cultural traditions which alone can give peace and harmony. Sanjeev argues successfully that Thiyam is spreading the message that meta narratives need to change to micronarratives of tradition which can bring solace.

Wairokpam Yaiphaba Chenglei's research is on how reading fluency in English as a Second Language can influence speaking fluency. He has conducted the research on thirty students very rigorously. His inference is that fluency in one has no co-relation to fluency in another field.

Dr. Ph. Jayalaxmi and Chingalembi Devi are interested in rejuvenation of traditional literature in the Northeast. In particular he focuses on analysing the fantasy world created by Avinuo Kire in her novel *Where the Cobbled Path Leads*. The protagonist is a little girl who comes into contact with the world of spirits as she yearns to visit her dead mother in the other world. Yet she also lives in the real world and references to the violence outside brings out the buried reality of the human world. The novel is actually a quest to find how to lead a happy life rooted in familiarity of home while embracing the unknown. Jayalaxmi and Chingalembi Devi demonstrate how the novel blurs the boundaries between fact and fantasy and gives glimpse of indigenous Naga life.

Dr Irom Robindro Singh critically discusses Nissim Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion* as a narrative poem which paints the picture of an Indian village, yet lives us in doubt about what really happened. The poet remembers his past in a village where his mother was bitten by a scorpion. Singh observes that there are three connected elements in the poem: the

simplicity of the villagers as they give mental comfort, the scientific knowledge of the husband and the power of the holy man. But above and beyond is the concept of Motherhood. The Indian mother at the end of the poem simply thanked God not for her survival but that her children had been spared. Such motherhood is also a universal concept.

Dr. N. Rebika Devi takes up the issue of suppression of female voices as shown in Anita Desai's novel *Voices in the city*. The setting is Kolkata, a city filled with meaningless babel. The novel charts the lives of three siblings, Nirode and his two sisters Monisha and Amla. Though the brother also suffers the sisters suffer more as they are women and so not allowed to articulate their deepest emotions and desires. However as Devi points out that while Monisha commits suicide Amla moves towards self-actualization.

Bunty Laishram has researched extensively on the difficulties encountered by Manipuri students at the university when they start academic writing. Manipuri students are taught English language from the beginning of their education. However academic writing skills are a different matter and this study examines the answer scripts written by Manipuri students. Data yielded by the study demonstrates that these students have little fluency in thinking outside the box and therefore their academic essay writing skills suffer. Laishram recommends that they be exposed to more critical thinking skills and writing practice.

Amitkumar Yurembam looks at the impact technology has on linguistic skills of postgraduate students in Manipur. Nowadays students have various technological avenues to gain information. It is found that they feel more motivated to study if technological aids are used in class. Research carried out with limited sample size found that all students have clear idea of how to use technology and nearly all used it frequently as an aid in their studies. Yurembam ends his study with the recommendation that smart class technology should be used in classroom settings to enhance student experience.

Jahnabi Baruah and **Dr. Sharmila Thingbaijam** focus on the issue of learning Hindi in Manipur. In India Hindi had been long used as a contact language and in administration. This has made acquiring Hindi as a language beneficial. However, non-Hindi speaking children has very little contact with the language outside class and the curriculum is dull and uninteresting to the child. Jahnabi and Thingbaijam therefore argue that children must be inspired to learn Hindi and recommends that the same

methods used in teaching English or French as a second language be applied here too.

Dr. Kishan Thingbaijam like Dr. Singh chooses to focus on *Night of the Scorpion* by Nissim Ezekiel and the two trends of thought – traditional and modern rationalism — present there. However he points out that the poem is perhaps an attempt by Ezekiel to return to his native roots that had been torn out by colonial modernity. Through the picture of the villagers and priest observing and affirming Hindu rituals while the father applied his scientific knowledge, he affirms that the two cultures can co-exist. Thingbaijam affirms that in the Hindu world view one set of practices need not obliterate the other; any binary reading of the poem is due to colonial consciousness.

As can be seen this volume can easily be divided into three sections. One deals with the well-known literature of the greater world inside and outside India. Another deals with literary creations of North Eastern people. Still another deals with the modern educational process in North East. The latter two are particularly illuminating since they have not been publicised much in other parts of the Indian sub-continent.

Eds.

Amitava Roy & Papia Mitra

Death at Thirty-Eight: Two European Playwrights

Tapu Biswas

ABSTRACT

The article proposes an evaluation of Lorca (1898-1936) the playwright through a comparison with the dramatic achievements of J.M.Synge (1871-1901), who also like Lorca had only thirty-eight years to live. The curious similarities between their backgrounds, lives, aspirations, politics, and objectives have been noted and placed in juxtaposition to indicate the sharp distinction between them as playwrights, in their artistic purpose, and their societal commitments. Their preparations for their literary careers and their musical bias have been taken into account here together with their exposure to the life outside their native countries. It has been suggested here that Lorca's highly sentimental approach towards the arts, arising out of his intense admiration of emotive gypsy singing, worked detrimentally in his dramatic opus; while Synge's tough, somewhat wryly comic approach towards poetry, also arising out of his understanding of the Irish peasant psyche, made him a fitter author for the stage. Synge's prose works and Lorca's Lectures have been considered, and particularly the idea of a theatre and a dramatic philosophy in both the authors have been sought and compared.

Keywords : Aspirations, Economic collapse, Irish populace, Dramaturgy.

On the 125th birth anniversary of Lorca we lament the untimely death of a dramatist in the hands of political brutes as he reached his thirty-eighth year in 1936. Then sobered, we remember that another playwright was killed just as he was entering his thirty-eighth year, although not by human violence. Hodgkin's disease took John Millington Synge away from us in 1909. Although there are striking resemblances and contrasts between both their lives, careers, aspirations, and achievements, their

relative importance in western theatre history has not yet been estimated. This prompts us to place them in parallels and in juxtapositions in an effort to understand why one of them requires special persuasions to be appreciated on the stage while the other still comes alive on the stage in every country and in every translation.

As far as the general focus of their plays are concerned, both the authors spoke for economically deprived and culturally marginalised communities: those of Spanish Andalusia and pre-Independence Ireland. Neither culture had an indigenous theatrical tradition that could be built a national playwright. Lorca's putative complaint that there was little theatre outside the Spanish capital, and that the provinces were deprived, was perhaps an exaggeration; for satire, political awareness, social awareness, even socially aware women playwrights (staged also in the provinces), were there in 19th century Spanish theatre.¹ But Lorca as a theatre director had chosen to stage Renaissance and Baroque playwrights for whom Synge too had much admiration. We can speculate that Lorca's choice was influenced by his inspirational backdrop of Andalusian culture, characterized by wildly emotive song and dance; and it permeated his dramatic imagination to an exceptional—indeed, to a detrimental—extent, encouraging the release of 'a maelstrom of pain, anger, frustration, and confusion'² that characterizes his plays and his theory of performance.

Ireland had its tradition of ballad-singing and story-telling. The theatre in Nineteenth century Ireland also was the melodramatic theatre: colonial, and foreign in spirit in as much as it presented the Irish 'natives' as clowns, viewing them with alien eyes. The Irish Dramatic Movement was aimed at challenging this colonial view of Ireland, and present an 'ideal' Ireland to the world at large. But as a part of a Nationalist movement, it necessarily (largely through Yeats and Lady Gregory) presented an idealized view of Ireland's mythic past glory, which was, if truth be told, as false to the real Ireland as the buffoonery on the colonial stage. Synge rejected both these visions, and made it his business as a playwright to put up real Irish characters on the stage. As he wrote to his friend Stephen McKenna:

I do not believe in the possibility of "a purely fantastic, unmodern, ideal, breezy, spring-dayish, Cuchulainoid National Theatre" ... no drama can grow out of anything other than the fundamental realities of life, which are never fantastic, are neither

modern nor unmodern and, as I see them, rarely spring-dayish, or breezy or Cuchulainoid.³

A Gaelic scholar in his own right, he expressed the hope in his letter to the powerful Gaelic League (which proposed a wholesale revival of ancient Irish culture and the Gaelic language to the exclusion of English) that

some young man with blood in his veins...will sweep over the backside of the world to the uttermost limbo this credo of mouthing gibberish.⁴

Both these playwrights came from tradition-bound conservative families. But Lorca's family had actually prospered in business in spite of the economic collapse caused by Spain's loss of Cuba with its sugar, and they were also firmly rooted in agriculture. Synge belonged to the Irish Protestant Ascendancy (paradoxically, a declining Ascendancy). Not much more than aristocratic pride was left to his family, and not a great deal of money. Both were dependent of family support paid in small instalments.

In consequence, both playwrights were financially straight jacketed, living on shoestring budgets (Synge had "Forty pounds a year and a suit of new clothes when this one gets too spoilt"); yet neither would accept the secure bourgeois lifestyle demanded by their families. Both chose the literary profession which did not — indeed, could not — secure them a steady income. Both were dissidents in their families; but while Lorca never quite lost his Catholic faith, Synge, a Protestant, lost his religion early in life after reading Darwin. Synge's rebellion against his family norms was more radical, since in a family that regularly produced priests and missionaries, he himself turned atheist. He went to Paris to study Socialism (to the great consternation and grief of his mother); tried a career as a journalist, and ended up a playwright.

Both playwrights were musically gifted too. Lorca had studied piano for several years, and had aspirations for a professional musical career. The musical quality of his poetry, especially the craftsmanship of his mature ones, that reflected the style of Andalusian songs, has been commented upon by critics familiar with Spanish musical culture. Indeed, a large number of his poems have the nomenclature of 'song'; and he also wrote arias for fellow musicians.

Synge played the piano, the flute, the violin, and had studied music theory and counterpoint at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, winning a scholarship to study counterpoint in Germany. But from there he shifted to Italy to study Italian language and literature. However, he was nervous about playing in public, and never appeared on the stage. Yet, his view of life and art was essentially musical:

Every life is a symphony and the translation of this sequence into music and from music again, for those who are not musicians, into literature, or painting or sculpture, is the real effort of the artist.

... It is this cosmic element in the person which gives all personal art, and all sincere life and all passionate love a share in the dignity of the world... If art is the expression of the abstract beauty of the person there are times when the person is the expression of the beauty that is beyond the world.

The world is an orchestra where every living thing plays one entry and then gives his place to another. We must be careful to play all the notes. It is for that we are created. If we play them well, we are not exorbitantly wretched.⁵

Both had started writing early and had practically disowned their first plays; both had strong reservations about their early poetry. But Lorca the poet has gained international repute, while Synge has not yet. Regarding Lorca's poetic reputation, however, D. G. Walters has mildly cautioned us that 'the fame that his works immediately achieved' was largely an aftermath to his death, and ends up by noting that 'The popularity of Lorca's work is due in part to the circumstances of his death and the mystery in which it was shrouded.'⁶

Synge's poems have not received much critical attention. His use of the tough and often heartless humour of the Irish folk imagination (interpreted both as a presumed brutality inhering the Irish national character, and as Synge's attraction to violence due to his imagined obsession with his impending death) and their simple ballad form have inhibited an objective assessment of his poems.⁷ He drew upon the popular traditions of the Irish folk, but he also realized the inherent falseness of much contemporary Irish idealistic literature:

The Irish ballad poetry of 'The Spirit of the Nation' school engrossed me for a while and made me commit my most serious literary error; I thought it excellent for a considerable time and then repented bitterly.⁸

He also rejected the over-sensitized introversion of artificial and decadent poetry, and, dismissing Baudelaire and Huysmans on one hand and Zola and Ibsen 'with their joyless pallid words' on the other, observed that 'In these days poetry is mostly the flower of evil or good, but it is the timber of poetry that wears most surely, and there is no timber that has not its strong roots in clay and worms'.⁹

There might have been a topographical reason for this difference between these two authors: Lorca had a populace at hand who, living on a fertile soil, were also singer-dancers by their very temperament, while Synge had focussed on a populace that led a tough life of proverbial poverty on an arid land and whose poetry of life was expressed through the wildness of their imagination embodied in their colourful dramatic speech. 'In Ireland', Synge wrote,

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.¹⁰

Both of them were mistaken as apolitical too. Lorca had strong left-wing sympathies, and he supported (a major reason for his death) the Republican Party which gave him the Directorship of 'La Baraca.' Synge's mother was worried about his "socialist" bias. Like Joyce,¹¹ Synge satirized the political fickleness of the Irish populace in the *Playboy*, and their self-delusion in *The Well of the Saints*. One of his most blatant political satires was the unfinished *National Drama: A Farce*.

Synge wrote only six plays in the last six years of his life, half of which are still considered to be world classics: *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Well of the Saints* (1905), and *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907). Lorca wrote a dozen; but is remembered for only three again: *Blood Wedding* (1932), *Yerma* (1934), and *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1936) — his 'Andalusian Trilogy'. Both became theatre directors: Lorca at *La Baraca*

and Synge at the *Abbey Theatre*. But at this point, where we note that Lorca's theatre kept aloof from Spanish political realities, the similarities end.

Synge was a linguist of formidable calibre: he had prepared himself painstakingly for his literary career: "I ran through History, Chemistry, Physics, Botany, Hebrew, Irish, Latin, Greek, something of French and German and made a really serious study of the history and theory of music. English literature also I read with much care..." mentioning Leslie Stephen, Arnold, and Carlyle among his close studies.¹² Later he would write articles in French; introduce French authors to the English readership; compare, contrast, and evaluate a multitude of European authors, critically appraise Gaelic poetry; and also translate from Old and Middle French, Italian and German poets, and ancient Gaelic. He had won college awards for Hebrew and ancient Gaelic, and later virtually "created" the Anglo-Irish dialect for the stage to recreate Gaelic linguistic turns in English for international audiences. But he, a master of Gaelic dialects, never wrote in Gaelic. He proposed that Ireland should realize herself in the modern European context rather than cling to its obsolete past, obsessed with shunning everything English. He criticized the 'patriotic' Gaelic ideologues thus:

'with their eyes glued on John Bull's navel, they dare not be Europeans for fear [that] the huckster across the street might call them English.'¹³

He wished Ireland a European status, and he considered himself a European Irishman.¹⁴ Like several other Irish authors of his time such as Joyce, Beckett, Shaw and Wilde, he sought intellectual emancipation outside the confines of Ireland. In fact, he was settling down in Paris when Yeats reportedly suggested that he return to Ireland. He wrote with a European audience in view, and his were the first Irish plays to be produced in Europe during his lifetime: in Prague, and in Germany (by no less a Director than Max Reinhardt).

Lorca, on the other hand, firmly refused to learn English or appreciate its literature both before and after his extended stay in America. He could utter only a limited few English words with an extremely thick Spanish accent. His deep admiration of the Black community of Harlem failed to inspire him enough to learn at least their version of English. Compared to

Synge, he was a playwright of regrettable linguistic poverty. Translators of his poetry remark that ‘the language that Lorca wrote in... looks remarkably like Spanish, but is really a language called Lorca.’¹⁵ The same holds true for his plays where the text looks remarkably like dialogues spoken by characters, but is really an extended monologue of Lorca.

Yeats and Lady Gregory’s ambition was to present on the stage the ‘poetic’ Ireland before the world. Synge chose a different path: refusing to project an idealised and holy Ireland of supreme virtues. Yeats later admitted:

I did not see, until Synge began to write, that we must renounce the deliberate creation of a kind of Holy City in the imagination and express the individual.¹⁶

Synge aimed at showing life as it was actually lived by his countrymen as well as their imaginative life. When questioned about his dramaturgy in *The Playboy*, he unhesitatingly announced to the Press: “it happens that I know Irish life best, and so I made my methods Irish”— and that famous public statement has remained unchallenged to date. Indeed, his artistic fidelity to Irish life has long become a critical byword. In his Preface to the same play he wrote:

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 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.

Lorca, enamoured of Andalusia and coming much after Synge, made no attempt to depict either Andalusian folk life or speech. A modern critic opines: ‘He witnessed the dire poverty in which they lived and was privy to the sordid conditions under which they functioned daily.’¹⁷ If he was, we find no trace of this condition in his plays (or even his poems), and instead, a deep concern with obsolescent aristocratic norms: family honour, blood feuds, betrothals, etc. Although the gypsy way of life had already

been depicted in Synge's *The Tinker's Wedding* (produced first in Europe in 1909), Lorca, already acquainted with *Riders to the Sea*, had not learnt much from him. Synge too had 'witnessed the dire poverty' and 'the sordid conditions' under which the Irish peasants lived, and was privy to the activities of the mercantile middle classes. In 1905, he wrote to his friend Stephen McKenna about life in County Mayo:

There are sides of all that western life, the groggy patriot-publican-general-shop-man who is married to the priest's half-sister and is second cousin once-removed of the dispensary doctor, that are horrible and awful. This is the type that is running the present United Irish League anti-grazier campaign, while they're swindling the people themselves in a dozen ways and then buying out their holdings and packing off whole families to America. ...I sometimes wish to God I hadn't a soul and then I could give myself up to putting those 'lads on the stage. God, wouldn't they hop!¹⁸

And he did put that society on the stage in *The Playboy of the Western World*. One would search in vain in the Lorca opus for a parallel.

We certainly need refer to Synge's prose works here: *The Aran Islands* (1907) and the body of his literary articles, travelogues on Wicklow, Kerry, Connemara, newspaper reportage on the congested districts, etc. All these support his claim to 'know Irish life best.' These recorded observations and experiences gave body—a solidity and truth—to his plays. The plots of all his plays except the discarded *When the Moon Has Set* (1901) and the unfinished *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1909), are traceable to either seen or reported real-life incidents. Unfortunately, Lorca never seems concerned with the actual miseries or happiness of the people he advocated for. Especially in the context of his theatre work, the words of his lecture on *Cante Jondo*:

Gentlemen, the musical soul of the race is in grave danger! The artistic riches of a whole people are on their way to oblivion! It seems that each day which passes another leaf falls from the wondrous tree of Andalusian lyric, old men carry to the grave the priceless treasures of past generations.¹⁹

fail to convince us that such people ever existed. They never appear on Lorca's stage.

Nor did the socio-political situation of his country engage Lorca in any way. Spain could not join the Allied Force during World War I due to its extreme economic crisis; and for long afterwards continued to remain largely detached from European politics for the same reason. The violent clash between the populist Republican and the monarchist Nationalist parties resulted in bloodsheds in which not even the innocents were spared. But these issues never found a voice in Lorca's plays. In view of this omission one finds it unbelievable that this playwright-director had actually declared in 1933 that

The Theatre which does not feel the social pulse, the historical pulse, the drama of its people, ...has no right to call itself a theatre.²⁰

unless of course we take it as a censure on his own theatre work. This contradiction between words and deeds characterizes Lorca, no matter how much we lionize him. At the best he had a sort of theoretical sympathy with the sufferings of the downtrodden; but being a lyricist, he simply failed to embody it in concrete human situations— perhaps too much of a lyricist to be a meaningful dramatist at all. This thought reminds us of Synge's words in his Notebook:

lyrical art is the art of National adolescence. . . Lyrics can be written by people who are immature, drama cannot. There is little great lyrical poetry. Dramatic literature is relatively more mature. Hence the intellectual maturity of most races is marked by a definite moment of dramatic creation.²¹

The ingrained contradiction in Lorca's dramaturgy lay in the fact that he had aimed at presenting the wild musical spirit of rural Andalusia through a static theatre concerned with the upper class gentry speaking in a frigid rhetoric of urban poetry best described in Synge's words as 'indulging in the abuse of adjectives that has been the curse of Irish literature'.²² This rhetoric characterizes the whole of Lorca's poetry, and excruciatingly, his prose, where clarity of expression is needed at all costs. It may be an unkind, but not too unkind a remark to say that Lorca used literature as a gimmick to project his inchoate thoughts arising out of a somewhat uncoordinated personality.

One can grasp the basic differences between the two playwrights by simply placing the opening stage directions from the more celebrated plays of each:

An island off the West of Ireland. (Cottage kitchen, with nets, oil-skins, spinning wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. Cathleen, a girl of about twenty, finishes kneading cake, and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire; then wipes her hands, and begins to spin at the wheel...)²³

*The **bright white interior** of Bernarda's house. Thick walls. Arched doorways with canvas curtains edged with tassels and ruffles. Rush chairs. Paintings of non-realistic landscapes with nymphs and legendary kings. It is **summer**. A **vast shadowy silence** fills the scene. When the curtain rises the stage is empty.²⁴*

It is common knowledge now that the everyday objects (down to the wooden shoes) used on the Synge stage were all brought in from the Aran islands itself where the action of the play lay, as also the fact that every single article mentioned here play a significant part in the action of the play. We only need to compare this with Lorca's *bright white summer interior* filled by a *shadowy* silence. It is an aristocratic house full of things inessential to the play's action: mere ornaments on the stage.

It also seems strange that a modern playwright and theatre director should say nothing about his idea of drama. The voluble Lorca, in sharp contrast to the taciturn Synge, never spoke of the idea of drama that he aspired to create, while lecturing widely on the spirit of inspired performance. The kindest thing that can be said of his plays is that he tried to illustrate his musical moods through stage visuals. The resultant drabness prompted him to try to enliven his plays with acute emotion and violent death, taking 'tragedy' in the obsolete Elizabethan sense of 'murder' as his excuse. There are also deeper reasons behind this.

Bull-baiting, glorified as Bullfight, was (and still is) the National sport of Spain; but there is little fight in it: a bunch of cowards attack a young bull, mercilessly sticking up to eight spears in its neck until the muscles weaken, until the poor creature becomes disoriented with pain, rage, fatigue, and helplessness, with virtually no 'fight' left in it. Next, a fancy-dressed butcher enters the arena to demonstrate with much aplomb that the incapacitated bull is no longer a threat, and slaughters it with sword thrusts. If he still fails, as he often does, others rush in with choppers and hack the bull's head off its body. Even a bull that has 'won' a fight is not allowed to leave the arena alive. Spain celebrated this butchering, and

Lorca glorified the deserved death of one such death-dealer (a *matador* in Spanish) in a prolonged 'Lament.' Today it looks like an irony that Lorca too should be similarly slaughtered by a bunch of butchers— without justice, without pity, without compunction, like an extension of their national sport.

This issue is relevant because it helps us understand the central position of bloodshed in Lorca's dramatic imagination. It was neither merely the melodramatic tradition that he was following in his plays; nor simply that his homosexual orientation in a macho Spanish society biased him towards idolizing violence. It was a part of the cultural ambience of Spain itself that smeared Lorca's dramatic art with blood. A truly sensitive individual, he was in the unfortunate position of St. Augustine's friend Alypius who, on witnessing bloodshed in the gladiatorial arena, instantly soaked up the savagery maddening the crowd, and inebriated by that spectacle of death, was transformed into a bloodthirsty brute yelling for more blood.

Synge, who had once attacked a rogue bull 'with a walking stick on the way from Roundwood fair and battle[d] with a rearing horse outside the forge at Annamoe,' however, had given up bait-fishing in his youth because he wouldn't hurt the worms by piercing them with hooks.²⁵ The folk story that he heard from Pat Dirane had a husband hitting his wife's paramour so hard on the head with his stick that blood leapt up and hit the ceiling. He transmuted this into a shockingly convincing rapport between the two at the end of *In the Shadow of the Glen*. The incident at Aran involving an actual parricide sheltered and helped by the local people to escape to America was transformed into *The Playboy*, where the supposedly 'murdered' father comes back looking for his son, is 'murdered' yet again, and again surfaces alive and kicking. At the same time, death in Synge's tragedies is quietly accepted as a fact against which human remonstrance is meaningless, as a victory over all attachments and suffering, and even as a final celebration of life:

MAURYA: Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied.²⁶

DEIRDRE: I have put away sorrow like a shoe that is worn out and muddy, for it is I have had a life that will be envied by great companies ... It's a pitiful thing, Conchubor, you have done this night in Emain; yet a thing will be a joy and triumph to the ends of life and time.²⁷

The main problem with Lorca the dramatist is not that the manner of his death has careened him into fame; but that he lacked a philosophy of theatre. He was a poet inasmuch as a modern reader can always be persuaded that what he is reading is poetry: urban poetry being a one-to-one communication. But theatre concerns the mass. Here plays fail unless founded on a dramatic vision. Synge, although he wrote two great tragedies, was essentially a writer of comedy (in the Balzacian sense of *La Comédie humaine*), observing the Huxleyan 'Whole Truth' with the disinterest of an onlooker. In his Notebook he always insisted on the importance of the humorous rather than on the tragic:

Humour is the test of morals, as no vice is humorous. Bestial is in its very essence opposed to the idea of humour.... All decadence is opposed to true humour. The heartiness of real and frank laughter is a sign that cannot be mistaken, [convincing us] that what we laugh at is not out of harmony with that instinct of sanity that we call so many names.

As his friend Masefield put it, he was much too interested in life to get involved in it emotionally or otherwise. 'His place was outside the social circle, gravely watching, and summing up with brilliant malice the fools and the wise ones inside.'²⁸ Much of his vision of drama and theatre is summed up in such brief remarks in his Preface to *The Tinker's Wedding* as:

The drama is made serious ... by the degree in which it gives the nourishment, not very easy to define, on which our imaginations live. We should ... go to the theatre ... as we go to a dinner, where the food we need is taken with pleasure and excitement.

Of the things which nourish the imagination humour is one of the most needful, and it is dangerous to limit or destroy it. Baudelaire calls laughter the greatest sign of the Satanic element in man; and where a country loses its humour ... there will be morbidity of mind, as Baudelaire's mind was morbid.

This consideration of a vision of art brings us to the most publicized of Lorca's lectures: his 'Theory and Play of Duende' (1933), in which he posits his idea of the essence of genuine creativity. It is a long and, to the uninitiated, tedious lecture starting with a wholehearted agreement with Goethe that it is beyond explanation. Therefore, he disserts endlessly on hearsay instances of the epiphany of Duende in select performances of sundry singers. We are simply required to accept the statements, since Duende is beyond verification. However, it is partly indicated by a singer's words (quoted by Lorca) that 'the duende is not in the throat: the duende surges up, inside, from the soles of the feet'—a ubiquitous notion expressed in India also by Akhtaribai Faizabadi, aka Begum Akhtar: *gana galey se thori hota hai* (singing has little to do with the throat). In his theory Lorca, without admitting the fact, was simply emoting the ancient Greek notions of inspiration and ecstasy: of the terrible *daimon*. Even his idea that Duende can pass from the singer to the audience is an echo of *Ion*, where Plato says that inspiration passes from the poet to the singer and from the singer to the audience. It is important to note that Lorca talks about the performer only, not about the poet—and by extension, of the actor only, and not the playwright. One suspects that this is because in literary compositions the presence of Duende is verifiable/deniable: one cannot simply claim the presence of Duende in a text without pointing out its presence. But Lorca's omission shifts the onus of a failed drama from the shoulder of the playwright to that of the performer who, arguably, lacks Duende.

The Duende are faery-like magical creatures of folk imagination reputed all over Spain for relieving human suffering. In Andalusia, however, they are diabolical, bringing danger and death also to humans. Lorca melodramatized this diabolical aspect of the Andalusian Duende, transforming the notion into a life-and-death struggle of the performer with his/her art at the edge of existence. But there is little objective proof of such a state of affairs, and little reason for its existence beyond that of vicariously melodramatizing one's own creative efforts. We should listen to Synge here, talking in his concise style through the mouth of Colm, the central character of his discarded play *When the Moon Has Set*:

The only calm of importance is the calm of the man who feels the vortex of passion and death straining beneath him and is able to deride them.²⁹

Deriding the vortex of passion and death, and achieving the sanity of nourishing humour was the aim of Synge's dramaturgy as much as it was that of Chekhov. As Masfield put it rather strongly, 'He covered his tragedy with mockeries.'³⁰ He was averse to sentimentalizing over anything, and especially over death:

Then I remembered that that 'I' was I,

And I'd a filthy job— to waste and die.³¹

I am haunted by the briefness of my world. It brings me at times a passionate thirst for the fulfilment of every passive or active capacity of my person.³²

Reading the two excerpts in sequence, one remembers that Yeats, Masfield, and others have spoken of Synge's preoccupation with dying, while Ann Saddlemyer and Edward Stephens have shortly dismissed their interpretation, pointing out that a man preparing for his marriage, who could cycle sixty miles a day on Wicklow hills to return refreshed to yet another draft of his play could not have been dying for ten years.³³ But Synge certainly had an pervasive awareness of mortality: of 'the briefness of my world', of the notion of the cessation of existence. Yeats also said that Synge existed so vibrantly that at his death he did not seem to have passed away from the world; but rather the world seemed to have passed away from Synge. Similarly Masfield: 'When I heard of his death I felt that his interest in life would soon get itself into another body, and come here again to look on and listen.'³⁴ Synge the playwright was the artist of life; not of death. Probably his final stance regarding death was the climactic speech of Deirdre quoted above.

In contrast, and despite his melodramatization of the deadliness of duende, Lorca hardly ever seems to have a notion of what death might actually signify. His severe confusion over the meanings of life and death surfaces in such public effusions as:

A dead man in Spain is more alive when dead than anywhere else on earth.³⁵

A dead person is deader in Spain than anywhere else in the world.³⁶

Lorca, possessed by the spirit of folk music, was essentially an emotion-drives a lyricist who failed as a playwright because of his surrealist

meanderings within a melodramatic mind-set. He lacked the essential mental qualities of a playwright: toughness, detachment, and objectivity. Synge's Notebook jottings once again provide a clarification:

Lyrical art is the art of national adolescence. Dramatic art is first of all a childish art— a reproduction of external experience— without form or philosophy; then after a lyrical interval we have it as mature drama dealing with the deeper truth of general life in a perfect form and with mature philosophy.³⁷

In other words, it is impossible to become a dramatist without crossing the border of artistic adolescence and getting rid of one's emotional overdrive.

In the end, we should reiterate that both these dramatists had the same number of years to live, with roughly equal opportunities to cultivate their art, and that one of them had already gained European recognition while the other was not yet in his teens. After nearly a century past Lorca's death, therefore, we should rather perceive him in a historical setting and evaluate his net worth as a dramatist in the broader European context rather than still adore his reflection in our emotional distorting mirror of his unfortunate death.

*In writing this article I have been greatly helped by Professor Dattatreya Dutt's in-depth study of Synge: *The Joy of Living: Nature and Society in the Plays of J. M. Synge* (Kolkata 2003). He has also kindly allowed me to consult his in-press Bengali article on Lorca. I hereby thank him for both.

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4. 'Can We Go Back into Our Mother's Womb?' *Collected Works II, Prose* ed. Alan Price (Oxford 1966).
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