

PERFORMANCE, MODERNITY AND
THE PLAYS OF J. M. SYNGE

Irish Revivalist playwright J. M. Synge has often been regarded as a realist. Yet what happens when his work is analysed through wider performance studies and situated alongside less familiar historical contexts? By addressing this question, Hélène Lecossois offers new and valuable perspectives on Synge's plays while at the same time engaging with the complexity of his treatment of a range of performance practices – from keening at rural funerals to the performances of 'native villagers' in the entertainment section of International Exhibitions. What emerges from her study is a dramatist acutely aware of the ability of theatre in performance to counteract relentless forward-moving narratives of modernity. Through detailed, contextualized case studies, the book simultaneously makes meaningful contributions to performance studies and opens up theoretical questions of performance relating to the status of the object on stage, the body on stage and theatrical time.

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Ómós do John Millington Synge

An toisc a thug tú chun mo dhaoine
Ón gcéin mhéith don charraig gharbh
Ba chéile léi an chré bheo
Is an leid a scéith as léan is danaid.

Níor éistis scéal na gcloch,
Bhí éacht i scéal an teallaigh,
Níor spéis leat leac ná cill,
Ní thig éamh as an gcré mharbh.

Do dhuinigh Deirdre romhat sa ród
Is curach Naoise do chas Ceann Gainimh,
D'imigh Deirdre is Naoise leo
Is chaith Peigín le Seáinín aithis.

An leabhar ba ghnáth i do dhóid
As ar chuiris bréithre ar marthain;
Ghabh Deirdre, Naoise is Peigín cló
Is thug léim ghaisce de na leathanaigh.

Tá cleacht mo dhaoine ag meath,
Ní cabhair feasta an tonn mar fhalla,
Ach go dtaga Coill Chuain go hInis Meáin
Beidh na bréithre a chnuasaís tráth
Ar marthain fós i dteanga eachtrann.

Máirtín Ó Direáin, *Selected Poems/Rogha Dánta*, ed. and trans.
Frank Sewell (An Spidéal, Co. na Gaillimhe:
Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2018), 106

Homage to J. M. Synge

Just what brought you to my people
From foreign luxury to rugged rock
Was something akin to the living clay
And inklings derived from grief and loss.

You never heard the stones' story,
The fireside tale caught your ear;
Nor showed interest in slab or churchyard;
There's no entreaty from clay that's dead.

But Deirdre appeared on the road before you
And Naoise's currach turned Ceann Gainimh;
Deirdre and Naoise went their way
And Pegeen cursed and swore at Shauneen.

Mostly, you had a book in hand
And, from it, brought the words to life:
Deirdre, Naoise and Pegeen took shape
And leapt, unbounded, from the pages.

My people's ways are in decline,
The wave no longer a protective wall,
But till Cuan Wood comes to Inishmaan,
The words that you compiled once
Will still live on in a foreign tongue.

Máirtín Ó Direáin, 'Ómós do John Millington Synge', translation
by Frank Sewell in *Selected Poems/Rogha Dánta*, ed.
and trans. Frank Sewell (An Spidéal, Co. na Gaillimhe:
Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2018), 107

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Abbreviations

INTS

The Playboy

Irish National Theatre Society

The Playboy of the Western World, J. M. Synge, *Collected Works*, vol. IV. Edited by Ann Saddlemyer (London: Oxford University Press, 1968)