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Significance of the Title *Playboy of the Western World*

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Abstract:

The *Playboy of the Western World* was written by John Millington Synge. It is built on a myth, that of a simple person, Christy Mohan, who professed to have killed his father in order to escape his tyranny, takes shelter in a country and boasts of being a murderer, becomes a hero in the eyes of the whole village population. The themes of dream and reality, patricide and self-discovery of Christy are all recapitulated. The previous title of *The Playboy of the Western World* was *Murderer*. It is the revised version of the play *Murderer*. Synge made various changes in this earlier version till the present version emerges to the satisfaction of the playwright. This play is written in a comic vein, no actual murder takes place, so the title *The Playboy of the Western World* seems to be more appropriate than the previous title *Murderer*. The phrase 'Playboy of the Western World' is used by Widow Quin in a sarcastic way taunting Christy after Old Mahon appears for the first time.

Keywords: sarcastic, sardonic, tyranny, patricide, recapitulated, version, appropriate.

The Sardonic Use of 'Playboy'

Christy, the protagonist, lands up in Mayo in a wretched condition. He was hungry and frightened. The crime of killing his own father has shaken him thoroughly and he is guilty for the same. Ironically, in the strange atmosphere of Mayo, where people are strangely invested with a quality of wild imagination, such heinous crime has been seen as a heroic act. And as a result of it a personality with self-confidence emerges of Christy and his shaken and shocked personality vanishes. Christy also feels a strong affection for Pegeen who is the daughter of Michael James, who gives shelter to Christy at their shebeen. It is also a jeering at Christy's immediate terrified reaction after seeing alive his assumed 'killed' father. The bare truth unfolds the timidity and meakness of Christy's prior self. 'the walking Playboy of the Western World' is commented by Widow Quin sarcastically on Christy's personality.

'Playboy' In The Positive Sense

Widow Quin once again uses the phrase 'The Champion Playboy of the Western World' but here she uses it in positive sense unlike the previous usage. It is an attribution to the champion athlete. Christy is in a winning spree in the sports he participated in. Old Mahon comes back to the shebeen for the second time and he inquires about the loud cheering by the spectators in the sports below. To answer his question Widow Quin uses this phrase. It is not a sardonic comment

but rather expresses her genuine admiration for Ch as a good sportsman who is winning accolades from everyone for his stupendous performance in sports.

‘Playboy’ Signifies Christy’s Popularity among Women Folk

He comes closer to the women folk of Mayo with the glorification of his deed. Thus, the world Playboy is also applicable in another sense in the play. We can have the glimpse of the sexual timidity of Christy in the description given by Old Mahon. Christy was a man who scares of facing girls but oingles at them surreptitiously like a frightened rabbit. But as a result of making him ‘God-like’ figure for his supposed murder, he comes out of this timidity. Such changes in his personality, boasts his confidence. His suppressed qualities unfold itself. He is now hailed as a good narrator of his own heroic achievements. Christy amazes the village girls by the power of his story-telling and freely mixes with them.

Christy Emerges As True ‘Playboy’

However, the illusion and fantasy shatter with the arrival of Old Mahon at the spot and Christy meeting him for the second time. The bare truth turns the Mayo people hostile towards Christy. They now sympathize with Old Mahon and want him to punish Christy. He ‘kills’ his father second time but it does not turn out to be favourable to get bck his lost glory. The fear of law now overpowers Mayoites and to save their skin they plan to hand over Christy to the policemen. This time Christy appears in the true light, stripped of any illusion. He is now a man of resolution, determined to establish his dominace over his father and live a life on his own terms. This evolution he himself recognizes and acknowledges the Mayoites’ role in bringing about such a change.

The Significance of ‘Western World’

The ‘Western World’ suggests the geographical setting and signifies the locale of the play where this fantastic world of wild imagination infused with farcial ideology of life is situated. Mayo is situated at the ‘top of the short arm’ of Ireland where the whole action takes place. It is stretching out westward towards America. The enlightenment of the southern and eastern part of the country had not reached here. The landscape here is wild with rough sea, marshy lands and rocky islands in the same way like the imaginative inhabitants of this play. The inhabitants of here are mostly poor fishermen and peasants. The people here indulges in gossipping, away from the blessings of civilization, that amuses an incredible shape by the wielding of wild imagination, and also drinking, a stimulant to explore the world of fantasy and illusion. Here a crime is constructed as an act of bravery and courage. Synge had consciously selected the locale that provides a conductive atmosphere for the apotheosis of Christy’s heinous crime.

‘Western World’ In The Broader Sense

The phrase ‘Western World’ does not simply imply to the restricted territory in Ireland but to the place where people’s sense of reasoning takes back seat when overpowered by illusion and fantasy. It is the world of illusion by the people susceptible to this illusion which can be created anywhere in the world. Anyway, this illusion initiates a change in Christy for good, as depicted by the playwright, not for bad. So Synge is not totally against this illusion. The idea holds some truth when we find Christy emerges as a true playboy after the disillusionment of the Mayoites. Symbolically, the ‘Western World’ is the place where the protagonist through disillusion and illusion experiences the evolution for the betterment of his personality.

Conclusion

The core message of the play is conveyed by the title “The Playboy Of The Western World” which is appropriate and which being interpreted in various angles comments upon the overall personality of the protagonist and also signifies the setting of the play that throughout the enactment of the action does not shift. By the repetitive mention of this phrase, Synge himself has invested it with the importance of being naturally chosen title of the play. The locale of the play provides the perfect atmosphere in which romanticism flourishes. The protagonist shows all the heroic qualities of courage, playfulness, rhetorical excellence and a charming personality to attract girls.

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