the Abbey. Incidentally, it may be noted that this use predates the use of Craig screens in the famous Hamlet at the Moscow Art Theatre (Dec 1911).

Lady Gregory and the Abbey Theatre*

JOHN QUINN

I was away from New York when the Abbey Theatre company of Dublin first came here, and I did not see them play until the end of their first week. In writing to a friend to explain who they were and what they had accomplished, I pointed out the perfect naturalness of their acting, the simplicity of their methods, their freedom from all distracting theatricalism and ‘stage business’, their little resort to gesture, the beautiful rhythm of their speech, the absence of extensive and elaborate scenery and stage-settings, and the delightful suggestion of spontaneity given by their apparently deliberate throwing away of technical accomplishments in the strict sense of the word. I said that too many theatres have costly scenery and expensive properties to cover the poverty of art in the play or the players, just as poor paintings are sold by dealers in big glaring gold frames; and had the same refined quality, not always apparent at the first glance, that old Chinese paintings are seen to have when placed alongside of modern paintings by western artists.

As I observed the fine craftsmanship of the actors, without a single false note, each seeming to get into the very skin of the part that he impersonated, my thoughts went back some eight or nine years to what were the beginnings of this whole enterprise.

Yeats, Hyde and I used to sit up every night until one or two in the morning, talking, it seems to me, about everything and everybody under the sky of Ireland, but chiefly about the theatre of which Yeats’ mind was full. These were wonderful nights, long nights filled with good talk, Yeats full of plans for the development of the theatre. The mornings were devoted to work, the afternoons to out-of-doors, and the evenings to the reading of scenarios for plays, the reading of short plays in English by Lady Gregory and in Irish by Hyde. Lady Gregory and Hyde read out to us from time to time their translations of Irish songs and ballads, in the

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beautiful English of her books and of Hyde's *Love Songs of Connacht*. Yeats and Lady Gregory made a scenario of a play and Hyde spent three afternoons 'putting the Irish on it'. She has written how one morning she went for a long drive to the sea, leaving Hyde with a bundle of blank paper before him. When she returned in the evening, Dr Hyde had finished the play and was out shooting wild duck. This play was *The Lost Saint*.\(^1\) Dr Hyde put the hymn in the play into Irish rhyme the next day while he was watching for wild duck beside the marsh. He read out the play to us in the evening, translating it back into English as he went along, and Lady Gregory has written how 'we were all left with a feeling as if some beautiful white blossom had suddenly fallen at our feet'.

At that time I was more interested in Yeats' writing and lyrical poetry and in Hyde's Gaelic revival than I was in Yeats' plans for an Irish theatre. Yeats was more interested in the poetry that moves masses of people in a theatre and in the drama than in what suffices to make up a book of lyric poetry that might lie on a lady's or gentleman's drawing-room table. I told Hyde and Yeats that that reminded me of Montaigne's\(^2\) saying that he had deliberately put indecencies into his essays because he hated the idea of those essays lying on women's tables.

Lady Gregory was then at work on her two great books, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* and *Gods and Fighting Men*. In these two books she brought together for the first time and retold in the language of the people of the country about her, in the unspoiled Elizabeth English of her own neighbourhood, the great legends of Ireland. She did for the old Irish sagas what Malory did for the Knights of the Round Table, and fairly won the right to be known as the Irish Malory.

Another night I first heard the name of John M. Synge. Yeats told us how he had come upon Synge at a small hotel in Paris and persuaded him to come to Ireland, and of the wonderful book that he had written on the Aran Islands. Yeats and Lady Gregory had tried to have it published. I myself offered to pay the expense of making plates for it, but Yeats said that he wanted the book taken on its merits, even if Synge had to wait some years for a publisher.\(^3\)

Synge's debt to Yeats has not, I think, been fully appreciated. It was Yeats who persuaded him to drop the attempt to rival Arthur Symons as an interpreter of continental literature to England, and to go back to Ireland and live among the people and write of the life that he knew best.

When Synge was writing his plays, poems and essays he came often to Coole. Other guests there were George Russell, the poet and writer, Douglas Hyde, 'John Eglinton',\(^4\) the brothers Fay, George Moore and Bernard Shaw, and Lady Gregory's home really became a centre of the literary life of Ireland of the last ten years.

From this great old house, almost covered by creeping vines, with the most beautiful garden I ever saw, the house in which were stored up so