John Millington Synge was a leading literary figure of the Irish Revival who played a significant role in the founding of Dublin’s Abbey Theatre in 1904. This Companion offers a comprehensive introduction to the whole range of Synge’s work, from well-known plays like *Rider to the Sea*, *The Well of the Saints* and *The Playboy of the Western World*, to his influential prose work *The Aran Islands*. The essays provide detailed and insightful analyses of individual texts, as well as perceptive reflections on his engagements with the Irish language, processes of decolonisation, gender, modernism and European culture. Critical accounts of landmark productions in Ireland and America are also included. With a guide to further reading and a chronology, this book will introduce students of drama, postcolonial studies and Irish studies, as well as theatre-goers, to one of the most influential and controversial dramatists of the twentieth century.

P. J. Mathews lectures in the School of English, Drama and Film at University College Dublin.

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.
THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

J. M. SYNGE

EDITED BY

P. J. MATHEWS
University College Dublin
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ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORT TITLES

Generally, references to Synge’s works are given parenthetically in the text (by abbreviated title, followed by volume and page reference). A list of the abbreviations follows.


I, 1871–1907
II, 1907–1909.
CHRONOLOGY

1871  John Millington Synge born in Rathfarnham in Dublin on 16 April to John Hatch Synge and Kathleen Traill, last of five children; Charles Darwin’s, *The Descent of Man* published.

1872  Death of Synge’s father from smallpox. He is buried on John’s first birthday.

1879  The Land League founded, beginning of a sustained period of agrarian unrest in rural Ireland; Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* first performed.

1884  The Gaelic Athletic Association founded to promote traditional Irish sports such as hurling and Gaelic football; Huysmans’ *Against Nature* published.

1885  Joins Dublin Naturalists’ Field Club.

1889  Begins studies at Trinity College Dublin; also studies violin at Royal Irish Academy of Music.

1891  Death of Charles Stewart Parnell.

1892  Graduation from Trinity College Dublin having specialised in Irish and Hebrew; Douglas Hyde’s address, ‘The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland’.

1893  Spends a year in Germany (Koblenz and Würzburg) studying music. Founding of the Gaelic League to promote the use of the Irish language.

1895  In Paris takes courses in French literature with A.E. Faguet, medieval literature with Petit de Julleville (Sorbonne), and comparative phonetics with Paul Passy (École Pratique des Hautes-Études).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Spends four months in Rome and Florence studying Italian language and art. Marriage proposal to Cherrie Matheson is rejected; continues studies in French literature at Sorbonne; meets W. B. Yeats in Paris.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Attends inaugural meeting of Maud Gonne’s <em>Association Irlandaise</em>, resigns three months later; operation on swollen gland in his neck, early manifestation of Hodgkin’s disease.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Studies Irish and Homeric civilisations with d’Arbois de Jubainville; first summer visit to Aran Islands (10 May–25 June).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Attends opening production of Irish Literary Theatre, <em>The Countess Cathleen</em> by W. B. Yeats; second visit to Aran (12 Sept–7 Oct); outbreak of Boer War.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Third visit to Aran (15 Sept–3 Oct).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Fourth visit to Aran (21 Sept–19 Oct); attends first professional production of an Irish language play, <em>Casadh an tSugáin</em> by Douglas Hyde.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Takes course in Old Irish with d’Arbois de Jubainville. Writes <em>Riders to the Sea</em>, <em>The Shadow of the Glen</em> and a draft of <em>The Tinker’s Wedding</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td><em>Riders to the Sea</em> produced; Abbey Theatre opens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td><em>The Well of the Saints</em> produced at the Abbey Theatre; commissioned (with artist Jack B. Yeats) by the <em>Manchester Guardian</em> to write a series of twelve articles on the congested districts of the west of Ireland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td><em>The Well of the Saints</em> staged at Deutsches Theatre in Berlin (translated by Max Meyerfeld); <em>The Shadow of the Glen</em> produced at the Inchover Theatre, Prague (translated by Karel Mušek).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>First production of <em>The Playboy of the Western World</em> at the Abbey Theatre, disturbances in the theatre during production; <em>The Aran Islands</em> published; <em>The Shadow of the Glen</em> produced at National Theatre, Prague; <em>The Tinker’s Wedding</em> published.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Directs Sudermann’s <em>Teja</em> and Molière’s <em>The Rogueries of Scapin</em>, both translated by Lady Gregory; death of Synge’s mother.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1909 Dies 24 March; The Playboy, Well, Shadow and Riders at Court Theatre, London; first production of The Tinker’s Wedding, His Majesty’s Theatre, London.


1913 Maurice Bourgeois’s translation of The Playboy (Le Baladin du monde occidental) produced at Théâtre de L’Oeuvre, Paris.

1914 Shoyo Tsubouchi’s version of Well, Reigen (A Miracle), performed in Toyko.

1917 Djuna Barnes’s article on Synge published in the New York Morning Telegraph (18 Feb).

1922 James Weldon Thornton acknowledges the influence of Synge in the Preface to The Book of American Negro Poetry.

1933 Riders influences Federico García Lorca’s Blood Wedding.

1934 Robert Flaherty directs his Synge-inspired film Man of Aran.

1935 Film version of Riders directed by Brian Desmond Hurst.

1937 Bertolt Brecht and Margarete Steffin adaptation of Riders, Señora Carrar’s Rifles; Antonin Artaud visits the Aran Islands to retrace the footsteps of Synge.

1941 Marcel Herrand stages The Playboy at the Théâtre des Mathurins; The Aran Islands translated into Japanese by Masami Anezaki.

1955 Japan’s famous ‘Gekidan Mingei’ (People’s Theatre Art Players) production of The Playboy.

1962 Film version of The Playboy directed by Brian Desmond Hurst.

1963 Arabic version of Riders produced by Syrian Arab Television.

1969 Unsi El Haj’s translation of Well performed at the Beit Meri Roman Temple, Lebanon.

1971 First performance of The Tinker’s Wedding at the Abbey Theatre.
**Chronology**

1975  
British National Theatre production of *The Playboy*.

1979  
Derek Walcott acknowledges *Riders* as a model for *The Sea at Dauphin*.

1982  
Druid Theatre’s landmark production of *The Playboy* directed by Gary Hynes.

1984  
Mustafa Matura’s *Playboy of the West Indies* based on Synge’s *The Playboy* performed at the Oxford Playhouse.

1994  
Abbey Theatre revival of *The Well of the Saints*, directed by Patrick Mason.

1997  
National Theatre in Prague stages *The Playboy* translated by Martin Hilský.

2005  
Druid Theatre Company, Galway, produces DruidSynge: a performance of the entire canon of Synge's plays which tours in Ireland, UK and USA.

2006  
Chinese version of *The Playboy* staged in Beijing and Dublin by Pan Pan theatre company.

2007  
In centenary year of its original production, the Abbey Theatre stages adaptation of *The Playboy* by Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle.