



MAURICE BOURGEOIS: *John Millington Synge and The Irish Theatre* (second edition)

Constable & Company LTD: London. Press, 1913.Pp.xix,337

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Abstract

John Millington Synge and The Irish Theatre by Maurice Bourgeois is a book dealing with the life and works of Synge within the framework of Irish history and theatrical background. This work is most likely to appeal especially to the students in their research or to the ones who are interested in Irish Literature. The author explores not only Synge's life beginning from his childhood to his death but also his plays overall in seven parts. In this book one of the main concerns of the writer is to present some facts which have not come to light about Synge and to set the circumstances in which he created his works, by giving some samples of experiences from his life besides the Irish Theatre of the time.

Keywords: Maurice Bourgeois, Irish Literature, Modern Continental languages, Personal Equation

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In the first part there is a discussion about whether Synge is Irish in relation with his family roots(5) which we do not have enough data as indicated in this quotation: "It was by solitude that he asserted his personality[...] and from the very start he was and remained himself and nothing but himself"(7-8). In the same part his interests, especially his tendency to languages including: Irish, Gaelic, German and French(later in his life), some other modern Continental languages(11) and music, are mentioned with following words: "[...] he even thought of taking up music as a profession; and, although he soon relinquished the idea, music always remained one of the pastimes in which he most fondly indulged, and it exercised a potent influence on his endowments as a stylish and playwright"(10-11). The last thing that may be necessary to express here is how the writer enriched his ideas with some photographs of Synge and his family tree chart, named *A Genealogical Chart Of The Synge Family Shewing J. M. Synge's Parentage and Lineal Ancestry* (ch.1).

The second chapter is about his academic life as an interpreter of French, competence in German and the process in making his mind towards literature in terms of his future career as a dramatist. The writer sometimes analyzes his claims, by citing W. B. Yeats' quotations. What is particularly noteworthy about the writer's judgment in this chapter is the influence of the conversation(41) in which Yeats suggested Synge to go to Aran Island to discover the gift in himself and its importance for his future career and writings by saying "Give up Paris[...] Go to the Aran Islands. [...] Express a life that has never found expression"(40). Although he didn't leave Paris forever, it was that day when Yeats directed Synge's steps to his native land (41). However, the writer can be criticised regarding the structure of the chapters. Instead of trying to cover a few themes under one chapter which leads to ambiguity, he may have divided them systematically into subtitles like "Chapter 1, part 1"(see Daniel Corkery, M.A.). In my view the other imperfection about the book is the lack of English translation of some original expressions; "un Irlandais dans la salle"(35), "en pension"(38), "manière"(55) in French, supposing the reader knows these statements or even guess from the context. In this chapter, his abroad experience is associated with his life experience and religious view.

The third chapter begins with the question "In what manner did the French influence exercise itself on Synge?"(50) and the answer to this question is given in the rest of the chapter by relating to the other versatile

writers like; Oscar Wilde, Manet, Zola, George Moore, Verlaine, Bernard Shaw and their influence on his works. This paragraph is followed by a short description of his personality and physical appearance, which I personally find inappropriate regarding where it stands and may destruct the coherence of the book.

The fourth chapter in which the writer resolves Synge's political point of view is introduced by the remark "This is the place to say something of Synge's politics"(86). The key point of Synge's approach to politics is supported with W. B. Yeats' thoughts: "Synge seemed by nature unfitted to think a political thought[...]"(86) and the author strengthens this idea by introducing Synge as a man of almost no opinions in an opinion-ridden country.(87). This unit concludes with the linguistic aspects of Synge's works.

Thanks to the two separate parts in the fifth chapter, the reader has the opportunity to conceive the background information of Irish theatre involving Anglo-Irish plays, characters, stage, plot, theme, and its reforms. One of the central points in the book is the sixth section in which Synge's plays are analyzed, maybe not detailed but subtle enough to give a first impression about each of them to the audience. Bourgeois' reference to Synge's "*personal equation*" [emphasis added] (230) and "*three elements*" [emphasis added] (239) best summarizes his style in the writings. The significant point worth mentioning here is the smooth transition between the chapters as we last observe in the conclusion part surveying his poetic aspect. A final shortcoming that may be evaluated in the book is the author's portrayal of the term "*Syngeisms*" [emphasis added](246) which is not exemplified by Bourgeois.

In conclusion, Bourgeois makes a remarkable contribution to literature revealing the fundamental elements of Irish theatre through Synge's life and his works with a wide range of an Appendix part, which is "be-all" and "end-all" of a successful research.

Works Cited

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