Synge Watching His Rehearsals*

OLIVER ST JOHN GOGARTY

Then, farther up the town in Camden Street,¹ Synge would be sitting watching rehearsals. He sat silent, holding his stick between his knees, his chin resting on his hands. He spoke seldom. When he did, the voice came in a short rush, as if he wished to get the talk over as soon as possible. A dour, but not a forbidding man. Had he been less competent it might have been said of him on account of his self-absorption that he 'stood aloof from other minds. In impotence of fancied power.' He never relaxed his mind from its burden.

I asked him if he did not intend his 'Playboy' for a satire to show up, for one thing, how lifeless and inert was the country where a man could be hailed as a hero for doing something kinetic even though it were a murder, and how ineffectual, for, as the event showed, even that had not been committed. He gave me a short glance and looked straight in front of himself, weighing me up and thinking how hard it would be to get the public to appreciate his play as a work of art, when one who should know better was reading analogies and satire into it already. He shook my question off with a shake of his head.

* *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street; A Phantasy in Fact* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1937) pp. 283–4; (London: Sphere Books, 1968) pp. 292–3.

NOTE

Oliver St John Gogarty (1878–1957), Irish physician, wit, poet, and novelist; Senator of the Irish Free State (1922–36). An intimate friend of both Yeats and Joyce, he appears in *Ulysses* as Buck Mulligan. His many volumes of poetry include *The Ship* (1918), *An Offering of Swans* (1924) and *Others to Adorn* (1939). In 1937 he published a book of reminiscences, *As I Was Walking Down Sackville Street*, which became the cause of a famous libel action. In 1954 he published his autobiography, *It Isn't This Time of Year at All*.

1. The early headquarters of the Irish National Theatre Society were a modest hall in Camden Street, Dublin.