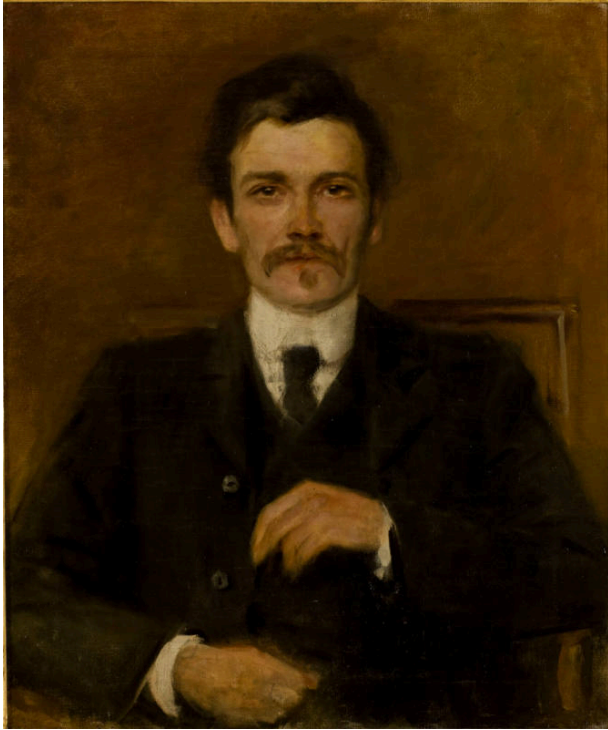


# Basic Detail Report

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## John Millington Synge

### Date

c 1905/1907

### Primary Maker

John Butler Yeats

### Medium

Oil on canvas

### Dimensions

75 x 62.6 cm

### Description

"And here's John Synge himself that rooted man,  
'Forgetting human words,' a grave deep face" 'The  
Municipal Gallery Revisited' by William Butler Yeats So

wrote William Butler Yeats about his friend and fellow writer John Millington Synge (1871-1909). Born in Dublin, Synge from an early age showed a passion for the arts and nature. He pursued a musical career while studying Irish and Hebrew at Trinity College. In 1892, he went to Germany to continue his study, but abandoned his musical ambitions 'seeing that Germans were so much more innately gifted with musical facilities than I was'. In 1895, he moved to Paris to study literature at the Sorbonne and it was here he met W.B. Yeats who advised him, 'go to the Aran Islands... express a life that has never found expression'. Remote and rural, the Aran Islands are located off the west coast of Ireland. The people and lifestyle were an endless source of fascination and inspiration for Synge, who made his first visit there in 1898. He learned the Irish language from the islanders and easily adapted to their lifestyle, playing his fiddle in their cottages. Synge returned to the Aran Islands for five consecutive summers, immersing himself in its folklore, tradition and music. In 1901, he completed his book 'The Aran Islands' drawing from his firsthand experiences on the island. Illustrated by Jack B. Yeats it was eventually published in 1907. His first play to be produced by the Irish Literary Theatre was 'In the Shadow of the Glen' in 1903. This was followed by 'Riders to the Sea' in 1904; 'The Well of the Saints' in 1905 and two years later his most famous play 'The Playboy of the Western World'. 'The Playboy' was the cause of riots in Dublin, with the audience reacting to what they regarded as blasphemous language. The repeated use of the word 'shift' (a woman's undergarment) was objected to as the audience felt it cast a slur on the propriety of Irish womanhood. The performances continued, but were accompanied by vociferous objections. Now 'The Playboy' is regarded as a masterpiece of Irish Theatre written in the English language. This portrait was commissioned by Hugh Lane in 1901 and in it John Butler Yeats captures the shy unobtrusive nature of this great playwright. It was painted c. 1905, just four years before the writer's untimely death. (Catalogue Entry [5]: A Century of Irish Painting - Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, 1997, pp. 142-143) 'Perhaps no one but

Dublin men who have lived abroad can quite realise the strange thrill it gave me to turn in from Harcourt-street - where I passed by to school long ago - and to find myself among Monets, and Manets and Renoirs, things I connect so directly with the life of Paris' - John Millington Synge, 24 January 1908.