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J. M. SYNGE
FROM MUSIC TO DRAMA, BY WAY OF GERMANY

In memory of Geoffrey and Mary King

> I have spoken of a certain interpenetration of the matter or subject of a work of art with the form of it, a condition realised only absolutely in music, as the condition to which every form of art is perpetually aspiring.
>
> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (1873?)

John Millington Synge's early schooling was discontinuous and less than distinguished in its outcome. Yet, while an undergraduate at Trinity College Dublin, he also studied music in the Royal Irish Academy of Music. In this, he was inhibited by a shyness in public performance, or perhaps, by nervousness. It is ironic perhaps, and apt certainly, that when young Synge gave up thoughts of music, he turned to the most public of all the literary arts—theatre. Wurzburg played an important role in the reorientation of a shy genius.

His reaching your city is inseparable from those youthful studies in the Academy of Music, which included musical theory, but other motive needs and drives should not be ignored, the most intimate being domestic. His barrister father, John Hatch Synge (1824-1872), owned estates in the west, where during winter visits, he shot wild duck.[1] Under fifty years old, he died of smallpox when the boy was one day short of his first birthday. Consequently, the mother's influence became unrivalled in the household. She was a fervent evangelical protestant, in part

[1] See *My Uncle John; Edward Stephens' Life of J. M. Synge* (ed. Andrew Carpenter) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974. p. 17.

confirmed in her own father's death in 1847, when she was scarcely out of infancy.

These were 'Reject-the World and All its Vanity' folk, with the arts and intellectualism constantly in her sights. Young Johnny eluded her prejudices through a commitment to natural history. Aged fourteen, he became an active member of the Dublin Naturalists' Field Club with moths and caterpillars among his close interests. Not shyly, but slyly he complicated matters by absorbing Darwinian theories of evolution through adaptation.

He perfected tactics to avoid Christmas, and even routine church services. When the family moved to Wicklow for summer vacations, he relaxed this severity, perhaps because he valued the opportunity to observe ordinary country people. In October 1887, he had begun music lessons with Patrick Griffith, a young teacher whose social background was Roman Catholic, as Mrs Synge might have noted disapprovingly. He was soon well versed in (if silent about) major works by Marx and Nietzsche. One passage from *The Use and Abuse of History* (1874) particularly springs to mind: 'all that is small and limited, mouldy and obsolete, gains a worth and inviolability of its own from the conservative and reverent soul of the antiquary migrating into it and building a secret nest there.'[2]

These surnames alone are indicators that the future dramatist was capable of playing two parts, even two characters, simultaneously while still comparatively young. I would suggest that the medium by which he first developed this capacity was music. The continental Baroque tradition had relatively fresh roots in Ireland. Georg Friedrich Handel's

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History* (trans. Adrian Collins). Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1978. p. 118.

Messiah was first performed in Dublin in 1742, but the composer was in temporary exile from London. Dean Swift's reputed comment was 'Pearls before swine.'

The nurture of music through the training of practitioners was consolidated by the founding of the Music Academy in 1848. In the generation preceding Synge's, Bernard Shaw made a formidable reputation in London as a concert reviewer. A decade younger than Synge, James Joyce infused his novels with musical allusions. The shy undergraduate's experience with the Academy were written up by Ann Saddlemyer as 'Synge's Soundscape'.[3]

Whereas Trinity College retained a lofty, frosty image of its protestant tradition, the Academy was secular in outlook, fostering groups among students of any or no religious attachment in concert. This latter prospect did not please Mrs. Synge at home. She had been born Kathleen Trail (1840-1908), the daughter of Robert Traill (1793-1847), rector of a parish in west County Cork. A vehement evangelical, he held his catholic neighbours in contempt mingled, during the Famine years, with some active pity. As a consequence of his tending to them, he died of typhus when Kathleen was just seven. She maintained his stern attitudes—without the pity—while raising six children. This domestic scene inevitably conditioned the future dramatist, her youngest child, but it failed to convince him. Within it, the boy discovered his need to develop a dual character, as many Victorian individuals found advisable.

His siblings—four brothers and one sister—responded by aligning themselves with business by one means or another, as late Victorian respectability urged. Robert and Edward contributed to estate

[3] Ann Saddlemyer, 'Synge's Soundscape' *Irish University Review* vol 22 no. 1 (Spring 1992) pp. 55-68.

management. Samuel obtained medical qualifications while also entering holy orders, becoming a medical missionary in China. His only sister, Annie, married a solicitor.

Their mother, the former Miss Traill, was not the only mature woman in the family's wider aspect. Miss Mary Helena Synge (1840-1917) was a relative of Kathleen's late husband, and thus bore the family name by birth and not (as young Synge's mother did) by widowhood. Mary was born in Parsonstown (now called Birr), the daughter of Edward Synge and his wife, Margaret Saunders. They were closely related to the landed baronets of Kiltrough (surname, Synge).

No intimation of a schizoid potential lurks in Johnny's background. Instead, Darwinian processes of adaptation were at work. Among his siblings, two offered contrasting ways forward. His only sister, Annie helpfully married Harry Stephens in January 1884, when she was legally acknowledged as a minor—her father was more than ten years dead.[4] A worldly man, Harry become a useful friend to his brother-in-law, especially when it came to the final months in a Dublin nursing-home run by Margaret Huxley (1854-1940), a niece of T. H. Huxley, known as Darwin's Bull Dog. In this fashion, Synge's youthful reading of *Origin of Species* found its resting-place, two characters reconciled.

His countryside studies were paralleled by his skill as a photographer. However, the surviving images include no botanical material, and little interest in the rural landscape as such. His *Wallet of Photographs* is replete with scenes in the west of Ireland and, notably in eastern County Wicklow.

[4] In 1939, Mrs Annie Stephens died in the Elpis Nursing Home, in the founding of which her husband had been a prime mover.

The final picture is entirely different – a close-up portrait of an elderly, well-attired woman who has been identified as Mary Synge.[5] This is certainly not a picture taken by JMS; it may have been a professional photo, commissioned by the concert pianist for promotional use.

In May 1893, Mary Synge visited the Synge household; then or somewhat later, she persuaded the widowed mother to allow her twenty-two-year-old son to visit Germany for the first time. Oberwerth, an island in the Rhine near Koblenz was their primary destination, providing his initial contact with the von Eicken sisters, whom Miss Synge could recommend as pious – though cheerful and cultivated – protestants. Crosthwaite Park West in Kingstown (nowadays Dun Laoghaire), where the family had settled in 1890, was not an exclusive redoubt of privilege. Its principal merit in Mrs Synge's calculation was immediate proximity of her married daughter and the growing Stephens family. While the emergent writer's sister provided an important link to a practical world, she was just one of *two* siblings whom we need to consider here today. The other was the youngest of his three brothers, Samuel, four years his elder.

These two shared a bedroom, while Sam prepared for his double training to become a medical missionary in China. They discussed sexuality, with discretion. By 1897, Johnny's inflamed neck glands required surgery which, in turn, prompted him to write a short piece, 'Under Ether'. Of all her children, Sam most faithfully absorbed Kathleen's religious fundamentalism. Many years later, he published

[5] *My Wallet of Photographs: The Collected Photographs of J. M. Synge*, arranged and introduced by Lilo Stephens. Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1971.

Memories of John Millington Synge (1932), which blurred rather than clarified understanding of his famous brother's final illness.

JMS attempted writing drama in Wurzburg, perhaps a piece in German, represented in the *Collected Works* by a commissioned English translation. But also/or the play now known as *When the Moon Has Set*. This latter echoes Ibsen's *Ghosts*, making it difficult to avoid the topic of syphilis as an anxiety. He had seen a Paris production in March 1898, by which date, the emergent play was unfinished. Sam's medical text books provided the younger brother an opportunity to check out symptoms.

Personally, I am keen to reach Wurzburg and to consider its influence on Synge. However, his complex upbringing and struggle against family tradition deserves renewed attention. The steady refusal to attend church services has long been noted. To counterbalance an emphasis on his agnosticism, a curious feature of his university education offers itself—Hebrew and the Irish language chosen for study and examination over four years. One should remember that Trinity College had been established in 1592 as an organ of learning devoted to the Elizabethan campaign to buttress the Protestant cause. Its school of divinity was central to the College mission.

The conversion of Ireland's predominantly Catholic population required clergy with some knowledge of the native language in order to preach effectively. This in turn required Gaelic translations of the scriptures and the Anglican liturgy. More broadly, scholarship in ancient languages was well-established in Dublin University. The Church of Ireland had been disestablished in 1869; the new and radical arrangements came into force in 1871, the year of Synge's birth. In practical terms, the recruitment of young clergy became a priority. Outside family contexts, the undergraduate Synge looked as if he had

some such career in mind. We know from his independent acquisition of German, French and Italian that he was an able linguist.[6]

It is difficult to believe Mrs Synge thought that Johnny had modified his attitudes towards religious belief. However, he may have chosen his college curriculum to please or at least pacify her. While rejecting her entire world-view, he was genuinely fond of her, and spoke of her goodness.

Her father, the dour west Cork rector, worked diligently translating portions of Flavius Josephus, a first century Romano-Jewish writer in Aramaic or Hebrew, known in English as *The Jewish Wars*, with its near-contemporary account of Jesus' circle. It appeared posthumously in 1851.[7] Synge's other grandfather, John Synge (1788-1845), had broadly similar interests; indeed, he set up a hand-press in his County Wicklow home for very limited printing of texts, including biblical commentary. Known informally as 'Pestalozzi Synge', he had also been active in encouraging a deviant tendency in the Church of Ireland, now known as Plymouth Brethren. The same tendency lured the agnostic Synge when he fell head over heels in love with Cherrie Matheson, a neighbour in Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire). The Brethren's origins lay less in England's Plymouth than in rural Calary in County Wicklow. If Germany gave the world Lutheranism and uncountable millions of Lutherans, four centuries later Wicklow gave it the Open and (later) the Exclusive Brethren, reductively Calvinist in its obsession with the Elect, a renewed theology of the Covenant, and subjected the historicity of biblical

[6] JMS began by studying the language alone. With the prospect of visiting Germany, he added lessons from Elilius Westpendorf, who taught in Wesley College. He died in 1904, a victim of premature senile decay.
[7] *The Jewish War of Flavius Josephus*; a New Translation by the Late Rev Robert Traill; edited with notes by Isaac Taylor. With pictorial illustration. London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1851.

narrative to Dispensationism. The group thrived in the United States, Switzerland and south-eastern France. I understand, from an online source that the German organisation is the *Bruederbewegung,* numbering perhaps 40,000 souls.[8] My concern with this general movement is limited to Synge's enduring friendship with the von Eicken sisters. Valeska teased him about 'the Holy One', that is, Miss Matheson. Clearly, the Oberwerth household was less prim than Mrs Kathleen Synge's.

Your speaker's keenness to reach Wurzburg somehow has been delayed, perhaps by an equally keen longing to engage with the plays Synge is celebrated and subjected to critical analysis for. So, a digression towards textual detail may take us over the hurdle. Saddlemyer's unchallenged 1968 edition opens with a scrupulous foot-note introducing 'Riders to the Sea', concerned with the naming of characters. Our focus here is on the mother.

The foot-note tells us that two important source typescripts read 'Maura', whereas the canonical texts have 'Maurya'. We could fuss over this. Instead, please note Synge's own hand-written comment within the source, 'in small type version Cailteen [sic] is the old woman Maura the elder daughter.' A spectacular psychological switch is in progress. (Let's relegate Cailteen, as spelled out here, to a footnote.[9]) The dramatist's mother's Christian name, Kathleen, is mildly amended towards Gaelic practice (Caitlín) but, almost simultaneously, replaced by Maura with its

[8] See a re-print of *Early Open Brethren in the German-Speaking Countries; Extracts from the Missionary Echo and Echoes of Service 1872-1918) on the Bruederbewegung* website.

[9] Without some sight of the original manuscript, it is better to be tentative. If the spelling given above is confirmed as JMS's, then he had oddly introduced an unforced notion. *Caillte* means 'lost'. The familiar Christian name is unconnected, being a Gaelic version of the common girl's name Katharine, Katerina etc.

Greek affinities (fate) and louder Christian nomenclature (Mary as the mother of Christ.)[10]

I'm not aware that any commentator has noted the structural resemblance between the family of his one-act play and his own domestic family. His 'small type version' emphasises the resemblance, while also noting that Maurya *had been* the elder daughter's name. Saddlemyer's footnote continues, 'In all the MS. versions Maur[y]a is the elder daughter and the mother's name is Bride.' In the canonical text, Maurya has no husband, she lives with one (surviving) son and two daughters. Mrs Kathleen Synge was also a widow, living with a larger brood.

This latter detail complicates the matter further. 'Bride', as used in Hiberno-English speech is perfect homonym with the role-name of the woman about to be married ('the bride'), whereas in Gaelic speech it is a two-syllable name. This view of 'Riders to the Sea' will have struck most of you as crude in its critical assumptions. though, when he was working on *The Playboy of the Western World*, he referred to it privately as *Fool of the Family*. While he was staying in Wurzburg, he began a play about family inheritance, isolation or engagement in local society, its setting recognisably Wicklow. Katharine Worth, in *The Irish Drama of Europe* (1978), describes it as 'his earliest play'; she also detects both an Ibsenite debt, and an awareness of Villiers de L'Isle Adam's *Axel* (1890). Known nowadays as *When the Moon Has Set*, it differs from the well-known plays in several ways. First, the family is unmistakably settled in a comfortable country house, with local people featuring as servants, quite unlike any of the plays which made Synge a celebrated dramatist in America and continental Europe. Second, the creaking plot depends on a

[10] Strictly speaking, in Gaelic the name used for Christ's mother is Muire, not Máire.

musical scene to reach its all-too-happy ending. In effect, a mockery of Walter Pater's observations that 'all art aspires to the condition of music.'[11]

When Oxford University Press published the four-volume *Collected Works* (1962-68) the editors chose to include a one-act version of this non-canonical work**,** although a longer version had also survived. My late friend, Mary King, brought the two-act text into the public domain (1982).[12] My own response appears in *The Silence of Barbara Synge* (2003), greeted with resounding silence by an Irish public keen to keep their Synge uncomplicated. The crux of the problem lay in the excavation of disturbing stuff from eighteenth-century family archives, indicating that the Wicklow Synges' status in a cultivated, landed elite had relied on grubby commercial trading, political shenanigans, and the suppression or forging of a will.

One could make too much of this intriguing piece of work. Indeed, I would plead guilty were it not for problems of classification. In outer form, it is clearly a dramatic work. But its contents—to use a convenient shorthand— constitute a genealogy, to use a term familiar from Nietzsche whom Synge. King cites the notebook for 1894-5. The *Birth of Tragedy* was published in the year of Synge's father's death.

Nietzsche's brusque reduction of historical inquiry to three types – the monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical – serves our limited purposes quite economically. Synge clearly paid attention to notable large buildings of old – the Dún on Inis Mór, the largest of the Aran Islands. is the most obvious western pre-historic structure to which he referred.

[11] Pater, *The Renaissance* (1877?)
[12] See also, King, *The Drama of J. M. Synge*. London: 1985. p 160-176.

In the east, and in the county of Wicklow where he spent much time in childhood and early manhood, the monastery at Glendalough is an extended site of churches and related structures, dating to the much-celebrated period of the Celtic Church. The place-name simply means the glen of two lakes. In one of his Wicklow essays, he wrote:

> At the end of the Upper Lake at Glendalough one is quite shut off from the part that has been spoiled by civilization, and when one fishes there from dusk to midnight a feeling of isolation creeps over one. (*Prose*. p. 195).

Now, I respect the writer almost beyond reason, but I have to point out to him that the lake has *two* ends; he has concentrated on the western end, furthest from the well-known monastic site. However, on the northern side of the Upper Lake, there still are the ruins of perhaps a dozen abandoned lead-miners' cottages in the townland of Camaderry, owned by the Mining Company of Ireland. The Company had built a larger settlement at Brockagh, with about fifty little houses for regular employees and their families, and a camp-site for numerous casual labourers. Synge's exercise in isolating his fishing haunt from non-monumental civilisation matches Nietzsche's remark about the antiquary who migrates into the object (or is it subject?) of his devotion, 'building a secret nest there.'

In a distinctive manner, Synge is a natural historian. However, he also can be assessed under the philosopher's third kind of historian, the critical. The evidence here is photographic. In Mrs Stephens's published collection, no member of his class is represented, no member of his own household, and none of the several respectable houses where they lived (in Dublin) or holidayed (in Wicklow). Of the fifty-odd photographs, two record street-market scenes near St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.

Apart from these, the settings are rural. Most feature human figures, constituting a critical survey of Irish social life, with evictions commenting loudly on impoverished farming and fishing life. The visual images of tramps also comment eloquently, providing the photographer with a self-satisfying analogy intended to identify a younger son of a higher class with the tramp or other outcast from the lowest. One Wicklow photograph which caught my literary historian's eye showed a race meeting in Arklow, probably an annual event, which Synge clearly attended. Why? Because such races make a fleeting appearance in *The Playboy*, decidedly a Mayo-set drama, as do Wicklow sheep.[13]

Back now to Germany and music. 'Vita Vecchia' is a short prose piece which serves as a means of displaying extensive early verse with dream recollections for contrasting support. Three opening paragraphs are of biographical interest. I won't quote them entirely. But the first sentence or two smacks of facticity:

> A young girl of the Roman Catholic Church spent nine weeks in the house where I lodged when I was studying music in Germany. Two days before she moved on to Venice I promised to play for her on the violin. The following night I dreamed that I did so and that when I began a crowd of people rushed into the room with such noise and disturbance that I stopped playing and threw down my fiddle on the floor with the horror of nightmare. . . . etc. [14]

[13] See McCormack, 'Notes from the Borderland' in Adrian Frazer (ed.), *Playboys of the Western World*. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2004. Mrs Stephens' captions suggest either Arklow or Wicklow town, but the beaches at Arklow are much superior, whereas Wicklow town is blocked off to the south by a rocky headland.
[14] Prose p. 16.

This passage testifies to his intense nervousness about performance even as he was studying seriously. The transition from music to drama was not simply prompted by his recognition that German standards were far superior to what he found at home in Ireland. Yet the very short, 'Autobiography', written at roughly the same time in fits and starts, opens boldly, 'Every life is a symphony, and the translation of this life into music and from music back to literature. . . is the real effort of the artist.'[15] He names three composers – Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. (No Brahms, no Richard Strauss. Nor, for that matter, any reference to Edward Elgar or Vaughan Williams.) The latter, one year younger than Synge, will feature actively before this lecture concludes. Meanwhile, I'd suggest that the significant word in the credo of Life and Symphony is *translation*.

We don't think of J. M. Synge as an epigram-ist, like Wilde or even Joyce at crucial moments. However, one untidy dictum pleads for attention, because it is open to misinterpretation. It is not offered as a sop to his pious, bible-thumping mother; instead it illuminates the idea of translation as the avenue leading one artistic form into a different one. In a notebook of 1904, he traced the Irish literary renaissance's growth through several stages—the lyrical is 'the art of a national adolescence', dramatic art is first of all a childish art, 'without form or philosophy'. Then, more pithily, 'journalism may be literary, literature is always *scriptura*l.'[16] I doubt that Mrs Synge ever saw this notebook from which she might have drawn a mistaken comfort.

I propose that a mature understanding of his chosen word should also note his insistence on *translation* as an essential factor in

[15] Prose, p. 3.
[16] Quoted *Plays II*, p. xxx. My emphasis.

considering the relations between the major art forms – music and literature, especially. As early as 'Riders to the Sea' and 'In the Shadow of the Glen' Synge incorporated biblical allusion. He read the King James Version, not simply for its accomplished late Elizabethan prose-style, but also for its succession of 'origin tales'—the Creation, the Mosaic escape from Egypt, the Destruction of Babel, truly scriptural texts. He is said to have read it when dying in the Elpis Nursing Home.

Let us look briefly at 'Deirdre of the Sorrows', his unfinished drama. Being neither Wicklow-based nor dependent on western landscapes, it differentiates itself through the declaredly northern settings of his final contribution to the Revival. *Settings* plural, because the action is divided between Ulster and what is now called Scotland.

There are some grounds on which to discern circularity in Synge's work as a dramatist. 'Riders to the Sea', with Maurya's final speech, establishes for the audience that 'Michael has a clean burial in the far north' – in Donegal, to be precise. The islanders do not dwell on a mainland; they are separated from near-by Connemara by treacherous seas and by differentiating levels of intrusive modernisation. 'Riders' and 'Deirdre' are dramas of conclusive death.

A second ground, on which to base a positioning of 'Deirdre' within the larger corpus, involves 'The Well of the Saints', set implicitly in Wicklow, and in the Early Christian period. It is, of course, a lob-sided comparison, 'Deirdre' being decidedly pre-Christian in time-setting and its manifestly mythological *dramatis personae*. Nevertheless, both plays removed themselves from the Irish Victorian milieu of land contestation and class-conflict. The (very) young writer posited a *Christless* form of

re-enchantment, oddly used recently by Sean Hewitt to buttress his case for an occult overview of Synge's mature work *in toto*.[17]

It is generally accepted that Synge's abandonment of music in favour of drama intricately draws on his experiences in Germany from 1893 onwards. These were facilitated by Cousin Mary's introducing him to the von Eicken sisters in Oberwerth, near Koblenz. He lodged with the sisters for five months in 1893, including Christmas. In the New Year, he moved to stay with a Frau Süsser in Wurzburg for four months, studying violin and piano, and had resumed contact with the von Eickens for two breaks, including Easter 1894, and the first two weeks of June and—after a summer in Wicklow with his mother—is back in Oberwerth for November and December, including a second Rhineland Christmas.

His linguistic interests included French and Italian, with the first half of 1895 largely spent in Paris, followed by three months in Rome. In December, he followed a course on Petrarch at the Sorbonne by the ageing Academician, Emile Gebhart, who held a professorship in Southern European Languages. Synge's interest in Petrarch offers a bridge to later musicians'—Vaughan Williams among them—interest in Synge. In the autumn of 1908, he made his final trip to the sisters, staying for four weeks.

His last full year alive was enormously challenging. From May to early July, he lay in Dublin's Elpis Nursing Home where he was operated upon for what turned out to be an inoperable tumour in his abdomen, with the matron Margaret Huxley in sympathetic control.[18] A revised version of *The Well of the Saints* was performed in the Abbey on 14 May,

[17] Sean Hewitt, *J. M. Synge; Nature, Politics, Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. p. 55.
[18] Saddlemyer held that JMS was not aware of the gravity of his condition, see Synge, *Collected Letters* vol 2 p. x.

while he was detained in Elpis. He subsequently convalesced in the Stephens' household till mid- August. In early September, he exchanged letters with Yeats about publication of his poems.

In October-November 1908, he travelled once again to the von Eickens, during which period his mother died in Dublin. The *Poems and Translations* appeared posthumously on 5 June 1909, from the Yeats family's Cuala Press, including the translations from Petrarch's *Sonnets to Laura*. Given his physical frailty, his journey to Oberwerth drew heavily on his resources of courage and dedication. Five months later, he was dead.

Such a long sequence of residential immersions in an Oberwerth household deserves deeper examination. There is more on record than a string of dates. Synge corresponded with the von Eicken sisters, especially Valeska. He composed a letter in German to the entire family from Wurzburg early in February 1894, ostensibly from Frau Süsser's address, though a diary entry of 25 January suggests that he had at the lest actively considered a month's commitment to the Railway Hotel. In 1908, Claire von Eicken called to the Synge household. A letter surviving only as an incomplete draft provides some evidence.[19] Indeed, the Trinity College holdings of these letters as they appear in the Oxford *Collected Letters* (2 vols) may need re-editing and more expansive annotation.

Two topics cannot be avoided, even if they seem tangential. First, Synge's friendship with James Joyce in Paris during 1902, when he gave the younger man a copy (probably in typescript) of *Riders to the Sea*, who later translated it into Italian. More to the immediate point, Joyce, writing to his brother Stanislaus in March 1903, reports that Synge 'has

[19] According to Saddlemyer, Claire travelled extensively on the Continent, and may have taught in Redhill, Surrey, at St Anne's School.

written four plays … all in one act.'[20] This valuable detail should be taken in tandem with Synge's own comment about his early literary experiments. In a December 1907 letter to Leon Brodsky, he declared, 'I wrote one play—which I have never published—in Paris, dealing with Ireland of course, but not a peasant play, before I wrote *Riders to the Sea* . . . It is quite complete.'[21] The first peasant play was published in October 1903, and first performed in February 1904. I do not believe that these dates cancel the notion that Synge worked on 'When the Moon Has Set' while in Wurzburg or Oberwerth.

The problem is exacerbated by Oxford University Press's emphatic preference for the one-act version over the two-act one.

Synge did indeed forsake music to give his major imaginative energies to drama. As we know and commemorate 'the rest of life' was brief. He did not live to see his equally disruptive friend, Joyce, fully bloom. Yet the friendship and affinity deserve further consideration.

As for music, it has not forsaken him. Much attention focused on the late translations of Petrarchan sonnets. A. J. Potter (1918-1980) set 'Four Petrarch Sonnets for Mixed Choir' in 1979. Elizabeth Maconchy's 'My Dark Heart' (1981) is a setting of three for piano. Both of these musicians came from Ulster backgrounds. It is not fanciful to consider whether, in those deeply Troubled years, Synge's northern tragedy, 'Deirdre of the Sorrows', brooded in their minds. Back in the post-war years, the English symphonist, Havergal Brian (1876-1972) contemplated a treatment of the same play, but his project was diverted towards his *Sinfonia Tragica* (1947-8). Near-simultaneously, he composed 'The Tinkers' Wedding', a comedy overture.

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[20] Joyce, *Collected Letters* (ed Richard Ellmann). Vol 2 London: Faber, 1966. p. 35.
[21] See *Collected Letters*, vol 2, p. 103; *Plays*, vol 1, p. 155.

I've kept the most compelling evidence to the end. The premier of Ralph Vaughan Williams's meticulous setting of 'Riders to the Sea' occurred in 1937, though composed years earlier.[22] It attracted little public interest until November 2008 Fiona Shaw directed it at London's Coliseum, for English National Opera.

[22] See Caireann Shannon, 'The Duty of Words to Music; Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Riders to the* Sea' *The Musicology Review* vol 2 (2005-6).