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

Do dhuinaigh 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 chuirís 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 tón mar fhalla,
Ach go dtagá Coill Chuain go hInis Meáin,
Beidh na bréithre a chnuasaí tráth
Ar marthain fós i dneanga eacrnann.

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.

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Acknowledgements

That writing a book is a collective endeavour, one knows intuitively. Realizing first-hand the affectual truth of the matter is an experience of a different order altogether. This book is no exception to the rule: it is the result of many intellectual and human encounters. I am delighted to be given the opportunity to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed to make it what it is.

This book would not have materialized without the love, wonderful sense of humour and unfailing support of the man I have the privilege and joy to share my life with. His critical comments, questions and scrupulous readings of the manuscript at different stages of its conception have been invaluable. Lionel, my deepest and most heartfelt thanks are to you.

I am immensely grateful to several friends and colleagues with a special interest in the project, who have been kind enough to read the manuscript and give generous feedback: Alexandra Poulain, Élisabeth Angel-Perez and Anna McMullan.

The research has been supported by CECILLE (Centre d’Études en Civilisations, Langues et Lettres Étrangères, Université de Lille (France)) and by two research fellowships: one from the Moore Institute of the National University of Ireland, Galway (April–May 2014) and one from the Société des Anglïciîïes de l’Enseignement Supérieur (SAES) and the Association Française d’Études Américaines (AFEA) (November 2016).

At crucial stages of the research, I received valuable assistance from staff members at various libraries and archives: Elizabeth Kirwan, Glenn Dunne and Justin Furlong at the National University of Ireland; Barry Houlihan at the James Hardiman Library, National University of Ireland, Galway; Eugene Roche at the James Joyce Library, University College Dublin; Gerard Whelan at the Royal Dublin Society; Aisling Lockhart at the manuscripts and archives department of the Library of Trinity College Dublin.

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript for their close, attentive readings and for their comments and
recommendations which have contributed to greatly improving the argument. I would also like to express my gratitude to Katharina Brett and Eilidh Burrett at Cambridge University Press and Liz Steel for their support and assistance during the editorial and publishing process.

My gratitude goes to Christiaan Corlett, Louis De Paor, Dermot Dix, John Holohan, Neill Moxham, Deirdre Ní Chonghaile, Micheál Ó Conghaile, Patricia Palmer, Clemens Radauer and Jonathan Shackleton for going out of their way to assist me in locating, securing or granting the rights to reproduce the visual materials included in the book or for providing me with translations from the Irish language.

I would like to thank those who have enriched the book through their questions and engagement with the argument at various seminars, conferences or around a dinner table: Pascal Aquien, Carle Bonnafous-Murat, Liliane Campos, Daniel Carey, Christopher Collins, Nessa Cronin, Kit Fan, Tadhg Foley, Jean-Michel Ganteau, Anne Goarzin, Nicholas Grene, Hugh Haughton, Stéphane Jousni, David Lloyd, Chandana Mathur, Fiona McCann, Charlotte McIvor, Sylvie Mikowski, Aoife Monks, Méabh Ní Fhuartháin, Clíona Ní Riordain, Muireann O’Cinneide, Maureen O’Connor, Adrian Paterson, Sean Ryder, Barra Ó Seaghdha, Helen Solterer and Tony Tracy.

Earlier versions of some of the materials in Chapters 1 and 4 first appeared in Ireland, Memory and Performing the Historical Imagination and Silages critiques. I thank their respective editors: Élisabeth Angel-Perez, Geneviève Cohen-Cheminet, Alexandra Poulain and Françoise Sammarcelli; Mary P. Caulfield and Christopher Collins.

I would like to thank Alice Maher for her extremely enthusiastic response to the project and her immediate agreement to Vox Hybrida I being reproduced as the front cover of the book.

I would also like to thank friends and relatives whose fun, intellectual and emotional support have meant more than I can say: Laurence Bécel, Sarah Belamich, Cécile Brion, Jim Cohen, Patrick Crowley, the late Angela Eborall, Brigitte Felix, Jeffrey Hopes, Anna Cecilia Hornedo, Alain Lecossois, Dominique Morot, Suzanne Morot, Siobhán Mullaly, Colin Pilkington, Gilles Sambras and Emmanuelle Toocaram.

Finally, I am indebted to the students of the English department of the Université de Lille (France) who attended my seminars on Irish studies, Performance and Failure. Their remarks, challenging questions and enthusiastic responses have fed into this project.
Abbreviations

INTS Irish National Theatre Society