

Introduction

This study is interested in the transformative potentialities of theatrical performance. It is conjointly preoccupied with the various ways in which the plays of J. M. Synge (1871–1909) problematize performance and, in so doing, possess the potential to unsettle narratives of progress and modernity. Performance is a slippery notion, embracing a large spectrum of social and cultural activities. Famously defined by Richard Schechner as ‘twice-behaved’ or ‘restored’ behaviour,¹ performance, in the theatrical sense of the term, explores a repertoire of existing embodied practices which it repeats, combines anew and even re-invents in the present. From that perpetual movement of re-composition and re-creation alternative ways of being and thinking can and do emerge. The theatre stage is a privileged site where these fluctuating alternatives can be elaborated, tested and played with. If theatre is inherently an art of repetition, its repetitions are indeed by essence singular and differential, insofar as the gap between one performance iteration and the next testifies to the individual and collective choices which have been made by actors and stage directors.² That space harbours uncertainty, freedom and utopian possibilities. At the core of the current book lies the belief in the ability of live performance to challenge the political *status quo* and alter social structures.

This book is concerned primarily with the entanglement of the performative and the theatrical. Like Ibsen before him, Synge exposed modern culture as highly performative.³ Synge’s plays forcefully invite thinking about the relation of modern Irish culture to Irish peasant or folk culture.

¹ Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 36. See also ‘Restoration of Behavior’. *Studies in Visual Communication* 7(3) (1981): 2–45.

² See, for example, Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death’s Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 33–34.

³ See, for example, Ben Levitas, ‘The Theatre of Modernity’. In *The Cambridge History of Modernism*, edited by Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 350.

His plays are infused with the vital, wider performative world of wakes, fairs and patterns. They embrace the Rabelaisian rowdiness of peasant oral culture and manifest a fascinated interest in the resourcefulness of a subjugated social formation. They are preoccupied with loss and death, but also, crucially, regeneration. The narratives of the plays seal the irrevocability of loss and unequivocally point to the incapacity of the characters' various communities to rejuvenate or reproduce themselves. Frequently, this is given literal expression as, for example, in *The Shadow of the Glen* (Molesworth Hall, Dublin, 1903), when Nora Burke is married to a much older man whose impotence is clearly hinted at,⁴ or in *Riders to the Sea* (Molesworth Hall, Dublin, 1904), which is entirely taken up by the death of Maurya's sixth and last son, Bartley. Metaphorically, such tropes of sterility or *mésalliance* serve Synge's satirical critique of middle-class Ireland. Thus, the final tableau of *The Shadow of the Glen*, which shows Dan Burke and Michael Dara drinking whiskey together after Nora has left with the Tramp, excoriates the acquisitive ethos of small farmers as the homo-social bond between the two male characters is seen to be valued over everything else.⁵ Finally, Synge's most scathing social satire, *The Playboy of the Western World* (Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 1907), ends with the intimation of the likely marriage of Pegeen Mike with her cousin, Shawn Keogh, a prospect that promises more debilitation through inbreeding for the Mayo community.⁶ However, Synge's use of folk cultural practices such as storytelling, keening, wake games or faction fighting complicates and potentially contradicts the narratives of the plays, suggesting counter meanings of endurance, opposition and rebirth.

The overall argument of the book, then, is twofold. Firstly, it contends that the inclusion in Synge's plays of a variety of peasant-based performance practices establishes a powerfully productive tension between, on the one hand, the forward-moving, teleological drive of the theatre as a modern, nationalist and capitalist-oriented institution dedicated to celebrating the heroism of the individual and, on the other, the often-incommensurate non-modern and non-capitalist values of an indigent peasant culture that celebrates the transformative power of collective

⁴ 'Nora: [. . .] He was always cold, every day since I knew him, – and every night [. . .].' *The Shadow of the Glen*. In J. M. Synge, *Collected Works, Plays, Book I*, edited by Ann Saddlemyer, vol. III (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 35.

⁵ Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 41.

⁶ See Susan Cannon Harris's reading of *The Playboy* as 'Eugenist Parable'. Susan Cannon Harris, *Gender and Modern Irish Drama* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 107–14.

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endeavour and insurgency. The second argument is closely related to the first, and is primarily methodological. That is, the critic's ability to discern the productively critical role of performance practices in Synge's plays depends on a deep historical knowledge and awareness. This is not just a matter of highlighting the relevance of the social and cultural history of *fin de siècle* and early twentieth-century Ireland, but a matter of engaging closely with the historical and political significance of Ireland's subaltern peasant culture.

Synge scholarship is carried out in a great variety of ways and the rapid survey of its recent developments outlined below is far from exhaustive. Nicholas Grene, Rónán McDonald and Alexandra Poulain have examined the dramaturgy of Synge's plays.⁷ Anthony Roche, Emilie Pine, Ondřej Pilný and Shaun Richards, for instance, have highlighted the literary influences which contributed to shaping Synge's writings, as well as the impact which they, in turn, have had on new literary and theatrical productions.⁸ Gregory Castle and Christopher Collins have respectively turned their attention to the ethnographic dimension of Synge's work and the playwright's interest in the residual culture of premodern Ireland.⁹ Mark Phelan has shed light on Synge's intimate knowledge of Irish peasant culture and on the profound effect it had on Synge's writings.¹⁰ Susan Cannon Harris has uncovered the importance of the plays' engagement with gender, sexual and social politics.¹¹ Lionel Pilkington, Ben Levitas and P. J. Mathews have investigated the complex engagement of Synge's oeuvre with the politics of late nineteenth and early twentieth century

⁷ Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Rónán McDonald, *Tragedy and Irish Literature: Synge, O'Casey, Beckett* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Alexandra Poulain, *Irish Drama, Modernity and the Passion Play* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁸ Anthony Roche, *Synge and the Making of Irish Drama* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2013); Emilie Pine, 'Living with Ghosts: Synge and Marina Carr', in *Synge and His Influences: Centenary Essays from the Synge Summer School*, ed. Patrick Lonergan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2011), pp. 215–24; Shaun Richards, 'Synge, Anarchism, and the European Avant-Garde', *ibid.*, pp. 133–51; Ondřej Pilný, 'The Translator's Playwright: Karel Mušek and J. M. Synge,' *ibid.*, pp. 153–80. See also Alexandra Poulain, 'Synge and Tom Murphy: Beyond Naturalism', *ibid.*, pp. 199–214.

⁹ Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Christopher Collins, *Theatre and Residual Culture: J. M. Synge and Pre-Christian Ireland* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

¹⁰ Mark Phelan, 'Fair Play Synge'. In *Synge and His Influences: Centenary Essays from the Synge Summer School*, edited by Patrick Lonergan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2011), pp. 111–31.

¹¹ Susan Cannon Harris, *Gender and Modern Irish Drama*; and *Irish Drama and the Other Revolutions: Playwrights, Sexual Politics and the International Left, 1892–1964* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

Ireland.¹² Even if the complex theatricality of Synge's plays – *The Playboy's*, especially – and their metadramatic dimensions received critical attention from a relatively early stage, no work has yet been devoted to the centrality of performance in Synge's plays.¹³ This is what the current book proposes to do.

The first productions of the plays are extremely well documented: one thinks of the work of James Kilroy, Adrian Frazier, Chris Morash or Paige Reynolds on the première of *The Playboy*, for example.¹⁴ The tumultuous reception of *The Shadow of the Glen* and *The Playboy* and the aesthetic and political debates which they sparked have encouraged us to think of Synge's plays by privileging the critical frameworks of political history, theatre history and theatre studies over literary or drama studies. The turn to theatre history in Synge scholarship has been especially perceptible since the early 1970s and the publication by the Dolmen Press of *The 'Playboy' Riots* by James Kilroy, and the Modern Irish Drama series, two volumes of which focus on the years of Synge's writing career.¹⁵ The 1971 celebrations of the centenary of Synge's birth and the renewal of Synge scholarship it helped foster were also pivotal. As Patrick Lonergan points out, so too were the new ways of staging Synge championed especially by Galway Druid Theatre Company in landmark productions in 1975 and 1982.¹⁶ It is now normative to think of Synge's plays in the context of their performance.

¹² Pilkington, *Theatre and the State*; Ben Levitas, *The Theatre of Nation: Irish Drama and Cultural Nationalism 1890–1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); P. J. Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-Operative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003).

¹³ Edward Hirsch, 'The Gallous Story and the Dirty Deed: The Two Playboys'. *Modern Drama* 26(1) (1983): 85–102; Nicholas Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays* (London: Macmillan Press, 1985), pp. 132–45; Mary C. King, *The Drama of J. M. Synge* (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), pp. 133–59.

¹⁴ James Kilroy, *The 'Playboy' Riots* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1971); Adrian Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman, and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 213–21; Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 130–38; and 'All Playboys Now: The Audience and the Riot'. In *Interpreting Synge. Essays from the Synge Summer School, 1991–2000*, edited by Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2000), pp. 135–50; Paige Reynolds, *Modernism, Drama, and the Audience for Irish Spectacle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 38–75.

¹⁵ Kilroy, *The 'Playboy' Riots*; Robert Hogan and James Kilroy (eds.), *Laying the Foundations 1902–1904. The Modern Irish Drama*, vol. 2 (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1976); *The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge, 1905–1909. The Modern Irish Drama*, vol. 3 (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1978).

¹⁶ Patrick Lonergan, 'Introduction'. In *Synge and His Influences: Centenary Essays from the Synge Summer School*, edited by Patrick Lonergan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2011), p. 2. See also Nicholas Grene, 'Two London Playboys: Before and after Druid,' in *Playboys of the Western World: Production Histories*, ed. Adrian Frazier (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2004), pp. 75–86.

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This study builds on the production histories of Synge's plays and the analyses of their theatricality to conceptualize ideas of performance and to envisage performance as a possible epistemology to read the plays. In that respect, the book is particularly indebted to the vibrant field of contemporary performance studies: in particular, its sustained interest in ideas of embodiedness,¹⁷ the serious attention it pays to the playful, at times self-contradictory forms of knowledge produced by bodies in motion¹⁸ and its commitment to apprehending 'the world of performance and the world as performance'.¹⁹ This study offers an argument and a methodology for reading Synge's plays grounded on the assertion that different forms of theatrical embodiment contain meanings that are capable of complementing *and* contradicting the meanings that are conveyed by a dramatic narrative. In other words, the present book primarily investigates performance as a site for contestation. It focuses on the discrepancies between script and performance and more specifically on the capacity of performance to resist and potentially subvert the linear, progress-oriented narrative of the theatre of modernity which, as Nicholas Ridout defines it, is 'the theatre of the darkened auditorium, that knows its own history, reflects and theorises upon its own origins, while participating eagerly in the worlds of commerce, leisure and entertainment that define its social space within modern capitalism'.²⁰

The cultural performance practices of the Irish peasantry and fisher folk of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland, which are so central to Synge's theatrical imagination, belong to a radically different tradition to that of the plays in which they have been incorporated. They were indeed participatory, community-based and, as Lionel Pilkington has shown, they relied on a 'conception of acting' that was closer to ideas of championship and celebrations of physical endurance than to our modern idea of the actor as the spectator's delegate.²¹ Within Gaelic peasant culture, the memory of a champion's feats were kept alive through

¹⁷ Tracy C. Davis, 'Introduction: The Pirouette, Detour, Revolution, Deflection, Deviation, Tack and Yaw of the Performative Turn'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, edited by Tracy C. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 2.

¹⁸ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, edited by Sara Brady (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 24. See also Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

¹⁹ Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 28.

²⁰ Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), p. 40.

²¹ Lionel Pilkington, 'The "Folk" and an Irish Theatre: Re-Reading J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*'. *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 68(1–2) (2007): 304.

storytelling and the transformations the story would undergo with each telling were accepted and even valued as they testified to the storyteller's talent. However, the foundational element of the story had to be rooted in some form of empirically-grounded truth. The conception of representation was therefore also very different to our modern understanding. The inclusion of such performances in Synge's plays – the most obvious examples are storytelling and keening respectively in *The Playboy* and *Riders to the Sea* – invites thinking about representation, both in an aesthetic and a political sense.

The participatory performance tradition acts as a recalcitrant counterpoint to the modern performativity of Synge's plays and thus highlights the disjunctiveness between the two modalities of performance. And its resistance to being subsumed in the overarching system of representation of modernity serves as a critique of that same system. It also produces a meta-discourse on performance as it draws attention to performance as performance. Gregory Castle's analysis of the self-reflexivity of performance in *The Playboy* sheds interesting light on that point and is worth quoting at some length:

Synge's *Playboy* functions as a kind of cultural performance in which the indigenous scene of storytelling (as represented in *The Aran Islands*) is transformed into stage drama. Performance thus becomes self-reflexive, meta-discursive; and it is at this point that it can begin to function as part of a strategy of cultural translation, whereby 'eccentric' or 'marginal' rituals can become accessible in a 'dominant' discourse without suffering the violent and wholesale transmutation of native ritual into Western social text.²²

Synge's plays are not immune to the danger of transforming ritual-based practices into spectacle or cultural commodity. One could argue that adapting performance practices typical of rural Ireland to the urban stage of an institutional theatre was a way to contain those practices and to bring them in line with capitalist modernity. And indeed, Synge's interest in practices which modernity has constructed as 'primitive' may be read as partaking of primitive modernism. In his study of the influence of anthropology on Irish Literary Revivalism, Castle shows that if, in *The Aran Islands*, Synge sometimes adopts 'the vantage point of an ethnographic observer who captures the islanders in his sweeping, possessive gaze', his 'commitment is less to an ethnographic imagination than to a

²² Gregory Castle, 'Staging Ethnography: John M. Synge's "Playboy of the Western World" and the Problem of Cultural Translation'. *Theatre Journal* 49(3) (1997): 268.

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critique of that mode of imagining'.²³ Combining heterogeneous, anti-theatrical performance traditions on the Dublin stage and not offering any easy resolution to their irreconcilability may equally be seen as a critique of a narrow mode of conceiving of performance and representation.

The Abbey Theatre was founded in the tradition of the literary theatre. As Roy Foster puts it, William Butler Yeats and Augusta Gregory were quick to adopt Synge into their 'cénacle'; they determined that Synge became 'part of the inner circle who would direct the Irish National Dramatic Society the way they wanted it to go'.²⁴ In 1903, the decision to produce *The Shadow of the Glen*, rather than James Cousins's *Sold*, was at the origin of a crisis in the Reading Committee of the nascent Irish National Theatre Society (INTS): Yeats blocked Cousins's play for the second time, which led Cousins to leave and turn to Cumann na nGaedheal Theatre Company instead. George Russell disapproved of the method of evaluation as he felt Yeats and Gregory had bypassed the Reading Committee by opting for private readings of Synge's plays instead, and Maud Gonne too disapproved of this 'unorthodox method of selection'.²⁵ On 3 March 1903 Augusta Gregory had indeed given a reading of *The Shadow of the Glen* at her London residence in Queen Anne's Mansions to an audience composed of John Masefield, Florence Farr, Arthur Symons and W. B. Yeats. And earlier that same year, on 20 January, Synge himself had read *Riders to the Sea* to acquaintances of Yeats's and Gregory's at the same London flat.²⁶ Subsequent to the dispute at the Reading Committee, Maud Gonne and Douglas Hyde decided to leave the INTS over its 'abandonment of national work'. At the core of the crisis was Yeats's determination that plays would be chosen according to what he saw as his absolute priority: a literary theatre.²⁷

After Synge's death, Yeats and Gregory hastened to align Synge's work with the agenda that they had set for their 'Irish theatre'. Yeats wrote his long essay, 'Synge and the Ireland of His Time' in September 1910 and Gregory's *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography*, a substantial part of which is actually devoted to Synge, was published in 1913. By these means, as Pilkington summarizes, 'the figure of Synge [was] rendered

²³ Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, pp. 30, 111.

For an analysis of the 'anticolonial potential' of Synge's prose work, *The Aran Islands* and the narrative strategies of resistance to othering, see Giulia Bruna, *J. M. Synge and Travel Writing of the Irish Revival* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017), pp. 17–64.

²⁴ R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life I: The Apprentice Mage, 1865–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 288.

²⁵ Pilkington, *Theatre and the State*, p. 39. ²⁶ Foster, *W. B. Yeats*, p. 287. ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

inseparable from the idea of the Abbey as an artistic and literary institution'.²⁸ But these texts also set the tone for the future reception of Synge's work. The decision to have Synge's plays appear in print first and in performance afterwards confirms this adherence to the principles of a literary theatre: *Riders to the Sea*, for instance, was published in Yeats's little magazine *Sambain* in March 1903, months before it was first produced at Molesworth Hall in Dublin, on 25 February 1904. And Synge himself had expressed his adherence to a literary theatre quite explicitly during his lifetime. After the Irish National Theatre Society's production of Yeats's *The King's Threshold* and Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen* and *Riders to the Sea* at the Royalty Theatre in London on 26 March 1904, Synge wrote to Frank Fay, emphasizing the essentially literary nature of the plays:

Archer seems to criticize – at least our prose plays – as dramas first, and literature afterwards. The whole interest of our movement is that our little plays try to be literature first – i.e. to be personal, sincere, and beautiful – and drama afterwards.²⁹

In underlining the central role of literature, Synge was demarcating the plays produced for and by the INTS from other stage representations of Ireland: the commercial theatre, as exemplified by Dion Boucicault for instance, and also, more importantly, the nationalist melodramas, such as those produced at the Queen's Royal Theatre in Dublin, that is, plays that were not committed to the 'personal' but aimed at stirring up their audiences' patriotic sentiment.³⁰ Contrary to what was to become the hallmark of the Abbey Theatre productions, productions at the Queen's were popular and participatory.³¹ Behind an aesthetic issue, then, lay a political question of paramount importance for a country on the brink of political independence. As Pilkington argues, the national theatre was perceived as foreshadowing the political organization of a self-governed Ireland:

If it could be accepted that the primary function of a national theatre was to criticize the views of the majority, then this was a consolation to the unionist and nationalist social élites that sponsored the literary theatre movement in the first place. But if Ireland's national theatre developed into a forum for nationalist propaganda, then this augured a more radical form of democratic majoritarianism.³²

²⁸ Pilkington, *Theatre and the State*, p. 39.

²⁹ Ann Saddlemyer, ed. *The Collected Letters of John Millington Synge: 1871–1907*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 81.

³⁰ Mary Trotter, *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), pp. 38–41.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41. ³² Pilkington, *Theatre and the State*, p. 37.

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Synge's social satires, *The Shadow of the Glen* and *The Playboy* especially, were instrumental in consolidating Yeats's and Gregory's conception of a national theatre as necessarily critical of the views of the majority.³³ Nevertheless, reading Synge's plays performatively, that is, by paying special attention to the participatory, community-based performance practices which they contain, offers a way of highlighting Synge's more ambivalent position than that of Yeats and Gregory and of foregrounding the complexity of Synge's plays' politics.

While Synge was committed to a literary theatre, his plays repeatedly testify to his enduring interest in non-elitist forms of agency. Nowhere is their political 'double' edge better evidenced but in performance, as one can see by pondering on the very last vignette of *The Playboy*:

Peegen: (*bitting him a box on the ear*). Quit my sight. (*Putting her shawl over her head and breaking out into wild lamentations.*) Oh my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only playboy of the western world. *Curtain.*³⁴

Here, the ending of *The Playboy* presents the spectators with a form of temporal and epistemological disjunction. The comedy wins them over to the side of Christy and celebrates the triumph of modernity: the emergence of the modern individual who leaves behind the old communal ties. Christy embodies the modern ways which the play supports and which the theatre of modernity supports also. Yet the play simultaneously leaves the audience with an epistemological difficulty. There is indeed something illegible in the violence that the Mayo community unleashes on Christy shortly before the end of act III, or in the very wildness of Peegen's lamentations on which the curtain falls. This illegibility can only be made sense of at the price of the epistemological violence entailed in dismissing the Mayo villagers as violent, backward and their reaction as characteristic of an antiquated social formation, incommensurate with the values of the modernity which Ireland was embracing. But is this ending truly the conclusion of Synge's play in the theatre?

The proposal of this study is that we harken more attentively to the wildness of Peegen's lamentations and to the illegibility of the Mayo peasants' reaction to Christy's offer to kill his father a second time in front of their eyes. My book does not do so in order to make sense of such practices or to recuperate them to a narrative of progress, but instead to celebrate their illegibility and their power to resist both the

³³ See *ibid.*, p. 39 and ff.

³⁴ J. M. Synge, *Collected Works, Plays, Book II*, edited by Ann Saddlemyer, vol. IV (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 173.

frame of the narrative of the play and the modernising agenda of a national theatre. Paying closer attention to performance than to text, to Pegeen's wild lamentations rather than to her words, allows one to see the last vignette of *The Playboy* as an expression of potential empowerment rather than an expression of loss or dispossession in a modern emotional economy. While it is not stated explicitly, Pegeen's wild lamentations constitute a form of keening which, as Angela Bourke reminds us, was part of a women's protest tradition largely occluded from mainstream cultural history.³⁵ As will be argued, a theatre director could decide to let Pegeen's keen-like lamentations unfold in all their wildness over an extended period of time before the last curtain, thereby highlighting the transformative power that the plays' performance could hold for the collective and offering a possible alternative to the narrative valorization of an individual-based modernity.

Further, *Performance, Modernity and the Plays of J. M. Synge* ties in Synge's interest in various modalities of performance and representation with his engagement with capitalist and industrial modernity. Although, with the exception of Belfast, Ireland's experience of the second industrial revolution radically differed from Britain's or continental Europe's, Ireland was nonetheless strongly affected by modernization. Discourses on productivity, efficiency and rationalization, which accompanied the second industrial revolution, had a huge impact on Ireland's conception of its own modernity. This second industrial revolution, also known as the technological revolution, started in the 1870s with the invention of the internal combustion engine and saw the rapid expansion of communication networks (e. g. railroads, telephone, telegraph), electrification on a grand scale, the use of radioactive materials, the beginnings of mass production and consumerism and the scientific management of work, otherwise known as Taylorism.³⁶ It was a period of rapid and far-reaching changes which did not leave any place or social formation unscathed, not even the colonial 'provinces' or the rural communities (which Synge favoured above all in his writings) located far away from the metropolitan centres. Even though

³⁵ Angela Bourke, 'Performing, Not Writing: The Reception of an Irish Woman's Lament'. In *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics on Poetry*, edited by Yopie Prins and Maera Shreiber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 144.

See also Angela Bourke, 'More in Anger than in Sorrow: Irish Women's Lament Poetry'. In *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture*, edited by Joan Newlon Radner (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

³⁶ See Nicholas Daly, 'The Machine Age'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, edited by Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 283.