



INDIRECT TRANSLATION AND LANGUAGE RECLAMATION IN THE WORKS OF J.M. SYNGE

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J.M. Synge remains one of the most influential figures in Irish drama, remembered most notably for *The Playboy of the Western World*¹ and *Riders to the Sea*.² His creative vision was shaped by extensive time spent in the west of Ireland where the Irish language retained a strong presence and where many customs, oral traditions and modes of expression had survived despite centuries of decline elsewhere. Synge recognised in this environment the potential for a new kind of dramatic production, one that would present Irish people authentically on the Abbey stage in Dublin. Although his depictions were contested by contemporaries who felt they misrepresented Ireland, Synge insisted that his work conveyed truth. Through careful study of local traditions and close interaction with Irish-speaking communities, Synge developed a distinctive hybrid idiom: an Irish-English (or Hiberno-English) that carried the rhythms, imagery and cultural resonance of Irish speech without employing the language itself.³ This linguistic innovation allowed him to capture the essence of Irish identity in English while remaining deeply rooted in the vernacular of the west.

It was only after J.M. Synge's death that scholars began to recognise the full potential of his achievement. Translators and language revivalists subsequently reclaimed his plays into the Irish language, treating his distinctive Irish-inflected English as a form of indirect translation. Indirect Translation is normally understood as a mediated or relay process in which a source text is translated via one or more intermediary languages rather than directly from the original. In the case of Synge, however, this process assumes an almost circular form: texts rooted in Irish linguistic structures were first articulated in English and later translated back into Irish, rather than progressing towards a third language.

In this process, the English versions were mapped seamlessly back into Irish as though they had originally been composed in the native tongue. While this practice does not constitute indirect translation in the contemporary theoretical sense, it nonetheless exemplifies how indirectness in translation can function as cultural reclamation.⁴ Focusing on *In the Shadow of the Glen*⁵ as a case study, this paper demonstrates how Synge's rooted Irish-English facilitated its transposition back into Irish and argues that such circular translation practices highlight the potential of indirect translation as a tool for restoring linguistic ownership and cultural identity.

References:

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