



## AN ANALYSIS OF TRAMPS AND VAGABONDS ACCULTURATION IN IRISH LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

*Theoretical perspectives on the culture and social practices of tramps and vagabonds have been a matter of contest, and this proposition has warranted multi-layered argumentative conflicts. The term 'tramp' has historically referred to a person who travelled from place to place in search of work, often performing manual labour jobs such as farming or construction. In Ireland, tramps played an essential role in the economy and culture of rural communities. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ireland experienced a period of significant economic hardship and political upheaval. Many rural communities were affected by poverty and unemployment, and tramps provided a valuable source of labour for local farmers and landowners. Tramps would travel from place to place in search of work, often in temporary camps or lodging houses. They were known for their ability to perform strenuous physical labour, such as digging ditches or harvesting crops, and were often hired temporarily. Tramps also played a role in Irish folklore and storytelling. They were often depicted as colourful characters with distinct dialects and traditions, and their travels and experiences were the subject of many stories and songs. However, the life of a tramp was often complex and uncertain. Society often stigmatised and marginalised them, and their transient lifestyle made it difficult to form long-term relationships or establish roots in a particular community. Despite these challenges, tramps played an essential role in the economy and culture of rural Ireland and are a vital part of the country's history and folklore.*

**Keywords:** *Subaltern, Acculturation, Migrants, Worth, Justification, Convention Theory, Pragmatic Sociology, Globalization Irish Theatre, Character Analysis, Social Conditions, Poverty, Nationalism, Gender Roles, Cultural Conflict.*

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poverty, nationalism, gender roles, cultural conflict.

The research paper explores the characters depicted in the plays of Seán O'Casey, one of Ireland's most renowned playwrights. Focusing on a selection of his works, this paper delves into the complex interplay between characters and the social conditions prevalent in early 20th-century Ireland. By examining characters from different social strata, their struggles, aspirations, and interactions, the paper provides insights into how O'Casey's plays mirror the multifaceted realities of Irish society during a time of profound change. Seán O'Casey's plays are known for their vivid characters who navigate the tumultuous social landscape of early 20th-century Ireland. Through a selection of his works, this paper analyses how these characters embody various social conditions, shedding light on themes such as poverty, nationalism, gender roles, and cultural conflict.

John Millington Synge was deeply influenced by the culture and traditions of rural Ireland, including the lives of tramps and other itinerant workers. Synge spent several years living among the people of the Aran Islands off the coast of Ireland, where he observed and documented the customs and lifestyles of the local population. Many of Synge's plays, including *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*, feature characters who are tramps or other forms of itinerant workers. These characters are often depicted as outsiders who are struggling to survive in a world that is hostile to them. Society marginalises and stigmatises them, and they must use their wits and resourcefulness to survive. Synge's writing often portrays the harsh realities of

life in rural Ireland, including poverty, violence, and social inequality. His portrayal of tramps and other itinerant workers is often sympathetic, and he recognises their essential role in rural communities' economy and culture.

Synge's depiction of tramps and other marginalised characters has been criticised for perpetuating negative stereotypes and reinforcing social hierarchies. Some critics argue that Synge's writing romanticises the lives of people with low incomes and marginalised rather than presenting a more nuanced and complex view of their experiences. Despite these criticisms, Synge's work remains an integral part of Irish literary and cultural history, and his portrayal of tramps and other itinerant workers continues to be studied and analysed by scholars and readers today. *The Shadow of a Gunman* delves into tenants' lives in a tenement house; the characters represent a spectrum of societal attitudes towards nationalism and rebellion. *Juno and the Paycock* examine the working-class Boyle family; the play explores the impact of political turmoil and economic hardship on their daily lives.

*The Plough and the Stars* focused on the 1916 Easter Rising and portrayed characters from diverse backgrounds grappling with their interpretations of patriotism and sacrifice. Poverty and disenchantment have had an impact on the lives of characters in Irish. Characters such as Donal Davoren in *The Shadow of a Gunman* and the Boyles in *Juno and the Paycock* reflect the harsh realities of

impoverished lives during political upheaval.

Nationalism and Identity cannot be kept separated because of Ireland's socio-cultural climate and upheaval. Characters like Nora Clitheroe in *The Plough and the Stars* illustrate the complexities of individual nationalism and its intersection with personal identity. Gender roles and empowerment are visible in Irish plays. Juno Boyle, among others, exemplifies the strength of women in adversity, challenging traditional gender roles.

The dynamics between characters in O'Casey's plays highlight the diversity of opinions within Irish society. Interactions between characters from different backgrounds often lead to clashes of ideology, class, and personal convictions, presenting a microcosm of the broader social fabric. The plays of Seán O'Casey acted as a reflection of societal shifts, capturing the disillusionment and hope present in Irish society during a time of transition. His characters personify the challenges and aspirations of the era, serving as a bridge between historical events and individual experiences.

By examining O'Casey's characters and socio-political contexts, we can draw parallels to contemporary social issues and continue engaging with his works as relevant reflections on broader human struggles. Seán O'Casey's characters encapsulate the rich tapestry of early 20th-century Irish society. Their diverse experiences and interactions offer a lens to view the complexities of poverty, nationalism, gender roles, and cultural

identity. The enduring relevance of O'Casey's plays lies in their ability to connect historical contexts with universal human experiences.

The vivid portrayal of the lives of marginalised communities in Ireland, particularly those living in rural areas, craftly explores the struggles of these communities against poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination. In *Playboy of the Western World*, for instance, Synge depicts the life of a young man who is ostracised by his community for committing patricide. The play explores themes of identity, belonging, and the power dynamics within rural communities. Similarly, *Riders to the Sea* focuses on a family living on the Aran Islands, facing poverty and losing their male relatives to the sea. The play is a powerful portrayal of the harsh realities of life for rural communities in Ireland and the resilience and resourcefulness required to survive in such a challenging environment. Other plays by Synge, such as *The Tinker's Wedding* and *The Well of the Saints*, feature characters from the travelling community or "tinkers." These characters are often depicted as outsiders struggling to find a place in Irish society and are subjected to discrimination and prejudice. Synge's work, particularly about the portrayal of tramps and tinkers, remains an essential part of Irish literary and cultural history. They provide valuable insight into the lives of marginalised communities in Ireland and have contributed to a broader understanding of the social and cultural dynamics that shape Irish society.

Theatrical assessment and depiction of Tramps and Vagabonds in Irish literature have been widely accepted and questioned their role in social behaviour. Tramps and vagabonds have been a recurring theme in Irish literature, particularly in the works of Irish playwrights and poets. These figures are often portrayed as outcasts, living on the margins of society and struggling to survive. One of the most famous depictions of tramps and vagabonds in Irish literature can be found in Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. The play's two main characters, Estragon and Vladimir, are homeless tramps who spend their days waiting for a mysterious figure named Godot to arrive. Through their conversations and interactions with other characters, the play explores existentialism, the meaning of life, and the futility of human existence.

Another important literary work that depicts tramps and vagabonds is James Joyce's novel "Ulysses." The novel's protagonist, Leopold Bloom, encounters several homeless characters throughout his day in Dublin, including the "citizen," a nationalist who despises tramps, and a group of "night town" prostitutes who befriend him. Through Bloom's interactions with these characters, Joyce explores themes of social class, sexuality, and the struggle for survival in a rapidly changing society. In addition to Beckett and Joyce, other Irish writers have depicted tramps and vagabonds in their works. For example, W.B. Yeats' poem *The Ragged Wood* describes a group of homeless wanderers searching for a place to belong.

In contrast, Seamus Heaney's poem "Casualty" tells the story of a man killed while trying to rescue a group of homeless people from a bombed-out building. These figures are often portrayed as outcasts, living on the margins of society and struggling to survive. They are treated as a symbol of the country's complex history of poverty, political upheaval, and social inequality. Through these depictions, writers have explored themes of identity, community, and the struggle for survival in adversity.

Living on the fringes of society and struggling to survive. They are often depicted as individuals pushed to the margins due to poverty, unemployment, and other social and economic factors. Through a deep understanding of Irish history, folklore, and tradition, writers have emphasised the importance of cultural heritage. These characters engage in philosophical conversations with the protagonist or the significant characters in the novels dealing with their social existence. Throughout Irish literature, tramps, vagabonds and bohemians have often been associated with political dissent and resistance. In many Irish literary works, tramps and vagabonds are portrayed as individuals who have been marginalised due to their political beliefs or involvement in political movements. Through their depiction, writers have explored poverty, social inequality, cultural heritage, and political resistance, shedding light on the country's complex history and cultural identity.

Their role in society is a productive element extending their role in appreciating and criticising the role of state mechanisms and systems of governance. One more reason for their social and political relevance in a country becomes instrumental due to their engagement in Ireland's historical and political context. In the early 20th century, Ireland underwent significant social and political discourses. Tramps and vagabonds also represented a challenge to traditional social norms and values. They were often depicted as rebels or non-conformists who rejected the rigid hierarchies of society and lived on the fringes of the mainstream culture.

James Joyce has adequately projected the underbelly of society and the dark side of human nature in *Ulysses*. The character of Leopold Bloom encounters a tramp that symbolises the poverty and despair of Dublin's lower classes. Similarly, Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* features two tramps waiting for a mysterious figure who never arrives, reflecting the theme of existentialism and the absurdity of human existence. Thus, tramps have played a significant role in Irish literature as symbols of social change, rebellion, and the human struggle for identity and belonging.

John Millington Synge, An Irish writer and dramatist, was deeply influenced by the culture and traditions of rural Ireland, including the lives of tramps and other itinerant workers. Synge spent several years living among the people of the Aran Islands off the coast of Ireland, where he observed and documented the customs and lifestyles of the local population. In his plays, he used

the tramp characters to showcase the misery of the Irish economic structure. Synge's writing often portrays the harsh realities of life in rural Ireland, including poverty, violence, and social inequality. His portrayal of tramps and other itinerant workers is often sympathetic, and he recognises their essential role in rural communities' economy and culture.

At the same time, Synge's depiction of tramps and other marginalised characters has been criticised for perpetuating negative stereotypes and reinforcing social hierarchies. Synge depicts the life of a young man who is ostracised by his community for committing patricide. The play explores themes of identity, belonging, and the power dynamics within rural communities.

Despite the criticisms of Synge's work, particularly about the portrayal of tramps and tinkers, his plays remain an essential part of Irish literary and cultural history. They provide valuable insight into the lives of marginalised communities in Ireland and have contributed to a broader understanding of the social and cultural dynamics that shape Irish society. Tramps and vagabonds are often referred to as vagrants or wanderers, and Irish literature has carried significant social implications, reflecting broader societal attitudes, economic conditions, and cultural dynamics. The social impact of tramps in Irish literary documents can be understood through several key dimensions:

Marginalisation and poverty have been depicted through Tramps in Irish literature, symbolising the marginalised and

impoverished segments of society. Their portrayal highlights individuals' harsh realities on the fringes of economic stability and social acceptance. By depicting tramps' struggles to find food, shelter, and dignity, the literature sheds light on the systemic issues of poverty and inequality. The depiction of tramps can serve as a form of social commentary, critiquing prevailing social hierarchies and economic disparities. Irish literary documents often explore the structural factors that lead individuals to a life of vagrancy, highlighting the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. Tramps' presence in literature can raise questions about identity and belonging. Many tramps are depicted as dislocated individuals with no fixed place in society. Their experiences can mirror broader discussions about national identity, cultural heritage, and the effects of colonial history on Irish society.

Some tramp characters in Irish literature may embody narratives of resistance against societal norms and expectations. These characters may reject conventional ways of life and challenge authority, offering an alternative perspective on freedom and autonomy. The portrayal of tramps in literature evokes compassion and empathy among readers. The stories of these characters humanise their struggles, fostering understanding and encouraging readers to question their attitudes toward those who are less fortunate. Tramps can also be used as symbols or allegorical figures in literature. Their journeys and encounters can represent more prominent themes, such as the search for meaning, the transient nature of life, or the complexities

of the human experience. Tramps in Irish literature may connect to cultural traditions and folklore.

In some cases, they might be reminiscent of figures from mythology or folklore, adding depth to their portrayal and linking them to broader cultural narratives. The depiction of tramps in different periods can reflect changing societal attitudes and values. As Ireland has undergone social, political, and economic transformations, the portrayal of tramps in literature may evolve to reflect these shifts.

Furthermore, the portrayal of tramps and vagabonds in Irish literature also reflects the cultural significance of these individuals in Irish society. Many Irish literary works portray tramps and vagabonds as storytellers, musicians, and other cultural figures. They are often depicted as individuals who deeply understand Irish history, folklore, and tradition. Through their portrayal, Irish writers have emphasised the importance of cultural heritage and the role marginalised members of society play in preserving it.

One such work is *The Vagabond in Literature* by Arthur Rickett, which discusses the portrayal of vagabonds in literature. The book explores the idea of a ride in the forest, a tramp on foot, or an interview with some wandering stranger as part of the literary tradition. The vagabond is often a symbol of freedom and rebellion against societal norms. In Irish literature, tramping and vagabondage are often associated with the search for meaning and self-discovery. The works of writers such as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and Flann

O'Brien have explored these themes in their unique ways. These themes remain relevant in modern Irish literature as writers grapple with the complexities of the human experience. Every great Russian writer has more or less of the Vagabond about him. Tolstoy, it is true, wears the robe of the Moralizer, and Tolstoy the Ascetic cries down Tolstoy the Artist. In the case of Gorky, of course, we have the Vagabond naked and unashamed. His novels are spirited defences of the Vagabond. Racial differences mark the Russian Vagabond from his English brother in many ways: a strange fatalism, a fierce melancholy, and a nature of greater emotional intensity.

Thus, the portrayal of tramps and vagabonds in Irish literature reflects the country's complex history of poverty, political upheaval, and social inequality. Irish writers have explored themes of identity, community, and the struggle for survival in the face of adversity through these depictions.

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