DRAMATIC THEORY AND PRACTICE
IN THE IRISH LITERARY THEATRE
Costume for the Fool in "The Hour Glass" drawing by Edward Gordon Craig, 1910
A study of the Dramatic Theory
developed by the founders of The Irish Literary Theatre
and the attempt to apply this theory in The Abbey Theatre,
with particular reference to the achievements of the major
figures during the first two decades of the movement.

by
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Being a thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of London.
"What we wanted was to create for Ireland a theatre with a base of realism, with an apex of beauty," Lady Gregory wrote of the early Abbey. This study examines, with special reference to the theatre movement in Ireland during the first two decades of this century, the dramatic theory and practice developed by William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, and John Millington Synge, in their attempt to create an Irish literary theatre.

It begins by considering the background of all three writers in an effort to place each within the aesthetic and national climate which nurtured their development and affected their aims and practice. This section traces the major European and Irish currents of thought in which they were involved.

A theatre with a base of realism and an apex of beauty implies special qualifications and involves certain basic conflicts. The main body of the thesis is devoted to a study of the development in theory and craftsmanship of these three playwrights as each evolved a dramatic form which would satisfy his artistic theories. Emphasis is placed on the achievements of each during the period 1900 to 1919.

The general development of the theatre as distinct from the individual work of its directors is then considered, and a survey made of the gradual evolution of a policy which gave rise to "the Abbey tradition" of writing and acting. A brief examination is made of the degree of interdependence between playwright, player, producer, and audience.

The founders succeeded in creating a theatre, but not in realizing their dream. The final chapter places the individual achievement of Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge against this background of the general movement and the theatre they founded, in an effort to determine the cause of this success and failure, and the reality of the dream.
"If we all told the story we would all tell it differently," Yeats commented on the creation of the Abbey Theatre. The first study of the Irish literary movement appeared in 1894, five years before the theatre was born; the latest is but a few months old. Many books have been written, all contributing either through personal reminiscence or the discovery of new material to an increasingly detailed picture of the theatre and its founders. But in part because of the emotional forces which played a decisive role in its creation, in part because of the awesome stature of the major figures involved, most of these studies of the movement have been limited in aim and interpretation. All tend to restrict their examination to a horizontal survey of the early years; few attempt to disentangle the principles of the founders in order to trace the individual development of each.

There are obvious disadvantages to one who arrives on the scene sixty years late, for it is impossible to recapture the initial atmosphere of excitement that inevitably exists during a period of revaluation and re-creation. Yet there are compensating advantages: ardour has cooled, material is available, distance encourages perspective on a deeper and broader scale. The participants can be placed not only against each other, which frequently again leads to false perspective, but against the broader European background in which each was involved. Furthermore, the histories are written and the groundwork already explored. All students of Irish theatre owe much to the preliminary work done by A.E. Malone in The Irish Drama and by Professor Una Ellis-Fermor in The Irish Dramatic Movement.

I am indebted not only to these works but to much unpublished material hitherto unavailable. Mrs. L.M. Stephens, literary executor of the J.M. Synge estate, offered me not only hospitality but all of the Synge papers and the late E.M. Stephens's invaluable manuscript on the life and work of Synge. Mrs. W.B. Yeats gave me access to all of the
theatre material in her possession, including all the extant correspondence between Miss Horniman and the Abbey Directors and two scrapbooks, apparently collected by Lady Gregory, containing a record of Yeats's early public career; she also gave me permission to examine the drafts of his plays and all the material pertaining to his work which is now deposited in the National Library of Ireland. Miss Ria Mooney, present director of the Abbey Theatre, Miss Siobhan Mackenna, former actress at the Abbey, kindly answered innumerable questions. Mr. Edward Gordon Craig corresponded freely and helpfully; information was also received from Mr. Ezra Pound, Professor Denis Gwynn, Mr. Iain Fletcher, and Mr. Rupert Hart-Davis. Mr. Owen Linnane placed his valuable recollections of Edward Martyn at my disposal. My grateful thanks go also to Mr. Alf MacLochlain of the National Library of Ireland and Miss Mary Pollard of the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, for the endless pains both took in seeking out relevant information and material; also to Dr. Gwladys Downes, Mrs. A.LeBrocquy, Mrs. Dora McAuliffe, Mrs. Eleanor Morgan, and Mrs. R.N. White. Mrs. Yeats has kindly given me permission to print the Black Jester's prologue; she and The Macmillan Company have also allowed me to reprint the material in the other appendices; the illustrations are acknowledged separately.

The idea for this thesis first occurred during research for The Plays of John Millington Synge, an M.A. Thesis for Queen's University, Canada, in 1956. Work was begun under the direction of the late Professor Una Ellis-Fermor; it was brought to completion under the guidance of Miss Margery M. Morgan, whose patience and encouragement, as well as that of Professor Kathleen Tillotson, I gratefully acknowledge.
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PART ONE

PROLOGUE: DREAMS AND REALITIES
CHAPTER 1 - MANIFESTOS: 1897 AND 1919

In the autumn of 1897 a small group of public figures received the announcement of the birth of a new theatre. The recipients were carefully selected, having two characteristics in common, Irish sympathies and literary leanings. The signatories on the prospectus had very little else in common, and only one was in any sense well-known. The announcement read in part as follows:

We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us.

It was signed by Augusta Gregory, Edward Martyn, and William Butler Yeats.\(^1\) Response was generous and the experiment in Irish drama was realized. But one more literary theatre made very little difference to the general scene. New movements were almost an everyday occurrence in the 'nineties.

This movement persisted, however, and many of the same public figures were somewhat startled to read seven years later that it had gone to school in its own building (provided by an Englishwoman), thereby becoming "the first endowed Theatre in any English-speaking country."\(^2\) Once again first principles were expounded:

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\(^1\)Lady Gregory, Our Irish Theatre (London and New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1913), 8-9. Lady Gregory gives the date as 1898, but Yeats's letters to her in 1897 clearly indicate that the prospectus was circulated in that year. Cf. The Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 288 and 290.

\(^2\)"The Irish Dramatic Movement," Samhain, 1904.
First. Our plays must be literature or written in the spirit of literature....
Second. If we are to make a drama of energy, of extravagance, of phantasy, of musical and noble speech, we shall need an appropriate stage-management....
Third. We must have a new kind of scenic art....
The experiments of the Irish National Theatre Society will have of necessity to be for a long time few and timid, and we must often, having no money and not a great deal of leisure, accept for a while compromises, and much even that we know to be irredeemably bad. One can only perfect an art very gradually; and good playwriting, good speaking, and good acting are the first necessity.

The principles expounded differed little from those of the 1897 manifesto. However, both the audience addressed and the list of signatories had altered and expanded. All who could find their way to the Abbey Theatre on the less fashionable side of the River Liffey, whether of literary leanings or nationalist sympathy, were appealed to in Samhain. Edward Martyn's name is absent, but among the signatures of directors and players was included that of John Millington Synge.

Fifteen more years passed. The movement was of age, and had been received into the most conservative theatres of London and America. It had been praised and on occasion martyred. Books had been written about it; schools had been founded after it. Once more an open letter appeared, this time signed by only one director, W.B. Yeats, and addressed, through the public, to the other founder-director, Lady Gregory. The note of hopeful planning has been replaced by a tone of discouraged renunciation:

The Abbey Theatre can never do all we had hoped.... We have been the first to create a true "People's Theatre," and we have succeeded because it is not an exploitation of local colour, or of a limited form of drama possessing a temporary novelty, but the first doing of something for which the world is ripe, something that will be done all over the world and done more and more perfectly; the making articulate of all the dumb classes each with its own knowledge of the world, its own dignity, but all objective with the objectivity of the office and the workshop, of the newspaper and the street, of mechanism and of politics. Yet we did not set out to create this sort of theatre, and its success has been to me a discouragement and a defeat.... You and I and Synge, not understanding the clock, set out to bring again the Theatre of Shakespeare or rather perhaps of Sophocles.... We thought we could bring the

1"The Play, the Player, and the Scene," Samhain, 1904.
old folk-life to Dublin, patriotic feeling to aid us, and with the folk-life all the life of the heart, understanding heart, according to Dante's definition, as the most interior being; but the modern world is more powerful than any Propaganda or even than any special circumstance, and our success has been that we have made a theatre of the head, and persuaded Dublin playgoers to think about their own trade or profession or class and their life within it, so long as the stage curtain is up, in relation to Ireland as a whole. ...I want to create for myself an unpopular theatre and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour and never to many. ...not a theatre but the theatre's anti-self.

The Abbey Theatre as a "People's Theatre" continues: the early plays are rarely produced; the plays of one founding dramatist are studied throughout the world as examples of the finest twentieth century drama, the plays of another are too frequently treated as interesting "source books" for the exposition of his poetry, the name of the third is rarely heard outside of the company of her famous colleagues. And the theatre of which they had such high hopes has become a parody, albeit a good-natured one, of their Samhain principles. This failure, as Yeats observed, occurred long before 1919. Perhaps it had been incipient from the beginning. Perhaps the principles of Samhain were in fact impossible to fulfil. The purpose of this thesis is to trace those principles from their foundation to their final issue, and to attempt some estimate of the success and failure of Yeats's dream and of the movement he initiated.

For the opening of that small theatre in Lower Abbey Street marked not only the achievement of a dream held for a decade by a small nucleus of Irish men and women, but the convergence of many interests and ideals, provincial, national, and cosmopolitan. The history of the Abbey has been frequently and well told by players, playwrights, audience, and critics: how Yeats and Martyn brought Moore back to Ireland and were joined first by Lady Gregory, later by the Fay brothers; how the generous

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but single-minded English heiress, Annie Horniman, endowed a theatre to her fellow-theosophist's muse; how Yeats "discovered" their first great playwright in a Paris attic, and twenty years later his fellow-director nurtured the second in a Dublin slum; and how during the period between Synge and O'Connor the Abbey became a symbol not only of the "Celtic Renaissance," but of a specific tradition in playwriting, producing, and acting. By examining these numerous accounts and the plays themselves, supplemented by records hitherto unavailable, it is possible to isolate the basic theories developed by the leaders of the movement which culminated in the Abbey Theatre, and to trace those theories through various stages to their final form in Irish drama.¹

As Professor Ellis-Fermor illustrated, the leaders carried their ideals into the theatre workshop, where they were tempered into a definite tradition: "poetic faith, poetic practice, and poetic theory."² And one of the most distinctive features of the Abbey Theatre is that, like its famous predecessor the Théâtre-Libre, it was conceived and established primarily as a playwright's theatre. In this sense dramatic theory determined not only the form and material of the play but the actual production as well; in turn, as the playwrights were also the directors and producers, production, performance, and policy influenced the scope and structure of the play. However, this line of development was not as simple as it may sound. The dramatist-directors developed each at his own pace and in his own direction; occasionally the resultant plays never reached the Abbey company; frequently their plays varied considerably from both the "Abbey tradition" and the work of their colleagues. It is a tribute to the artistic integrity of all three that none was limited to or by the theatre they had created. A thorough examination of the

¹The latest of these histories, Gerard Fay's The Abbey Theatre: Cradle of Genius (London: Hollis and Carter, 1958), is restricted mainly to a more thorough study of the contributions of the Fays, but otherwise retraces old ground and occasionally sinks into the same quicksand. The best history of the movement remains, as Professor Ellis-Fermor indicated, A.E. Malone's The Irish Drama (London: Constable, 1929)

dramatic theory and practice developed by the founders of the Irish
dramatic movement requires one step further still, therefore, back
to the initial impulse which stirred each, to an analysis of the basic
motives that resulted in the formation not only of an Irish theatre but
of their own individual plays.

Like its sister theatres on the continent, the Abbey was the product
of mixed parentage, one parent cosmopolitan and sophisticated, the other
ruder and more provincial. Despite nationalistic stirrings, Dublin of
the nineteenth century was still both artistically and socially the
second capital of the Empire: those who were Protestant and
sufficiently wealthy sent their children to England (and to England's
Irish outpost, Trinity College) for their education, and to France for
their culture; those who were Catholic and wealthy did the same; the
others on the whole scrambled through what education they could in
Ireland. The link with England through Castle, government, and trade
was strong if at times difficult for some to bear; Paris had for so
long been a refuge of "wild geese" and political exiles that a strong
sympathetic bond had been forged between the French and the Irish,
ocasionally exhibiting itself in subversive underground movements.

Consequently the young writers of the "ascendancy class", educated
abroad, returned to their homeland with a cosmopolitan background
which rested comfortably if not always unselfconsciously on their
shoulders. Further, distance and a broader basis of experience
invested them with a more objective, critical, and hence occasionally
didactic, attitude towards their country and countrymen. And most
important of all, participation in the restless, constantly shifting,

1 Cf. Elizabeth Plunkett, Countess of Fingall, Seventy Years Young
As Told to Pamela Hinkson (London: Collins, 1937), 456-70 et passim.

2 Maud Gonne MacBride, A Servant of the Queen (London: Gollancz,
1938), chs. 3, 15 et passim.

3 Cf. John Eglinton [W. K. Magee], Preface to Anglo-Irish Essays
(Dublin: Talbot Press, 1917), 4-5.
allegiances and coteries of the arts abroad stirred them to propagate their own aesthetic ideals at home.

Examined in retrospect, the origin of the Irish dramatic movement might in fact be considered the third stage of a favourite twentieth century theme - the exile's return. The early years of Yeats, Martyn, and Moore followed the curiously similar pattern appropriate to their birth and station. All three had spent part of their boyhood in London and chose to return there as young men. While Martyn went up to Oxford, the other two studied painting, Moore in Paris and Yeats in Dublin. By the 1880's all were once again in London, intent on literary careers, and while each made regular trips to Ireland and occasional visits to the continent, for the last decade of the nineteenth century their centre of intellectual interest remained London. Even their literary apprenticeship followed similar lines: poetry, novels, plays and critical essays with varying success. (The tradition of creating dramatists out of other material still exists in the Abbey Theatre). Although Lady Gregory's development as a dramatist occurred much later, she too arrived by a devious route, through research into folklore, translation from the Irish, and collaboration. As wife of a colonial governor, she had journeyed extensively abroad, gained an increasing critical knowledge and experience of the arts, and for many years kept a house in London. 1 "AE", too, shared his colleagues' cosmopolitanism: born in Ulster, he may have spent some of his early years in London, 2 and after a desultory study of painting in Dublin, devoted himself to the study


2 A private letter to the present writer suggests that he might have studied for some time in London; this has not been verified.
of theosophy, which in itself presupposes an international outlook,\(^1\) and to the propagation of Horace Plunkett's economic land reforms. The youngest of that company, John Synge, travelled directly to the continent from Trinity College, and for ten years divided his time between Paris and rural Ireland. He, too, passed from one art to the other, studying music before finally turning to poetry, criticism, and drama.

This dual education proved of advantage when the forces gathered in Dublin at the end of the century. Having been educated to look beyond Ireland for their culture, they were prevented by their Irish heritage from complete identification with any other nation. Although each possessed the instincts of the Irish by nature from childhood, extensive travel gave them a cosmopolitan attitude towards the arts and their own country, thereby preserving them from the greatest dangers of an insular habit of mind. Nor were they hampered by any sense of inferiority which might prevent them from participating in the intellectual activities they discovered in their travels, no matter how self-conscious they might become at home. For the contribution of Irish men of letters to world literature was already a firmly established tradition, which would extend from Goldsmith, Congreve, Sheridan, Swift, through Allingham, Boucicault and Wilde, to Shaw and Joyce.

Equally significant and provocative in the formation of the Irish dramatic movement was the fresh wave of nationalist feeling which was flooding the political and literary circles of Dublin, carrying on its crest most of the individual and highly eloquent leaders of the time and even seeping through the hitherto impervious gates of Trinity College. Irish wares, literature, and language became fashionable, and Irish writers discovered overnight the vast unfathomed treasure of their own folklore and legend, buried until now in dusty manuscripts. To

\(^1\)Cf. The Internationalist, edd. George Russell and H.A.W. Coryn, Dublin, 1897-1898.
these returned "exiles," came the inevitable question, where there is so much native material, might not there also be a native audience? Must the drama, like most of the literature, remain "cross-channel" in subject and inspiration as well as in policy and performance? And so the desire to create a truly indigenous drama took its place beside the impulse to create an ideal theatre of the arts.

The origin of the Abbey Theatre was, then, artificial in the sense that it resulted from a deliberate and self-conscious effort to create something out of two disparate elements. That the graft was at all successful is due not only to the condition of the soil, but to the skill and inspiration of those who tended it. One of the purposes of this study will be an attempt to determine what qualities effected this transformation, its permanency, its originality, and, most essential of all in the production of an artistic form, its creativity.
CHAPTER 2 - NATIONALISM

We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us.

(Irish Literary Theatre Prospectus, 1897)

There are things a man must not do to save a nation.

(John O'Leary)

Nurtured as he was on the cosmopolitan ideals of France, England, and Norway, it was only natural that when Yeats met Lady Gregory in 1896 their talk "turned on plays." But this most public of the arts had another appeal, perhaps most obvious in Lady Gregory. For despite their nominal membership of the "Ascendancy" class, Yeats, Martyn and Lady Gregory had each developed strong nationalist sentiments. For none of them could Art for its own sake remain sufficient; Art must somehow, without lowering its own standard in any way, be for the Nation as well. Ten years later the title page of The Arrow, founded by the Abbey directors in defiance of the very audience they wished to serve, would flaunt the following quotation from Wagner:

In the Theatre there lies the spiritual seed and kernel of all national poetic and national moral culture. No other branch of Art can ever truly flourish or ever aid in cultivating the people until the Theatre's all-powerful assistance has been completely recognised and guaranteed.

In the late 'nineties, however, while declaring their belief in "national life and national feeling" as "the basis of admirable literature," the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre must have wondered at their own temerity in striding forth where so many had already fallen.


3Quotation from Yeats' lecture on "Dramatic Ideals and the Irish Literary Theatre," Dublin Daily Express, 8 May 1899, 6.
For despite indications of literary uprisings in Irish literature, the intellectual climate of Dublin was not markedly different from that of earlier decades of the century. Writers of Irish literature in the English language could roughly be separated into two main parties: the "West Britons" or literary Unionists whose residence in Ireland seemed a mere accident from a literary point of view, and the true Anglo-Irish writers who, if not always writing for Ireland, wrote of it.

Professor Edward Dowden of Trinity College might be considered the "grand old man" of literary Unionism. Poet, scholar, critic, and boyhood friend of John Butler Yeats, "for perhaps a couple of years he was an image of romance" to the painter's son. His "quiet influence" was praised by Nationalist and English alike, but he did not have the imagination (or in the Yeatses' opinion the courage) to believe in an Irish renaissance, and remained distrustful of any movement that broke away from the great traditions of the English renaissance. Perhaps his closest contact with the new movement was unknown to him, when a young college student, John Synge, recorded and preserved his lectures on the ethical qualities of Elizabethan literature.

Trinity College tended to remain a bulwark of anti-nationalism in the eyes of the young literary nationalists, however. Professor Atkinson incurred lasting opprobrium by publicly declaring that the "Gaelic Irish literature" on which their hopes and beliefs were based, was "intolerably low in tone," having "very little idealism in it, and

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4 Collected papers of John Millington Synge in the possession of Mrs. L.M. Stephens.
very little imagination. And in 1914 Provost Mahaffy gained notoriety by prohibiting "the man Pearse" from lecturing within the College walls. But even when favourably disposed towards the new movement, such Trinity College men as George Savage-Armstrong (1845-1906) and Dr. John Todhunter (1839-1916) remained English both in output and outlook, preferring the spirit of Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth to the "ancient idealism" of the Celt. For any forecast of the renaissance at the end of the century, therefore, we must look elsewhere.

The term describing the work of our second general category of Irish writers, "Anglo-Irish literature," has always been a difficult one to define. It was used most accurately, perhaps, by Thomas MacDonagh, now celebrated as one of the patriots of 1916, known then not only as "helper and friend" to the schoolmaster Pearse, but as an astute literary critic and one of the more hopeful poets. In a collection of essays published in 1916 MacDonagh looks back on the literary movement which had to all appearances then passed its zenith:

The term Anglo-Irish literature is worth having as a term only to apply to the literature produced by the English-speaking Irish, and by those in general only when writing in Ireland and for the Irish people .... so much in love with Ireland, ... in consonance with the Irish rhythm of life and literature, in converse with Irish people and out of converse with others.

By applying this measure, MacDonagh felt justified in rejecting certain

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1Quoted by Standish O'Grady in a review of Lady Gregory's Gods and Fighting Men, All-Ireland Review, 28 January 1905,41.

2This gave rise to a publication in 1947 of Yeats's speech at the Thomas Davis Centenary meeting, held in Dublin on November 20th,1914 with Dr. Mahaffy's prohibition, and an unpublished protest by AE. Cf. Tribute to Thomas Davis (Oxford:Cork University Press,1947). Pearse was one of the leaders of the Easter Rebellion in 1916.

3See below, chapter 4, p.190ff.

writers of Gaelic stock as "more Greek than Gael," and accepting such alien friends as Lionel Johnson and Nora Cheson.¹

Yeats, like all successful autocrats inclined to create, alter, or discard on the sincerity of the moment, was willing to extend his interpretation of Anglo-Irish letters not only to embrace his good friends Lionel Johnson and Arthur Symons, but to sense an undefined Celtic sympathy even in such opposite forces as William Blake and Maurice Maeterlinck. But if he allowed himself extremes in one direction, he channelled his enthusiasms in others. Like two other major Irish critics, the brilliant but testy historian Standish O'Grady, and "our one philosophical critic," John Eglinton,² Yeats never succumbed to the Irish language as thoroughly as George Moore or Edward Martyn, believing instead that "we must put Irish emotion into the English language if we were to reach our generation."³ For the purposes of this study, then, we may accept as Anglo-Irish writers those authors who wrote for Ireland and the Irish, while maintaining their belief in literature "as an expression of such insight into life and nature as man can gain by any means in his power."⁴

The Anglo-Irish tradition of letters has been a long and noble if not always consistent one, achieving its greatest breadth and following in the nineteenth century. It in turn can be sub-divided as to motive, between those who, although self-consciously Irish, wrote with one eye cocked at the English market, and those who were content, sometimes naively so, to sing their native woodnotes wild. Some of the more sophisticated writers were distinctively Irish only in subject matter, such as the poet William Allingham (1824-1889), whose best lyrics

²Samhain, 1904.
display the lightness and grace which so charmed his friends Ruskin and Rossetti; but even Allingham did not hesitate to import the English fairy kingdom when required. Others, more consistently and deliberately Irish, yet remained travellers in a strange land, observing, recording, occasionally in the interests of good story-telling exaggerating, the life about them. Earlier writers such as the novelists, Samuel Lover (1797-1868), Charles Lever (1806-1872), and Gerald Griffin (1803-1840), although possessing a gift for character and situation, had remained Irish "on purpose rather than out of the necessity of ... blood."¹ Even "the great Maria," Miss Edgeworth (1767-1849), destined for dual fame through her influence on the model chosen by the new nationalists, Sir Walter Scott, had flinched from the realities staring at her during the miseries of famine and poverty.²

But the Anglo-Irish writers to whom the new nationalists looked for encouragement and example came of a different strain. These were the novelists and poets who wrote not only of Ireland but only for Ireland as well. Some belonged to the Ascendancy class; many more came from the peasantry of whom they spoke and sang. At their best they achieved a "square-built power"³ and realism in advance of their fellow novelists in England; at their worst they lapsed into the "buffoonery and easy sentiment" deplored by the new literary school. Among the novelists, William Carleton (1794-1869), "the Walter Scott of Ireland,"⁴ perhaps best known for his Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry (1830), is outstanding. Of peasant stock and casual education, Carleton was well qualified among those who "saw the whole of everything they looked at ... the brutal with the tender, the coarse with the refined."⁵ In 1889 Yeats edited a selection of

¹Yeats's letter to Father Matthew Russell, December 1889, Letters, 143.
³Yeats, letter to Father Matthew Russell, December 1889, Letters, 143.
⁴Daniel O'Connor, quoted by Kiely, Poor Scholar, 177.
⁵Yeats, ibid.
Carleton's stories, and two years later gave him pride of place in his Representative Irish Tales. As late as 1901 he mentioned proudly that his publisher found him equal with Carleton in unpopularity among Dublin booksellers.

A less virile strain had entered Irish literature with the poetry of Thomas Moore (1779-1852), whose "dazzling lightness and insincere sentiment" were frowned upon by later sterner critics. But the tenderness and pathos of Moore's Irish Melodies (1807) and National Airs (1815) coloured poets' visions of Ireland for almost a century. The popular sentiment of his poetry in turn paved the way for the sentimental nationalism and propaganda of The Nation, whose founders "united literature to their politics and civil morality to literature." Charles Gavan Duffy (1816-1903), editor of the newspaper, and Thomas Davis (1814-1845), leading spirit of The Nation's political school of poetry, together inspired and created the picture of Ireland still broadcast by sentimental Irish emigrants, raising Irish patriotism to "a sort of religious or idealistic status" later realists have never been allowed to alter. By encouraging and publishing the poems of Irish men and women of all classes and creeds, The Nation truly became the voice of Ireland, but the sacrifice of quality to quantity built up an idealistic concept of Ireland which became so mingled with patriotism that criticism automatically implied a dismissal of national values as well. "If we said that The Spirit of the Nation [a collection of selections

1Stories from Carleton (London: Walter Scott, 1888); Representative Irish Tales, First Series (NY and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1891).
4Brooke, op. cit., xii.
from the newspaper was but salutary rhetoric, England might overhear us and take up the cry. Although recognizing the importance of such "images for the affections ... the Soldier, the Orator, the Patriot, the Poet, the Chieftain, and above all the Peasant," Yeats and his colleagues deplored the rhetoric, convention and sentimentality begotten by this levelling process. Believing that "the sentimental mind is the bourgeois mind" (and the Irish are descendants of kings), they in their turn dreamed of the unspoilt peasant untouched by "the mind of the town," at times perhaps just as artificial an ideal as the one against which they so violently reacted. A great deal of Yeats's own unpopularity in Ireland can be traced to his frequent and vehement denunciations of what AE called "boycottish" propaganda which lacked "a single thought older than a boy of twenty-one might have." Many years later Yeats still had difficulty shaking off memories of "the Tower and wolf-dog, harp and shamrock, verdigris-green sectaries who wrecked my movement for the time."

But deplorable as its aesthetic qualities might be, "the rhymed


3Samhain,1905,6; Synge diaries, Stephens MS.


5AE to Sean O'Faolain, 5 April 1933, quoted by Monk Gibbon, The Early Years of George Russell (AE) and his Connection with the Theosophical Movement, Ph.D. Thesis for Trinity College, Dublin,1947-48,383.

6Letter to Olivia Shakespear, 1 August 1921, Letters,672. Mrs. Shakespear was the "Diana Vernon" of his early years in London.
lesson book of Davis'\textsuperscript{1} provided not only an outlet for hitherto mute
inglorious patriots, but a source and goal to which they could direct
previously scattered or unexpressed hopes and ideals. Even in the
"rhetoricians" and "newspaper hacks"\textsuperscript{2} there could be detected "a
certain dignity, an intensity born of continuity of purpose."\textsuperscript{3} For
the first time since the rebellion of 1798, Ireland had a rallying
point. Without this step away from localized or provincial loyalties
towards nationalism, no matter how artificial the conjuration, the
later hopes of the literary nationalists could never have been realized,
new "images for the affections" never forged. "They taught fervour,
and labour, and religious toleration, and left that memory for an
inspiration to the young men of Ireland."\textsuperscript{4} Nor was that inspiration
reserved for the "Young Ireland" of the middle class and peasantry.
The impressive funeral cortège devoted to Thomas Davis resulted in the
poetry of "Speranza," the future Lady Wilde.\textsuperscript{5} And as a young girl
Lady Gregory,\textsuperscript{6} "best customer for Fenian books," chose for her
birthday gift that same collection of The Nation's poetry which
inspired Speranza. (Nor was her youthful enthusiasm dampened when
a doubtful sister qualified the gift by the inscription, "Patriotism
is the last refuge of the scoundrel."\textsuperscript{6})

Alongside the "Young Ireland" or Nation writers, two nationalist
poets excite interest for their originality and genius, James Clarence
Mangan (1803-1849) and Sir Samuel Ferguson (1810-1886).\textsuperscript{7} Notable

\textsuperscript{1}Tribute to Thomas Davis,1914,16.
\textsuperscript{2}Yeats, "The New Irish Library," The Bookman,June 1896,83
\textsuperscript{3}Lady Gregory, Introduction to The Kiltartan Poetry Book
\textsuperscript{4}Yeats, "Young Ireland," The Bookman,January 1897,120.
\textsuperscript{5}Patrick Byrne, The Wildes of Merrion Square (London:Staples
\textsuperscript{6}Lady Gregory. Kiltartan Poetry Book,4.
\textsuperscript{7}Cf. Gerard Manfred Hopkins' description of Ferguson's poetry in a
letter to Coventry Patmore,7 November 1866, Further Letters of Gerard
for their technical virtuosity and breadth of treatment, both poets in a sense helped initiate the true Celtic revival which gained such prominence in the 1890's and the early twentieth century. Almost a century earlier poets such as J.J. Callanan (1795-1829) and Edward Walsh (1805-1850) had introduced Gaelic refrains and references to Gaelic poems in their work; Allingham had re-worked and distributed old street ballads; the poets of The Nation had invoked the name of the ancient Gael. Now Ferguson and Mangan, and to a certain extent Aubrey de Vere (1814-1902), not only translated the ancient literature of the Gael, but reintroduced his very spirit, the "peculiar strain of mingled homeliness and grandeur, of simplicity and elaboration, of sensuousness and mysticism."¹ The works of both differ strongly from the propagandist verse of the time, although both were in their own ways strongly nationalist. Their most distinguishing feature is, perhaps, their scholarship, for they combined the passionate subject and temper of the Irish translations with a thorough knowledge of foreign work. Mangan translated extensively from the German, following the fashion in Orientalism as well. Ferguson turned to the classics, attempting with Irish subjects the breadth and manner of the epic. Both tempered their patriotism to their art, and by doing so provided the models the writers of the 'nineties were seeking.

If literatures are to go on they must add art to impulse and temper their fire with knowledge. Literary Ireland is going through such a training. The days of Davis were followed by those of Allingham's Ballyshannon songs and de Vere's "Innisfail" and his "Legends of St. Patrick" and Ferguson's later and greater work, his "Deirdre" and "Conary." Those men were all experimenters, trying to find out a literary style that would be polished and yet Irish of the Irish. Those who follow them have their work made more easy through their experiments.²

Ferguson's Lays of the Western Gael (1864) in particular, the first work of any length to deal with the epic cycles of Ireland, can perhaps

¹T.W. Rolleston, Treasury of Irish Poetry, 115.
be considered the Chronicle on which later writers based and developed and expanded their work. But neither Ferguson nor Mangan achieved the recognition they deserved, and Yeats may have been thinking of these two writers when he explained his own intentions in writing *The Secret Rose* (1897):

> It is at any rate an honest attempt towards that aristocratic esoteric Irish literature, which has been my chief ambition. We have a literature for the people but nothing yet for the few.¹

But the field which mainly concerned the new movement as a whole was the drama. Dublin had always been, and often still is, used as a "trial run" for English productions. Actor-managers considered their frequent visits as important extensions of their provincial tours. In the past there had been occasional Irish "stars" and more frequently managers (Thomas Sheridan [1719-1788], the playwright's father, who provoked one of the most notable of Dublin's early theatre riots²; Joseph Ashbury [1638-1720], actor, manager, Master of the Revels under five monarchs), but on the whole the traffic maintained a steady east-westerly stream.³ There are occasional records, also, of "native Irish" plays: *The Pride of Life*, a fragment of fifteenth century morality;⁴ an improvised Masque enacted in the Abbey of Galway the year after the Armada;⁵ Ireland's first comedy in 1663, *Hic et Ubique, or the Humours of Dublin*, by Richard Head;⁶ the first comedy of Dublin manners about

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⁴Clark, *ibid.*, 9.
⁵"Ireland and the Drama," *All-Ireland Review*, ed. Standish O'Grady, 23 November 1901, 297.
1700, St. Stephen's Green: or The Generous Lovers, by the Governor of Londonderry's son, William Philips, whose dedication opens with the significant remark: "I writ it, and for our Irish Stage"; in the next century William Carleton recalled his rôle at the age of ten (1804) as stage-director and prompter to amateur productions on the stage of Derry and the Battle of Aughrim; and in 1899, a drama critic looking back nostalgically over twenty-two years, recalled "a rattling good Irish pantomine ... racy of the soil" entitled "The Man in the Moon, or Dan O'Rourke and the Eagle: Harlequin O'Donaghe of the Lakes and the Leprechauns of the Fairy Valley."

But although the Irish appear to have early shown an innate love for the stage and oratory, they produced very few plays themselves; what is even more puzzling, they were content to accept the English theatre tradition of "the stage Irishman." From the 1897 declaration of war against "buffoonery and easy sentiment" to Yeats's withdrawal from his "people's theatre" in 1919, the literary revolutionists waged war against this walking cliché that had become so firmly imbedded in popular fiction and drama. Audiences and playwrights alike, increasingly self-conscious of this false portrayal of Irish life and character on the stage, became hyper-sensitive to any representation which might slander or impute any indignity to the fair name of Ireland. It is worthwhile, therefore, to examine more closely the four faces of this stock character as he appeared first to playgoers of the seventeenth century and later both in dramas and novels.

When he first appeared on the stage, the stock Irishman could be distinguished in four main rôles: "the Irish in Dumb Show, the sham Irishman, the Irish soldier, and the Irish serving man." The first

1Clark, op. cit.,116-17.
2Kiely, Poor Scholar,36-37.
3"Hokey-Pokey," "Thirty Years of ... Dublin Pantomimes," The Irish Playgoer 21 December 1899,18-20.
4Clark, The Early Irish Stage, 77 et passim.
two depended on a particular type of plot, and so their appearances were limited. As the soldier and serving man, however, the stage Irishman really came into his own. Shakespeare's fiery Captain Macmorris (1599) gave way to Jonson's less savoury Captain Whit (1631); both spoke variants of the bastard dialect most fully employed by Jonson in his Irish Masque (1613) and faithfully reproduced by playwrights of the next two centuries. The faithful serving man had a more sympathetic if not less extravagant lineage: a strong genial Irish footman first appeared in The Life of Sir John Oldcastle (1600) and reached his fullest characterization as the witty, likeable Teg of Sir Robert Howard's The Committee (1662). Prototype for all later fictional Irishmen, Teg possessed all the qualities generally associated with his race: friendliness, loyalty, poverty; a seemingly inexhaustible stock of spurious experiences attributed to Saint Patrick; mild but frequent profanity, outrageous blunders and "bulls"; whiskey (poitín) and potatoes for his diet, shamrocks for his emblem, shillelas for comfort, and pigs for company.¹

Like all stage characters, the stock Irishman must have originally had some basis in fact; his mispronunciations and apparently incomprehensible phrases can, for example, frequently be traced to the original Gaelic.² By the time Teg arrived, however, all attempts at authenticity had apparently disappeared. Both on the English and the Irish stage this stock character became a convention, usually as an object for laughter. More serious still, even those Anglo-Irish authors who wrote for their own Dublin audiences accepted this convention,³ and so we see Teg, now a peasant, reflected in the novel as well. Even Maria Edgeworth (Castle Rackrent, 1800) and William Carleton (Parra


²Bartley, op. cit., 441-42.

³cf. the negro minstrel who whitened his face to play a white man and blackened it to play a black man, described by Yeats, Autobiographies, 563.
Sastha; or Paddy-Go-Easy and his wife, Nancy, 1845), could, with the best of intentions, be guilty of selling their birthright. By the nineteenth century, then, this national caricature was well in control of both the stage and the novel, and had lost nearly all basis in fact.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, when drama in Ireland appeared to have lost any vigour it might once have had, audiences turned with relief to Dion Boucicault (1820-1890), an Irish-American playwright-actor-manager. Exiles in America, always intensely nationalist, found in such dramas as The Colleen Bawn; or the Brides of Garryowen (1860), Arrah-na-Pogue; or The Wicklow Wedding (1865), and The Shaughraun (1875) a combination of the whole-hearted laughter associated with the stock Irish character and the sentimental dreams they held of Ireland. Although born in Dublin, Boucicault achieved fame first in America and England, not only for his "skill and shrewdness in knocking together effective situations and spinning lively dialogue," but for his practical reforms as playwright and theatre manager. He arrived at a time when Ireland needed new blood; the stage Irishman with his shillela and brogue had strutted the boards too long as food for the laughter of his English conquerors; Boucicault's melodramas flattered local self-esteem, and as late as 1909 he was commended for his ability to "put his countrymen in a pleasant, bright, and agreeable light, and not to degrade them."

But although moving away from the typical stock comic character and spurious dialect employed by his predecessors, Boucicault was writing to suit the demands of the audience; consequently his dramas reflected current taste rather than any dramatic ideal. He presented a

1 Henry James, quoted by Michael Ó hAodha, "On the Track of Boucicault," Irish Times, 6 and 7 February 1960.
2 Ó hAodha, ibid.
heightened picture of Ireland that homesick or sentimental audiences wanted to see rather than any realistic picture of the people as he saw them. And, because the national stock character had for so long dominated the Irish stage, Boucicault was not averse to including a touch of him as well, for those who still held him in sentimental regard. Nor did his dictum, "plays are not written, they are re-written," die with him;\(^1\) melodramatic variations on his themes and echoes of his high-sounding rhetoric and deeds of daring continued to be applauded well into the twentieth century.\(^2\) "We may regret that the average audience in Ireland should prefer the modern music hall comedy to the works of even Shakespeare himself," commented the editor of The Irish Playgoer in 1899, "but all the regret in the world will not alter the fact."\(^3\) And a comparison of the theatre programmes for 1899 with those listed in his Theatre Diary of 1907 by Joseph Holloway, Abbey Theatre architect and self-appointed arbiter of public taste, indicates no radical change.\(^4\)

Despite the melodramatic ideal Boucicault held up for Irish theatre, however, his influence in turning the spotlight away from the laughable stage Irishman towards a more sympathetic and human if not less unrealistic character cannot be denied, nor can his importance as a man of the theatre be under-rated. He restored pride of nationality to the

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\(^1\) Quoted by O hAodha, op.cit.

\(^2\) Cf. "Irish Drama: A Symposium," New Ireland Review, III,2 (April 1895), 104-114; "All Ireland," United Irishman, 10 May 1902, 1; letter from Joseph Holloway, 27 January 1907 to Father Sheehy of All Hallows College in reply to a request for "good Anglo-Irish plays, not ... the Abbey ones," quoted in Holloway's Diary, National Library of Ireland MS 1805, 62.

\(^3\) "A Foreword," The Irish Playgoer, Dublin, 9 November 1899, 11.

stage, and the audience in turn, once initiated, zealously guarded it. Indeed, by breaking ground for the reformers of the early twentieth century, Boucicault at the same time increased the natural distrust by the audience of the playwright: he too came under suspicion. And the tradition of theatre rioting which had begun in the seventeenth century thus continued under new management in the Abbey Theatre three centuries later.

When Yeats, Martyn, and Lady Gregory published their manifesto and declared their faith in the people, the traditions in drama, prose, and poetry were therefore against them. The literary traffic of Ireland, like that of England, pursued its sluggish journey down the centre of the stream, rarely daring to alter course. But at the same time, the revolutionary triumvirate was not working completely alone or without example. They were, in fact, the logical and legitimate successors to a movement that had been quietly but steadily acquiring momentum and followers throughout the preceding decade.

Although generally referred to as the "Celtic Renaissance," the increasing interest in the early literature of the Gael might with more accuracy be termed a revival of Irish scholarship. For its original impetus was critical and corrective rather than creative; indeed, one of the permanent characteristics of this movement throughout its various phases has been its emphasis on teaching, whether of individuals, particular groups, or the general public. Its beginning was rooted in traditional scholarship, however, thereby limited to the isolated few who, in the nineteenth century, were not only familiar with the Irish language but qualified to work with the twelve or fourteen hundred octavo volumes of manuscripts then available. It

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1 Cf. Beltaine, Samhain, United Irishman editorials, etc.
is perhaps significant, also, that this astonishing mass of relatively untouched material should be popularized outside Ireland before receiving general recognition within the country itself. Long before Arnold had delivered his memorable plea for the study of Celtic literature or Trinity College had made room in its curriculum for the study of Irish history, German scholarship was attacking the field with customary industry: first Zueß in 1853 with his *Grammatica Celtique*, followed by Windisch and Zwemmer, and, most popular and industrious of all, Dr. Kuno Meyer, who came to study and remained to teach. Irish scholars and their colleagues in England and America took up the work, and interpretation, often exceedingly free, followed translation, so that by the latter part of the century an increased awareness of the literature of their own country prompted a renewed interest in Irish history, archeology, theology, legend, and, finally, the language itself.

There had, of course, been individual forays into these related fields before, especially in the field of Irish folk music and song, which had long held a fascination for the collector and musicologist. Collections of traditional music had been made by Bunting (1796), Hudson (1841), Petrie (1855), Pigot (1842), and P.W. Joyce (1873); Thomas Moore had composed verses for many anonymous tunes. But whereas the earlier historians had been prompted simply to collect, the renewed interest in the songs of the Fíoleas, Brehons and Seanachies of the Druidic age, the harpers of the thirteenth century, the wandering songsters of a later period, reflected a more personal, immediate approach. Yeats, Douglas Hyde, Lady Gregory concerned themselves more with the character of the bard himself than with his representative or collectors' value; Douglas Hyde's translation of the *Love Songs of*  

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Connacht, while retaining the charm and naïveté of the original, was a work of art in itself; Yeats's search for legends and traditions of fairy and folklore was to a great extent part of his lifelong search for himself in a world scheme; Lady Gregory haunted the cottages of her tenants and sought out the blind poet Raftery's lonely, unmarked grave.

The reaction in other branches of the "Renaissance" similarly reflected this personal interest. Petrie and Stokes with their archeological and architectural studies of early Ireland paved the way for a fresh interest not only in history but in things religious; Edward Martyn strove to preserve traditional music and improve church decoration, interests perhaps resulting largely from his own aesthetic asceticism; Katharine Tynan and Eleanor Hull wrote of the lives of the saints. And just as the folklore and peasant scholarship of Douglas Hyde, Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge idealized the Celt as peasant, the popular folk history and mythology of Standish O'Grady, Lady Gregory, Alfred Nutt, T.W.Rolleston, William Larminie and Eleanor Hull (as well as countless other minor popular historians) exalted the Celt as hero. The epic cycles of romance, taken from the Book of the Dun Cow, the Book of Leinster, the Speckled Book, and the Yellow Book of Lecan confirmed this mixture of ancient mythology with great heroic battles. The new generation desired, in fact, not a realistic knowledge of past history, but an indication for the future, a "deliberate creation of a kind of Holy City in the imagination" erected over the cairns of ancient gods and heroes. AE confided in Yeats his hope for an Irish millenium; Yeats planned a "Légende des Siècles of Ireland," and Lionel Johnson and Lady Gregory furthered the dream; Synge alone.

1 In her notes to Cuchulain of Muirthemne (London: John Murray, 1902) and Gods and Fighting Men (London: John Murray, 1904), Lady Gregory lists most of the early authorities on whose work later writers based their studies and translations.

2 Yeats, Autobiographies, 493-94.


4 Yeats, op. cit.
objected to their pattern of fairy belief and epic legend, retaining his Aran Islands within a realistic framework.¹

Occasionally there were objections to this method of regaining a national literature: Standish O'Grady rebuked Lady Gregory for her "refinement" of the Saga story,² then objected to the dramatization of the Deirdre legend on moral grounds.³ John Eglinton questioned whether "anything but belles lettres, as distinguished from a national literature, is likely to spring from a determined pre-occupation" with these ancient legends of Ireland.⁴ And when Yeats and Moore dared to interpret the legend of Diarmuid and Grania in their own way, the general public joined the protest.⁵

Meanwhile, however, this renewed interest in things Irish prompted a slight industrial renaissance as well. The All-Ireland Review, edited by Standish O'Grady, campaigned for the use of Irish matches and patronage of the Irish Industrial Fair; gradually a new nationalism arose which attempted to displace the old hatred of England with a concern for Ireland. In 1889 Horace Plunkett formed the first agricultural organisation society in an effort to beat the Danish market for England, in bacon, eggs, and butter. In ten years there were over two hundred societies and a system of agricultural banks, organised under Plunkett's banner by AE.⁶ Ireland was beginning to stir.

¹Letter from Lady Gregory to Synge, quoted in Greene and Stephens, J.M. Synge, 120-121.
²All-Ireland Review, 3, 23 (9 August 1902), 357. However, see his review of Gods and Fighting Men, AIR 6, 4 (28 January 1905), 41-42.
³AE eventually capitulated. The controversy was carried on through the Dublin Daily Express and many of the essays later published in Literary Ideals in Ireland (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899).
⁴"What Should be the Subjects of a National Drama?" Literary Ideals in Ireland, 11.
⁵See below. Part II, ch. 8, p. 472.
⁶Lady Gregory, "Ireland, Real and Idea," Nineteenth Century, November 1898, 770-774.
Alongside Plunkett's Society of Agricultural Co-operation grew a revival of interest in the Irish language; mainly through the efforts of Douglas Hyde and Dr. George Sigerson the Gaelic League was founded in 1893, a society which aimed "not at getting rid of English but at 'keeping Irish spoken where it is spoken still.'"\(^1\)

The agricultural organisations prospered in comparative peace, but the language question remained controversial. Douglas Hyde spoke frequently and vehemently on "the necessity for de-Anglicizing Ireland";\(^2\) of his own book of Gaelic poems he wrote, "I would like better to make even one good verse in the language in which I am now writing, than to make a whole book of verse in English. For if there should be any good found in my English verse, it would not go to the credit of my mother, Ireland, but of my stepmother, England."\(^3\) At the height of his Irish enthusiasm George Moore threatened to disown his brother's children if they did not immediately learn to speak Irish,\(^4\) and Edward Martyn was for many years a member of the Coisde Gnotha, governing body of the Gaelic League.\(^5\) Lady Gregory, on the other hand, advocated bi-lingualism,\(^6\) and Yeats, although in his usual politic manner remaining on friendly terms with the Gaelic Leagers (at one time he even advocated the establishment of a Gaelic touring

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\(^1\)Ibid., 775-78.


\(^3\)Translated and quoted by Lady Gregory in Poets and Dreamers 3rd ed. (Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1903), 76.


\(^6\)"Ireland, Real and Ideal," Nineteenth Century, November, 1898, 775.
company for the Abbey)\(^1\), never seriously studied the language. But Synge, who had studied Irish at Trinity College and practised it on the Aran Islands, vehemently denounced the Gaelic League as "founded on a doctrine that is made up of ignorance, fraud, and hypocrisy,"\(^2\) and John Eglinton advised a "thought movement" rather than a "language movement" as the path towards true nationality.\(^3\)

However, despite the varying attitudes towards the Gaelic League, and the vehemence with which the opposing parties built their platforms, the renewed interest in the Irish language served the double function of increasing the general knowledge of the mythology and folklore utilised by the new writers, and helping Ireland regain her self-respect as a nation.

Politically speaking, Ireland had been suffering for some time from the extremes of both hero-worship and its inevitable disillusionment. In 1875 a newly-elected member of Parliament, Charles Stewart Parnell, had fired the imagination of the Irish people; five years later he became President of the Land League and largely through his efforts the Gladstone government finally passed the Land Act in 1881, recognizing "the three P's" of Tenant-rights: Fixity of Tenure, Free Sale and Fair Rents.\(^4\) Hopes of Home Rule once more rose, to be swamped in 1889 by Captain O'Shea's petition for divorce, citing Parnell as co-respondent.\(^5\) The machine Parnell had so carefully constructed, in which for the first time he had successfully "reconciled the Nationalist Party with the Fenians, and brought both in contact with

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\(^1\) Yeats, "Reasons for and against the Establishment of the Gaelic Co.\textsuperscript{1}," written sometime before 1908, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.

\(^2\) "Can We go Back Into our Mother's Womb?", quoted by Greene and Stephens, \textit{J.M. Synge}, 262.

\(^3\) Preface to \textit{Bards and Saints} (Dublin: Maunsel, 1906), 11.


\(^5\) In some of the country areas, Parnell's political enemies incited public opinion by using the "shift" as a symbol for Kitty O'Shea. Cf. R.S.L. Lyons, \textit{The Fall of Parnell} (London: Routledge, 1960).
the economic needs and desires of the peasantry," irreparably broke
down.  

Economically, matters were not much better. The great
Clearances of the 1850's and the evictions of the 1870's still rankled
in the minds of the older peasants; the vast emigration (unaided by
the government) which had begun after the famine of 1846 continued.  

All political action seemed to have come to nothing. And so, after the
fall of Parnell, the active element adopted a complete reversal of
tactics. Parliamentary action gave way to direct action; hope of
British aid was replaced by "independent voluntary effort within the
domain of economics and social action."  

Social development became
more important than political growth, and the energy which had previously
been governed by Parnell, or allowed to drain off into unorganized
individual interest,  

was channelled into the agricultural co-operative
efforts, the Gaelic League, and, for those who still, like the printer-
patriot John Mitchel, felt the only remedy lay in "the edge of the
sword,"  
the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The first two movements as
we have seen continued their efforts to "rehabilitate Ireland from
within";  
the third aimed at complete separation of Ireland from
England.

Nationalism, religious consciousness, and the land are laced into
the heartstrings of every Irishman;  
they are in turn the basis of
Irish literature. But they are also the cause of sensitivity to Irish

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1 Ernest Barker, *Ireland in the Last Fifty Years*, 2nd ed.  

2 Between 1851 and 1905 there were 4,028,589 emigrants. Cf.

3 Barker, *op.cit.*,22-23

Review*, C (1911),240; Sean O'Faolain, *The Irish* (London:Penguin Books,  
1947),ch.9.

5 John Mitchel, *Jail Journal; or,Five Years in British Prisons*
Poems*,398.

6 Barker, *op.cit.*,25.

7 Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin and Cork:
Cork U.P.,1931),19.
literature, and further resentment of the "stage Irishman", now inextricably linked with the fall of Parnell, continued to cause suspicion of any portrayal of the national character on stage or printed page. Extremists of the Sinn Fein movement banned any import of English culture as well as English goods, and the Anglo-Irish writers, who chose the English language as their literary medium, were frequently under fire. The new ideal of Irish literature in a foreign language, English, was accused of heresy. And the Gaelic League, although ostensibly non-political, was encouraged by these extremists as the only truly "national" literary movement.

Fortunately about this time a new "Young Ireland" movement arose, mainly Fenian in its source, but finding as its leader a man who while declaring, "We protest against the right of patriots to perpetrate bad verses," had sufficiently proven his patriotism by going to jail for it. It was through the personal influence of John O'Leary that the younger group of patriots, Yeats, AE, Maud Gonne, the fiery, red-haired orator John F. Taylor, and others, found a new call to patriotism, "beautiful, lofty things." And O'Leary, in turn, fired their enthusiasm for Irish folklore and history. Once again the hopeful young nationalists had a goal, and the "acts and happenings which are long since forgotten" softened the bitter downfall of "the

3Autobiographies, 209-13. For a short time Yeats shared lodgings with O'Leary.
5Maud Gonne MacBride, A Servant of the Queen (London:Gollancz, 1938),176-78.
6Autobiographies,96-99.
7Ellmann, op.cit.,47 quotes from his speech in 1886, "What Irishmen Should Know."
8AE, op.cit.
Great Comedian," Parnell.¹

Each of these young nationalists reacted according to his own nature.² Yeats, involved in the literary societies of London, found encouragement for his own pursuits. His mission in Ireland was "to serve taste rather than any definite propaganda,"³ to create a National Theatre of Beauty. O'Leary gave him Irish history to read, and bade him create for the sake of Ireland. He in turn used Ireland as the focal point required for his art. "Remember," he warned Katharine Tynan in 1887, "by being Irish as you can, you will be more original and true to yourself and in the long run more interesting, even to English readers."⁴ And a few years later, "Much may depend in the future on Ireland now developing writers who know how to formulate in clear expressions the vague feelings now abroad -- to formulate them for Ireland's not for England's use."⁵ "I would have Ireland recreate the ancient arts, the arts as they were understood in Judea, in India, in Scandinavia, in Greece and Rome, in every ancient land;


²Cf. Herbert Howarth, The Irish Writers: 1880-1940. Literature Under Parnell's Star (London: Rockliff, 1958), ch. 1 et passim. In stating his case, Howarth tends to overlook the influence of the United Irishmen, the Fenians, and O'Leary in the re-birth of nationalism; even the self-critical spirit of the literary movement which he attributes to Parnell's downfall was obvious before.

³Letter to Lady Gregory, 25 May 1901, Letters, 352. Cf. "An Irish National Theatre," Collected Works, 1908, IV, 120-123: "I am a Nationalist .... but if some external necessity had forced me to write nothing but drama with an obviously patriotic intention, instead of letting my work shape itself under the casual impulses of dreams and daily thoughts, I would have lost, in a short time, the power to write movingly upon any theme."


⁵October, 1889, ibid., 138-39.
as they were understood when they moved a whole people and not a few people.\textsuperscript{1}

But Yeats was also aware of the dangers of too narrow a nationalism. Many years later he commented, "A nation should be like an audience in some great theatre -- 'In the theatre' said Victor Hugo 'the mob becomes a people' -- watching the sacred drama of its own history; every spectator finding self and neighbour there, finding all the world there as we find the sun in the bright spot under the burning glass."\textsuperscript{2} And, like the audience, the nation should participate and at the same time criticize. "Young Ireland," he felt, had taught "a study of our history with the glory of Ireland for event."\textsuperscript{3} Their leader, Davis, had been concerned with "conscious patriotism." "His Ireland was artificial, an idea built up in a couple of generations by a few commonplace men."\textsuperscript{4} Because of this emphasis on a propaganda that appealed to the commonplace rather than to the individual, "hardly any Irish writer can liberate his mind sufficiently from questions of practical reform for this contemplation. Art for art's sake ... seems to him a neglect of public duty."\textsuperscript{5} The "poetry of the middle class"\textsuperscript{6} must be exchanged for "a speech for our private griefs and sorrows."\textsuperscript{7} One of the faults

\textsuperscript{1}"Ireland and the Arts"(1901), Essays and Introductions, 206.

\textsuperscript{2}Commentary on the "Three Songs to the Same Tune," King of the Great Clock Tower,1934, 36-38.

\textsuperscript{3}"J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time"(1910), Essays and Introductions, 316. Cf. quotation by Ricketts, Self Portrait; Letters and Journals of Charles Ricketts, comp. T.Sturge Moore, ed. Cecil Lewis (London:Peter Davies,1939), 268: "Ireland is like a man diseased who can only think of his disease."

\textsuperscript{4}Autobiographies, 471-72.

\textsuperscript{5}Samhain,1905, 12.

\textsuperscript{6}The Literary Movement in Ireland"(1899), Ideals in Ireland, ed. Lady Gregory (London:At the Unicorn,1901), 87-88.

\textsuperscript{7}Tribute to Thomas Davis, 19.
of Irish writers (including Shaw, Wilde, and George Moore) was their inability to restrain this habit of writing "not for our own delight but for the improvement of our neighbours."  

Politically, Yeats refused to commit himself wholeheartedly to any particular party. In part this attitude was due to his cosmopolitan interest in art, which he felt transcended any narrow nationalism, but in part he wisely refrained from involving himself with any partisan group which might prevent him from receiving the co-operation of any other group for his own literary aims. "I had withdrawn from politics because I could not bear perplexing, by what I said about books, the simple patriotic men whose confidence I had gained by what I said about nationality," he commented in his autobiography. The "infinite triviality of politics" was not, he felt, his business. And, even though O'Leary had great influence on his thought, perhaps the model he took for his own political platform was William Morris. In one sense certainly his nationalism was a reaction against the Victorian materialism and ugliness he saw in England and reflected in Dublin. Speaking at a Wolfe Tone banquet in London in 1898 he tried to transmute this into a nationalism he himself could believe in:

We hated at first the ideals and ambitions of England, the materialisms of England, because they were hers, but we have come to hate them with a nobler hatred. We hate them now because they are evil. We have suffered too long from them, not to understand, that hurry to become rich, that delight in mere bigness, that insolence to the weak are evil and vulgar things.  

Where Morris and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood turned to the past for their models, Yeats turned to the Ireland he wished to create.

1 Samhain, 1905, 12. Cf. Samhain, 1908, 11.
2 Autobiographies, 448.
3 Letter to Lady Gregory, October 1897, Letters, 288.
His Utopian Ireland, too, owes much of its spirit to Morris. He foresees a nicely ordered world in which people live aesthetically but everything gets done; enough workers feel inclined to reap when the grain has ripened:

First of all, we Irish do not desire, like the English, to build up a nation where shall be a very rich class and a very poor class. ... I think that the best ideal for our people ... is that Ireland is going to become a country where, if there are few rich, there shall be nobody very poor. Wherever men have tried to imagine a perfect life, they have imagined a place where men plough and sow and reap, not a place where there are great wheels turning and great chimneys vomiting smoke. Ireland will always be a country where men plough and sow and reap.

His ideal was by no means a classless society, but, like Morris's, might be termed an aristocratic socialism, A Dream of John Ball for the arts and intellect. One must "accept the baptism of the gutter," if necessary, but he was convinced that "public order cannot long persist without the rule of educated and able men." Like Morris's, Butler's, and Shaw's, his aim if he had one at all was to create that aristocratic society of the intellect. "The end of all government, the end of all politics, the end of all movements is the making of character," and that political movement was best that made "the most men of high and stable character" in a country.

Towards this aim he was willing to contribute time and energy, and for ten years he struggled towards its fulfilment. About the same time that he met John O'Leary, he joined a discussion group called the "Contemporary Club," organized by Charles Hubert Oldham, leader of a group of nationalists at Trinity College and largely responsible for founding the Dublin University Review which published Yeats's first

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2 Letter to Lady Gregory, 10 April 1900, Letters, 339.


4 Yeats's speech at the Delegates' Dinner, Agricultural Organisation Society's Conference, reported by The Irish Homestead, 6 November 1897, 742.
work. In 1889, the year before Parnell's fall, he met the nationalist beauty Maud Gonne, whose hatred of England was rivalled only by her passionate desire to "free Ireland." The following year he paid his first visit to the Southwark Irish Literary Club of London, whose objects were "the cultivation of Irish History, art, and literature, and the providing of a medium of social and intellectual intercourse for Irish people of both sexes." And in 1891 he and T.W. Rolleston founded the London Irish Literary Society. He then moved across to Ireland and proceeded to establish the Irish Literary Society of Dublin. In a letter to the morning papers, 2 June 1892, he outlined the aims the founder-members had in mind:

... to circulate a new "Library of Ireland" through the existing Literary Societies and by establishing new bodies for the purpose .... to aid the educational influence of the library by well-organized lectures and discussions .... These books and lectures will be national but not political in any narrow sense of the word. They will endeavour to make the patriotism of the people who read them both deeper and more enlightened, and will set before them the national and legendary heroes as they present themselves to the minds of scholars and thinkers.

Yeats's plans for a New Irish Library were taken over by Charles Gavan Duffy and eventually the control of the National Literary Society passed from his hands, but by then he had turned his nationalist endeavours elsewhere. In 1898, when the Irish Literary Theatre sought sponsorship, the National Literary Society was on hand to grant its benison.

He had, in fact, turned not to London but to Paris. Encouraged by

1 Ellmann, Man and the Masks, 45.
3 Letter to the Daily Express, 2 June 1892. The Society was founded by Yeats, John T. Kelly, and the new sub-editor of United Ireland, John McGrath.
4 Cf. report of Dr. Sigerson's speech, "Irish Literary Theatre," Daily Express 8 May 1899, 6.
Maud Gonne, in 1896 he joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and for the next two years travelled between London and Paris in preparations for the great Wolfe Tone Centennial celebrations. Yet still he did not commit himself; his aim became a "union of the Gael," which would once more restore the ancient sovereignty to the race, through culture, not through politics.\textsuperscript{1} For in order to achieve the Utopia of the arts he dreamed of for Ireland, union of the various political parties must first be arranged, this time through the common celebration of the great union of 1798. Again he succeeded, and again turned once more to a new scheme, the experiment of an Irish Literary Theatre. But this time the experiment outlasted the limits set for it, and he became involved in a project which was to occupy much of his time and many of his plans for the rest of his life. The last deliberate political move we see him making was a formal letter of protest over Queen Victoria's visit to Ireland in 1900,\textsuperscript{2} and his contribution to Maud Gonne's successful counter-display through the streets of Dublin.\textsuperscript{3}

Yeats's nationalism, then, while in itself a strong emotional need, was in part a result of a much larger dream of art. Art must belong to all and come from all. His aim, therefore, was "to restore what is called a more picturesque way of life ... in which the common man has some share in imaginative art."\textsuperscript{4} Once securely rooted in the nation, art then had an audience. By bringing "the imagination and speech of the country, all that poetical tradition descended from the Middle Ages,\

\textsuperscript{1} Letter to Fiona Macleod, January 1897, \textit{Letters}, 279. A manuscript draft of an early speech is included in a booklet with the March 1889 draft of the "Countess Kathleen O'Shea": "I believe there is a great future before this literature of Ireland. We may yet leave our imprint upon the world. The nations that have long held its ear are in their old age. The past is with them, with us the ... future. They are tangled in technicalities and legalities. In Ireland we have no technicalities or legalities at all, but the ever flaming heart." National Library of Ireland MS. 8758(2). [The italics are his]\

\textsuperscript{2} "Noble and Ignoble Loyalties," \textit{United Irishman}, III, 60(21 April 1900).\

\textsuperscript{3} Cf. MacBride, \textit{A Servant of the Queen}.\

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Samhain}, 1906, 5-6.
to the people of the town,"¹ the artist was once more free to develop
in his own way, secure in his own subject and in the understanding of
those for whom he wrote: "I thought we might bring the halves together
if we had a national literature that made Ireland beautiful in the
memory, and yet had been freed from provincialism by an exacting
criticism, a European pose."² Literature would therefore once more
be united to the "great passion of patriotism," thereby ennobling both.³
For these reasons, then, he and his colleagues dreamed of "a school
whose declared purpose is to create in Ireland a true, cultivated,
patriotic class, and which for the first time unites Montagu and
Capulet in the one movement."⁴ This would require scholarship as
much as patriotism,⁵ artistic freedom as well as collective energy.⁶
"Creative work has always a fatherland,"⁷ for "in greater poets

¹Autobiographies,570.Cf.his quotation of Denmark's motto, If I were
Four and Twenty (1919) Dublin:Cuala,1940),18: "to understand the
peasant by the saga and the saga by the peasant."

²Autobiographies,102.

³"The Irish National Literary Society," Boston Pilot, 19 November
1892, reprinted in Letters to the New Island, ed. Horace Reynolds

⁴"An Irish Patriot," Yeats's review of Lady Ferguson's Sir Samuel
Samhain,1901, 4; Samhain,1905,5-6; " Estrangement" (1909).Autobiographies,
493-94; Introduction to Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany
(Dundrum; Cuala Press,1912),II.

⁵"For a national literature can only be painted, as it were,
against a background of patient and minute scholarship," "Young Ireland,"
The Bookman, XI,64, (January 1897),120. Cf. Letter to Father Matthew
Russell, July 1889, Letters,130; "The Three O'Byrnes," Boston Pilot,
23 November 1889, reprinted in Letters to the New Island,69-90; report
of an interview with Yeats in Chicago Daily News, March 1903; Samhain,

⁶Cf. below, Part II, Ch.5,p.

⁷"Mr.William Wills," The Boston Pilot, 3 August 1889, reprinted in
Letters to the New Island, 74. Cf. "John Eglinton," United Irishman,VI,
141, (9 November 1901),5: "The Poet of Ballyshannon," Providence
Sunday Journal, 2 September 1888, Letters to the New Island,174: "Browning",
Boston Pilot, 22 February 1890, op.cit.,103-04; "Poetry and Patriotism"
(1907), Poetry and Ireland:Essays by W.B. Yeats and Lionel Johnson
(Dundrum:Cuala,1908),1.
everything has relation to the national life or to profound feeling; nothing is an isolated artistic moment; there is a unity everywhere, everything fulfils a purpose that is not his own; the hailstone is a journeyman of God, and the grass blade carries the universe upon its point."

However, he warns, "though a poet may govern his life by his enthusiasms, he must, when he sits down at his desk, but use them as the potter the clay." He must write in the language of his thoughts, for only then can he be true to himself. And if he finds examples elsewhere, he must be free to choose his models from another nation. Nationalism must be tempered by cosmopolitanism; "it is the presence of a personal element alone that can give it nationality in a fine sense." A writer is not less National because he shows the influence of other countries and of the great writers of the world." National literature could therefore be defined as "the work of writers, who are moulded by influences that are moulding their country, and who write out of so deep a life that they are accepted

1"William Allingham," The Poets and the Poetry of the Nineteenth Century, ed. Alfred H.Miles, V (London:George Routledge,1905),244.
2Introduction to A Book of Irish Verse (London:Methuen,1895), xiv. Cf. "Ireland and the Arts" (1901), Essays and Introductions, 206-07; Samhain, 1903,6-7; Samhain,1908,8-9.
3Yeats's address to the Trinity College Historical Society quoted by An Claidheamh Soluis, 10 June 1889,200; letter to Father Matthew Russell, December1889, Letters,143; Yeats's address on the Irish Literary Theatre at the National Literary Society's "At Home", reported in the Independent,19 February 1900; "What is 'Popular Poetry'?"(1901), Essays and Introductions.
4Samhain,1904.
5Samhain,1908,7.
there in the end." What Yeats required for his art was stability in the culture of his nation and at the same time a free passport to the wisdom of the ages, as befitting that roving aristocrat of the intellect, the artist. If necessary he would by means of his art mould the first to his ideal, in spite of his art challenge his right to the second.

Lady Gregory (1852-1932)

Patriotism for Lady Gregory was a simpler idea, seen on a much smaller scale. Descendant of the Persses of Roxborough, who arrived in Ireland with Cromwell, and the O'Grady's of literary and legal fame, until her marriage with Sir William Gregory of Coole she had seen little of Ireland beyond her own county, Galway. But the west of Ireland she did know well; as a young girl she had eagerly observed the great working-estate, and as a young widow capably managed the Coole property for her son Robert. Yeats had memories of tales told by Mary Battle in the kitchen at Sligo; she heard tales of the faery and -- even more stirring, of the rebellion of '98 -- from her old nurse Mary Sheridan. Later she herself participated in the foundation of Samhain, 1904, 20. Yeats, "The Irish Literary Theatre," Daily Express, 14 January 1899, 3.

"The fine life is always a part played finely before fine spectators," Preface to Gods and Fighting Men by Lady Gregory (London: John Murray, 1904), xxii.

Standish O'Grady the Attorney General who prosecuted Robert Emmet, and Standish Hayes O'Grady, one of the first scholars to translate early Irish texts, and Standish O'Grady, editor of the All-Ireland Review, were all distant cousins of Lady Gregory.

Elizabeth Coxhead, Lady Gregory: A Literary Portrait (London: Macmillan, 1961), chapter 1, gives a more complete picture of her family and childhood than any other account.

In her early history of the movement, Our Irish Theatre (London: Putnam's, 1913), 106, she records a note in her diary: "Now I feel myself longing to take over the saw-mill, which has stopped with the head sawyer's departure and only wants a steady superintendent." One feels she would have been competent at that, also.
of village libraries, visited the cottages on the estate, and acted as secretary to the families of emigrants to America. Her marriage for some years interrupted her firm relationship with the peasantry, but did not dissolve it, and after her husband died she once more picked up the threads of her friendship with those who still hold her memory dear in Ireland. "She has been like a serving-maid among us," said an old peasant to Yeats.1

Patriotic she had always been, ever since the first Fenian pamphlet she bought as a child in the small town of Loughrea; "for a romantic love of country had awakened in me, perhaps through the wide beauty of my home .... or it may be through the half revealed sympathy of my old nurse for the rebels whose cheering she remembered when the French landed at Killala in '98; or perhaps but through the natural breaking of a younger child of the house from the conservatism of her elders."2 However, it was not until she found herself turning against England that she became intensely nationalistic. In 1898 her edition of her husband's grandfather's papers was published,3 and when questioned concerning the Home Rule sentiments that creep into her comments, she replied: "I defy anyone to study Irish History without getting a dislike and distrust of England."4 (At the unexpected success of Martyn's rewritten play, The Bending of the Bough, she assured the bewildered authors, "We are not working for Home Rule; we are preparing for it."5) And it was not until after she had become involved in the Irish Literary Theatre that she met John O'Leary and the other political rebels who had influenced Yeats's nationalism.6 Through her husband,

1Autobiographies, 395. Lily K. MacManus, White Light and Flame (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1929), 37-40 describes her manner with the peasants.
4Our Irish Theatre (London: Putnam's 1913), 55.
5Ibid., 28.
6Ibid., 63.
one-time Member of Parliament and Governor of Ceylon, she had made
many friends among English Unionists, but always she managed to
reconcile, if at times uneasily, the friendships formed during Sir
William's work for England and those she herself made in her own work
for Ireland. In this sense alone, she was invaluable to Yeats; he
"the baptism of the gutter" for the sake of his national dream, but she preferred
was willing to accept "the baptism of clean water." Involvement in
the idea of a national theatre, however, increased her nationalist
feelings still more, and where Yeats subordinated his ideals of art
to no nation, she avowed her determination to work principally for
"the dignity of Ireland." As her interest in art increased, so too
did her love for her country. The one inspiration fed on the other.

As she herself sought for the dignity her nationalism demanded of
her country, so she also demanded it of others. The patriotic verses
in The Spirit of the Nation appealed to her because of "a certain
dignity, an intensity born of continuity of purpose; they are roughly
hammered links in a chain of unequal workmanship, but stretching back
through the centuries to the Munster poets of the days of Elizabeth."
In her own work she strove for this same dignity and "continuity of
purpose." (Many years later Yeats was to characterize her as Phase
Twenty-four of A Vision, the true mask self-reliance and organisation)
She, like Yeats, was moved by the death of Parnell, however not
realizing until later that by tearing from the corner of a newspaper
Katherine Tynan's lament, she had "unwittingly taken note of almost
the moment of a new impulse in literature in poetry. For with that

1W.H. Lecky, the historian and Member of Parliament for Trinity
College, was instrumental in having the Dublin Theatres Bill amended
so that the first productions of the Irish Literary Theatre could take
place, later withdrew his support because of Yeats's letters concerning
Queen Victoria's visit in 1900.

2Our Irish Theatre, 71.

3Ibid., 37.

4"I myself found every year an increased delight and happiness in
Ireland," she wrote in her diary for 1900, Our Irish Theatre, 61.


is also categorized in this phase.
death, the loss of that dominant personality, and in the quarrel that
followed came the disbanding of an army, the unloosing of forces, the
setting free of the imagination of Ireland."\(^1\) Always her nationalism
retained this strong desire to win once more the dignity of Ireland,
and like Yeats, she believed it possible through the arts. One day
while collecting folk tales on Aran,\(^2\) she happened to glance through
a volume of *Don Quixote*, and the thought of England's false half-vision
of Ireland crossed her mind:

They see in us one part boastful quarrelsome adventurer, one part
vulgar rollicking buffoon.... But we begin to think after all that
truth is best, that we have worn the mask thrust upon us too long,
and that we are more likely to win at least respect when we appear
in our own form. .... Poetry and pathos may be granted to us, but
when we claim dignity, those who see only the sham fights of
Westminster shake their heads. But here, in real Ireland, dignity
can live side by side with the strongest political feeling.\(^3\)

The words re-echo through the Manifesto of 1897: "We will show that
Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and easy sentiment .... but of
ancient idealism."

Her nationalism and concern for the historic past of her nation led
her, like Yeats, to a study of folklore. "In these days, when so much
of the printed history we were taught as children is being cast out by
scholars, we must refill the vessel by calling in tradition, or if need
be our own imaginings," she wrote in 1912 concerning her highly
individual treatment of King James in *The White Cockade*.\(^4\) And her

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1 Kiltartan Poetry Book, 7-8.
2 She saw Synge for the first time on this trip to Aran; Our Irish
   Theatre, 120.
3 "Ireland, Real and Ideal," Nineteenth Century, November 1898,
   769-782.
4 "Notes to The White Cockade," Irish Folk History Plays: Second
   Series (London: Putnam's, 1912), 194. CT: "The Canavans," The Arrow, vol.1,
   no.2 (24 November 1906), 2-3: "I took my historical atmosphere less
   from history books than from the tradition of the people, who have not
   been taught English history in the schools, and so have learned it
   through tradition or the songs of the wandering poets, of Raftery,
   or another."
Kiltartan History Book bears the following dedication: "Dedicated and Recommended to the History Classes in the New University." But first came her study of the Irish Language, one step further than Yeats had gone.

Even as a child, she relates, she had been eager to learn Irish, but had received nothing but discouragement and mockery from her elders. Later, after her marriage, she bought a grammar and "worked at it for a while with the help of a gardener." But it was not until her own son had shown a like interest in the language that she studied it in earnest. By then Dr. Hyde had founded the Gaelic League, (she helped form the Kiltartan branch in 1899), and through the newly awakened interest in the legends of the past as told by the early poets, she discovered "this disclosure of the folk learning, the folk poetry, the ancient tradition," which was "the small beginning of a weighty change." "It was an upsetting of the table of values, an astonishing excitement. The imagination of Ireland had found a new homing place." With it her own imagination found roots at last. The excitement of this new revolution led her to a study not only of the folklore of the past, "the call ... of my own country; Cisin and Finn and Cuchulain," but to a renewed interest in the folklore of the present, and her excitement joined that of Yeats' in the collection of stories from the peasantry.

"The Celtic Twilight" was the first book of Mr. Yeats's that I read, and even before I met him, a little time later, I had begun looking for news of the invisible world; for his stories were of Sligo and I felt jealous for Galway,

1. The Kiltartan History Book (Dublin: Maunsel, 1909), v.
2. The Kiltartan Poetry Book, 8-10.
3. Our Irish Theatre, 76.
she confesses in her introduction to *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*:\(^1\)

Lady Gregory's contribution to the study and collection of folklore cannot be overestimated. Her contribution was in one sense more scholarly than Yeats's, for as she admits, "Even when I began to gather these stories I cared less for the evidence given in them than for the beautiful rhythmic sentences in which they were told." Having no theories, nothing to prove, she recorded fully, carefully, and sincerely:

To gather folk-lore one needs, I think, leisure, patience, reverence, and a good memory. I tried not to change or alter anything, but to write down the very words in which the story had been told .... I filled many copybooks and came to have a very faithful memory for all sides of folk-lore, stories of saints, of heroes, of giants and enchanters, as well as for these visions.\(^2\)

Her collection was not published until 1920, but in her autobiography she indicates that she had already begun her work before the plans for the theatre were initiated.\(^3\) Her reliability is still praised by the Irish Folklore Commission, and has gained her the title, "Mother of folklore."\(^4\)

Her search led her far afield, "among the imaginative class, the holders of the traditions of Ireland, country people in thatched houses,

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^1^"Introduction to Sea Stories," *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland Collected and Arranged by Lady Gregory: with Two Essays and Notes by W.B.Yeats* (London:Putnam's,1920),1,3. In his notes to these volumes Yeats says that this study in turn led him to a deeper study of spiritualism in an effort to trace "correspondences."

^2^"Introduction to Sea Stories," *Visions and Beliefs*,4-5. Cf. her note to *The Kiltartan Wonder Book* (Dublin:Maunsel,1910),105: "I have not changed a word in these stories as they were told to me, but having heard some of them in different versions from different old people, I have sometimes taken a passage or phrase from one and put it in another where it seemed to fit."

^3^Our Irish Theatre,6. An article, "Some Folk Stories of Usheen," was published in the *Dublin Daily Express*,17 September, 1898.

workers in fields and bogs, and by such a circuitous route, she found herself back in the world she had left on her marriage.

My own imagination was aroused. I was becoming conscious of a world close to me and that I had been ignorant of. It was not now in the corners of newspapers I looked for poetic emotion, nor even to the singers in the streets. It was among farmers and potato diggers and old men in workhouses and beggars at my own door that I found what was beyond these and yet farther beyond that drawingroom poet of my childhood in the expression of love, and grief, and the pain of parting, that are the disclosure of the individual soul.

Yeats was to search for the celebration of the soul in ancient mythology, turning at last to the legends of his own country; Lady Gregory also found the synthesis of her nationalism and her art in the tales at her own back door, from "the men and women ... in poorhouses and on road-sides or by the hearth who have kept in mind through many years the great wonders done among the children of the Gael." And, like Yeats, she found in "The Book of the People" the continuity and re-birth of tradition she was seeking as foundation for her own beliefs and art.

This continuity of the intellectual life of the people was endangered, however, by "the shoving out of the Language." No more did minstrel-poets like the blind Raftery celebrated in Poets and Dreamers wander the roads, with the power of satires and curses on their tongues. Her studies of folklore led her in turn, therefore, to a translation of the early myths of Ireland, to the great cycles of the Tuatha de Danaan, the Fianna, and the Warriors of the Red Branch. Cuchulain of Muirthemne appeared in 1903, greeted by Yeats as "the most important book that has come out of Ireland in my time." Gods and Fighting Men came in 1904,

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1Visions and Beliefs, I, 4.
2The Kiltartan Poetry Book, 10.
3A Book of Saints and Wonders (Dundrum, Dun Emer Press, 1906).
4Visions and Beliefs, I, 4.
5"Raftery" (1900), Poets and Dreamers, 3rd ed. (Dublin: Hodges and Figgis, 1903), 43.
and Lady Gregory was hailed as "the Irish Malory." If her method
of popularisation is referred to, the appellation is a fitting one.
But scholastically speaking, these two volumes cannot be accepted with
the same faith as her folklore collections. Nor did Lady Gregory intend
them to be accepted as literal translations. The imagination of the
Gael, which had first stirred her as she collected folklore among the
peasants, had moved her in turn to recapture that imagination in a form
which would be available to her countrymen. In her dedication to the
people of Kiltartan she explains her method and intentions:

When I began to gather these stories together, it is of you I
was thinking, that you would like to have them and to be reading
them. For although you have not to go far to get stories of Finn
and Goll and Oisin from any old person in the place, there is very
little of the history of Cuchulain and his friends left in the
memory of the people, but only that they were brave men and good
fighters, and that Deirdre was beautiful.

When I went looking for the stories in the old writings, I
found that the Irish in them is too hard for any person to read
that has not made a long study of it. .... and the stories them­
selves are confused, every one giving a different account from
the others in some small thing, the way there is not much pleasure
in reading them. It is what I have tried to do, to take the best
of the stories, or whatever parts of each will fit best to one
another, and in that way to give a fair account of Cuchulain's
life and death. I left out a good deal I thought you would not
care about for one reason or another, but I put in nothing of my
own that could be helped, only a sentence or so now and again to
link the different parts together. I have told the whole story
in plain and simple words, in the same way my old nurse Mary
Sheridan used to be telling stories from the Irish long ago, and
I a child at Roxborough.

Standish O'Grady, who had himself worked over the same field,
sympathised with her attempt to refine and simplify the saga, but
criticized what he felt was her timidity: "One of the great stories
of the whole World ought to be printed and published in the very words
that our ancestors thought fit to use, with all the barbarism and the
very loose morality of the age set down exactly as those people thought

1"The Legendary and Mythological Foundation of the Plays," Collected
Works, 1908, II, 254-55.

2Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch
of Ulster (London: John Murray, 1902).
and wrote. But although she may have been concerned with the sensitive feelings of the drawing-room, as O'Grady and Rolleston implied, her aim had been to get the sagas into the drawing-room, and there she succeeded. Her two books still remain the source books for most Irish writers, and Yeats himself acknowledged his great debt to his colleague's work. And as long as her books remain, the threat to the traditions of Ireland is in abeyance. And we shall see to what extent she herself makes use of those traditions in her own plays.

"I have told the whole story in plain and simple words," Lady Gregory stated in her Dedication. _Cuchulain of Muirthemne_ was her first extensive use of the Anglo-Irish dialect referred to as "Kiltartanese," and which she was to use throughout all her plays. The significance of this use of language belongs in a study of her development as a playwright, but it is important to note here the dual importance of her early work. For it, too, came out of her own observations and knowledge of the peasantry, who while speaking in English thought back to an ancient tongue. In 1903 Synge was to use a variant of this language in his first plays; and throughout their work as collaborators, the influence of Lady Gregory's research into language as well as tradition, can be seen in Yeats's own work.

**Edward Martyn (1859-1923)**

Yeats and Lady Gregory sought a union of the peasant with the artist-aristocrat, and in Edward Martyn they found the invaluable combination of Catholic peasant and landlord gentry. Martyn, too, came from Galway: his father's family descended from one of the "Fourteen Tribes" who had established themselves in Ireland during the period of the early Crusades; his mother came from the wealthy peasant Smyth family. A sincere Catholic (to the point of asceticism), Martyn

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1 Standish O'Grady, "Current Events," _All Ireland Review_, III, 23 (9 August 1902), 357-58. Cf. _All Ireland Review_, VI, 4 (28 January 1905), 41-42.

had studied at Oxford during the Pater period and taken the Grand Tour under the tutelage of his distant cousin George Moore. His favourite dramatist was Henrik Ibsen; his favourite composers were Palestrina and Wagner.¹ Inextricably involved in music, drama, and his country, he represented the three national emotions of religion, patriotism, and the land. But Martyn did not understand or care for the peasants from whom he had sprung, and they in turn had little trust of him.² His nationalism, though intense, was private and individual, reflecting his own taste and inclinations rather than any deep concern for or sympathy with his countrymen whom, he felt, "perverse education and worse government have distorted to the degradation of intellectual savagery."³ However, he was deeply concerned for Ireland, and devoted his life and his fortune to "a very determined fight for some of the improvements in civilisation" he sought for his country.

I am one of those who walk the thorny path of the reformer, a path everyone knows is as thorny as that of the venerable female of our rather eccentric patriotic device. Perhaps it is because we have chosen a decrepit old woman as the symbol of our country struggling for her rights, and called those who follow her "wild geese," that we may be more difficult material for the reformer than other peoples.

he wrote many years later, looking back at his struggles for the sake of his dream.⁴

¹For much of these general impressions of Martyn I am indebted to his man-servant, Mr. Owen Linnane, Tulira, Ardrahan, Co. Galway.
²Linnane. Cf. letter from Yeats to Martyn quoted by Denis Gwynn, Edward Martyn and the Irish Revival (London:Jonathan Cape, 1930) asking Martyn to speak at the Abbey. "It is very important to have somebody there who does really know the Irish peasant." This may refer to the open discussion after The Playboy riots.
³"Wagner's Parsifal, or the Cult of Liturgical Aestheticism," Irish Review, December 1913, 538.
⁴Martyn, unpublished introduction to Paragraphs for the Peverse, a collection of his essays which have, with all his collected papers, since disappeared. Quoted by Gwynn, op. cit., 31-32.
Martyn's passion to help his country was equalled by his hatred of England. Lady Gregory records that his conversion to nationalism came about through a reading of Lecky's *Leaders of Public Opinion in Ireland*, but even during his childhood and schooldays, Martyn had disliked England. His father and only brother had both died young; his mother, determined to mould him to the required standards of a respected ancient family, had given him the education of an English gentleman. Years later Martyn was to look back with resentment upon the wasted training of his youth:

"My earlier days were wasted foolishly in trying to inculcate in me an Englishman's ideas, accent and outlook .... After finishing my so-called education I became the owner of an estate and mansion, things I never wanted .... I had no idea how to manage land nor did I want to."¹

For the rest of his life he regretted not having the education or opportunity to achieve his ideal, the cultivated man of letters. But his dislike of England remained, and in 1904 Dublin was regaled with the lawsuit brought against the Kildare Street Club, when, because of his letters objecting to the King's visit, he was asked to resign.²

Martyn's dislike of England was, like Yeats's, mainly an aesthetic one:

Indeed a fatal deterioration of the Celt would seem to follow from his contact with the Saxon. His incomparable sense of refinement and elegance ... fades and vanishes before the comparative grossness and materialism of the Saxon touch .... that is why in those parts of Ireland which are much affected with English influence we generally remark a certain air of second-hand, shabby England defacing all objects and customs .... While the inhabitants of the shabby England are often vulgar, the Celtic peasants of the uncontaminated West are naturally refined.³

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¹Our Irish Theatre, 73. Lecky's political survey was first published in 1861.

²Linnane, "What he aimed at was to make England's governing ridiculous, by writing and propaganda."

³Linnane.

⁴Gwynn, Edward Martyn 28:301-304, and 308-09. On one occasion he refused to have "God Save the King" sung at a concert held on his estate.

⁵"The Use of a Provincial Feis," Dublin Daily Express, 17 September 1898. In Paragraphs for the Perverse he altered the title to "How I was the first to discover traditional singing."
Like Swift, he disliked "Handy Andy" but believed in a national ideal; like Yeats, he expressed his own vision of Utopia in his writings. That he lacked the genius of either of his countrymen is obvious, but it is ironical that in temperament and inclination he was more kin to the great Dean than to his fellow-worker.

Martyn's first published work was in fact a satirical novel in which, embedded in the egoistic Bowel Philosophy with which he crudely satirizes nineteenth century culture and aestheticism, can be traced his own theories of art and civilization. The influence of Swift and Rabelais mingles with the doctrines of Pater, and Martyn's description of Agathopolis, "the golden city that sages have yearned to reach, that none may enter with corrupt mind, that chases the unworthy and fades from his sight," owes much to his own vision of Byzantium. The citizens of Martyn's "golden city" bear the calm unsullied expressions seen in Butler's Erewhon; true to his own well-developed misogyny, however, they are all "graceful and exquisitely proportioned" youths, "indicating at once a character so courageous, and an ideal of life so lofty, that one might well doubt that they were indeed the sons of men." The interests of this spiritual aristocracy are, naturally, the antique tradition of Greek literature ("poetry of the higher and more sublime order" and historical criticism), liturgical music, and the theatre. It is governed by a benevolent but firm dictator, "a magnificent patron

1 Paragraphs for the Perverse, Gwynn, op.cit., 31-32: "We have many clever, brave and consistent people, the best I have ever known in any country, but we have not enough of them."

2 Sirius [Edward Martyn], Morgante the Lesser: his Notorious Life and Wonderful Deeds (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1890), Book IX, 249, Sister Courtney, op.cit., describes this as a satire on "Voltairianism", but many of the barbs can more easily find their mark in the more extreme tenets of the "aesthetic school" Martyn encountered at Oxford.

3 Ibid., 253.
of the arts and of gifted men."¹

Art, then, for Martyn, was a means to an end; "founded on some philosophical idea," it must exert a "refining and educational influence upon the artistic and moral character of the nation."² If his nationalism was cosmopolitan in character and personal in interpretation, his philosophy of art was subject to the higher demands of education and spiritual refinement. His aim remained constant, the remoulding of the nation to which he owed allegiance into the Agathopolis which could with impunity demand that allegiance. He described himself as "one of those who walk the thorny path of the reformer," and throughout his life he adhered to those early aims, despite the frequent and great provocations to take an easier way.

Martyn advocated classicism in the decorative arts and music, tradition in language, aristocracy in politics. Deploring "the vulgarity of pretension and sham—the vulgarity of the intellect"³ he observed in the "trade architecture" which had replaced the simplicity of early Irish art, he encouraged stained-glass artists,⁴ sculptors and painters⁵ to return to the style of the early ages.⁶ Similarly, he advocated a revival of the Irish language. "Nothing Irish will ever succeed until Ireland shakes off her self-imposed slavery and becomes

¹Ibid., 254ff. Sister Courtney, op. cit., 39 reports that "in later years ... he was to rank aristocracy next to religion as a safeguard for the people."

³Martyn's preface to Robert Elliott, Art and Ireland (Dublin: Sealy, Bryers and Walker, 1906) v-vi.
⁴Autobiographies, 387.
⁵In a review of his paintings, he describes John Butler Yeats as "essentially a religious painter," "Two Irish Artists," The Leader (26 October 1901), 141-42.
⁶He approved highly of W.A. Scott's design of the Church at Spiddal.
really Irish again," and he felt this was impossible unless Gaelic returned not only to the schools but to "the Big House" as well. To accomplish this he became a member of the governing board of the Gaelic League and Sinn Fein, of which he was President from 1904 to 1908. Although he early evinced an interest in Irish history and archeology (George Moore records that he travelled with an archeological party in the west of Ireland), he himself admits that his interest in things Irish was brought about in part by his love of things Greek:

My studies of Irish have convinced me that it is finer and more beautiful than any language I know, except Greek, which will always be to me the most beautiful, the tongue of the highest civilisation the world has ever seen. It was indeed my Hellenism that first led me to the Irish language through the subtle Greek refinements I found in Irish ornamental art.

But perhaps his most abiding passion was again a result of his travels and studies away from Ireland, the sixteenth century ecclesiastical music of Palestrina. And just as his belief in drama led him to the endowment of the Irish Literary Theatre, so his belief in music led him to the much more impressive foundation of the Palestrina Choir in the Pro-Cathedral of Dublin. Like his colleagues, he was willing to devote all for the sake of his dream.

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2. Mr. Henry B.O'Hanlon, information received by Sister Courtney, Edward Martyn, 150.
3. Michael O hAeodha, "Edward Martyn," Irish Times, 3 February 1959, 5. Martyn was an admirer of Arthur Griffith and while President was responsible for the publication of Griffith's pamphlet, "The Resurrection of Hungary."
5. Cf. Wilde's statement that Greek and French are the most beautiful languages.
George Moore (1852-1933)

The name of Edward Martyn immediately calls forth the name of his most prolific biographer, George Moore. Although Moore was also a Roman Catholic landlord from the west of Ireland, the similarity between the cousins ends there. Like all his enthusiasms, Moore's patriotism passed through all the phases between two extremes. "It is one of Mr. Moore's peculiarities," commented Max Beerbohm on Moore's farewell to England, "that whatever is uppermost in his mind seems to him to be the one thing in the world, and he cannot conceive that there will ever be room for anything else .... But even if the Keltic Renascence prove to be the most important movement ever made in Art it will not long enchain him." Beerbohm was of course right, and the prodigal did return, his disgust of the English being replaced by an even more fervent disgust of the once-praised Irish. But Moore must be allowed the last word, which he takes in a collection of stories that clearly express his debt to "dear Edward," Yeats, and his entire sojourn in Ireland:

"You knew from the beginning that Paris was the source of all art, that everyone here who is more distinguished than the others has been to Paris. We go to Paris with baskets on our backs, and sticks in our hands, and bring back what we can pick up. And having lived immersed in art till you're forty, you return to the Catholic Celt! Your biographer will be puzzled to explain this last episode, and however he may explain it, it will seem a discrepancy." If Yeats's "Masters" brought him metaphors for his poetry, how much more did Moore's own enthusiasms bring him material for his art.

It might be said that Moore, even when most vehemently denouncing his own country (to the extent of embracing Protestantism), was always

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1Unless, like Yeats, one considers them the inseparable two sides of the same coin. Cf. Autobiographies, 401-402 and The Cat and the Moon.
Irish. And indeed, throughout his work he never really escapes from his past. Like Martyn, he also had received his education abroad, substituting the coterie and salons of Paris for the more conventional studies of Oxford. Unlike Martyn, he returned to his Irish estates only to disencumber himself of them. The Celtic Renaissance was not, however, his first glance at Ireland for "copy." Having published A Modern Lover (1883) and A Mummer's Wife, (1885) both based on Zola's theory of naturalism and first-hand observation, he wrote A Drama in Muslin, (1886) a sympathetic portrayal of the "marriage trade" as he observed its practice in the upper circles of Dublin Castle. But his task over, including an amusing exchange with the Castle officials duly publicized by Moore, he once more returned to "civilization," leaving as his parting shot an unfortunate diatribe against that town "of miserable vice and hideous decrepitude," that "country of abandoned dreams" with its "damp, flaccid, evil smell of poverty."¹ But ten years after Parnell and his Island he was back, embracing the once-abandoned dreams, advocating for all but himself the Irish language: "That one child should learn Irish interests me far more than the publication of a masterpiece," he wrote to Yeats in 1901.² And in 1902 he entertained Dublin (those who did not attend as much as those who did) to a Gaelic lawn party.³ The same year, under the auspices of the Gaelic

¹Parnell and his Island (London: Swann Sonnenschein, Lowry, 1887), 22, 49, 56. He refers to "dirt and patriotism -- which are apparently but two words for one and the same thing," p. 179.


³J.B. Yeats describes the party in a letter to Lily Yeats, summer 1902, J.B. Yeats Letters to his son W.B. Yeats and others 1869-1922, ed. Joseph Hone (London: Faber, 1944), 71. An Irish play, by Douglas Hyde The Tinker and the Fairy (later published in Irish and English in New Ireland Review, May 1902, 185-192), was performed on the occasion by members of the Gaelic League.
League, he published The Untilled Field, translated into Irish by a Trinity College student.¹

But by then his connection with the Irish theatre had ceased, and with it much of his fervent nationalism. "Ireland ... is no country for an educated man," the artist hero of The Untilled Field exclaims. "Let the Gael disappear... Since Cormac's Chapel he has built nothing but mud cabins. Since the Cross of Cong he has imported Virgins from Germany."² Since his nation would not appreciate his art, he could not appreciate the nation. And in 1908, while still living in Dublin he wrote to a friend in Paris, "Ireland is the cemetery of Catholicism... The Celtic Renascence... does not exist, it is a myth, like a good many other things."³

It would, however, be both unfair and dishonest to leave the impression that Moore's sojourn in Ireland was one of "intellectual slapstick" only.⁴ Near the end of his life he was to quote as his epitaph, "Nature I loved, and next to nature, art,"⁵ and it was because of this passion for art that he returned to Ireland. Moreover, he involved himself in the Irish Literary movement at the request of Yeats and Martyn, who had had little experience with the theatre at

¹"Literary Notes," Dublin Penny Journal, 5 April 1902, 5.
²"In the Clay," 12 and 26. The stories "A Play House in the Waste" and "The Wild Goose" also blame the clergy for the state of affairs in Ireland.
⁵Quoted by C. Patrick Thompson, "George Moore at Home," John O'London's Weekly, 6 August 1932, 652-3 and 662.
the time, and whose work he respected. A letter written to Yeats in 1898 contains the following passage which indicates much of the characters of both:

I liked it [The Countess Cathleen] better on the second reading and I shall have an opportunity of saying how much I admire it in my preface to Martyn's plays which by the way I shall begin tomorrow. I am your best advertiser in all the houses I frequent. I cry: I am not the Lord. There is one greater than I, the lachet of whose shoe I am not worthy to tie.²

Always a willing collaborator, if at times a difficult one, Moore gave eagerly for the enthusiasm of the moment, and his contribution to the dramatic work of both Martyn and Yeats will be considered later. However, Moore was never as unwisely hasty in his judgments as many critics imply, and his attitude towards language in general is proof of this.

Speaking of Swinburne, Moore commented, "Like everybody else in these islands, he looked upon prose narrative as an entertainment rather than as an art."² Narrative to Moore meant a plot in language, and the style was more important to him than the plot. His theory in fact is very similar to that of the "living speech" Yeats himself advocated, and if we examine his interest in the Irish language we find it an interesting complement to Yeats's own:

A language may be compared to a seed, for a seed is a potential flower, and every language is a potential literature; the beauty of the flower and the literature vary according to the quality of the seed and the language, and the influences they use and when they rise into the upper air.... Style becomes necessary when language becomes corrupt .... compelling those who desire a work of art to isolate themselves in some less vulgar speech.... I plead for the preservation of that mysterious background of legends and traditions out of which Ireland has come, and which a hundred years of determined Anglicisation has not altogether blotted out.... In stealing from him [the peasant] the traditions of his race, his songs and legends, you do not give him what is best in England... but the gutterpress of London.³

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¹15 October 1898, unpublished letter in the National Library of Ireland.
²Avowals (London: Heinemann, 1919), 68.
Admittedly this is a grafting of Moore's belief in style on to an already burdened branch of Yeatsian dialectic, but through the unwieldy argument one can hear the George Moore of the constant revisions, the incessant search for truth in art, and the struggle to master the tools of that art. And although Moore may have insisted upon carrying on his education in public, as Wilde quipped, the technical virtuosity he finally achieved was a result of this interest in a living language which he could mould to his interpretation of life. "George Moore is the best living novelist," writes Virginia Woolf, "— and the worst; writes the most beautiful prose of his time — and the feeblest; has a passion for literature which none of those dismal pundits, his contemporaries, shares." And her masterly summing-up concludes with the key to Moore's sympathy for the language of his own country, "and has taught himself an accent, a cadence, indeed a language, for saying it in which, though they are not English, but Irish, will give him his place among the lesser immortals of our tongue."^1

But although Moore himself struggled for a style which has its roots in the accent of his compatriots, and for a time at any rate believed in the Gaelic League, he never agreed with Yeats's belief in the peasant dialect developed by Lady Gregory. "Is it not true that peasant speech limits the range of our ideas?" he asks in Vale.

"Peasant speech is only adapted to dialogue," and therefore, to Moore,

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1 The Death of the Moth and other Essays (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), 101-14. In a letter to John Eglinton in 1914 Moore himself acknowledges his debt, although referring to Eglinton, Best, and Russell rather than to Yeats: "You see I didn't know how to write until I went over to Ireland -- it was you fellows that taught me," Letters of George Moore, ed. John Eglinton (Bournemouth: Sydenham, 1942), 23.

2 "Nor did he approve of Yeats's involvement in politics. In 1898 he wrote, "I hope however that you will abandon politics as Wagner did and that you will realize as he did that his mission was not politics but art." National Library of Ireland collection.
whose abilities were by now obviously not dramatic, useless. Nor, although he would plead for the revival of Gaelic as the only salvation of the peasant, did he ever resign his own aristocratic sympathies. "Art is the direct antithesis to democracy," he declared in his Confessions. In the same article that pleaded for the soul of the peasant, he insists on a selected audience. And not many years later he began issuing his own works in limited editions.

Eventually his belief in a literary renaissance disappeared as well, and he returned to civilization, to the London he had abandoned ten years earlier. "Art comes to a country and flourishes in it for a while, and then leaves it, never to return."  

AE (George W. Russell, 1867-1935)

Moore's enthusiasm for Yeats was replaced by an equally fervid admiration for AE, "the Angelic Anarchist" who with Yeats shared the leadership of the more active literary groups of Dublin at the turn of the century. AE differed from Moore to an even greater extent than Martyn; born in Ulster of a middle class family, he was rescued by Yeats from his position as clerk in a dry goods store and sent by

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1. Hail and Farewell: Vale (New York: D. Appleton, 1914), 180-182. He then proceeds to give his own example of peasant dialect.
6. A study of the various versions of Sister Teresa indicates Moore's changing attitude: the poet hero of the first edition is Yeats, in the later editions he has been metamorphosed into AE. "George Moore will be in Dublin this week," AE wrote to Yeats. "He writes a note in which he compares me to Saint Teresa. I hope she is all right." Passages from the Letters of A.E. to W.B. Yeats (Dublin: Cuala, 1936), 39.
Horace Plunkett into the country districts to organize a co-operative agricultural movement. Although his former experience had been limited to painting and mysticism, he was surprisingly successful and became one of the leading authorities in Ireland not only on co-operatives but on matters economic, political, and social which affected his country.¹

But during the early years of the literary movement AE's influence was a personal one. As a poet and painter his interest in art equalled Yeats's and Moore's, but his belief in nationalism was rooted in an individual mystic philosophy fed on his own omnivorous reading and the more general influence of Madame Blavatsky.² AE's test of art was, like the early Yeats's, "its power of creating a noble mood" in which the artist "must think at least as much of his subject as of his craft."³ Like Yeats, too, he elevated the power of imagination to a condition of idealism.

If we are to have a school of art worthy the name in Ireland, it must start with a philosophy at least as serious, and be in accord with that peculiar idealism which, in our literature and music has expressed itself with so much passion, pathos, and spiritual longing,

¹Cf. H.F. Norman, "George Russell," offprint from Year Book of Agricultural Co-operation, 11-27. In a letter to Yeats, 1 February 1898, Passages, 14, AE writes, "How are the mighty hurled from their seats. You mixed up with '98, O'Grady edits a local bi-weekly paper. I explain to starved-looking peasants how advantageously they could buy their pigs under the benign influence of a Rural Bank!"

²In a letter to Monk Gibbon, quoted in the Early Years of George Russell (AE) and his Connection with the Theosophical Movement, Ph.D. Thesis for Trinity College, Dublin, 1947-48, 264, Harry Norman describes him in 1894 as "head over heels a propagandizing theosophist.... a red hot missionary!"

he wrote of Hugh Lane's first Loan Exhibition in 1899. This emphasis upon "insight" over technique was to limit his own work; but the same emphasis resulted in the peculiar mystic nationalism which pervaded all his writings and activities and to a great extent accounts for his personal influence in Ireland.

Russell's "idea of the national being" was inextricably mixed with his own mystic life in "the Ireland behind the veil," as he described his occult experiences. "The Gods have returned to Eriand have centred themselves in the sacred mountains and blow the fire through the country," he wrote to Yeats in great excitement in 1896. "Out of Ireland will come a light to transform many ages and peoples." And he proposed a "declaration of intellectual independence" which, broadcast not only across Ireland but to America as well, would "wake people up and instil into them something which might supply the deficiency in their arid political aspirations." Like Yeats, he was concerned with the influence of "English commercial ideals to make us comfortable, material." They must, he urged, "declare that our aspirations as a people are not for gold alone but to bring forth heroic people; that all the splendours and ideals of the past are possible here and today for us... as the upholders of a natural humanity

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1Ibid. Cf. letter in 1893 to Carrie Rea, Gibbon, 262; "To me all external forms are only symbols of thought and life. They are little for themselves but much for what they suggest." And in another early letter, op. cit., 115: "Art and literature do not interest me now, only one thing interests and that is Life or Truth. I want to become rather than to know."


4Letter to Yeats, 1896, Some Passages, 6-7.
with its mystic ideal and religious hope." "The Celtic twilight
is going to break into Dawn." 1

But AE's scheme for a declaration of ideals never materialized,
and he developed a form of nationalism which gradually departed from
the path taken by Yeats. Ironically, he who would later become far
more involved in the practical institutions of Ireland disapproved
of Yeats's temporarily active political life. "The literary man,"
he felt, "ought to be concerned mainly with intellectual interests,
should only intervene in politics when principles affecting the
spiritual life of his country are involved." 2 He disapproved of
Yeats's stand concerning the Queen's visit, and urged him to "only
enter into a political discussion when you have some principle to
declare." 3 Nor was he at first convinced that he could in turn
follow Yeats's lead in writing "as a Celt for the Celt." "I am
afraid it would be a futile task to try consciously for the Celtic
traditional feeling. A certain spirit of it I have but I am not Celt
inside, not for many lives." 4 But it was his play, based on the
Celtic legend of Deirdre, that accidentally touched off the spark which
brought the Fays and the Irish Literary Theatre together.

He did, however, approve of the Gaelic League's attempt to
revive the Irish language. Again he emphasised a nationalism of
the spirit:

1 Letter to Yeats, 1896, Gibbon, 305. (This portion of the letter
is not reprinted in Some Passages...).
2 "Nationality and Imperialism," Ideals in Ireland, 16-17.
3 Letter to Yeats, June 1900, Some Passages, 21.
4 Letter to Yeats, 3 April 1897, Gibbon, op.cit., 328.
(Excerpts not published in Some Passages).
We in Ireland would keep in mind our language, teach our children our history, the story of our heroes, and the long traditions of our race which stretch back to God... We feel poignantly it is not merely Gaelic which is being suppressed, but the spiritual life of our race.

And his avowed dislike of England was perhaps even more disconcerting in its expression than the open letters of Martyn, Yeats, and Moore:

I confess I do not love England.... But for that myriad humanity which throngs the cities of England I feel a profound pity.... I do not say that everything English is stupid, invariably and inevitably wrong. But I do say that every act by which England would make our people other than they would be themselves, is stupid, invariably and inevitably wrong.1

AE’s influence, then, remained a personal one, and although he never contributed another play to the literary movement, he remained involved in its management for several years, sometimes acting as liaison officer between the players and the playwrights, other times upsetting Yeats’s carefully-laid plans, but always encouraging and turning a helping hand to all parties. However, as the movement gained momentum and established its aesthetic creed beyond the pale of nationalism, he gradually moved away to his own interests and activities, establishing new movements and encouraging new ideals.

John Millington Synge (1871-1909)

Synge, the youngest of the company, entered the literary movement as AE was leaving it, after most of the ideals had been expressed and the early policy in the main established. Like Yeats, Martyn, and Moore, he too belonged to the "gentry," albeit a less recognized and more impoverished branch. And he retained his desire for anonymity even while his work acquired notoriety. Unlike his colleagues, his roots were in County Wicklow in the south and east of Ireland; he did not visit the west until 1898, and even then he preferred the stony islands of Aran to the faery kingdom of Galway and Connemara. A "quiet,

solitary man who lived apart," he exulted in violence, colour, and rhetoric, but only in his art, and certainly never in his nation. Like Lady Gregory, Synge practised more than he theorized, and like her also his contribution to nationalism was of a practical kind reflected in his plays and essays. Like Yeats, he was a romantic, his love of Ireland an intense emotion which he used to interpret himself. However, unlike Yeats, he never tried to rationalize this national feeling, but merely expressed it through his observation and dramatization of the peasantry.

Synge differed from the rest of the group in both his upbringing and his education. Coming from a devout, narrow, Protestant sect which had supplied bishops and missionaries to the world for several centuries, his own emotional development though intense, was of necessity private, especially as he discovered himself moving further and further away from the position held by his strict, Unionist family. It was not, perhaps, until he left Ireland altogether to study on the continent that he managed to complete his own development and consolidate his own feelings towards his art and his country. For, like many exiles, he could not see his nation steadily and whole until he had left it.

The development of his nationalism followed the pattern one would expect of a poet who felt deeply but rarely expressed himself publicly except through his art. As a youth he had gone through the stage of mystical nationalism where "everything in fact that was Irish had a charm neither human nor divine, rather perhaps as if I had fallen in love with a goddess." And, as with Lady Gregory, his first contact

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1 Cf. David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens, *J. M. Synge 1871-1909* (NY: Macmillan, 1959), ch. 1 et passim. I am indebted throughout to the thorough and extremely helpful MS. written by Edward M. Stephens on which this biography is based and which was made available to me by Mrs. L. M. Stephens.

2 James Joyce is perhaps the most notable example, closely followed by Shaw.

3 Stephens MS, 498.
with patriotic literature had been *The Spirit of the Nation*, which, like Yeats, he tended to over-estimate as literature because stirred by the sincerity of expression.\(^1\) While attending Trinity College he studied the Irish language, at the same time extending his interest to a thorough study of archeology and history.\(^2\) Later in Paris he continued his studies on Celtic literature under Professor de Joubainville at the Sorbonne, and Anatole le Braz. But still his interest in his country remained an academic one, and it was not until he met Yeats in Paris in 1896 and through him joined Maud Gonne's Association Irlandaise that he actively participated in any nationalist cause.\(^3\) By then, however, he had taken a theoretical interest in socialism, reading among other works on the subject the writings of William Morris, and had felt the first stirrings of ambition "to do good."\(^4\) For a time he was strongly influenced by his new friends, and fancied himself a similar radical.\(^5\) However, he realized that his "theory of regeneration for Ireland" differed from the "revolutionary and semi-military movement" inaugurated by Yeats and Miss Gonne. "I wish to work in my own way for the cause of Ireland," he wrote the same

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\(^1\)Greene and Stephens, *op. cit.*, 13-19.

\(^2\)As well as the required texts, his notebooks record his reading *The Children of Lir* and *Diarimuig and Grania* in Irish, Wakeman's *Handbook of Irish Antiquities*, Musgrave's *Rebellions in Ireland*, Froude's *The English in Ireland*, C.T.Stokes' *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, Petrie's *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland*. (Stephens MS.)

\(^3\)Synge records the date, 21 December 1896, in his diary; Yeats is therefore two years out in his preface to *The Well of the Saints*.

\(^4\)Mrs. Synge's letter to her son Samuel, quoted by Greene and Stephens, *op. cit.*, 57.

\(^5\)His nephew quotes him as saying in 1900, "A radical is a person who wants change root and branch, and I'm proud to be a radical." (Stephens MS., 1203).
year in his letter of resignation to the latter. But still he did not know how, except for a general idea that "Ireland will come to her own in years to come when socialistic ideas spread in England."  

In 1898 I went to the Aran Islands -- I had known the County Wicklow peasantry -- we always spent every summer there -- intimates for years -- and found the subjects of most of my plays there,

Synge wrote in a cryptic note to an American journalist in 1907. He had, as Yeats records and the literary world knows, been sent to Aran by Yeats in order that he might learn his craft. Ironically, he already knew far more about the Celtic movements in Europe than he did of the Gaelic movement at home, and consequently his attitude towards the Irish peasant, although a response to the emotional needs he felt in himself, was also influenced by his study of the entire European movement of which he felt his own nation's to be an integral part. An article on the Irish legendary material written for a Paris journal in 1902 stresses the European importance of the literature then being translated by Lady Gregory:

In our legends and in the cycles which I have just mentioned there is a mythology of the first epoch, a nucleus of the most primitive beliefs of the Indo-European races.... This literature is also important from another point of view. Life, morals and worships described there are none other than the phases of the civilization of all the Celtic races west of Europe at the time of the Caesars.

1Quoted in full by Greene and Stephens, op.cit.,62-63. Cf. C.H.H., "John Synge as I Knew Him," Irish Statesman, 5 July 1924,532 + 534; letter by A.Lynch, Irish Statesman, 20 October 1928, concerning his Paris days: "Synge was critical rather in respect to our means of action than to our ultimate aim"; quotation from NY Evening Sun, 2 April 1909, probably by Jack Yeats: "Synge was a keen observer of political conditions, although he never talked politics."

2Mrs. Synge's letter to her son Robert, ibid.,63.

3Letter to Leon Brodzky,10 December 1907, Spencer Brodney collection in Trinity College, Dublin.
Therefore in reconstructing the world from which our texts have come, a rather clear idea of the ancient Gauls may be arrived at.\(^1\)

An unpublished letter Synge wrote after the Playboy riots indicates that his attitude towards Ireland as part of a much larger European culture never changed:

How are the mighty fallen! Was there ever a sight so piteous as an old and respectable people setting up the idea of Fee-Gee because, with their eyes glued on John Bull's navel, they dare not be European for fear the huckster across the street might call them English.... It will not be long -- we will make it our first hope -- till some young man... will sweep over the backside of the world to the uttermost limbo this credo of mouthing gibberish. (I speak here not of the old and magnificent language of our manuscripts, or of the two or three dialects still spoken, though with many barbarisms, in the west and south, but of the incoherent twaddle that is passed off as Irish in the Gaelic League). This young man will teach Ireland again that she is part of Europe.\(^2\)

Like Yeats's, his nationalism could not be restricted to narrow movements.

A national feeling that is "too fiery, too conscious" is more likely to degenerate into "excited rhetoric" than produce literature of value, he felt.\(^3\) Consequently he distrusted the work of the Gaelic League, whose doctrine as has already been stated he regarded as being made up of "ignorance, fraud, and hypocrisy." "Irish as a living language is dying out year by year,"\(^4\) he claimed, and Irish nationalists would be better employed if they concentrated instead on keeping "the cruder powers of the Irish mind" occupied until the Irish literature written in English became a more definite influence in Irish life. "Modern peasant Gaelic is full of rareness and beauty, but if it was sophisticated by journalists and translators... it would lose all its freshness; and then limits, which now make its charm, would tend to prevent all further development."\(^5\) A "special intimacy" with a language can alone produce real works of literature," and if the new literary movement is to be a lasting one, he felt, national feeling must "cease to be an obsession"

\(^1\)"La Vieille Littérature Irlandaise," L'Européen (Paris), 15 March 1902, 11.
\(^2\)Printed in Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 262-63.
\(^3\)"Le Mouvement Intellectuel Irlandais," L'Européen, 31 May 1902, 12.
\(^4\)Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 262.
\(^5\)"The Old and New in Ireland," Academy and Literature, 6 September, 1902, 238-39.
so that the language most frequently in use can gradually become the true mother tongue.1

Synge was in fact preaching National heresy. Furthermore, he practised it. He found the material he was looking for in "the manifold and beautiful life we have all missed who have been born in modern Europe," as he observed it among the peasants and tinkers of Wicklow.2 He was charmed by the simplicity and vigour of the Aran Islander, who lived with the harshness and bitterness of reality.3 And he loathed the "rampant double-chinned vulgarity" he found among the prosperous Gaelic Leaguers.4 For all his early interest in socialism, in fact, Synge the artist would have been the first to disparage a socialist society as much as Synge the humanitarian would have welcomed the alleviation of the unhappiness and horror of the congested districts. And the attitude of the aristocratic artist who finds the greatest happiness among the peasants he celebrates in his works is clearly expressed throughout his life. "As you know," he wrote to Stephen MacKenna after the Playboy riots, "I have the wildest admiration for the Irish peasants, and for Irish men of known or unknown genius.... But between the two there's an ungodly ruck of fat-faced, sweaty-headed swine."5 Poetic licence and physical discomfort aside, his experiences with Dublin audiences tended to increase

1"Le Mouvement Intellectuel Irlandais."
2Jottings in a notebook, 1902, Stephens MS.1448-49; Notes in a diary about the same time, Stephens MS.1483-84.
3Cf. Preface to Playboy of the Western World.
4Letter to MacKenna, 13 July 1905, quoted by Greene and Stephens, op.cit., 187-88. Cf. his emotion at the audience's reaction to the Irish Literary Theatre performances in 1901, "Le Mouvement Intellectuel Irlandais."
5Letter to MacKenna, mid-April, 1907, quoted in Greene and Stephens, op.cit., 263-64. Cf. letter to MacKenna 28 January 1904, ibid., 156-57. In notes describing a visit to the races at Arklow Synge comments that the races are far enough from Dublin to be out of reach of "horsey riff-raff cities produce." Stephens MS.1326-27.
his romanticism rather than turn him towards realism. He could, however, be extremely realistic in his attitude towards Irish politics. He was aware of the importance of the new movements, but at the same time realized that "in Ireland nothing is done without the influence of a dominating personality." And since the fall of Parnell, Ireland's hope lay in her intellectual activity rather than any undirected political energy. "I have never known a man with so passionate, so pedantic a value for truth as Synge," his close friend Stephen MacKenna wrote many years after his death. "He didn't so much judge the lie intellectually or morally as simply hate it -- as one hates a bad smell or a filthy taste. This alone would put him off any public movement whatever." "I take it he wanted as dearly as he wanted anything, to see Ireland quite free; but one thing kept him quiet -- he hated publicity, co-operation and lies. He refused to support the Gaelic League because one pamphlet it issued contained the statement...that to know modern Irish was to be in possession of the ancient Saga." In a letter to his publisher concerning some articles on the people of the Wicklow glens, Synge wrote, "I greatly prefer... working here for people I know, and I have no wish at all to press for a big price." One thing only was important, and that was his fidelity to art and life as he saw it.

1 "Le Mouvement Intellectuel Irlandais."
2 Article on the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin, Stephens MS.
4 Letter by MacKenna to The Irish Statesman, 3 November 1928.
These, then, were the leaders who came together at the turn of the century and made a new literary movement in Ireland possible. Each strongly individual and resolutely independent, they were bound together by three ties: a dedication to art and their own aesthetic creeds, a passionate desire to create a permanent memorial to their nation, and a sincere respect for each other's work. But art came first, on occasion in defiance of the nation for which each was working and in spite of a high regard for their fellow-workers.

"There are things a man must not do to save a nation," John O'Leary had said to Yeats. The history of the Irish Literary Theatre and its successor, the Abbey Theatre, records not only what these men were willing to do for the sake of their nation, but to an even greater extent what they refused to do for the sake of their art. Edward Martyn left the movement to found a theatre of his own which would satisfy his own artistic creed; George Moore returned to the artistic form which expressed his concept of art; AE moved on to encourage other young artists for the glory of Ireland. Yeats and Lady Gregory remained, joined now by the dramatist who was to become their biggest burden and their greatest glory, Synge. But the story of their attempt to synthesise nationalism and art belongs to a later chapter.
CHAPTER 3 - COSMOPOLITANISM

The confusion of the present times is great, the multitude of voices counselling different things bewildering, the number of existing works capable of attracting a young writer's attention and of becoming his models, immense. What he wants is a hand to guide him through the confusion, a voice to prescribe to him the aim which he should keep in view, and to explain to him that the value of the literary works which offer themselves to his attention is relative to their power of helping him forward on his road towards this aim. (Matthew Arnold, Preface to Poems, 1855)

The various forms of intellectual activity which together make up the culture of an age, move for the most part from different starting-points, and by unconnected roads. As products of the same generation they partake indeed of a common character, and unconsciously illustrate each other; but of the producers themselves, each group is solitary, gaining what advantage or disadvantage there may be in intellectual isolation.

(Walter Pater, Preface to The Renaissance, 1873)

"The Irish Literary Theatre will attempt to do in Dublin something of what has been done in London and Paris," proclaimed the first issue of Beltaine in May 1899. The founders of this new project in Dublin clearly wished to identify themselves with international as well as national movements. And when we recall that these founders had schooled themselves in European culture before attempting to re-create a genuine Irish culture, it is even more necessary to investigate further not only their models, but the aesthetic philosophy which fostered their artistic aims. "To an Irishman," Yeats had claimed, "England is fairyland."¹ And Martyn, Moore and Yeats had for many years lived in the centre of that kingdom. It is to London that we must turn, then, for the earliest signs of the dramatic revival in Ireland. But London itself was an intellectual whirlpool of new ideas and fresh evaluations of all aspects of art. The fresh currents came from the north, the south, and the west; some rose in the provinces, others in the universities. Some trickled out, others gained momentum and direction; but all contributed to the form of the new century's letters. It was

¹Conversation with Frank O'Connor, quoted by Ellmann, The Man and the Masks, 79.
these restless tributaries rather than the general stream the young men from Ireland chose to explore.

Modern industrialism and the accompanying rise of the middle class had produced in England an age of materialism and ugliness which no artist or thinker could with honesty condone or with sanity endure. Two paths lay open: he could strive to make the world about him worth living in and working for, or he could turn away and create a world of light and beauty in which he could live and work happily alone. Both solutions had enthusiastic advocates who in turn gained many disciples even more enthusiastic; both looked to an earlier age for an expression of the world they dreamed of. "We did not look forward or look outward, we left that to the prose writers; we looked back," wrote Yeats many years later.¹

But even among "the prose writers" this new spirit was evident.² Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, and William Morris led the body of critics and social reformers who tried to remake the world in a better and more tasteful image. Like most prophets, they were misunderstood, often by their own disciples. Deploiring the Philistinism and provincialism he found about him, Arnold advocated a return to the simplicity, precision, and seriousness of the classics.³ Cosmopolitan in learning as well as taste, he turned frequently to the literature of France, at the same time urging English writers to express life with clarity of vision, to make "the effort to see the object as in itself it really is."

While Arnold advocated a classical ideal, Ruskin pointed to the art of the middle ages which he felt expressed the morality and freedom of the craftsman. Art to him was the supreme business of life, because the


²Except, of course, in the Imperialist writings of Kipling and Henley; romantic writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson solved their personal problems by escaping into adventure. George Moore praised Beau Austin, written by Stevenson and Henley, Pall Mall Gazette, 7 September 1892.

highest expression of the good in man. As Slade Professor at Oxford (1870-1878), Ruskin dictated the artistic taste of the age\(^1\); as social and economic reformer, he preached Carlyle's gospel of work, and was not averse to handling a pick-axe himself for the purpose.\(^2\)

Foremost of Ruskin's disciples was William Morris. A successful poet and craftsman, he entered vigorously into the campaign against ugliness, and extended the battlefield into the drawing-room, the cathedral, and the printing shop. Finally he bore the standard of socialism into the market place, and into the outstretched hands of another young Irishman, George Bernard Shaw (who promptly carried it into the nearest theatre, where it has been wildly waving ever since\(^3\)).

Morris's activities ranged from designs for wallpaper, tapestry, stained glass, and type, to the propagation of a Utopia where man could express his joy in work and life through beautiful crafts and art.\(^4\) He, too, however, looked to the past for inspiration, seeking first in the middle

\(^1\)He was not always a benevolent dictator; his famous lawsuit with Whistler could in a sense represent the quarrel between the two choices of the artist. Cf. William Gaunt, *The Aesthetic Adventure* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1945), 80-96.


\(^3\)Shaw's debt to Morris has been frequently paid in his writings and by others. Cf. St. John Ervine, *Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends* (London: Constable, 1956). One of the recent Royal Court playwrights, Arnold Wesker, says of the final play of his trilogy: "Basically it is a family affair; on another plane it's a play about human relationships and on a third and most important plane -- it's a story of people moved by political ideas in a particular social time. There are many theories about Socialism. *Chicken Soup* ... handles a Communist aspect. *Roots*... deals with a personal aspect...which suggests that one can only teach by example. *Jerusalem* is a sort of study in a William Morris kind of Socialism. If you like, the three plays are three aspects of Socialism played out through the lives of a Jewish family." *The Times*, 29 March 1960.

ages and later in the sagas of Iceland for the colour and vitality he found lacking in the world about him.¹ And he created a lasting impression not only on Shaw, but on the young Yeats, who was a frequent visitor to Kelmscott House:²

I took to him first because of some little tricks of speech and body that reminded me of my old grandfather in Sligo, but soon discovered his spontaneity and joy and made him my chief of men. Today I do not set his poetry very high, but for an odd altogether wonderful line, or thought; and yet, if some angel offered me the choice, I would choose to live his life, poetry and all, rather than my own or any other man's.³

But Yeats's criticism of Morris's poetry came much later in life, and in a review of The Well at the World's End he pays tribute to the prophet who "was the poet of his time who was most perfectly a poet," for "he more than any man of modern days tried to change the life of his time into the life of his dream."⁴ Morris's appreciation of The Wanderings of Oisin meant much to the young poet;⁵ and in later years his copy of the Kelmscott Chaucer, resting on a lectern between two blue candles, occupied a prominent position in his rooms on Woburn Walk.⁶

¹Dorothy M. Hoare, The Works of Morris and Yeats in relation to early Saga Literature (CUP, 1937). Yeats refers to the "new romance" Morris and Wagner have created, "Celtic Element in Literature" (1903), Essays and Introductions, 186. Morris was probably as great an influence on Masefield as Yeats, cf. The Locked Chest, 1906, based on an Icelandic tale.

²His sister studied embroidery with Miss May Morris, and for a time Yeats joined her there to take French lessons; J.M. Hone, W.B. Yeats, 65.

³Autobiographies, 141.

⁴The Bookman, November, 1896. He once described The Sundering Flood and News from Nowhere as "the only books I ever read slowly so that I might not come quickly to the end"; Hone, op. cit., 65.

⁵Letters to Katharine Tynan, 24 January 1889, Letters, 102.

On the whole George Moore, unlike Yeats, remained unaffected by the ideals represented, but he considered The Defence of Guenevere "one of the most beautiful poems in the language." Martyn, however, arrived in Oxford before Ruskin's retirement, and although he found an immediate interest elsewhere, Modern Painters became one of his favourite works. For when Martyn went up to Oxford, and Moore and Yeats dined in the literary circles of London, a more seductive doctrine was attracting the young writers who had less inclination towards outright social reform. And now at last a doctrine that had startled France half a century before found its way into England: art not for the sake of society or culture, but for the sake of itself.

The banner of artistic freedom had been raised before in England. "Be it remembered," Max Beerbohm reminds us, "that long before this time there had been in the heart of Chelsea a kind of Cult of Beauty.... Beauty had existed long before 1880. It was Mr. Oscar Wilde who first trotted her round." The young Yeats had heard his father's circle discuss the aims of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: to paint directly from nature and experiences without conforming to traditional methods; to devote close attention to individual details (always selecting those details and subjects which appealed, of course); and, turning away from the ugliness of this scientific industrial age, to dream of a medieval world where sunlight and happiness prevailed. Leader of the group was Dante Gabriel Rossetti, visionary, poet, and painter, who expressed his desire for beauty in dreamy madonnas, and his rejection of ideas

3. In the preface to Théophile Gautier's novel Mlle de Maupin (1836).
in sensuous mystical lyrics. William Morris had been strongly influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, but the effect shows more in his style than in his theory. Another notable neophyte was a feverish, brilliant young poet, Algernon Charles Swinburne. While Morris energetically applied himself to the task of beautifying all he saw in the world about him, the Pre-Raphaelite withdrawal into sensual and decorative beauty influenced Swinburne towards the symbolist movement of France, more specifically to the emphasis on form and technique advocated by Gautier and the Parnassians, and on pagan beauty as celebrated by Baudelaire.

Walter Pater (1859-1894)

A more positive exposition of this aesthetic doctrine was expressed in the writings and conversation of Walter Pater, Fellow of Brasenose College. Pater had been impressed by Arnold's cosmopolitan attitude towards letters and Ruskin's insistence on the supremacy of art; he read Goethe and translated Flaubert; he lectured on Hegelian dialectic; and he met Swinburne. In *The Renaissance* (1873) and more fully through the adventures of his painfully sensitive hero in *Marius the Epicurean*

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1 As a young man, J.B.Yeats and "the Brotherhood"(J.T.Nettleship, Edwin Ellis, and George Wilson, artists Yeats worked with) loved Whitman, Swinburne and Shelley, J.B.Yeats:Letters,47, but Swinburne's attack on W.B.Yeats in his revised edition of his book on Blake turned the Elder Yeats against "that damned homunculus... without sweetheart or wife or child or friend," whose poetry "at best is a sort of choric rhetoric." Op.cit.,105.


3 Ibid.,93. It is interesting to note that Swinburne, Symons and Synge all translated Villon.

(1885), Pater defined his creed: "to rouse, to startle [the human spirit] to a life of constant and eager observation." Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. "A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life....To burn always with hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life."\(^1\) Perhaps more important, he elevated to creative status the function of the critic: "to distinguish, analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which a picture...produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced." Beauty for Pater must be defined not in the abstract," but in the most concrete terms possible."\(^2\)

Indiscriminately applied to life, this doctrine of "for ever curiously testing new opinions and counting new impressions" reaped its casualties, a danger which led Pater to suppress the relevant passages in the second edition of The Renaissance.\(^3\) Adopted as a fair expression of artistic endeavour, it offered writers and artists the scope in subject matter and freedom of treatment they had long been seeking. Arnold had argued for touchstones; Pater illustrated them.

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\(^{1}\)Conclusion to Studies in the History of the Renaissance, 1st ed. (1873).

\(^{2}\)Preface to The Renaissance (1873).

\(^{3}\)Pater also altered the title of the second edition (1877) to The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry. The third edition (1888) replaced the conclusion in revised form. Although Wilde is generally considered the greatest casualty, a more direct victim was perhaps the painter Simeon Solomon, who took Swinburne's pagan games far more seriously than the poet did. Cf. Gaunt,op.cit.,45-48. It is debatable whether or not Lionel Johnson whom Yeats admired falls into this category. Cf. his poetry, The Complete Poems of Lionel Johnson, ed. I. Fletcher (London: Unicorn, 1955).
That it could appeal to men as different in temperament and belief as Edward Martyn and W.B. Yeats testifies to its universality. Each took from it according to his temperament and talent. Freed from the moral earnestness which marked the work of the social reformers, they inclined even more towards a cosmopolitan attitude in art, asking only of an artistic work: "Is it beautiful?" And the young Yeats reflected this ideal. "Beauty is the end and law of poetry," he wrote to AE in 1900. But emphasis on the personal test of individual expression and impression can have its dangers as well. Sense was less important than feeling, and occasionally the temptation to bemuse or shock ("épater le bourgeois") took precedence over the desire to communicate. One of Moore's favourite stories was of Baudelaire's "The day that I killed my father..." and the cheaper imitations of the fin de siècle movement grasped only this element without the art.

The aesthetic movement, as this emphasis on art for the sake of art rather than for the sake of society might be called, expressed itself in England in four main tendencies, none entirely divorced from the others, but each emphasizing different qualities and each owing much to France. The accent on sensation and emotion expressed in a

1Letters, 343.
2Cf. Coventry Patmore's advice to Le Gallienne, The Romantic '90's, 74: "You live too much on the capital, rather than the interest, of passion."

3Occasionally this can be seen in Beardsley and other artists of The Yellow Book. The reviewer, "the Yellow Dwarf," insisted upon a critical standard of beauty and not utility. Moore himself is consistently guilty.


5In England the aesthetics attempted to synthesize the opposing forces of "Decadence" and "Symbolism" as described by May Daniels, The French Drama of the Unspoken (Edinburgh U.P., 1953), 21-23.
personal language resulted in symbolism; the importance of ritual and form already partially experienced in the High Church movement at Oxford and heightened by an interest in Swedenborg and Bahme (mainly via Blake), encouraged an interest in mysticism; the constant search for earlier models and fresh material encouraged the "celtic revival" which was by no means limited to Ireland; the concern for style and delight in polished language resulted in an elegance and wit reminiscent of neo-classicism. Martyn was apparently attracted by Pater and his doctrines; Pater remained one of his favourite authors. Moore, having discovered impressionism in French painting, was carried across the channel by "Marius" and symbolism. Yeats, already of a mystical cast of mind, became one of the leading symbolist poets. All three were first led back to Ireland by the "celtic revival," to be joined by Synge from Paris.


^2 Pierre Loti and Anatole LeBraz, who wrote of Brittany; Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold who wrote of the Celt at large; Fiona Macleod who spoke for Scotland.

^3 Wilde and Whistler in conversation; W.S. Gilbert and Wilde in drama; Beerbohm and Shaw in essays.

^4 Henry B. O'Hanlon, quoted by Sister Courtney, Edward Martyn, 41.

^5 Avowals (London: privately printed, 1918), chs. IX, X, and XI.

^6 Symons dedicated The Symbolist Movement to Yeats; cf. Ideas of Good and Evil (1903).

^7 Bettaine promises a "Celtic" play by Fiona Macleod.
The aesthetic reaction against the Victorian demand for high seriousness is seen at its most extreme in the trend towards dandyism. Wilde's purple breeches were the first indication, modified by the stylish dress of Max Beerbohm and Aubrey Beardsley. For years Yeats wore a loose silk tie and flowing cape; and Moore was distinguished by his French attire when he returned to England. Matching this sartorial elegance, the young aesthetes practised the *mot juste*. At its best and most brilliant, this wit can be enjoyed in Beerbohm's and Shaw's essays, Wilde's plays, and the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. But neither Gilbert nor Wilde was able to free himself completely from the sentimentality of the commercial theatre: Wilde's earliest plays were melodramas and his first successes were frankly based on the highly moral well-made pattern of Arthur Wing Pinero (as his novel was based on a conglomerate of well-made patterns with an impeccable moral). The doctrines of the aesthetic movement, like those of their reformer associates, were often misinterpreted and abused by their apostles; Gilbert's libretti judiciously balanced clever satire with "right sentiment," and *Patience* did much to restrain the exaggerated accessories of aestheticism. Further, the emphasis

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1 Yeats later chose the conservative black costume befitting the serious poet.

2 *Vera, or the Nihilists* (1881) and *The Duchess of Palma* (1882), both of which contain Wilde's first attempt at the "Lord Henry" figure. Neither has ever been performed in England.

3 Gilbert had originally intended it to be a satire on the church, but thought better of it and aimed it at Wilde instead. (Actually Bunthorne and his lovesick maids is a better caricature of Yeats, who had not yet appeared on the scene). D'Oyly Carte, the Gilbert and Sullivan impresario, sponsored Wilde's lecture tour to America during the first run of *Patience*.

4 Such extremes as pseudo-Gothic architecture had their parallels: the "Japanese craze" and the "blue phase" both introduced by Whistler. Cf. George du Maurier's caricature, reproduced in Gaunt, *Aesthetic Adventure*, 58: "Are you intense?"
on wit encouraged consciousness of style and language; conversation once more became an art outside the theatre. Apart from this movement, yet allied to it through the broad distinction of humour, are the plays of James Barrie. Like Gilbert and Sullivan, he maintained excellent terms with the public, which could leave its social responsibilities behind and enter the world of whimsy without endorsing the "decadence" of the aesthetes.

The culmination of this emphasis on style can be seen most clearly in the life and work of Oscar Wilde. Like Yeats, Wilde learned his "extravagant style" from Pater. Unlike Yeats or Pater, he developed his belief in artistic creation until it engulfed his entire life, emphasising the individualism of Pater's aesthetics until the pose became the man, and the mask, like Lord George Hall's, moulded the personality. But it is not sufficient to dismiss the "tragedy" of Oscar Wilde as an unfortunate enthusiasm; his life and his art were the result of a deliberate effort at creation. The tragedy lay not in the practice, but in the impractical attempt to apply an aesthetic creed of perfection to that imperfect creation, man. It was Wilde's misunderstanding not of Pater's creed, but of his own, that was at fault.

Wilde's aesthetic creed is stated consistently and clearly throughout his work, from the early plays through his novel, stories, and essays to De Profundis. Frequently it is stated in the same language; nearly always it is spoken by the same character who, under different guises, acts as Wilde's alter ego. It is expressed most clearly, perhaps, in the Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray:

1 Pinero's plays had always tended slightly towards this "comedy of manners," but always self-consciously.


4 Prince Paul in Vera, Gilbert in The Critic as Artist, Lord Henry in Dorian Gray, Lord Darlington in Lady Windermere's Fan, Lord Goring in An Ideal Husband.
The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim. The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things. The highest, as the lowest, form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.

They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty....

Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art....

From the point of view of form, the type of all the arts is the art of the musician. From the point of view of feeling, the actor's craft is the type.

Beauty must be appreciated for itself alone and can only be appreciated through the impressions; all of life and nature (which includes the artist) should be translated by the artist into beauty; all things are instruments of the artist's craft. Wilde was in fact taking Pater's doctrine of withdrawal from the "unbeautiful" moment one step further -- into life; in doing so, he imposed upon himself the impossible task of recreating life in the artist's image. He succeeded as long as he limited his task to a recreation of himself into his famous pose; he failed when he tried to apply it to the reality about him. Man can copy art, but nature can not. (It is significant that Wilde's alter ego, while moulding others to his own conception, remains completely detached and unaltered during the process).

"Art is a symbol, because man is a symbol....the artistic life is simply self-development," Wilde wrote in De Profundis, his last public statement. This emphasis upon selfhood was one of the cardinal tenets of the aesthetic creed of the 'nineties, and Wilde developed it to its finest stage in his doctrine of the mask. "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth," says Gilbert in The Critic as Artist.

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1De Profundis (1905) (London: Methuen, 1949), 93. Cf. The Soul of Man under Socialism, which emphasizes "Individualism."
2Oscar Wilde's Plays, Prose Writings, and Poems (London: Everyman's, 1930), 48.
in fact, is himself as seen by himself, the essential ego, when he is "perfectly and absolutely himself." In order to achieve this mask, the artist must have the courage to give himself up to his impressions, for "that is the secret of the artistic life." Furthermore, by becoming his own creation, man detaches himself from all threat of ugliness, and the greatest cause of ugliness is human suffering. "Through Art only...we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence"; Dorian does not feel safe until his wish to remain as he is in Basil's painting is granted, and he is "out of nature." Similarly, he can love Sibyl Vane as long as she remains the actress a mask, but "the moment she touched actual life, she marred it, and it marred her."

Just as the artist should devote his life to re-creating himself into the mask, so should he impose pattern and style on his material. Consequently, form and technique were more important to Wilde than subject matter. Furthermore, the critical faculty was essential for creation, as only the critic can see with sufficient objectivity. "That spirit of choice, that subtle tact of omission, is really the critical faculty in one of its most characteristic moods, and no one who does not possess this critical faculty can create anything at all in art." And it is the critical faculty that invents fresh forms, also, thereby avoiding the danger of repetition as we observe it in nature. "This love of definite conception, this cleanness of vision, this artistic sense of limit, is the characteristic of all great work.

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3"The Critic as Artist," op.cit.,40.
5"The Critic as Artist," op.cit.,16.
6Ibid.,18.
and poetry."¹ The artist has achieved perfection when the subject cannot be separated from the method of its expression.² For when the material, form, manner, and technique are in the perfect control of the artist, the creation becomes a tapestry of rhythm, mood, and image: "So far from desiring to isolate [beauty] in a formula appealing to the intellect, we...seek to materialise it in a form that gives joy to the soul through the senses."³ The ideal form for this philosophy of correspondences is the paradox, which we see throughout his work the perfect balancing of two halves, and is represented in the "two faces" of Earnest. This, then, was the aesthetic doctrine Wilde preached. That he succeeded in his work is evident from the perfection of The Importance of Being Earnest, where at last subject and expression synthesize and eliminate the personality of the artist; that he failed in his attempt to apply the same creed to his life was the result of his blindness in not realizing his own dictum that the method should be suited to the material.

It is ironical that the artist who most closely achieves Wilde's aims was his most bitter caricaturist, W.S.Gilbert. For Gilbert succeeded in his plays (and even his libretti are plays) because he recognised the importance of being earnest. Shaw, feeling uneasy about Earnest, fancied a resemblance in plot to Gilbert's Engaged, written almost twenty years earlier.⁴ However the closest similarity is not in plot, but in style, as Gilbert's foreword to the play makes clear:

It is absolutely essential to the success of this piece that it should be played with the most perfect earnestness and gravity throughout. There should be no exaggeration in costume, make-up, or demeanour; and the characters, one and all, should appear to believe, throughout, in the perfect sincerity of their words and

²Ibid.,136.
³"Lecture to Art Students"(1883), Essays and Lectures,199.
⁴Our Theatres in the Nineties (London:Constable,1948),I,41-44.
actions. Directly the actors show that they are conscious of the absurdity of their utterances the piece begins to drag.\^1

His concern, as it was Wilde's, is with the artistic unity of the play as a whole, "when the subject cannot be separated from the method of expression."

But the two young men most directly influenced by Wilde's aesthetic doctrine were Aubrey Beardsley and W.B. Yeats. Beardsley's paintings graphically illustrate Wilde's belief that the "dark half of the garden" is genuine subject for art as much as the sun-lit side. As his sister commented, "He hated the people who denied the existence of evil, and so being young he filled his pictures with evil. He had a passion for reality."\^2 In line and technique as well he emphasised the importance of form and pattern over colour, and the objectivity of the artist is evident in the mockery of the beauty he expressed and satirized. And Yeats in later years saw in a "strange, precocious genius" the artist who "would take upon himself not the consequences but the knowledge of sin."\^3 Beardsley's poster advertised the first production of The Land of Heart's Desire and both contributed to The Yellow Book. But their closest tie was Wilde, and through Wilde, Pater.

If Rossetti was a subconscious influence, and perhaps the most powerful of all, we looked consciously to Pater for our philosophy...Marius the Epicurean...seemed to us all, the only great prose in modern English....It taught us to walk upon a rope tightly stretched through serene air, and we were left to keep our feet upon a swaying rope in a storm, Yeats wrote much later.\^4 And the names of Pater and Wilde recur constantly throughout his Autobiographies. As much as Wilde, Yeats was fascinated by "the slow-moving elegance" that characterized Pater's prose,\^5 and strove in his own writing to achieve the same perfection


\^2Quoted by Yeats, letter to Lady Gregory, 11 February 1913, Letters, 575.

\^3Autobiographies, 330-31.

\^4Autobiographies, 302-03.

\^5Unpublished draft of Four Years, quoted by Ellmann, Man and the Mask, 139.
(perhaps most notable in *Rosa Alchemica*). And it was this same emphasis on style (both in life and art) that he appreciated in Wilde. AE recalls that Yeats vigorously defended Wilde against the charge of being merely a *poseur*. "He said it was merely living artistically, and it was the duty of everybody to have a conception of themselves, and he intended to conceive of himself." And AE is perhaps right in believing Wilde's doctrine responsible for Yeats's own later doctrine of the mask, for Yeats admired both the style — Wilde and Shaw were, he felt, "the only dramatists of the nineteenth century whose plays were worth going to hear"— and the man — "in Sheridan and Oscar Wilde, you have personalities, the personalities that make drama." As Wilde himself had said, "For there is no art where there is no style, and no style where there is no unity, and unity is of the individual." And out of the struggle for unity comes pattern, the tapestry, the mask.

Symbolism — Arthur Symons (1865-1945)

While the emphasis on wit exploited many of the techniques of realism, symbolism was the result of suggestion as opposed to factual

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1Lady Gregory in her *Journals: 1916-1930*, ed. Lennox Robinson (London: Putnam, 1946), 263 quotes him: "But these critics ought to think more of the writing. They have given up God, they shouldn't give up perfection." Lady Gregory comments: "Well, he practises what he preaches; is working over those old poems as if for a competition for eternity."


3See below, Part Two, Chapter 5 *passim*.

4Quoted in an unpublished letter by Frank Fay to Yeats, 11 December 1902, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. Wilde's plays are more successful when adapted to wireless and television than most plays written for the theatre.

5Interview with the *San Francisco Examiner*, 31 January 1904.

6"The Critic as Artist," 17.
statement. "A symbol indeed is the only possible expression of some invisible essence," Yeats wrote in an essay on Blake in 1896.1
And in the work of Arthur Symons are expressed all the various aspects of symbolism in English literature. Close friend of Yeats, Moore, and Martyn, he participated in almost all the activities before the English public during the final decade of the century, usually involving his friends in one or another of his pursuits. As poet, translator, scholar, theorist, critic, playwright, and journalist, he combined a cosmopolitan attitude towards the arts with a strong desire to interpret those arts to his fellow countrymen. He was equally at home in Paris and London, and therefore doubly valuable to a poet like Yeats. His writings, in fact, express the specific form symbolism took in England when it was adapted from the French, with strong overtones of Wilde:

I contend on behalf of the liberty of art, and I deny that morals have any right of jurisdiction over it. Art may be served by morality: it can never be its servant.... The moods of men! There I find my subject: there the region over which art rules.... Whatever has existed has achieved the right of artistic existence.2

Although art lives "where cities pour/Their turbid human stream through street and mart,"3 there is "no necessary difference in artistic value between a good poem about a flower in the hedge and a good poem about the scent in a satchet."4

Symons's greatest influence, however, lay in his critical rather than his creative writings, as pedagogue to Yeats, Martyn, and Moore. Attempting in his critical and theoretical writing "to be as little

1William Blake and his Illustrations to the Divine Comedy," Essays and Introductions,116.
3Prologue to Days and Nights (1897), "in all gratitude and admiration to Walter Pater," op.cit.,3.
abstract as possible, and to study first principles...as they may be
discovered...in every achieved form of art," he worked his way towards
"a system of aesthetics, of all the arts."¹ And his twofold insistence
on treating each art as a separate developing movement and yet their
interdependence as parts of an aesthetic whole sharpened a tendency
towards a technical language common to all the arts.² Terminology
formerly reserved for painters was adopted by poets and musicians, and
vice versa. Whistler's Nocturnes enraged Ruskin and resulted in the
famous lawsuit; "tone poems" might be considered a part of the same
tendency.³

However, although on a technical critical level this enlarged the
scope of the artist, on the symbolic level -- the expression of a
personal emotion -- this language tended to widen the gulf between
the artist and the layman.⁴

Martyn dedicated The Heather Field and Maeve to Yeats and Symons,
and Symons was responsible for the "dream scenes" in Maeve, but the
influence was not one-sided. For Yeats had a natural tendency towards
the symbolism Symons was studying, and helped considerably in the
writing of The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899).⁵ Further,
he and Moore agreed in much of their criticism, and as John Freeman
points out in his study of Moore, their work and interest in literature
followed parallel currents.⁶ Where Moore was attracted by Manet and

¹Preface to Plays Acting and Music:A Book of Theory (1903).
²Cf. The Symbolist Movement in Literature(1899); Studies in
Seven Arts (1906).
³This tendency can be observed in the descriptions of paintings by
Ruskin and Pater, in particular, of course, "La Gioconda."
⁴Cf. Yeats's poem, "On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac,"
⁵Unpublished letters referred to by Ellmann, Man and the Masks,
143-44, 315.
⁶A Portrait of George Moore in a study of his Work (London:
T.Werner Laurie, 1922), 104-05.
the impressionist painters, who were concerned with "the deeper and more difficult question of getting nature, seen frankly, into the pattern, instead of coming to nature with one's pattern ready made," Symons was instrumental in introducing the work of Mallarmé and the French symbolists to English literature.

Mallarmé taught "the spiritualizing of the word" which Symons felt essential to the future of literature, and which Yeats practised in his early poetry and essays. An "impressionist poet" who was more concerned with suggestion and allusion than description, Mallarmé taught the doctrine of symbolism as the pathway to a higher system of ideas which would eventually lead the poet to the absolute, ultimate truth. Ironically, he had himself "discovered" this system through reading the works of Edgar Allan Poe, but then switched allegiance to his "other maître," Swinburne. (Therefore, while the English poets under Symons's tutelage were elevating Mallarmé at the expense of Swinburne and had probably never read Poe, the French poets were paying homage to Swinburne). He also, however, owed a great deal to the Parnassian school, led by Théophile Gautier, whose concern for form and objectivity is translated by Mallarmé and the symbolists into the mood which should arise from perfection in form and a critical refinement resulting from a personal objectivity divorced from reality.

During one of his early visits to Paris Yeats met both Mallarmé and Verlaine, and one of the sections of his autobiography is taken

1 "The Painting of the Nineteenth Century" (1903), *Studies in Seven Arts* (London: Secker, 1924), 24.
from Mallarmé’s statement, "The whole age is full of the trembling of the veil of the temple," which Yeats interprets in his own way. Reading a translation of his works many years later, he commented in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley,

I find it exciting, as it shows me the road I and others of my time went for certain furlongs. It is not the way I go now, but one of the legitimate roads. He escapes from history; you and I are in history. And one of the ways he and the symbolists "escaped from history" was through mysticism.

**Mysticism**

In any case, symbolism would naturally lead to an increased interest in mysticism for its own sake. The mood of doubt and disbelief caused by the scientific revolutions of the century had resulted in a search for some philosophy to take the place of "scientific determinism." Modern biological and anthropological studies had in one blow swept away the invulnerability of man's gods and the romantic conception of man himself. Now the sphere of the supernatural which had long been reserved for the devout offered new scope for the artist as well. Man searched around for some proof of his superiority to the rest of the animal world, and looked hopefully towards mysticism. The attractions of ritual and dogma had already led some to High Anglicanism and even to Rome. Long after he ceased to believe in his calling Pater continued in his determination to become ordained and regularly attended High Church services. A poet like Gerard Manly Hopkins, imbued with a much earlier and less complicated religious spirit, had been able to combine the mysticism of Catholicism with the aesthetic ideals of

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1 Letter to AE, 1 July 1921, Letters, 670. The book referred to is The Trembling of the Veil, Autobiographies, 107-381, and includes his account of "The Tragic Generation," Johnson, Symons, Wilde, the Rhymers' Club, etc.

2 4 May 1937, Letters, 887

3 Cf. Shaw's annotations to Irving Fiske, Bernard Shaw's Debt to William Blake (London: Shaw Society, 1951), Shavian Tract no. 2. See below, Part Two, Chapter 5, passim. Much modern criticism re-applies this doctrine as a basis for aesthetic judgment, for example the brilliant thematic studies of Dover Wilson and other apostles of "higher criticism".

style, design ("inscape"), and individuality ("instress"). A few of the social philosophers, like Arnold, sought a substitute in humanism; others, like Butler, Wells, and Shaw, transformed the "will to endure" into the "will to perfect"; still others instead turned to theosophy and religions of the East in their pursuit of the marvellous. From France came strange, symbolical writings that seemed to dramatize vague longings long felt but never quite understood. And hand in hand with the aroused interest in mysticism with its consoling promise of the unassailable and unfathomable, travelled the "scientific" study of ceremonial magic with its security for the initiated few.

When Martyn went up to Oxford the influence of Newman still hung over the university, although altered in course by the doctrines of Pater. Already firmly established within the Church of Rome, Martyn held the position which appealed to many of the undergraduates who were following Pater into the incense and ritual of the High Church. The tendency towards the rigours of Catholicism may in fact be a solution to Martyn's constant castigation of conscience; he could go no further, and so instead increased his asceticism, even burning his classical poetry.¹

In London this appeal took a slightly different form. "The Mystical in Art, the Mystical in Life, the Mystical in Nature — this is what I am looking for," Wilde wrote in *De Profundis*.² And in 1891 the Rhymers' Club was formed, mainly under the auspices of Yeats, Ernest Rhys, and T.W. Rolleston.³ The young poets gathered regularly at the Cheshire Cheese, and in their search for "the Mystical in Art" raised

poetry to the tradition of a religion, and life itself to the eminence of ritual. They took their models from the past, trying "to write like the poets of the Greek Anthology, or like Catullus, or like the Jacobean lyricists, men who wrote while poetry was still pure." But although he published over a dozen poems in the two volumes of selections issued by the Club, Yeats was not satisfied with the "pure gem-like flame" advocated by Pater and expounded by his fellow poets. Already possessing to a great degree the mystical strain of the Irish and dissatisfied with the established religions, he first joined Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society and a few years later was initiated into the Hermetic Society of the Golden Dawn. Defending his interest in magic and ritual, he wrote in 1892:

The mystical life is the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write...I have always considered myself a voice of what I believe to be a greater renaissance -- the revolt of the soul against the intellect -- now beginning in the world.

And, as we shall later see, he practised magic all his life, his interests later becoming a part of his philosophical studies. However, in seeking endorsement from the past for the eccentricities of the present, these young poets found as models three men as different

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2The Book of the Rhymers' Club (London:Elkin Matthews,1892); The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club (London:Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1894).


4Letter to John O'Leary, July 1892, Letters,210-211.

5Part Two, Chapter 5 passim.
in life as in work, but who represented qualities they admired and sought in various degrees to emulate: William Blake, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, and Maurice Maeterlinck.

Mystic and rebel, Blake represented for these literary revolutionists "the first to claim for imagination the freedom which...was won for the heart by the Renaissance." His prophetic books, edited with more enthusiasm and perception than accuracy by Yeats and Edwin Ellis, indicated "an eddy of that flood-tide of symbolism which attained its tide-mark in the magic of the Middle Ages." Prophet and seer, he professed "a system to deliver men from systems," and, to Yeats at least, heralded "the new epoch in which poets and poetic thinkers should be once more, as they were in the days of the Hebrew Prophets, the Spiritual leaders of the race." And we shall see later that this early belief in the poet, acting as poet, accepting the responsibilities of leadership, remained a constant one for Yeats as it had for Blake.

In 1898 we find him writing:

The arts are, I believe, about to take upon their shoulders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of priests, and to lead us back upon our journey by filling our thoughts with the essences of things, and not with things.

To the young poets at the Cheshire Cheese and in the incense-soaked rooms of the Blavatsky circle, Count Villiers de l'Isle Adam's strange poetic Axel seemed rather part of a religious rite than a work for literary criticism. Yeats recalls reading the play with difficulty and so slowly "that certain passages had an exaggerated importance, while all remained so obscure that I could without much effort imagine that here at last was the Sacred Book I longed for." Here, he felt,

3"The Autumn of the Body" (1890), Essays and Introductions, 193.
5Autobiographies, 320.
"was a man crying out for a mythology, and trying to make one because he could not find one to his hand."¹ The students of theosophy had listened attentively to their Brahmin tutor, Mohini Chatterjee, teaching the doctrine of the spirit, that "all action and all words that lead to action were a little vulgar, a little trivial."² Now in Villier's strange weary sentences, "words behind which glimmered a spiritual and passionate mood,"³ they saw this doctrine applied to art. His theme of renunciation and disdain of life represented that extreme withdrawal from the world or "fin de siècle" lassitude which helped increase the atmosphere of isolation and indifference the young writers felt to the mundane world about them, encouraging them to break the bonds of tradition and assert the artist's freedom of subject and form they had already experienced in Wilde. The phrase, "As for living, our servants will do that for us," became a password, and the young Yeats printed it at the head of his own mystic manifesto, The Secret Rose. However, as friend of Baudelaire and Wagner, Villiers himself bore little resemblance to the shadowy ideal of withdrawal depicted in Axel. A serious, if erratic, writer, he dreamed of "a symphonic drama with a densely woven web," reflecting not only personal intrigue, but the characteristics and elements of the nation.⁴ For Villiers, as for his readers, Axel's castle remained subject for speculation only. But it was not until some years later that English readers discovered that the same playwright had anticipated Ibsen by nine years in the portrayal of domestic rebellion.⁵ His influence remained that of the mystic

¹"William Blake and the Imagination" (1897), Essays and Introductions, 114.
²Yeats, "The Way of Wisdom," The Speaker, 14 April 1900.
⁵La Revolte (1870) was translated by Mrs. Theresa Barclay and published in The Fortnightly Review, December 1897, after Ibsen had been introduced into England.
rather than the realist: "He opened the door of the unknown with a 
crash, and a generation has gone through them to the infinite."\(^1\)

Although Yeats admits the influence of *Axel* on his style and 
thought during the 'nineties, the essays and dramas of a Belgian mystic 
had perhaps even a greater influence.\(^2\) Maurice Maeterlinck was also 
a disciple of Villiers in one sense, sharing the same vague symbolism 
and elegant disregard for reality.\(^3\) One of several Belgian writers 
reflecting the same moods and emotions,\(^4\) he was perhaps more akin to 
Emerson as a mystic, claiming that the noblest aim of life was "to 
seek out [man's] own special aptitude for a higher life in the midst 
of the humble and inevitable reality of daily existence."\(^5\) To the 
extent that man achieves this deeper life does he develop his own 
innermost soul; and the language of the soul is, for Maeterlinck as 
for Wilde, beauty.\(^6\) However, where Wilde's aim was to avoid suffering, 
Maeterlinck approached Mallarme's belief that "the value of ourselves 
is but the value of our melancholy and our disquiet."\(^7\) The true human

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\(^1\) Remy de Gourment, quoted by Yeats, "John Eglinton and Spiritual 
Art," *Daily Express* 29 October 1898, reprinted in *Literary Ideals in 
Ireland*, 32.

\(^2\) *Autobiographies*, 305, 320-21; "William Blake and the Imagination" 
(1897); *Essays and Introductions*, 114; "The Celtic Element in Literature" 
(1897), *op.cit.*, 187; "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1900), *op.cit.*, 162; "Blake's 
Illustrations to Dante" (1897), *op.cit.*, 128; "Discoveries" (1906), 
*op.cit.*, 296.

\(^3\) Ruth Z. Temple, *The Critic's Alchemy*, 159.

\(^4\) Others were Georges Rodenbach, Emile Verhaeren, and Camille 
Lemonnier. Cf. W.L. Courtney, *The Development of Maurice Maeterlinck* 
(London: Grant Richards, 1904), 67-75. Lemonnier's mystery play, *The 
Eyes that Have Seen*, trans. by Martha Leonard for *Tomorrow*, July 1897, 
31-58, bears a strong resemblance to Maeterlinck.

Alfred Sutro (London: Allen, 1897), 171.

\(^6\) "The Inner Beauty," *op.cit.*, 203.

\(^7\) "The Star," *op.cit.*, 124.
existence can be found not in the conditions of time and space, but in a sphere of its own; and although this sphere is most easily attained by the poet, truth is found not in speech or efforts at communication, but in that passive silence "when life is sluggish within us." As the greatest silence is the silence of death, we do not achieve fullness of life until, paradoxically, at the point of death; "our death is the mould into which our life flows."

Life for Maeterlinck, then, is a mysterious reaching out after the unknown, where silence is more expressive than speech and, as for the two lovers of Axel's castle, death fulfills all. And although Maeterlinck gradually moved from this mystic fatalism to a more cheerful confidence in man's ability to control his destiny, this earlier philosophy was the strongest influence in England. Yeats quoted him; Symons discussed his mysticism; even Synge reviewed him, describing La Sagesse et la Destinee as one of "the few books of pure and perfect conception"; AE mentioned with approval his debt to Madame Blavatsky.

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6. The Return of Ulysses (1896), Essays and Introductions, 198; "Emotion of Multitude" (1903), op. cit., 216; "The Autumn of the Body" (1898), op. cit., 189; "The Celtic Element in Literature" (1897), op. cit., 187; "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1900), op. cit., 87; "Symbolism in Painting" (1899), op. cit., 148; "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1900), op. cit., 162.
8. Daily Express, 17 December 1898.
One other book from France created a profound influence on the English symbolists, Huysmans' *A rebours* (1884). A fugitive from the naturalist camp of Zola, Joris Karl Huysmans wrote of the adventures of des Esseintes, a decadent aristocrat "in search of an earthly paradise," and provided a model for Wilde's Dorian Gray and Moore's "young man," and one more peg for Symons's criticism. But after a violent reaction from the naturalism he had helped propagandize, Huysmans gradually moved towards Christian mysticism, and a philosophical position very similar to Maeterlinck's.

Like symbolism, then, mysticism tended to heighten the artist's sense of vocation, separating him even more from the layman who was not in on the secret and, he felt, could not possibly understand anyway. The desire to communicate decreased in direct proportion to their concern with mood and atmosphere. The members of the aesthetic movement in England tended to become more and more a select community limited to the discerning few who were in possession of the password. However, just as the emphasis on "wit" helped prevent the symbolists from taking themselves too seriously, a fourth interest prevented the mystics from perishing altogether in the rarefied atmosphere of symbolism and self-conscious artistry.

**Pan-Celticism**

The "celtic revival" of the last decade of the century was no new phenomenon in literature. It was essentially a re-naming and re-ordering of a familiar trait, the "folk spirit," marked by the heightened passions and superstitions common to all literature rising from the

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1 His novel *Marthe* was written in 1876, the year Zola proclaimed the doctrine of *Naturalisme*. Cf. James Laver, *The First Decadent* (London: Faber, 1954), 62-63.


people, and given new life by the recent scientific studies of folklore and myth culminating in Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* in 1890. In addition, it possessed a strong tendency towards melancholy which attracted the mystics of Maeterlinck's school. But the new element in the "celtic revival" was a sense of place, as opposed to a vague atmosphere. Life and mood became more pointed by the close relationship between nature and emotion. In a general sense this element of the Celtic spirit could be considered a natural outgrowth of the Pantheism or nature-worship of the Romantics influenced by the mystics' renewed interest in Druidism; more specifically it arose from a self-conscious intellectual attempt to inject fresh life into well-known themes and develop a new approach to old form. The literary movement gradually became a nationalist and language movement limited to one country, Ireland, with its own periodicals and political platform, as we have seen, thus losing much of its earlier depth and cosmopolitan significance.

As early as 1856 Ernest Renan explored Brittany and discovered the Celt; ten years later Matthew Arnold elaborated Renan's description of the Celtic element in literature and advocated a Chair of Celtic Literatures at Oxford. Another fifteen years had shown such an increase in activity that Grant Allen could feel justified in making

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the Celt responsible for all the modern movements in England, and by the end of the century innumerable scholars, organizations and periodicals were devoted to the recovery of the Celt. In his introduction to *Lyra Celtica*, one of the largest and most sweeping collections of Celtic literature, William Sharp devoted three and a half pages to a survey of the writings of Celtic specialists. The greatest impetus came from Ireland, as we have seen, where for the first time Old Irish manuscripts had been translated and made available to historians and literary scholars. Writers rejoiced in the "new fountain of legends" which were thus suddenly available, and both poetry and prose flowed with ancient Irish tales and exciting new symbols. Moreover the Celtic movement was not limited to Ireland. Claimants and supporters arose in Scotland, Brittany, Wales, Cornwall, and even on the Isle of Man, and the Pan-Celtic Society was founded in 1899. In their enthusiasm for the Celtic virtues, many writers of dubious national heritage claimed a share of the spoils: Arthur Symons qualified doubly as a member, being of Welsh birth and Cornish parentage; Lionel Johnson discovered a strain of Celtic ancestry and was duly admitted.

2 *Lyra Celtica*, 1896, xx-xxiii.
4 Scotland has the distinction of having produced two literary "frauds", James McPherson's Ossian in the 18th century, and William Sharp's Fiona Macleod in the 19th.
6 Although hardly to be taken as argument, it is interesting to note that Ibsen wrote to Archer in 1895: "One of the conclusions to which I have come is that there are very strong traces in me of my Scotch descent," *Correspondence of Henrik Ibsen*, ed. Mary Morison (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), 443. According to Ellmann, *Man and the Masks*, 108, Yeats early antagonized the Irish division of the Pan-Celtic Society by his outspoken literary criticism.
Although the case for Celtic ancestry was at times pushed beyond genealogical sanction, the Celtic movement as it gradually took form in the 1890's illustrated definite tendencies and prevalent characteristics, especially in the work of the major writers, Yeats, "Fiona Macleod," and Ernest Rhys, representing Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. As well as the "natural magic" and "sense of the mystery of life" recognized by Arnold and Renan, there developed a "franker trust in passion and in beauty than was possible to the poets who put their trust in the external world and its laws."¹ The sense of melancholy and vague longings associated with "the Celtic twilight" gradually gave way to specific references to ancient legend and mythology, which in turn sharpened imagery and diction and rooted experience in time and space. That the time was the distant past and the space some far-off corner of the world strengthened the appeal and well demonstrated William Blake's belief that "art is a labour to bring back again the golden age."² A critic of this cult of the Celt might see in the renewed emphasis on the virtues of the peasant and the glamour of the remote past a natural development of the romanticism of Rousseau and Ruskin.

These, then, were the four main elements of the doctrine of art for art's sake as expressed in England. It was not, of course, an integrated movement, but it was a self-conscious one in its attempt to develop an aesthetic theory and then practise it. The result was a greater consciousness of style with corresponding emphasis on wit and polish, a greater element of interaction and sympathy between the various arts, and an aristocracy of tone which further separated the artist from his audience. Interest in the "folk element" tended to remain a romantic ideal bearing little resemblance to social reality, and the gulf between audience and artists remained, emphasised on both sides by the illusions each held about itself and the other. In each

¹Yeats, "Miss Fiona Macleod as a Poet," Bookman, December 1896, 92-93.
²Yeats, "Mr. Rhys' Welsh Ballads," Bookman, April 1898, 14.
phase of the movement, also, the continental influence can be traced. There had always been a certain amount of sympathy between the arts of England and France, although the corresponding English movements tended to lag behind and were rarely as extreme. It became the practice to take one's literary master from France: Arnold and Edmund Gosse accepted Sainte-Beuve as master; Swinburne, Victor Hugo; Moore, Zola; Symons, Mallarmé. This new cosmopolitanism was further developed by Symons and Moore, and Moore constituted himself ambassador of the arts, leaving France only "to found the aesthetic novel in English."\(^1\) His first published works, *Flowers of Passion* (1878) and *Pagan Poems* (1881) show the obvious influence of Baudelaire,\(^2\) and this role was further magnified through his almost single-handed championship of Émile Zola, the master of naturalism.

**Naturalism**

While the majority of writers in England either turned towards aestheticism in an attempt to escape from the life about them or became actively involved in socialist efforts to improve that life, a few were content to "stand and stare." These writers, instead of fighting the influence of the new science, joined forces with it, adapting the philosophy as well as the techniques to their own literary ends. In general, this movement concerned itself with the expression of contemporary life and attempted to depict the absolute objective facts of life. The naturalists, as the followers of the movement were called, were sociological in their methods to the extent that they recognized the importance of man's environment towards his development; they were evolutionists to the extent that they acknowledged the influence of heredity. Again, the impetus came from France. Honoré de Balzac's *Comédie humaine* illustrated a "scientific" attempt to classify the various social species; Émile Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* series was based

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\(^1\) Quoted by Geraint Goodwin, *Conversations with George Moore* (London: Benn, 1929), 87.

on the laws of scientific determinism, in particular the influence of heredity, and earned Moore's enthusiastic description as "the Homer of modern life."\(^1\)

This development of naturalism in the nineteenth century was an almost inevitable culmination of two movements in literature which were neither original nor modern: the choice of everyday life as subject for literature, and insistence upon realistic detail. In his famous preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth had argued a return to "incidents and situations from common life" rooted and described as far as possible "in a selection of language used by men," but Wordsworth was only one of many theorists, Southey, Crabbe, Shelley, Byron, who advocated a choice of common life for subject matter. And Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, first published in 1855, celebrated the individual with unrestrained enthusiasm: "I celebrate myself and sing myself." But the poetry of contemporary life extends back further than Chaucer; nor is the insistence on detail and fidelity of representation, basic characteristics of the realist method, a new discovery.\(^2\)

Concreteness of imagery and a detached, objective point of view have always been qualities associated with classical literature, and we shall also observe a gradual advance of realism in the commercial theatre. It was, however, only with the new scientific spirit of the age and the corresponding clinical interest in contemporary detail that this realistic approach to art could have narrowed into a convention with its own rules and techniques. As George Moore implied,\(^3\) naturalism attempted the modern epic, but concentration was no longer on man the hero, who had been shorn of his heroic stature and much of his free will by the advances of science, but on his society, and an attempt

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1Preface to the English translation of *Piping Hot! [Pot-Bouille]* (London: Vizetelly, 1885).

2The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "realism" as "fidelity of representation, truth to nature, insistence upon details." Cf. Pope, Homer.

3Preface to *Piping Hot!*, also Preface to *The Rush for the Spoil* (translation of *La Curée*) (London: Vizetelly, 1886).
at accurate representation of "la tranche de vie." This change of emphasis demanded a corresponding change of form and manner; the artist could no longer be selective, for "photographic realism" (as naturalism was frequently termed) required the inclusion of every detail no matter how insignificant it may have appeared to the bystander. The aim of the naturalists, as defined by Zola, was to replace "les abstractions par des réalités," thereby achieving truth.1

The seeds of naturalism were sown by Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) and Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880). Balzac's aim was to become "The secretary of society"; he saw, Moore claimed, "that the drawing-room was the great feature of civilization": "As God is said to have created Adam from a handful of clay, so did Balzac create the French novel."2 He aimed at more, not only to record the society of a particular period, but by means of his ambitious scheme, La Comédie humaine, (1829-1850) attempt to improve society by moral comment. However, although the detailed settings and minute descriptions give the panoramic impression of early nineteenth century life and crude analysis of dominating passions which revolutionized the modern novel, a romantic flamboyance and oversentimentality too frequently step between the characters and the reader.3 Flaubert's first published novel, Madame Bovary (1857), had little of such romanticism; in fact, it provoked government prosecution for "outrage of public morals and religions." Like Chekhov, he was brought up in a medical environment, and a clinical influence can be observed in his objectivity and careful documentation. But Flaubert aimed at more than "an abstract and brief chronicle of the times"; detail and documentation were selected and subordinated to the unified artistic effect he wished to create. "Que M. Gustave Flaubert l’avait voulu ou non," wrote Zola, "il venait d’apporter au naturalisme la dernière force qui lui manquait, celle de la forme parfait et impérissable qui aide les œuvres à vivre."4

3E.g. Eugenie Grandet (1833) and Le Père Goriot (1835).
Balzac and Flaubert had a permanent influence on the Irish writers. Yeats worked steadily through all forty volumes of *La Comédie humaine* (in 1909 he reports that he has only four of five volumes left)\(^1\) claiming in later life, "I was educated upon Balzac and Shakespeare and cannot go beyond them."\(^2\) Moore's *A Modern Lover* (1883) owes much to Flaubert's *L'Education Sentimentale* (1869) in form as well as situation.\(^3\) Wilde's *Salome*, written first in French, had already been treated by Huysmans and Flaubert, and in 1911 Yeats commented:

> It is many years since I have read Flaubert. How much of what is most typical in our generation, Wilde's *Salome* for instance and much elsewhere in his work, has come out of it. Flaubert has made enough fabulous beasts to make the wilderness of romance tremble for another hundred years.\(^4\)

Moore, who confessed to a lyrical love for Shelley and Gautier, was charmed by Flaubert's emphasis on style,\(^5\) but perhaps the most far-reaching influence of the French writers of the 'nineties was the impact of Emile Zola (1840-1902). The Goncourt brothers, Edmond (1822-1896) and Jules (1830-1870) worked on the same principles of documentation: the conscientious selection of a milieu and the collection and subsequent discussion of all details, including the slang expressions peculiar to that "slice of life." But it was in Zola's works that this technique of realism was carried to its extreme conclusion as a scientific process of research and observation which would imitate the laboratory in its formulation of the laws of human behaviour.\(^6\) And almost single-handed, Moore campaigned for Zola's creed

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2. Letter to Joseph Hone, 14 February 1932, *Letters*, 791. Cf. "If I were Four and Twenty (1919): "The reading of the whole *Comédie humaine* once changed all my thought."


in England. Because of Moore's tendency to embroider fact, it is
difficult to date his entrance into the Naturalist circle. He had few
intimate friends among the naturalist school, and did not meet Zola
until a return visit to Paris.\(^1\) However by then he had already adopted
"the idea of a new art based upon science, in opposition to the art
of the old world that was based on imagination, an art that should
explain all things and embrace modern life in its entirety."\(^2\)
Struck by "the pain and joy of a sudden and inward light," he eagerly accepted
the edicts of the master. Here, he triumphantly cried, was "the vivid
sentiment of modern life rather than the pale dream which reveals to us
the past." The Rougon-Macquart series, as later would Ibsen's *Ghosts*,\(^3\)
demonstrated the true epic faculty:

> Does not the great idea of fate receive a new and more terrible
> signification? Is not the horror and gloom of the tragedy increased
> by the fact that the thought was born in the study of the scientist,
> and not in the cloud-palace of the dreamer? What poet ever conceived
> an idea more vast?\(^4\)

And in his first letter to Zola he speaks proudly of having been "the
first to sow this grain of truth, as you will understand in view of all
the silly things that have been said of you in the Paris journals how
the ground here is encumbered with daily mounting stupidity in your
regard."\(^5\)

For both Balzac (although not as careful a craftsman) and Flaubert,
art was more important than science; in Zola, the subtler attributes
of art were too often suffocated by the mass of detail his scientific

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of Zola," and *Impressions and Opinions*.
2 *Confessions of a Young Man*, 65.
3 "Note on 'Ghosts'," *Impressions and Opinions*, 162-67.
4 Preface to *Piping Hot!*, ix. Cf. *Impressions and Opinions*, Memoirs
of my Dead Life, *Vale, Avowals*.
5 Quoted by Hone, *George Moore*, 93.
creed demanded. In attempting to study society as well as the source and development of physical and psychological traits, the naturalist tended to lose sight of the characters.

J'ai voulu étudier des tempéraments et non des caractères.... J'ai cherché à suivre pas à pas dans ces brutes le travail sourd des passions, les poussées de l'instinct, les détraquements cérébraux survenus à la suite d'une crise nerveuse,

Zola wrote in his preface to Thérèse Raquin (the novel, 1890). Further, limited as he was to the use of scientific methods and tools, his world became almost entirely mechanistic and materialistic; there was no room for fancy or subjectivity in the interpretation or exposition of his characters. "Le romancier n'est plus qu'un greffier," he claimed. In this effort to see life objectively and whole, the naturalist tended to compensate for the lack of emotional and subjective description which is the contribution of the writer to his material by an emphasis on the ugly and sordid details of life which had previously been avoided in literature. The convention itself was too rigid, and the result was that writers were either carried away by the description of the sordid for its own sake, or like Zola, tumbled over backwards into social propaganda. Zola's L'Assommoir (1877) and Nana (1880), powerful studies of the alcoholic and the prostitute, brought storms of protest from the public; in later novels such as Les quatre évangiles (1899) we see the disinterested observer turning social preacher.

Although in the extreme sense which Zola expounded, naturalism gained more enemies than advocates, its influence extended far beyond the literary coterie of Paris. In a general sense it freed literature from the shackles of an outmoded convention (although in the case of Zola it was an escape from one convention into another equally rigid) and, by virtue of its "shock technique" alone, prepared the public for a more realistic and slightly more tolerant approach to the arts. At

1Thérèse Raquin, nouvelle éd. (Paris: Charpentier, 1890), ii.
2"Le Naturalisme au Théâtre," Le Roman Expérimental, 125.
the same time, however, the savagery of its onslaught on orthodox
mores alienated the general public even more than the extreme aspects
of the aesthetic movement had. And Zola's most eloquent disciples,
after learning their craft from the master, soon turned back into
the more liberal path of realism.

This was the case for both Huysmans in France and Moore in England.
In his Confessions, Moore takes pains to assure us that, despite his
enthusiasm for Zola, he "did not fall into the stupid mistake of placing
the realistic writers of 1877 side by side with and on the same plan
of intellectual vision as the great Balzac." What A Modern Lover
did not owe to Flaubert it owed to Zola, as Moore frankly acknowledged,
and the novelist hero expounds the naturalist creed:

We do not always choose what you call unpleasant subjects, but
we try to go to the roots of things; and the basis of life, being
material and not spiritual, the analyst inevitably finds himself,
sooner or later, handling what this sentimental age calls coarse.

But the contemporary reviews imply, perhaps with some relief, that the
disciple's success was in part due to his deviation (which they
attributed to the young author's delicacy and taste as a Christian
gentleman) from the master's path. Although English critics showed
some sympathy with this new approach to the novel, the general public,
however, was roused to the same indignant storm of protest which three
years earlier was accorded the first production of Ibsen in England
and would be given to Hardy's Jude the Obscure thirteen years later.
At the first rumbling of danger those omnipotent dictators of public
prose consumption and self-appointed guardians of Victorian taste, the
lending libraries, immediately withdrew A Modern Lover from circulation
and so began Moore's lifelong war against Smith's, Mudie's, and
censorship of any form. The battle may have extended his interest in

1 Op. cit., 68
2 Hone, George Moore, 96. Cf. preface to Lewis Seymour and Some Women
(London: Heinemann, 1917).
3 A Modern Lover (London: Tinsley, 1883), I, 77
4 Articles in the Pall Mall Gazette, references in Confessions, 
Impressions, Conversations in Ebury Street, Memoirs of My Dead Life,
preface to Piping Hot!
the standard techniques of naturalism, for his next two novels, *A Mummer's Wife* (1885) and *A Drama in Muslin* (1886), were written in the same vein, the author travelling with notebook in hand with some touring players for the first and to Dublin for the second.\(^1\)

Elated at the battle, Moore wrote to Zola:

> If I succeed, as I expect, in digging a dagger into the heart of the sentimental school, I shall have hopes of bringing about a change in the literature of my country -- of being in fact Zola's offshoot in England.\(^2\)

And later, "Certainly I have a great part to play -- I am fighting that Englishmen may exercise a right which they formerly enjoyed, that of writing freely and sanely."\(^3\)

In 1885 he wrote his pamphlet, *Literature at Nurse*, attacking the practices of the lending libraries,\(^4\) and *Avowals* carries full descriptions of his part in the Vizetelly trials.\(^5\)

But his battle with Dublin Castle had turned his attention to Ireland, indeed for a time giving him the status of an Irish Nationalist hero,\(^6\) and as early as 1885 he had enthusiastically reviewed Huysmans' *A rebours* for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The same year, in his preface to the translation of *Piping Hot!* he expounds a doctrine conflicting with Zola's deterministic and experimental psychology:

> Art...is a perpetual concession; and the character of the artist is determined by the selection he makes amid the mass of conflicting issues that, all clamouring equally to be chosen, present themselves to his mind.

He is more concerned even here with the literary battle not "for either realism or romanticism, but for freedom of speech."\(^7\)

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\(^1\) *A Communication to My Friends* (London: Nonesuch, 1933), 28-34.

\(^2\) Quoted by Hone, *George Moore*, 101.

\(^3\) Ibid., 114.

\(^4\) (London: Vizetelly, 1885).


\(^7\) xvii.
behind that he could write, "the anecdote that does not represent a moral idea, however curious, however exciting, can never rise to the height of great literature....Art is made up in almost equal proportions of truth and falsehood; it is by neglecting nature and by copying nature that we may produce illusion."¹ Clearly Moore gives the artist more power to select than Zola ever did. It is significant that the list of great writers which follows this statement contains no reference to Zola. Moore has crossed the floor from science to art.

A man of many enthusiasms but, as Max Beerbohm pointed out, of only one at a time, Moore found censorship and Ireland more exciting topics than Zolaism. But although he was to turn away from Zola himself in disdain,² he never forgot his debt or his lesson:

He who would be an artist must melt down all things; he must discover new formulas, new moulds, all the old values must be swept aside, and he must arrive at a new estimate.³

And his description of "a true novel" aptly indicates his debt to and departure from Zola:

a story...based, as far as was humanly possible, upon a novelist's complete knowledge and intuitive understanding of his subject, and told with that indifference to all but aesthetic consequence by which a story-teller is justified.⁴

Naturalism in the extreme form Zola expounded, therefore, made little headway in English letters. Besides Moore, Arnold Bennett (1867-1931) and George Gissing (1857-1903) appear to show the most direct influences, but it was not until the twentieth century that a theory of naturalism arose in the drama, and this realism as described by Galsworthy was still not as extreme owing, as we shall see, more

¹Preface to Poor Folk, trans. Lena Milman (London: Elkin Matthew and John Lane, 1894), vii-viii, xix.
²Hone, George Moore, 142-44.
³Reminiscences of Impressionist Painters (Dublin: Maunsel, 1906), 16.
to Ibsen than to Zola:

To set before the public...the phenomena of life and character, selected and combined, but not distorted, by the dramatist's outlook....to create such an illusion of actual life passing on the stage as to compel the spectator for the moment to lose all sense of artifice.¹

Although this was in part due to the censorship, operating on hearsay as much as fact, imposed by public opinion and the circulating libraries, it was due even more to the time lag which inevitably occurs before a literary movement finds its way into another culture. As Yeats wrote in 1897,

The literary movement of our time has been a movement against the external and heterogeneous, and like all literary movements, its French expression is more intelligible and obvious than its English expression, because more extreme.²

The English public was no more ready for Moore than it had been for Wilde. And so we find the ironical situation of the later movement, aestheticism, which had arisen in France partly as a reaction to naturalism, preventing the earlier movement, naturalism, from gaining much of a foothold in England. Also, as we have seen, the aesthetic movement in England had been a direct reaction to the effects of the new science and materialism before any such doctrine as naturalism had time to be formulated. Nor did the young intellectuals feel much need for one more landslide to sweep away all traditions and conventions; when the realistic method entered literature its role was one of synthesis rather than of destruction: as already indicated in the work of Moore, in its modified form it was to strike a balance between the two schools of art for the sake of art and art as the result of science. In the meantime, many of the characteristics of naturalist thought had already been felt in other related arts: the Pre-Raphaelites had earlier reacted against rigid conformity and conventions.

¹John Galsworthy, "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama"(1909), The Inn of Tranquillity (London:Heinemann,1912),190. The italics are his.
²"Aglavaine and Selysette," Bookman, September, 1897, 135.
in painting, and now the French Impressionists, (Courbet, Manet, Monet, Pisarro, Degas, and Renoir), and later the post-Impressionists (Cezanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin) moved across the channel as well. And, as was the case with English realism, the aims of the early Impressionists to paint what they saw -- as Degas stated, "I want to look through the keyhole" -- were transmuted in the work of James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), friend of Wilde, and Walter Sickert (1860-1942), friend of Moore and Symons, into a sacrifice of design and form for the sake of light and colour, which, they argued, was actually all the eye really saw. 

Furthermore, realism had been steadily gaining ground in the Victorian theatre, as we shall see, and two new forces in drama, Ibsen and Maeterlinck, presently offered fully developed art forms to those who wished to follow new paths. Instead, therefore, of attacking English thought and literature with the force and concentration it had achieved in France, naturalism tended to filter into England through channels already carved. Moore expressed this reaction in his own way:

"I am the youngest of the naturalists, the eldest of the symbolists. The naturalists affected the art of painting, the symbolists the art of music; and since the symbolists there has been no artistic manifestation - the game is played out."

The followers of the aesthetic movement were inclined to consider naturalism as one more missile launched by the enemy, science, at the temple of art. Symons dismissed with contempt that vague sort of seeing everything in general and feeling nothing at all, which is supposed to be seeing things as they really are. Things as they really are! That paradox for fools. For everyone probably, for the artist certainly, things are as one sees them; and if most people seem to see things in very much the same way, that is only another proof of the small amount of individuality.

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2 "La Butte," Memoirs of my Dead Life (London: Heinemann, 1921), 48-49.
in the average man, his deplorable faculty of imitation, his inability not only to think but to see for himself.\textsuperscript{1} While Yeats, deploring the "meagre language" and the "action crushed into the narrow limits of possibility" which he saw in naturalist literature, advocated the use of "the outer world" for "metaphors and examples, and that is all."\textsuperscript{2} Retiring even more to the inner world, he looked back wistfully to the old masters, who cared little "for what every fool can see and every knave can praise."\textsuperscript{3} To Yeats, as to Symons, the true maker of fine literature "has felt something in the depth of his mind and he wants to make it as visible and powerful to our senses as possible."\textsuperscript{4} Doubtless the battle forced both sides into overstated, but it was the case for "art and the individual" that was pressed into the position of defence, as W.H. Auden indicates:

When the scientists said, "Science is knowledge of reality, Art is a fairyland," the artists were driven to reply, "Very well, fairies are fun, science is dull." When the former said, "Art has no relation to life," the latter retorted, "Thank God." To the assertion that "every mind can recognize the absolute truths of science, but the values of art are purely relative, an arbitrary affair of individual taste," came back the counter-claim, "Only the exceptional individual matters."\textsuperscript{5}

The necessity each movement felt for proving and justifying its theories gave rise to a large body of critics from within its own ranks, and so we find writers and artists combining the function of creator with that of critic, but not in the sense Wilde was advocating. It

\textsuperscript{1}"The Painting of the Nineteenth Century" (1903), \textit{Studies in Seven Arts}, (London: Secker, 1924), IX, 40.
\textsuperscript{2}"Has Drama of Contemporary Life a Root of its Own?" (1906), \textit{Essays and Introductions}, 275-77.
\textsuperscript{3}"Why the Blind Man in Ancient Times was Made a Poet" (1906), \textit{op. cit.}, 280. Cf. "The Autumn of the Body" (1898), \textit{op. cit.}, 189; "The Holy Places" (1906), \textit{op. cit.}, 295.
\textsuperscript{4}"Has the Drama of Contemporary Life a Root of its Own?" \textit{op. cit.}, 276.
might be argued that this dual capacity provoked a greater awareness in artist, critic, and interested public of the theory and forms of art; at the same time, however, the need each group felt to defend and interpret its own members prolonged that divorce between artist and public which the aesthetic movement had helped bring about. The naturalists, like their opponents, tended to maintain an impersonal attitude towards the general public, and the solutions they at times felt compelled to offer for the unsatisfactory state of society were put forward in a detached clinical manner far removed from the personal and emotional upbraidings administered by the earlier band of social reformers led by Ruskin, Arnold, and Morris. It was not until the coming of Ibsen and Shaw to England that an attempt at synthesis between artistic endeavour and socialist fervour once more entered English literature. But by then Yeats, Martyn and Moore had interests elsewhere.

Richard Wagner (1803-1883)

While the naturalists and followers of the aesthetic movement were forcing writers and thinkers to reconsider the foundations of art, another voice by dint of repetition and sheer strength was heard throughout Europe, the battle-cry of Richard Wagner. Although more inclined towards the aesthetic school than the naturalist's creed, Wagner's philosophy of art was as different from the doctrine of "art for art's sake" as the trombone from the flute. For Wagner was concerned with a union of all the arts, each developed to its highest possible state of perfection, "Beauty energised." Art, he claimed, was "only a shadow of its genuine self"; to achieve his ideal of the "living art-work of the future" required "an entire re-birth." And "the highest conjoint of art is the Drama; it can only be at hand in all its possible fulness when in it each separate branch of art is at hand in its own utmost fulness." Complete art comes from feeling and emotion expressed

2.Author's Introduction, Prose Works, I, xviii.
through the understanding and intellect, "the emotionalizing of the intellect." "We must become knowers through the feeling." The drama, therefore, "goes from within outwards," but it must also grow up from below, blossoming from "a natural culture." We can only know and feel art, then, if we understand the roots from which it has sprung — "the folk." And he defines the Folk as those who feel a common want, an "absolute need," and who have the will to revolt and withstand for that need. Therefore this common denominator of man's surroundings must also be achieved in order to understand the folk and, through the folk, art. "Art is the highest expression of activity of a race that has developed its physical beauty in unison with itself and Nature." What Wagner really desired, then, was a communism of art. And the theatre became "a glorified symbol of the mass," existing only for that mass; "There exists no higher Power than Man's Community; there is naught so worthy Love as the Brotherhood of Man." Because art exists for the Folk, the audience becomes a co-creator:

Drama is only conceivable as the fullest expression of a joint artistic longing to impart; while this longing, again, can only parley with a common receptivity... the true Drama is only conceivable as proceeding from a common urgency of every art towards the most direct appeal to a common public.

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3"Opera and Drama," ibid., II, 171; 208-09.
5Ibid., 205.
6"Opera and Drama," ibid., 168-72; 38.
7Author's Introduction, ibid., xviii; Cooperman, The Aesthetics of Mallarmé, 95.
8"Art and Climate," op. cit., I, 263.
Wagner carried these ideals into practice with an energy and determination worthy of his Teutonic background. The result was a new art form, "music drama," which takes its subject matter from the myth, is in its Germanic qualities decidedly national, and is performed at its own theatre, especially designed according to Wagner's requirements, at Bayreuth where as much care is devoted to staging and acting as to the musical ability of the singers. In fact, "music drama," being a union of all the arts, ideally places far more emphasis on the actor than on the musician; for the actor should combine all the elements of which drama for Wagner was composed. "I required the Actor in the forefront, and the Singer only as the actor's aid; lastly, therefore, a public who should join me in this claim."\(^1\) As Symons in a review of the Bayreuth productions commented, "Bayreuth is Wagner's creation in the world of action, as the music-dramas are his creation in the world of art....Remember that every artist...has desired his own Bayreuth."\(^2\)

As an artist Wagner by his own admission was a poet first and then a musician.\(^3\) The form of his tone poems, or music dramas, was dictated by subject-matter alone,\(^4\) and communicated in a manner designed to convey "as vividly and intelligibly as possible" what he felt, saw, and heard.\(^5\) Symons, calling him "the Turner of music," claimed that Wagner had "made music pictorial."\(^6\) "Utmost clearness was the chief endeavour of my working-out,"\(^7\) Wagner stated, and he achieved this clarity by the introduction of the leitmotiv or thematic elaboration, which characterizes the Ring cycle. Not only does the leitmotiv give depth to the drama and introduce innumerable possibilities of development and

\(^1\)"A Communication to my Friends"(1851),*op.cit.*, I, 337
\(^2\)"Notes on Wagner at Bayreuth," *Plays Acting and Music*, 297.
\(^3\)"A Communication to my Friends," *op.cit.*, 363.
\(^4\)Ibid., 309.
\(^5\)Ibid., 346.
\(^6\)"Notes on Wagner at Bayreuth," *op.cit.*, 307-08.
\(^7\)"A Communication to my Friends,"*op.cit.*, 346.
elaboration of basic themes (which might be referred to as "permutations and combinations"), but it actually extends the language of symbolism as well, developing a larger base or composite myth around which the symbols can work. The introduction of the myth was a natural result of this attempt at depth and breadth at the same time. "Art is the fulfillment of a longing to know one's self in the likeness of an object of one's love or adoration"; hence the myth, as expressed through God, the Hero, and man. Like Morris, Wagner had created "new romance," claimed Yeats. And since the advent of Wagner, the use of the leitmotiv has been extended to prose, in the works of Shaw, Granville-Barker, and most clearly of all in Joyce.

With his new concept of art and the effort to extend the boundaries of the art form, Wagner's influence was both direct and indirect. As a musician who was first of all a poet, as a theorist who desired a union of all the arts, as a writer who sought for material from "the folk", and as a mystic who "rendered mysticism through the senses," he had much in common with the aesthetic movement. As a writer who sought his material from life about him and his audience from the largest common denominator, he had some affinity with the naturalists. As an artist who unashamedly preached nationalism, he belongs in part with the social reformers. One might say, in fact, that in theory and practice he most clearly illustrated the interaction and inter-relation of the arts. Throughout the 'nineties a steady stream of pilgrims flowed from England to Bayreuth. Symons, Martyn, Moore, and Shaw were all converts to Wagnerism. Yeats, notorious for his lack of musical ear, was intrigued by Wagnerian theory and impressed by the actual theatre performance.

1 "Opera and Drama," op. cit., 154-56.
3 Symons, "Notes on Wagner at Bayreuth," op. cit., 301.
at Bayreuth. And English aesthetics received it second-hand as well, through the theoretical writings of Mallarmé. "Carry the theories of Mallarmé to a practical conclusion, multiply his powers in a direct ratio, and you have Wagner. It is his failure not to be Wagner," wrote Symons. Mallarmé idealized and heightened Wagnerian principles into a concept of abstract mathematical symmetry in his poetry; the result was symbolism.

But Wagnerism entered England by a direct route as well, promoted by George Bernard Shaw, Edward Martyn, and George Moore, each hearing and seeing Wagner according to his own interests and training. As music critic for the Star (1888-90), and later for the World (1890-94), Shaw indefatigably electioneered for Wagner as he had earlier campaigned for the Impressionists and for his entire life would fight for Ibsen. "The wars of religion were not more bloodthirsty than the discussions of the Wagnerites and Anti-Wagnerites," largely the result of Shavian dialectic. Shaw saw Wagner as "the literary musician par excellence," "not only a consummate musician, like Mozart, but a dramatic poet and a critical and philosophical essayist." As a musicologist, Shaw appreciated the "musical expression of poetic feeling" in Wagner's tone poetry; as a dramatist he delighted in Wagner's stage management, which combined "with one stroke a dramatic effect, a scenic effect, and

1"At Stratford-on-Avon" (1901), Essays and Introductions, 99. He no doubt learned most of it from Symons, but also from Miss Horniman, who was a devout Wagnerian. (Unpublished letters from Miss Horniman to Yeats, in Mrs. Yeats's possession).


5The Perfect Wagnerite (London: Constable, 1902), 127; 129.

6The World, 7 January 1894, Bentley, op. cit., 113.
a musical effect."¹ Shaw also recognized Wagner's "insistence on
the need for sensuous apprehension to give reality to abstract
comprehension," in fact, the naturalism of Wagner's music.² And
praising the excellent qualities of the Bayreuth Bühnenfestspielhaus,³ he
demanded why such a theatre could not be constructed in England,
where it could do double duty for Shakespeare as well.⁴

Another faithful Wagnerite was Edward Martyn, who made his first
visit to Bayreuth to see Parsifal at the second festival in 1882.⁵
Martyn regularly attended productions both in London and Bayreuth,⁶
and considered Wagner one of the four greatest musicians of the world
(the others being Palestrina, Bach, and Beethoven⁷). An organist and
keen student of liturgical music,⁸ he was drawn to Wagner's technical
accomplishments rather than to his theories or dramatic effects,
unlike his friend Arthur Symons, who was most impressed by the dramatic
and mystic qualities of the Bayreuth productions.⁹ Martyn admired the
"sincerity of purpose" and "fidelity in practice" with which Wagner
in his music dramas defined "the limits of vocal music," and deplored

¹The World, 8 August 1894, ibid., 124.
²Perfect Wagnerite, op. cit., 74.
³Ibid., 135ff.
⁵Sister Courtney, Edward Martyn, 154n62.
⁶Gwynn, Edward Martyn, 173; Moore, Ave, 198ff.
⁷Introduction to Paragraphs for the Perverse, Gwynn, op. cit., 263;
Mr. Owen Linnane.
Arthur Symons, "A Causerie: From a Castle in Ireland," The Savoy,
October 1896.
the common tendency "to make great music at the expense of the verbal text."\(^1\) As is to be expected, Wagner's choral effects appealed to him most,\(^2\) "the grand orchestral effects" of the polyphonic school\(^3\) which were to lead him eventually back through to "the incomparable Pierluigi," Palestina.\(^4\) However, Wagner's nationalism and emphasis on "the folk" also found favour with Martyn, who came to believe that in "folk hymns" and traditional music\(^5\) one could still find the "exquisite melody and tonality"\(^6\) so rare in modern performance.\(^7\) It was but a short step to the belief that the future of music, as of literature, "mostly lies with the small nationalities."\(^8\)

Moore gives Martyn the credit for his conversion to Wagner,\(^9\) but his closest friend in Paris, Edouard Dujardin, was editor of La Revue wagnerienne, to which most of the French symbolists contributed.\(^10\) Like Martyn, Moore took his Wagnerism seriously, determining to learn more each trip made with his cousin to Bayreuth. Admitting that his ear was "but rudimentary," he like Symons more fully appreciated the "wonderful...conception and literary art" of the dramas, although like Martyn and Dujardin he approved of the Master's skill in blending music with poetry. "Wagner is so essentially human that there is something

\(^1\) Martyn, The Speaker, 1895, quoted by Gwynn, op.cit., 182.
\(^3\) The Leader, 1896, ibid., 182.
\(^4\) The Speaker, 1895, ibid., 178.
\(^5\) Essay on Schools of National Music, ibid., 262-63.
\(^6\) Introduction to Paragrammes for the Perverse, ibid., 258.
\(^7\) "The Use of a Provincial Feis," Daily Express, 17 September 1898.
\(^8\) "Schools of National Music," Gwynn, op.cit., 266.
\(^10\) Hone, George Moore, 1934.
in his art for everybody," he felt. Furthermore, the story-teller in Moore recognized Wagner's dramatic skill (although he conceded that judicious cutting might benefit *The Meistersingers*) which was apparent even in the theatre surroundings, and, like Symons, admired "the natural world in the midst of which his people of the drama live their passionate life, a world in sympathy with all their passion." True to his belief that the novelist should base his work on personal experience, he lost no time in making use of his Wagnerism: *Evelyn Innes* (1898) and *Sister Teresa* (1901) tell of a Wagnerian opera singer, whose father is an expert in liturgical music, and whose lover buys a copy of the *Wagnerian Review* after visiting Bayreuth. A little later his knowledge had advanced to an understanding of form and melodic line, and he acknowledged his debt to *Lohengrin*, his favourite opera, in *The Lake* (1905). *Parsifal*, on the other hand, held no personal appeal, perhaps a clear indication of the difference between Moore and Martyn, although one is tempted to believe that at a later stage of his artistic and philosophical development Moore might have appreciated it. It was during this "Wagnerian phase" that Moore toyed with the idea of writing "very heroic" scenarios for opera, but this in turn led him to the drama. Years later, thinking back upon his

1 *Ave*, 198-200.
2 *Conversations in Ebury Street* (London: Heinemann, 1936), 234.
4 Symons, "Notes on Wagner at Bayreuth," *op. cit.*, 307-08.
5 Which led Wilde to quip, "I hear Evelyn Innes has to be played on the piano." Quoted by Gerald Griffin, *The Wild Geese* (London: Jarrold's, 1938), 66.
6 "Niveness in the Oneness," *op. cit.*, 9; *Letters from George Moore to Ed. Dujardin*, 22 April 1897, 38.
experiences in the theatre, he could recall "only one instance of scenery saying something that neither literary nor musical text could say," the rainbow at the end of Das Rheingold; high praise indeed for Wagner the dramatist.  

The Irish writers were to remember Wagner in his capacity both as a national and a revolutionary dramatist when they came to build their own theatre. Even the unmusical Yeats found much of value in the depth and breadth of structure, symbolism, emotional appeal, and theory expressed in Wagner's work. We shall see later how Yeats in turn developed his own personal myth through his art, like Wagner making it an integral element of structure and form. But most heartening example of all to the founders of the Irish literary theatre, Wagner had achieved his Bayreuth.

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1 "Niveness in the Oneness," op. cit., 8.
2 Yeats, "A Note on National Drama," Literary Ideals in Ireland, 17.
3 Yeats, letter to Symons, 10 September, 1905, Letters, 460.
CHAPTER 4 - REVOLUTION IN THE THEATRE

On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality.

(J.M. Synge, Preface to The Playboy of the Western World)

The English commercial theatre of the 'eighties of which the Dublin theatre was merely an offshoot, was itself badly in need of some new blood. A serious student of literature would find little mental nourishment in its heavy diet of spectacle, melodrama, and solid sentiment. For years it had placidly gone on supplying what the public demanded, until both were suffering from intellectual malnutrition. Variations in diet were eyed with distrust and avoided; a survey conducted in 1884 revealed that the most popular plays were favourites from the preceding decade, T.W. Robertson's comfortably sentimental Caste (1867) and H.J. Byron's farcical Our Boys (1875). Foreign offerings were served in familiar sauce; most playwrights of the period learned their craft by adapting or imitating French plays. Even the more conservative critics such as Clement Scott were dismayed at the condition of the theatre:

It is the quality of reverence that, I fear, is wanting; it is the fault of the age, and it is shown in the playhouse as elsewhere. If the player is respected he will command attention; if the author be earnest in his work he will be spared indignity. Too often nowadays the artist and author alike are mere playthings, to be tossed about hither and thither by an audience utterly indifferent to the dignity of dramatic art, and presumably careless of the personal feelings of those who endeavour to amuse them.


2 The most recent French import, Irma la Douce, has been running since July 1958.

3 "First Nights at the Play," The Theatre, 1884, 61-65.
The most popular younger playwrights were Henry Arthur Jones, who began with melodrama and proceeded to the conventional society "problem play"; Arthur Wing Pinero, who skipped lightly through the comedy of situation with one eye on Mrs. Grundy and the other on the box office; and Sydney Grundy, who successfully applied the methods of Scribe and Sardou, occasionally achieving such masterpieces of adaptation as *A Pair of Spectacles* (1890). All adhered to the pattern of the *piece bien faite*: ingenious construction, a dash of moral, and a sufficiently amusing but harmless lesson. Yet even these favourites occasionally fell foul of the strict code of manners and morals the audience imposed upon dramatic subjects. One of Jones's early melodramas, *Welcome Little Stranger*, was banned because of "frank references to childbirth," and at the producer's request Pinero substituted a reconciliation scene for the dramatically valid ending of *The Profligate* (1889).

By this time the Bancrofts at the Prince of Wales's and Henry Irving at the Lyceum had succeeded in wooing polite society into the stalls, a change specifically mentioned by Arnold, and the Old Price riots were a wistful memory to the remaining pittites; but the return

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2 Cf. Shaw, Preface to *Three Plays for Puritans* (1901).

3 Cordell, *op.cit.*,40-41.

4 Both endings were published in the first edition.


of a more cultivated audience had not raised the standard of drama or eased the stringent taboos of the puritan-minded middle class. The theatre was still considered "the special Colossus of wickedness"; years later J.B. Yeats recalled the Calvinist minister Charles Haddon Spurgeon's (1834-1892) words, "I have seen the trail of the theatre on too many ruined homes not to condemn theatres." The result was a tasteless play which titillated the senses and yet preached the "right sentiments"; the audience could vicariously enjoy the villain's sins and self-righteously applaud the hero.

Comedy fared little better than melodrama in the popular theatre. Despite T.W. Robertson's efforts in his early "cup-and-saucer plays" to adopt a subtler use of detail and action, the broad methods of burlesque and the gags of traditional "characters" drew the applause. W.S. Gilbert, who attempted to puncture both moral sentimentality and inflated burlesque in his plays and libretti, deplored this indiscriminate applause and the methods used to draw it:

A claptrap sentiment, a burlesque breakdown, a musichall parody, a comic man coming down the chimney, an indecent joke, a black eye, a red nose, a pair of trowsers with a patch behind, a live baby, a real cab, a smash of crockery, a pun in a "comedy," an allusion, however clumsy, to any topic of the day, a piece of costermonger's slang, or any strongly marked tailoring eccentricity, is quite sure of a rapturous reception whenever it is presented to an audience.

The audience controlled the curtain; authority on the other side of the footlights rested with the actor-manager. From Thomas Betterton at the end of the seventeenth century to Beerbohm Tree at the beginning of the twentieth, this despot of the stage dictated mode and conduct.

1 Letter to Andrew Jameson, 14 November 1919, Letters of J.B. Yeats, 266.

2 Cf. the kitchen tea party in Caste; The Bancrofts, ch.4; William Archer, English Dramatists of Today (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1892), 21-22.

Plays were written generally at his request, although not always with equal success (for example, Browning’s *Strafford*, written to save Macready from America), and particularly to suit his tastes and talents. "I have worked for the stage some fourteen years, yet only once have I had a play accepted that was not written to order -- and then it was not produced," James Albery, author of the popular comedy *Two Roses* (1870), confided to his public in 1884. The personality of the actor-manager was a far more dangerous barrier between play and public than the "newfangled" footlights.

A one-man show offers little encouragement to supporting actors, and it is not surprising that, although the age brought forth many "stars" whose interpretations, such as Forbes-Robertson's *Hamlet* and Irving's Mathias in *The Bells* have since been considered classic, the general standard of acting was apparently not very high. Audiences went to see their favourites and expected "a good show," with little regard for fidelity to the book or to nature. On the whole, acting remained as broad and declamatory as ever, in plays chosen for theatrical effect rather than for their literary value.

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3 The Times, 25 April 1960, describes Forbes-Robertson's 1913 film of *Hamlet*. In a letter to Florence Farr, 7 October 1907, Letters, 500, Yeats describes the "gay heroic delight in the serviceable man" as portrayed by Forbes-Robertson's *Caesar and Cleopatre*, then adds, "Ah if he had but style, distinction, and was not such a barbarian of the barricades."
4 Described in detail by Gordon Craig, Henry Irving (London:Dent, 1938), 49-61, cf. photographs in Laurence Irving, Henry Irving: The Actor and his World, (London:Faber, 1951), 192. All his life Yeats retained the memory of Irving's *Hamlet*, which he had seen as a young boy, Autobiographies, 47.
5 Cf. Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties; Moore, Impressions and Opinions; J.T. Grein's articles in To-morrow (1896-98).
Nor was the actor-manager eager to yield his prerogative to others; too frequently the rest of the cast had only one responsibility: to remain as much as possible in the background and throw the hero his cue.1 Irving was first offered a knighthood in 1883,2 and the actor's newly-attained respectability affected the acting tradition: the stage became a profession for "respectable young ladies and gentlemen," many of whom had no other qualifications, and too frequently whatever training there was took place before the audience.3 In the English theatre, unlike the French, the amount of training considered necessary depended on the tastes of the individual actor-manager rather than on any accepted tradition; for example, Frank Benson, who produced the first plays for the Irish Literary Theatre, was exceptionally fond of athletic displays, so demanded gymnastic prowess over histrionic talent, with what unfortunate results we shall see later.4 Conversely, however, this emphasis on personal taste resulted in a greater awareness of technique and a keener, more critical eye on the part of the audience, who looked for familiar mannerisms. And a comparison of dramatic reviews of the period with those of the preceding decade indicates a developing interest in technique as well as in result and effect.5

The actor-manager required a setting suitable to the splendour of his exalted position, and so productions became increasingly glittering

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4 See below, Part III, chapter 9, p. 527
5 Shaw, Grein, Archer, Scott.
and spectacular. Shakespeare provided him and the public with the most satisfactory vehicle for lavish display, with emphasis centred on the hero and the scenery rather than on the poetry or dramatic consistency. Productions became more and more elaborate, culminating finally in Beerbohm Tree's spectacles, complete with livestock and real trees, in a Shakespearean framework. (In a letter to Lady Gregory, Yeats describes Beerbohm Tree's ideal of beauty as "thrice-vomited flesh," but in an early diary Synge notes with approval his production of Hamlet. The devotion of the actor-managers to Shakespeare cannot be denied. They spared neither effort nor money in keeping faith with their public, and despite Irving's motto, "To succeed as an art the theatre must succeed as a business," Shakespearean productions usually did lose money. Further, by taking their plays on tour they reached a much larger audience than would otherwise have been possible. Unfortunately, however, too often in their anxiety to praise Shakespeare they tended to bury him.

Shakespeare was not the only poet "discovered" by the actor-manager. Byron's Werner and Sardonapalus were popular numbers in Macready's repertoire, and Browning's Strafford at least reached the boards. Several of Tennyson's plays were produced by Irving, and the role of Becket became one of his favourites. Shelley's Cenci

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126 November 1909, Letters, 539.
2 Stephens MS., 576.
3 Hudson, The English Stage, 75.
4 Rowell, op. cit., 32ff.
5 Becket was first produced in 1893, Allardyce Nicoll, Late Nineteenth Century Drama, 2nd ed. (CUP, 1959) 208-09. In a letter to Lady Gregory, 12 May 1905, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, Yeats describes the play as "sentimental melodrama, with nothing to act, and therefore no acting....The construction of the play is childlike and the characters drawings of the stage." Cf. H. Granville-Barker, "Tennyson, Swinburne, Meredith -- and the Theatre," The Eighteen-Seventies, ed. H. Granville-Barker (CUP, 1929), 161-91.
was first produced in 1886.¹ Victor Hugo's plays were produced and acclaimed as masterpieces.² A steady supply of pseudo-Shakespearean blank-verse dramas was provided by Bulwer-Lytton, Sheridan Knowles, W.G.Wills.³ Even Jones tried his hand, but The Tempter was not a success, perhaps because of the devil-hero's dispensability. None of these plays were masterpieces, but interest in blank verse drama continued into the twentieth century, notably in the plays of Stephen Phillips, whose meteoric rise to fame was equalled only by his eclipse.⁴ (Moore compared Tree's production of Phillips' Herod to "the Gustave Doré Gallery with a nigger playing a harmonium in the corner."⁵) However, despite these efforts, the divorce between theatre and literature continued.

Although the era of the actor-manager stunted the natural growth of the play in relation to changing society, it did create a stable relationship between playwright and producer. The actor-manager as producer could make a bad play palatable, and frequently had to; on the other hand, if the resident dramatist followed the rules, he could at least be assured of a hearing. And in the case of T.W. Robertson, collaboration between playwright and manager contributed to technical

³Cf. Yeats's review of Wills' Claudian, The Boston Pilot, 3 August 1889, reprinted in Letters to the New Island, 69-76. Wills was also an artist and appeared for Whistler when he sued Ruskin for libel.
refinements which ultimately gave the author more scope in subject matter and increased control over form and presentation. The preceding fifty years had seen the gradual emergence of the theatre as we know it today: elaborate sets replaced the customary two chairs and a table; a complex system of stage machinery nourished the taste for spectacular melodrama reflected in the modern musical comedy; improvements in lighting influenced both acting technique and presentation, resulting in the experiments of Gordon Craig. Robertson and his managers, the Bancrofts, were the first to adapt these technical innovations to the subtler details of production. They could not bring back the intimacy banished by footlights and larger auditoriums, but they did try to replace it with a closer fidelity to reality and greater emphasis on stage-play. Robertson's detailed stage directions, generously acknowledged in Pinero's Trelawny of the "Wells" (1898), indicate that these overtures to realism were more subtle and vital than a mere use of real doorknobs and windows, and Jones and Pinero readily followed his example. The move towards reconciliation of stage life with actual experience had begun. It might not be too fanciful to suggest that this enthusiasm for technical innovations and concern for detail, which caused Archer to dub Robertson "the Pre-Raphaelite of the theatre," gave birth to the modern stage manager. Sir John Hare and W.S. Gilbert both comment on Robertson's stage-management; and the collaboration between playwright and producer gradually developed into the author-managership of Shaw, Granville-Barker, and the later "Ibsenites."

Despite occasional bursts of rapture or wrath from the critics, however, the established theatre pursued its apathetic course, hampered by a sentimental audience demanding the glittering world of make-believe still evident today in the commercial film, and confined by the declamatory style and glorified tradition of the actor-manager.

1William Archer, The Old Drama and the New (London: Heinemann, 1925), 260.
The slow progress towards realistic presentation and awareness of technique did not rise from a unity of effort or of aim. And when fresh impetus did stir the sluggish flow of the popular theatre, it tended to come from without, when a fully-developed body of theory altered the mainstream of English drama both in course and form. But meantime the divorce between literature and the theatre was as marked as ever, and many despaired of any reconciliation. The same year that Clement Scott had analysed the theatre and found it wanting, George Moore turned his attention to the drama. And Moore too blamed the public for discouraging artistic effort and encouraging the long run, which he felt was the main reason for the decline in dramatic writing:

The prevalence of the three-hundred-night run dams the current, and a free current is necessary for the development of every literature; secondly, it forces the author to compose strange compounds of farce, comedy, drama, and sensationalism. Thirdly, it forbids all originality of thought and treatment, for such might prove dangerous; mediocrity will alone find favour in the eyes of a million or so of people drawn from all classes of society.  

Five years later he joined the lists once again, severely criticizing this "literature of an age of smug respectability -- an age interested especially in the preservation of villas and silk hats; an age most anxious for peace so long as peace does not disturb the money market."  

"No first-rate man of letters now writes for the stage," he complained. "None among those who supply the theatres with plays can, if looked at from a literary side, compare with any leading novelist or essayist," and as far as Moore was concerned, the plays that read well were the plays that acted well. 

1"His article on the Theatre-Libre(1884), quoted by him in "Our Dramatists and their Literature," Fortnightly Review,1 November 1889, revised and reprinted in Impressions and Opinions,157-58.  
2"Our Dramatists and their Literature," op.cit., quotation not reprinted in Impressions and Opinions.  
3Ibid., not reprinted in Impressions and Opinions.  
4"Note on 'Ghost!',' Impressions and Opinions,163 and "Why I Don't Write Plays," Pall Mall Gazette,7 September 1892,3.
Younger critics, such as William Archer (of The World and Manchester Guardian), A.B. Walkley (of The Daily Graphic, The Globe, and The Athenæum), Bernard Shaw (of The Saturday Review), were in general agreement with Moore's and Scott's outspoken criticism on the state of the theatre. "Pessimism is the prevailing attitude of the critical mind with regard to the theatre," Archer had written in 1882; the only optimistic note struck was by Henry Arthur Jones, who acclaimed "a renascence of the drama." The passing of the copyright laws of 1887 and 1891 encouraged playwrights to defend their plays in print and put a stop to the frequent practice of pirating, but although this provocation increased the tendency towards detailed stage and character directions, the reading and attending public on the whole still maintained separate establishments. Perhaps William Archer, for once agreeing with his fellow-critic Clement Scott, described the situation most accurately:

Though the English drama does not exist in literature, it exists and flourishes as a non-literary product....I should like to see in England a body of playwrights, however small, whose works are not only acted, but printed and read....Our dramas have no relevance to the moral facts and problems of English life, as the dramas of Augier, Dumas, Feuillet, and Sardou have to those of French life....It is with the public, I believe, that the fault lies....Modern Englishmen cannot be got to take the drama seriously....I am convinced that "the coming critic" who must certainly precede "the coming dramatist" is to be looked for rather in the magazines than in the daily press....When he appears, I shall begin to have some hope that the day of regeneration is at hand. It was largely through the efforts of such critics as Archer and Shaw that signs of regeneration soon appeared.

The idea of organizing the theatre, as planned and practised by

1 English Dramatists of Today, 1.
3 Cf. general introductions by the authors to collected plays of Pinero and Jones.
4 Archer, op. cit., 3-16.
Wagner at Bayreuth, was surprisingly repeated in London by Matthew Arnold, who had hitherto shown little public interest in the theatre. In 1879, however, he reviewed Sarah Bernhardt's productions in London, and took this opportunity to air his personal views on the theatre. Criticising the existing English theatre as "without organisation, or purpose, or dignity," he claimed that there was "no modern drama at all, except a fantastical one," based on ill-fitting adaptations to an English model of the French ideal of l'homme sensuel moyen. As a remedy for this deplorable state of affairs, he advised subsidising a repertory company and founding a school of dramatic elocution and declamation: "The theatre is irresistible; organize the theatre!"

The same year a Mrs. Pfeiffer offered one thousand pounds for "the regeneration of the English drama," but neither Arnold's plea nor her funds brought forth any satisfactory result or suggestions from either Arnold's background of social reformers or the contemporary dramatists. Of the social reformers, only one actively entered the theatre, and then it was in his rôle as a socialist that William Morris betrayed a momentary interest. Envisaging the theatre this energetic master-of-all-arts might have built, his ardent admirer Bernard Shaw described Morris's production and participation in an original topical extravaganza. But although the evening was "the most successful first night" in the young critic's memory, the experiment was never

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repeated, and Morris retired to his crafts.\textsuperscript{1} It was not, therefore, until the advent of GBS himself as a critic-turned-dramatist that social reformers turned seriously to the drama as a means of propaganda and art for the sake of society.

Although the reformers betrayed little interest in the theatre, both the followers of the aesthetic movement and the naturalists eagerly adopted the dramatic form to their purposes. And once again, as with the theory, the initial impetus came from France. As we have already seen, the English theatre had long been influenced by the theatres on the other side of the channel. The romanticism of Dumas père and Victor Hugo (who proclaimed the poet's mission in society in the preface to Cromwell, 1827) on the one hand, and the "well-made play" of Scribe and his collaborators on the other continued to act as models for Victorian popular playwrights well into the next century.\textsuperscript{2} One of the greatest successes of 1897 was Edmond Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac, which owes much to Hugo's Ruy Blas (1839). It is not surprising, therefore, that European experimental drama should also arouse interest and imitators. Indeed, the major influences felt by the young rebels of the English theatre came not from the revered Comédie Française or even from "the divine Sarah", but rather from two theatres opposed in theory but united in aim, André Antoine's Théâtre Libre and Lugné-Poë's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre.

The French theatre was in much the same condition as the English

\textsuperscript{1}Our Theatre in the Nineties, II, 213. Morris might have had something to do with the Fabian private production of A Doll's House in the mid-eighties, in which Shaw and Eleanor Marx took part; cf. Harley Granville-Barker, "The Coming of Ibsen," The Eighteen Eighties, ed. Walter de la Mare (CUP, 1930) 159-196; W.Y. Tindall, Forces in Modern British Literature: 1885-1946 (NY: Knopf, 1949), 37.

\textsuperscript{2}Archer, The Old Drama and the New, 250-51; Jones, Plays, xvii-ix.
commercial theatre. Eugène Scribe (1791-1861) and Victorien Sardou (1831-1908) produced the well-constructed play with its carefully isolated plot, logical development of action, effectively motivated entries, exits, and denouements. The romantic drama of Alexandre Dumas fils (1824-1895) and Emile Augier (1820-1889), although more concerned with social relationship and personal responsibility expounded by the inevitable raisonneur, remained within the narrow limits of the pièce bien faite. The heroic verse drama of Victor Hugo (1802-1885) strayed even further from reality. "I hold the receipt from my father for a successful play," claimed Dumas fils: "The first act very clear; the second act very short; interest everywhere. That is the secret of writing plays." This penchant for the well-contrived play was encouraged by the critic "Uncle" Francisque Sarcey (1827-1899), who unlike Archer, Shaw, and Moore, insisted that the function of the critic was to furnish "guideposts," not to lead the way: the principles of dramatic technique were conditioned by the nature, of the public, the period, and the tradition; therefore conventions were necessary as the basis of dramatic illusion; exposition and unity of impression were also essential, and could be achieved by constructing the play about a scène à faire in which the whole action culminated. Preaching this dramatic theory each day in Le Temps from 1867 to 1899, Sarcey dictated the success and failure of the French theatre and effectively defended the status quo.

The style of acting, as exemplified by the two large theatres

1Quoted by Lucien Guitry of the Comédie-Française, when interviewed by Charles Dauborn, "A Prince of the Paris Stage: Lucien Guitry and his London Visit," Pall Mall Gazette, 11 June 1909, 5.

subsidized by the state, the Comédie Française and the Odeon, was also unrealistic, and in the naturalist's opinion more suitable to a Hyde Park corner harangue than to characterization within the framework of a play. The scenery and setting, too, were artificial though splendid. It is not surprising, therefore, that the naturalists, having successfully levelled all before them in the novel, should now turn to that "dernière forteresse de la convention," the drama.¹

Writing in Le Messager de l'Europe in 1879, Zola thundered his denunciation of the contemporary theatre and propounded his solution: "La formule naturaliste doit être la formule du nouvel état social.... Ou le théâtre sera naturaliste, ou il ne sera pas, telle est la conclusion formelle."²

What Zola had advocated for the novel he now applied to the play, "l'étude et la peinture de la vie," "un résumé de la langue parlée.... qui met le mot juste en sa place, avec la valeur qu'il doit avoir."³ There had already been isolated attempts by other novelists to break through the stereotyped drama of the contemporary theatre: Balzac's


²"Le Naturalisme au théâtre," op. cit., 118, 147; Antoine LaPorte, Le Naturalisme ou l'immoralité littéraire: Émile Zola, l'homme et l'œuvre (Paris: Gautherin, 1894). Le Roman expérimental is a collection of articles from Le Messager de l'Europe, a St. Petersburg review, and two Paris periodicals, le Bien public and le Voltaire. Further collections were published in Le Naturalisme au théâtre (1881) and Nos Auteurs dramatiques (1881). Cf. Moore, Confessions, 64ff.

³"Le Naturalisme au théâtre," op. cit., 153-54.
La Marâtre (1848), the de Goncourts' Henriette Marechal (1863) and La Patrie en danger (1867), Flaubert's Le Candidat (1874); but although more revolutionary than Dumas fils' La Dame aux Camélias (1859), for example, these plays illustrated rather than fulfilled the need for a more realistic approach. Zola's four-act drama, Thérèse Raquin, described by Grein as "the first step of naturalism upon the stage," was produced in 1873; two farces, neither very successful, Les Héritiers Rabourdin (1874) and Le Bouton de rose (1878), followed, although the former did reach the Independent Theatre in London in 1894.1 Zola continued to speak most persuasively as critic and theorist, as his preface to Thérèse Raquin indicates.

Two other critics spoke vehemently against the French theatre, Villiers de l'Isle Adam and Henry Becque. Villiers' Abel had had a profound influence on the aesthetic movement; his La Révolte (1870) was a landmark of a different nature. Its theme, the ineffectual rebellion of a young wife against the deadening and sterile outlook of her materialist bourgeois husband, anticipates Ibsen's A Doll's House by nine years, although the dramatic treatment and technique in the two plays differ considerably. Its preface, however, anticipates Zola as well, lamenting the stage of the French theatre, "qui est devenu l'opprobre de l'Art moderne," and hopefully considering La Révolte "la première tentative, le premier essai, risques sur la scène française, pour briser ces soi-disant règles déshonourables!"2 But Villiers had more influence on the symbolists than on the dramatists, and Henry Becque, author of only seven plays and a few dramatic sketches, did more than any other contemporary dramatist to prepare for the "new theatre" Zola and his followers demanded. At the same time however, Becque remained opposed to theory of any kind, especially

1 Translated by A. Teixeira de Mattos (London: Henry, 1894), see below, p. 157.
the scientific approach advocated by Zola. The drama, he claimed, "is the art of elimination,"¹ and for subject matter he chose, "une observation générale, très simple et très nette, et qui pouvait encadrer une pièce sans nuire à la vérité des caractères."² In the preface to Les Corbeaux (1877) he describes his technique:

Le plus souvent je travaillais devant ma glace; je cherchais jusqu'aux gestes de mes personnages et j'attendais que le mot juste, la phrase exacte me vinsent sur les levres. Tout ce que je veux en écrivant, c'est me satisfaire moi-même; je ne connais plus rien ni personne; je ne sais seulement pas s'il y a un public.³

In his bitter, ironic comedies, Les Corbeaux and Le Parisienne (1882), he achieved through this basic method naturalistic drama which became the classical example for the playwrights who followed.

Like Zola and Villiers, too, Becque considered himself the forerunner of a new drama,⁴ and even went so far as to outline a twelve-point programme for this theatre of the future which, though strongly flavoured by his own personal disappointments and hostility towards directors, contained certain points of prophetic importance:

Article Premier. Il est créé un théâtre extraordinaire pour la confection et la réfection des auteurs dramatiques....

Art.3. Un concours est ouvert pour la place de directeur. Les personnes...devront, en se présentant, justifier d'une qualité indispensable: l'austérité....

Art.6. Toute pièce, jouée à ce théâtre, ne pourra l'être que pendant trois semaines, le temps nécessaire pour en monter une autre....

Art.9. Le matériel du théâtre ne pourra comprendre que quatre décors: un temple, une forêt, une rue, et un salon....

Art.11. Un commissaire du gouvernement sera attaché au théâtre avec des attributions nouvelles; il prendra la part des auteurs contre le directeur, contrairement à ce qui s'est passé jusqu'à ce jour.⁵

In formulating this programme for his ideal theatre, Becque voiced not only the partially formed ideals of his fellow playwrights, but the general movement within the theatre which culminated in the founding

¹Quoted by Waxman, Antoine, 49.
²Becque, Souvenirs, 20.
³Ibid., 21.
⁴"Préface 1882," Souvenirs, 220.
⁵Ibid., 217-19.
of small groups throughout Europe, all of them united in their desire to create a theatre for new authors, based on a repertory system in opposition to the static established theatre programme, in which the spoken word would be more important than either vocal delivery or scenic devices. In 1888 (Preface to *Miss Julie*) August Strindberg, and in 1896 (Preface to *Ubu Roi*) Alfred Jarry, were to carry these demands further still, leaving naturalism behind once more.

Le Théâtre-Libre

That day hopefully anticipated in France by Zola, Villiers, and Becque arrived five years later, but from an entirely unexpected quarter. In 1887 a young clerk, André Antoine, left his job and risked his small capital on a theatrical venture which was to have a far-reaching influence neither he nor his forerunners would have dreamed possible. The Théâtre-Libre, as his company of amateurs was called, was founded as a protest "contre les tenants du théâtre d'alors," and among his reforms Antoine projected "new pieces, comfortable places, low prices and an ensemble in the interpretation." Partly to avoid "les pattes de la censure," as hypersensitive and active in France as in England, and partly to emphasize the individuality of the venture, Antoine's company was founded as a private theatre, "réservé à une élite" which he hoped to find among sympathetic subscribers and members of the press. Not until 1896 and the Théâtre Antoine did he turn his attention towards "the conquest of the general public"; while the "dernière lutte contre les traditions officielles et la routine administrative" took place in earnest at the Odéon, which he directed.

2 Quoted from *Le Théâtre-Libre*, a pamphlet published privately in May 1890 for his subscribers, and described by Moore in *"Théâtre Libre," Impressions and Opinions*, 175. The chapter entitled "Antoine's Dream," Waxman, op. cit., 121-135, paraphrases most of this rare 186-page brochure.
3 *Souvenirs*, 121-122.
Almost echoing Becque's manifesto, Antoine's aim was to make the Théâtre-Libre a theatre of and for new playwrights, "un refuge pour les jeunes, et un laboratoire d'essai," where young authors could perfect their art and enlarge their conceptions in preparation for their onslaught on the regular theatres, at present unyieldingly commanded by a dozen or so established playwrights. Antoine constantly reiterated his belief in the paramount importance of the play itself; that interpretation, production, scenery and presentation must be subordinated to the author's aims:

Interpretation with us ought to have only a secondary importance.... The essential thing is to continue assuring young writers of the certainty that their plays will be read and played, even very badly, for that is worth more to them than not to be played at all. These plays will ultimately find talented actors elsewhere.

And contrary to the "star system" of the French stage,

l'idéal absolu de l'acteur doit être de devenir un clavier, un instrument merveilleusement accordé, dont l'auteur jouera à songe. ...Les comédiens ne connaissent jamais rien aux pièces qu'ils doivent jouer.... Ils sont en réalité des mannequins, des marionnettes plus ou moins perfectionnées suivant leur talent, et que l'auteur habille et agite à sa fantaisie.

We shall encounter this concept of the actor-marionette again, from Jarry, Maeterlinck, Craig, and Yeats.

If the actor was to have no theories, neither was the producer.

"Une formule trop étroite serait la mort....Il faut nous tenir prêts à accueillir largement tout le monde," Antoine replied to Bauer's
(the dramatic critic of *l'Echo de Paris*) adaptation of Zola, "Le Théâtre-Libre sera naturaliste ou ne sera pas." The first season of the Théâtre-Libre emphasised Antoine's eclectic ideal, when the names of Zola and his followers of the "Soirées de Médan" (Alexis, Hennique, de Maupassant, and Céard), Meténier, Théodore de Banville, Baudelaire, and the Wagnerian disciple, Catulle-Mendès. However, as time went on, more and more young dramatists writing under the wing of, or imitating the success of, the naturalists, flocked to the Théâtre-Libre; and despite his protests, Antoine and his theatre became synonymous with naturalist drama. Perhaps this was inevitable in a movement striving for new life in the face of outworn conventions. By 1908, in reply to an international symposium conducted by Gordon Craig's periodical, *The Mask*, Antoine could write, J'ai trop combattu pour le réalisme pour que vous puissiez douter que mon absolue conviction est qu'il est la source essentielle de toute beauté...non le réalisme étroit mais l'observation de la vie et de la nature. Zola a dit,"L'œuvre d'art est l'expression de la nature à travers un temperament." Rien de plus profond et de plus fécond que cette parole de notre grand professeur d'énergie.

Antoine's basic belief in the actor's rôle further led him into the realist movement, in part as a reaction against the exaggerated technique of the time, partly because of his own emphasis on ensemble playing. Defending his method, he wrote to Sarcey in 1890, C'est que ce théâtre nouveau (ou renouvelé) exigerait des interprètes nouveaux ou renouvelés.... c'est qu'une œuvre vraie.

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1 6 mai 1889, quoted by Antoine in *Souvenirs*, 143-44.
3 Richard Wagner, 1886, was one of the first defences of Wagner; he also edited *la Revue Fantaisiste*.
4 Letter to Sarcey in 1888 mentioned by Waxman, op. cit., 92.
veut être jouée *vrai*, de même qu'une pièce classique veut surtout être dite, puisque le personnage n'est, le plus souvent, qu'une abstraction, qu'une synthèse, sans vie matérielle.\(^1\)

Insisting that acting be based on "truth, observation, and direct study of nature," "portraying the verities of everyday life,"\(^2\) Antoine revolutionized the art, and "Antoine's Back" became a byword in Paris for the realistic effect the young producer introduced.\(^3\) His own acting was highly praised, his elisions, awkward gestures and expressive silences in fact representing the "realistic truth" Zola had demanded of the new theatre.

La caractéristique de ce nouveau théâtre est, n'est-ce pas? l'inconscience des personnages, toujours, comme nous faisons des bêtises et des énormités, sans nous en apercevoir....C'est qu'ils ont des voix comme les nôtres, que leur langage est celui de notre vie journalière, avec ses élisions, ses tours familiers, et non la rhétorique et le style noble de nos classiques.\(^4\)

The actor, therefore, must learn to modify and at the same time amplify his movements, imitating "the simple and appropriate gestures of a modern man, living our everyday life,"\(^5\) thereby communicating the inner life and thought of the character through subtle nuances and details hitherto impossible in the theatre.

Antoine was helped considerably in his revolutionary ideas of acting by an amateur group of actors who, by reason of their very inexperience, stumbled towards the naturalness he wished them to express. Later, Yeats and the Fays found themselves with the same advantage. So also with his concept of the ensemble. Having no spotlight-seeking "stars" to deal with, he was able to train his

\(^2\)Antoine's 1890 brochure, quoted by Waxman,*op.cit.*,128-29.
\(^3\)Waxman,*op.cit.*,98; Anna Irene Miller, *The Independent Theatres of Europe* (NY:Long and Smith,1931),59.
\(^4\)Letter to Sarcey,1890,*Souvenirs*,199. The italics are his.
\(^5\)Antoine's brochure, quoted by Waxman,*op.cit.*,130.
company as a team, actors playing a major rôle one evening and a supernumerary the next. He was encouraged in this attitude by his observations of the Saxe-Meiningen troupe whom he studied in Brussels for several weeks before attempting the crowd scenes in such plays as the de Goncourts' *La Patrie en danger* and Léon Hennique's *Mort du duc d'Enghien*. A lengthy letter from Antoine to Sarcey describes this company which emphasized ensemble playing and naturalism that led the Duke on one occasion to bring a dead horse on to the stage.¹ Antoine comments on "la sensation de la multitude" he felt in these "groupements d'une vérité extraordinaire," and referring to the Duke's and Wagner's technique of dividing the chorus into separate groups, each personifying a particular element of the crowd, he asks why they too might not appropriate the best elements of these interesting innovations.² Bearing in mind his observations of the Meininger and his own experiences, Antoine described his model ensemble group as "some thirty players of equal ability, of ordinary talent, of simple personality, who would yield always and in spite of every other consideration to that fundamental law of ensemble."³ Over thirty years later Yeats's description of his choice of actors reads strangely similar: "I will go into some crowded room, put the name of everybody in it on a different piece of paper, put all those pieces of paper into a hat and draw the first twelve." The room would be deliberately chosen, the inhabitants sifted, but the principle remained the same.⁴

Stage decoration, too, must be revolutionized to conform with this new type of play and interpretation of the actor's rôle. Rejecting

¹Eric Bentley, *The Playwright as Thinker* (NY: Meridian 1957), 263.
⁴1890 brochure, quoted by Waxman, *op. cit.*, 132.
⁵"The Bounty of Sweden," *Autobiographies*, 563.
the elaborate scenic devices of the popular theatre, Antoine again referred to the Meiningen company, pleading for settings in keeping with the contemporary life depicted on the stage, in which the characters could move about with comfort and both look and feel at home:

Dans les œuvres modernes, écrites dans un mouvement de vérité et de naturalisme ou la théorie des milieux et de l'influence des choses extérieures a pris une si large place, le décor n'est-il pas le complément indispensable de l'œuvre? Ne doit-il pas prendre, au théâtre, la même importance que la description tient dans un roman? N'est-il pas une sorte d'exposition du sujet?!

And if the stage is too large for the intimacy of the play, he suggests it be reduced by bringing the acting space forward.² Showing his customary concern for details, Antoine joined other innovators in his use of actual door handles, real wood panels, and experiments in lighting technique.³

During the first three years of the Theatre-Libre Antoine saw many of his aims put into practice. One hundred and twenty-five new plays were produced by fifty-one authors, forty-two of them under forty years of age;⁴ several plays had gone to the Comédie-Française,⁵ to the Odéon,⁶ and to the Gymnase;⁷ his acting technique had been sufficiently

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¹ Letter to Sarcey, 24 November 1890, reprinted in Souvenirs, 199-200.
² Ibid., 200.
³ Miller, op.cit., 62-63; Waxman, op.cit., 133-34. Strindberg's Preface to Miss Julie might have been influenced by Antoine.
⁴ Cf. appendices to Thalasso, Le Théâtre-Libre, and Waxman, op.cit. for lists of authors, programmes, actors, etc.
⁵ Catulle-Mendès' La Femme de Taborin, Théodore de Banville's Le Baiser, François de Curel's Les Fossiles.
⁶ Léon Hennique's dramatization of Zola's Jacques Damour.
⁷ Port-Riche's La Chance de Françoise.
accepted for some of his company to move to professional theatres; and most important of all, by giving free rein to new authors, Antoine had forced critics and public once again to take stock of the situation in their theatres; at least twelve thousand articles were written about his theatre during these three years.\footnote{1}{The movement which led to Antoine had begun in the work of Zola and Becque, and in looking back over his own career Becque remarked of his offspring: \textit{Tout le mouvement dramatique de ces dix dernières années, c'est Antoine qui l'a créé. Tous les auteurs dramatiques d'aujourd'hui et de demain, c'est Antoine qui les a mis en vue.}}

But despite his efforts to remain eclectic in policy, Antoine's Theatre-Libre produced only fifteen verse plays during the eight years of his management.\footnote{3}{Consequently, as we shall see, several theatres devoted to poetic drama were founded in opposition to the Theatre-Libre. And during the same period, other small groups were conceived: Le Cercle des Escholiers, which opened the same night as the Théâtre-Libre and gave Lugné-Poë, soon to become Antoine's greatest rival, his first experience as producer;\footnote{4}{the Théâtre de l'Application, organized as a studio theatre for young actors of the conservatory of the Comédie-Française; and the Théâtre-Libre of Marseilles, founded in 1892 by Emile Fabre (later a playwright of the Paris Théâtre-Libre) and Auguste Rondel in emulation of the parent group.}} Antoine had been influenced by the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen's troupe and Wagner's theatre at Bayreuth; in 1889 he returned the compliment by acting as the model for the Freie-Bühne which in its turn produced Gerhart Hauptmann. Meanwhile a young drama critic in Dublin,\footnote{5}{\footnote{1890 brochure, quoted by Waxman,\textit{op. cit.},124.}{\footnote{"Une Fête Litteraire," quoted by Antoine in \textit{Souvenirs,op. cit.}, 181.}{\footnote{Thalasso,\textit{op. cit.}, 281-82.}{\footnote{Miller,\textit{op. cit.},73-74.}{\footnote{Ibid.,73.}}}}}
Frank Fay, read with interest news of Antoine's innovations in Paris. Mainly through the advertisements of George Moore, news of the Théâtre-Libre was heard in England. In company with his friend Paul Alexis (of the Médan group), Moore had attended performances at Antoine's theatre and written in praise of his work. As proud possessor of "probably the only [copy] in England," he quoted from Antoine's 1890 brochure in another article, and in still another discussed the possibility of an English Théâtre-Libre. As we have already seen, Moore had shown an interest in English theatrical conditions as early as 1884, when he first suggested that the main reason for the decline in dramatic writing lay in the "long run," a practice which Beque had also disapproved of, and like every iconoclast before him, Moore blamed the tastes of the age for the "tawdry ware that at present holds the theatrical market." But it was also this public that could endow a national theatre, freed from "the thraldom of farcical melodrama and melodramatic farces." And although Moore gradually altered his idea of a national theatre for all to a subsidised theatre open to the few, he felt certain that the "innumerable articles...of much vague content" already written on the subject indicated sufficient interest for the idea of an endowed theatre to be considered seriously.

Like Antoine, Moore considered this theatre one primarily for authors, "a theatre which, by producing some thirty or forty new plays every year, will allow us to say what we have to say, and in the form

1"Note on 'Ghosts!'"(1890), Impressions and Opinions,162-67.
2"Theâtre Libre"(1890), op.cit.,170.
3"On the Necessity of an English Théâtre Libre"(1890), op.cit., 176-82.
4"Our Dramatic Critics," Pall Mall Gazette, September 1891,2.
5"Our Dramatists and their Literature"(1889), Impressions and Opinions,161.
6"Note on 'Ghosts!'" op.cit.,167.
which is natural and peculiar to us." He already considers himself one of the playwrights, but feels it necessary to warn his prospective audience,

that it is as imperative for an English as for a French Theatre-Libre to refuse good conventional plays as bad ones....To get the fine fleur of society, literature and art the Theatre-Libre must offer a supremacy of sensation -- the strange, the unknown, the unexpected. The plays need not be great plays -- great plays are out of the question -- they need only be plays with something in them; even though that something is not always deeper than the charm which we find in a piece of bric-a-brac, or a piece of old china.

In effect, the plays must provide a nouveau frisson, suitable to English sensibilities. However, he continues, "The most absolute eclecticism should prevail, and...no preference be given one form of art more than another. That the play should be rare is the first and almost the only qualification necessary to secure for it right of representation." Although such rare plays could not at the moment be found in England, he was confident that they could be supplied by the novelists -- Michael Field,^ Meredith, Hardy; Stevenson, and Henley. In a later article Moore judged Henley and Stevenson's Beau Austin a "perfectly proportioned" comedy, "written with a grace and supple incisiveness not seen in a dramatic work since the 'School for Scandal.'" Pinero, Grundy, and Jones could also be drafted, for plays "on the moral and ethical problems of the day." And already on hand were plays from Antoine's repertoire: Tolstoi's Dominion of Darkness [sic], Henrique's La Mort du Duc d'Enghien and Jacques Damour, Meténier's En Famille, and Ibsen's Ghosts.^

^"Michael Field" [Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley] wrote many plays as well as poems, and among Yeats' letters (Letters,407) is a rejection of their Deirdre.
^"Our Dramatic Critics," Pall Mall Gazette,10 September 1891,2.
But Moore's plans for an English Théâtre-Libre never went beyond conjecture, and even then he showed no concern about actors. "The first thing to do is get the plays," an attitude he would later take towards the Irish Literary Theatre. Fortunately, however, there appeared someone who was willing to risk the actual project, and in 1891 the Independent Theatre Society was founded by a Dutch merchant turned English critic, J.T. Grein. Moore immediately became an enthusiastic member of the committee, but according to his own account resigned after Grein neglected to acknowledge his help in directing *Ghosts*. The aim of the Society was "to give special performances of plays which have a literary and artistic rather than a commercial value," but if anything Grein was more discerning and censorious than his French colleague. This British Théâtre-Libre "would nurture realism but realism of a healthy kind": "it would strive to annihilate the puppets which have done yeomen's service for years and years and would instead depict human beings, bearing human characters, speaking human language and torn by human passions." Unlike the Théâtre-Libre, also, which only produced eleven foreign plays during the eight years

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of Antoine's management, the Independent Theatre did not limit itself to English playwrights. In fact, as Moore had prophesied, its first two productions and two-thirds of the next were given over to plays in translation. In 1892, however, Grein "discovered" a new playwright, George Bernard Shaw, and 1893 brought him plays by Moore (in consequence of a wager), Todhunter, and Michael Field.

Other groups based on the same pattern followed. In 1897 the New Century Theatre issued its prospectus, declaring that "the sole endeavour of the Executive will be to further the cause of Dramatic Art, and, without bias or prejudice, to pave the way for the permanent institution, artistically administered, which is essential to the development of the drama and acting." In 1899 the Stage Society was formed "to promote and encourage Dramatic Art; to serve as an Experimental Theatre; to provide such an organization as shall be capable of dealing with any opportunities that may present themselves, or be created, for the permanent establishment of a Repertory Theatre; and to establish and undertake the management and control of such a Theatre."

Activities of these and similar groups (The Pioneers and Pioneer Players, The Play Actors' Society, the English Drama Society, the

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1 Thalasso, Le Théâtre-Libre, 279-80.
2 Ibsen's Ghosts, Zola's Thérèse Raquin, Brandes' A Visit, Banville's The Kiss. Moore's letter to the Editor, Pall Mall Gazette, 29 February 1892, 2.
4 "Why I don't Write Plays," Pall Mall Gazette, 7 September 1892, 3; Hail and Farewell: Ave, 49-51.
5 Quoted by Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties, III, 98.
6 Quoted by Miller, Independent Theatre in Europe, 177.
New Stage Club continued into the twentieth century, leading eventually to the Court Theatre of Granville-Barker and Bernard Shaw, but in essence there was very little difference among them. All were concerned, like their French prototype, primarily with the encouragement of playwrights, which eventually led to a similar concern for the actor:

For the Independent Theatre, by the very conditions of its existence, is enabled to produce plays which, whether or not they have any commercial value, at all events have the greatest value for the actor, in providing him with such acting parts as he will not often find in the theatres conducted on commercial lines.

As in France, also, they provided an opportunity for the production of the one-act play, which had little value in the commercial theatre except as a rarely-attended curtain raiser. And perhaps most important of all, both the English and the French Théâtre-Libres introduced to the general public the most influential dramatic force of the century, Henrik Ibsen.

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906)

In May 1890, with an approved translation and the benediction of the dramatist himself, Antoine introduced Ibsen's Ghosts to the French public and, incidentally, to George Moore. Several of Ibsen's plays

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1 The New Stage Club was the first in England to produce Strindberg.
2 Miller, op.cit.,183-94.
3 Moore, Letter to the Editor, Pall Mall Gazette, 29 February 1892, 2.
4 Cf. Ibsen's letters to Antoine and the translator R. Darzens, reprinted in Le Théâtre, 249-50; also Antoine's letter to Sarcey, July 1888, describing the Meiningen production of Les Revenants, reprinted in Souvenirs, 112. According to Waxman, op.cit., 114-15, it was Zola who called Antoine's attention to a production of Ghosts in Germany, 1890.
5 "Note on 'Ghosts,'" Impressions and Opinions, 162-67.
had been published in translation, but to the Théâtre-Libre must go the credit for once more setting the theatrical fashion of Paris. Le Canard sauvage followed Les Revenants in April 1891, and soon other French theatres followed suit. The Théâtre-Libre of Berlin had opened in November 1889 with Ghosts, and by opening his Independent Theatre with the same play in 1891, Grein was following a precedent which by this time implied not only artistic intention but technical ambition. The first production of the New Century Theatre was John Gabriel Borkman, and the "Thalia Society" of Budapest, run on similar lines, was responsible for the success of Ibsen on the Hungarian stage. This practice of proclaiming allegiance to the avant-garde by flourishing the standard of Ibsen indicates the

1Count Moritz Prozor, trans., Les Revenants, 1889, La Revue indépendante. A translation of Moore's Confessions of a Young Man had appeared in this literary periodical in 1888. Les Soutiens de la Société, Pages d'Histoire de Henrik Ibsen (Lady Inger) and Björnson's Le Nouveau Système also first appeared here.


4Shaw, Our Theatres in the Nineties, III, 97-103; Moore, Introduction to The Heather Field and Maeve, xvi.

5Recorded by the foreign correspondent of The Mask, I (1908), 87.

importance of his work to contemporary thought and theatre. Indeed, Ibsen's position in the history of drama is comparable to Yeats's in poetry several decades later. The published works of both span a wide period, beginning with the conventional forms and methods of the time (Ibsen learned much of his technique from Scribe and Sardou, as the early Yeats echoes Keats, Shelley, and Morris), progressing steadily on to new ground in both technique and subject-matter, encompassing all that came across their path, both in the realm of ideas and form, and without hesitation discarding all dross as they moved on. Although at each stage of their progression they crystal-lized certain ideas and attitudes which were eagerly recognized and exploited by those who followed in their wake, Ibsen even less than Yeats can be considered the leader of a "school" or movement in the way Zola or Mallarmé can. The charge of "Ibsenism" applies more accurately to his imitators and apostles than to the dramatist himself, just as the terms "Celticism" and "Celtic Twilight" are inappropriate labels for Yeats's work. Yet at the same time, by his experiments with form and constant preoccupation with effective clarification and communi-cation of "the temporal and eternal questions..." the age and in the community," Ibsen made easier the task of such playwrights as August Strindberg, Gerhart Hauptmann, George Bernard Shaw, Eugene O'Neill, and all who came after him. Deservedly or not, he provided a target for the reaction, sometimes hysterical in intensity, against the ideas and attitudes which became associated in the public mind with the "New Drama." And sometimes this reaction came from writers whom one would expect a greater sympathy with Ibsen's artistic aims, such as Yeats and Synge.

Although each artist must of course experience and refine his material in his own way, Ibsen's contribution to the theatre might be

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1Ibsen's speech to Norwegian students, 10September 1874, Speeches and New Letters, trans. Arne Kildal (London: Frank Palmer, 1911), 51.

2 Cf. below, pages 171 and 243, however.
considered one of synthesis rather than originality. He was, foremost, a Norwegian poet, writing like Synge and Yeats out of the experience of his age and country to his countrymen. "No poet lives through anything isolated," he declared. "What he lives through all of his countrymen live through together with him." His characters, too, reflect the dual nature of their country. Living and dreaming through hours and seasons as sharply defined as the background panorama of fjord, forest, and mountain, they yet remain hedged in by the narrow, rigid, and often outworn traditions and prejudices of the small unsophisticated communities from which they spring. Like Yeats and Lady Gregory, Ibsen in his younger days had spent some time collecting folklore and stories of the countryside, which were later to enrich his work. And even though he spent most of his writing life abroad (a self-imposed exile similar to that of another Irish writer, James Joyce), this served merely to clarify and intensify his own reactions to his country and countrymen, enabling him "to look into myself and into the condition of affairs" with the objectivity he felt necessary: "A poet by nature belongs to the far-sighted. Never have I seen the fatherland and the actual life of the fatherland so fully, so clearly, and at a closer range than just from afar and during my absence," a statement Synge might also have made. Yet also like these Irish

4 Letter to critic Clemens Petersen, 4 December 1865, *Speeches and New Letters*, 71.
writers, Ibsen refused to subordinate his task as an artist to his country's immediate needs. "I do not think it is our task to take charge of the state's liberty and independence," he replied to one of Bjornson's frequent political appeals, "but certainly to awaken into liberty and independence the individual, and as many as possible." To those who sought specific creeds and loyalties in his plays he warned,

Whatever I have written has been without any conscious thought of making propaganda. I have been more poet and less social philosopher than people generally seemed inclined to believe.... To me it has seemed a problem of humanity in general.... My task has been the description of humanity.

It is interesting to note that Synge's reply to the detractors of The Playboy almost echoes these words.

Part of the reaction against Ibsen might have been the coincidence of the productions of his plays at the very time Zola was expounding his theories of naturalism. For like other thinkers of the nineteenth century, Ibsen was greatly impressed by the scientific and psychological discoveries of his day and reflected this interest in his plays. Like

1Cf. W. H. Schofield, "Personal Impressions of Bjornson and Ibsen," Atlantic Monthly, LXXXI (1898), 570. Bjornson is reported to have described John Gabriel Borkman as "entirely pessimistic and useless; not the kind of thing we want at all. It won't do anybody any good." La Gallienne, The Romantic '90's, 40-44.

212 July 1879, Speeches and New Letters, 86. Ibsen frequently made the distinction between "Liberty" and "liberties" both in his correspondence and his plays, cf. letter to Brandes, 3 January 1882, Correspondence, 350. Cf. also letter to Brandes 30 October 1888, ibid., 420.

3Speech at the Festival of the Norwegian Women's Rights League, Christiania, 26 May 1898, Speeches and New Letters, 65. The italics are his. Cf. letter to Hans Lien-Brekstad, August 1890, Correspondence, 431; Shaw, The Quintessence of Ibsenism, 1891.

4Greene and Stephens, J. M. Synge, 236-244.

5Cf. letters to Lorentz Dietrichson, 19 December 1897 and Brandes, 24 September 1871, Correspondence, 324 and 218.
Zola he saw man as the repository of the past as well as the product of his immediate environment and circumstances. In this sense Ibsen carried his theory of inherited characteristics even further than Zola, seeing man as heir to a world of prejudices and outmoded beliefs as vestigial as the inherited weaknesses of the body. But at the same time he committed himself for humanity to a greater extent than Zola by his belief in man's innate nobility of soul (or will),\(^1\) which he is capable in himself of developing more fully and which, even though it may be degraded or distorted by the stupidity of man-made conventions and institutions, can never be utterly destroyed.\(^2\) The form and type of play Ibsen wrote was a result of this belief and of his subsequent approach to life as material for the artist. The artist must be subjective to the extent that he has undergone and sympathizes with the experience he is treating,\(^3\) measuring man against his society as well as against himself,\(^4\) and answerable to both.\(^5\) He must retain a certain degree of "masked objectivity"\(^6\) as well, in order to report dispassionately and deal honestly with the painful or the ugly as with

\(^1\)The power of the human will is expressed, directly and indirectly, throughout *The Lady from the Sea.*


\(^3\)Cf. letters to Magdalene Thoreson, 29 May 1870, *Correspondence*, 190; Laura Kieler, 11 June 1870, *ibid.*, 193; Peter Hansen, 28 October 1870, *ibid.*, 198.


the good and beautiful.¹

Part of the reaction to Ibsen among audience and other playwrights was due to this dark world he saw about him; they did not wait for the flashes springing from his own belief in the potentiality of mankind to illuminate that darkness. Part of the reaction was also due to "the illusion of reality"² Ibsen felt was necessary in order "to see in such a manner that the thing seen is perceived by his audience just as the poet saw it."³ Ibsen himself deplored the extremes of naturalism,⁴ and in his own plays practised a selective realism which, we shall see, was also practised by Synge and Lady Gregory. And in practising this selective realism he introduced other innovations as well: he retained the clarity of action and strength of line of the "well-made play,"⁵ avoided any unnatural


²Letter to Gosse, 15 January 1874, Correspondence, 269.

³Speech to Norwegian students, 10 September 1874, Speeches and New Letters, 49. Cf. letter to S. Schandorph, 6 January 1882, ibid., 352.

⁴Cf. Ibsen's early dramatic criticism, 1851, quoted by P. F. D. Tennant, Ibsen's Dramatic Technique (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1948), 33; letter to Mme. Thoreson, 29 May 1870, Correspondence, 190. "Zola descends to the sewer to take a bath, I, in order to cleanse it," Halvdahn Koht, Henrik Ibsen (Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1929), II, 199. M. C. Bradbrook, Ibsen the Norwegian, 94n2 translates "for a rense den" as "to wash myself."

interpolation in speech,1 concentrated on "the genuine, plain language spoken in real life,"2 and replaced the conventional form of exposition, intrigue, climax, revelation and happy ending by a subtle retrospective exposition which ruthlessly pursued his characters into the past, through the present and into the future. By achieving his denouement (if such an indecisive ending can be so called) through the natural development of his characters and a fastidious attention to detail, carefully balancing action with words by the more subtle methods of inference and implication, he heightened the impression of timelessness within a framework of strictly regulated unity of time and place. Yet at the same time this force and emphasis created an impact on the spectator equivalent to that of Zola's naturalist technique. The spectator cannot escape from Ibsen's heightened reality any more than he can ignore the naturalist's exaggerated realism. And so the audience, attuned to the one, neglected to see beyond the consistency of detail and closely interlocking structure of Ibsen's plays to the poetic symbolism behind them. The design was too scrupulously compounded to unravel easily;3 theme and technique were constantly fused and interwoven along the main line of action, emphasising and illuminating, contrasting and intensifying each other by means of concentration, intimation, interplay, and dramatic unity. Even Ibsen's humour played a double rôle, resulting in a laughter more ironic than comic, and leaving him open to the complaint later levelled at Synge, that he had no sense of humour at all. Yet paradoxically, it was this concern, projected with

1 Letters to Lucie Wolf the actress, 25 May 1883, Correspondence, 367-68; Edmund Gosse, 15 January 1874, ibid., 268-69; Brandes, 26 June 1869, ibid., 174; Schandorph, 6 January 1882, ibid., 552.
2 Letter to Lucie Wolf, 25 May 1883, Correspondence, 367-68.
3 Even the titles are symbolic, cf. letters to Count Prozor, 4 December 1890, Correspondence, 435, and 23 January 1891, ibid., 436.
such technical skill, not only for the world of appearances but also for the underlying world of truth, with the dream as well as the deed, illusion and reality, fantasy and action, that gave Ibsen's plays their concentrated power and unrelenting accuracy of aim, so that, by following exactly the opposite course to Maeterlinck, who was frequently praised at Ibsen's expense, he achieved Maeterlinck's, Yeats's, and Synge's aim of symbolic realism. And like these three dramatists also, Ibsen considered the actor merely a means to an end, belonging "to a complicated machine, in the working of which he is bound by law to take part." And like these three dramatists also, Ibsen considered the actor merely a means to an end, belonging "to a complicated machine, in the working of which he is bound by law to take part."

The impact of Ibsen's works was felt gradually, first in Germany, then in France and Italy. Although Ibsen had been "discovered" by Edmund Gosse as early as 1871 (the year after Dickens' death and ten years after Turgenev's Father and Sons) and there had been occasional private amateur performances of his works during the 'eighties, his plays did not create any great impression on the English public until the notorious uproar over the Independent Theatre's production of Ghosts in 1891. "You made a hole in the dyke," Shaw wrote to Grein thirty years later, and the weight of the flood outside did the rest.

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1 Cf. Shaw, Our Theatres, III, 139: "true modern drama...poetically realistic illusion."
2 Letter to Mme. Thoreson, 5 June 1870, Correspondence, 191.
5 Archer, "Ghosts and Gibberings," Pall Mall Gazette, 8 April 1891; Shaw, Quintessence of Ibsenism, 3rd ed. (London: Constable, 1922), 87-90.
On the whole, however, Ibsen's influence in England does not appear to have been as direct during these early years as either Wagner's or Maeterlinck's, although few plays written after 1890 can be considered entirely free of "ibsenity," as the leader of the opposition, Clement Scott, dramatic critic for the Daily Telegraph, derogatorily described the uncompromising truths behind Ibsen's plays. All, though many unwillingly, recognized what Ibsen had achieved with the raw material of the naturalists; and even his supporters found him uncomfortable at times. But whether scatological denunciation, witty disparagement, indignant moralizing, or unrestrained hero-worship, the reaction provoked by Ibsen was intense. "Ibsenism" and "anti-Ibsenism" became slogans. In fact, the enthusiasm of his admirers was equally if not more responsible than the antipathy of his detractors for the furore raised over Ibsen's plays in England. The reasons put forward for this strong reaction were many, but they can with impunity be reduced to the propitious converging of the three essential elements of effective theatre: what the dramatist says, how he says it, and when he says it.

As has already been described, the English theatre had for a number of years been slowly coming to terms with realism. The process, however, had remained so gradual that the audience had followed it each step of

1 Gosse, "Henrik Ibsen" (1873), Northern Studies (London: Walter Scott, 1890), 38; Gosse, Ibsen (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), 172; James Huneker, "Henrik Ibsen," Iconoclasts, 12.
2 F. Anstey, Mr. Punch's Pocket Ibsen (London: Heinemann, 1895); J. M. Barrie, Ibsen's Ghost: or, Toole up to Date, produced at Toole's Theatre, 30 May 1891; even the censor was inclined to dismiss Ibsen's plays as "too absurd to do any harm," Shaw, Our Theatres, I, 52-53.
3 Walter Besant's sequel to A Doll's House, "The Doll's House -- and After," English Illustrated Magazine, January 1890, 315-25, to which, in turn, Shaw wrote a sequel and according to Shaw so did Eleanor Marx Aveling, Quintessence of Ibsenism, 86nl.
4 Archer, "Ibsen and English Criticism," Fortnightly Review, 46 (1 July 1889), 30-37; Old Drama and the New, 306-37.
the way, remaining aware of the technique while appreciating the effect. Nor had any playwright arisen to challenge this audience control. Consequently, by sheer technical prowess alone the initial impact of Ibsen's plays was unexpectedly powerful, and the spectator, caught off guard, was helpless to detach himself from the tragedy on the stage. Ibsen had discovered what Shaw was to learn from him, that if you want to convey meaning as well as entertainment, you must first learn to say it so subtly and yet so deftly that through sheer emotional force alone, your audience will listen, identify, and believe. Nor was it possible not to identify one's self with the action of Ibsen's plays, for the middle class spectator, accustomed to observe the antics of Pinero's upper classes, watched with horror the enfolding of a tragedy that could easily have been his own. "Ibsen never presents his play to you as a romance for your entertainment," Bernard Shaw pointed out. "He says, in effect, 'Here is yourself and myself, our society, our civilization. The evil and good, the horror and the hope of it, are woven out of your life and mine.'"¹

The actors and stage producers were prepared by the reformers who had already entered the English theatre;² the audience, confused and not prepared, was unable to distinguish between art and reporting, and could do nothing but beat the dog that threatened its own comfortable precepts of art and society. Less than twenty years later, the audience, this time the Dublin section, would react in the same way, and for many of the same reasons.³

This willingness on the part of the audience and critic to consider

¹Our Theatres in the Nineties, I, 103. The reaction was no doubt heightened through the English misunderstanding of a society which has no aristocracy. One critic did try to lessen the impact of A Doll's House by urging the public to look upon it as part of fairyland, The Athenaeum, 15 June, 1889, 769-70.

²See below, p. 189 ff.

³See below, Part Three, chapter 9, p. 590 ff.
the selective realism of Ibsen's plays as mere literal reporting was emphasized by two circumstances of production: first, the choice of plays, and second, the necessity at first for private single performances. Of all Ibsen's plays, those which were presented first to the English public were the ones most apt to rouse strong opposing views: *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Hedda Gabler*. ¹ These belonged to the period during which Ibsen was primarily concerned with the individual in his society, "with his social and personal morality, with the effects of his conduct at the bar of public opinion and to a greater or less degree also by his own conscience."² This at a time when through the advances of science and philosophy all conventions were being challenged. Ibsen and especially his unfortunate heroine Nora became involved in the "moral earthquake," as Shaw dramatically put it, "which threatened to bring every suburban villa crashing to the ground in a hurricane of Feminism and Anti-Clericalism and anti-Idealism."³ Here was one more example of the advanced liberal slamming the door of convention. Nor were these early critics given the opportunity of re-assessing their first hasty reactions; this new "realism-symbolism" so neatly employed by Ibsen required, as has already been stated, much careful and painstaking unstitching in order that the craftsmanship of the finished product might be recognized. Partly due to the wholesale condemnation of the critics, partly due to the single private performances, the strange never had the opportunity of becoming familiar. And Yeats, who was in London during the height of the reaction against Ibsen, remembered

this when, sixteen years later, he demanded and with force finally received a "fair hearing" for Synge.¹ There was a good deal to be said for Shaw's plea for an Ibsen theatre.²

Another important factor contributing to the unwillingness of critics and audience to accept Ibsen was caused by the Ibsenites themselves. Drawn from the new aesthetic, naturalist, and Wagnerian coteries on the one hand, and from the socialist philosophers on the other, each group sought and found its own tenets in Ibsen, neglecting to a large or small extent the conscientious objectivity which Ibsen demanded of himself. The socialists, led by the dynamic and eloquent logic of Bernard Shaw, easily claimed him as their own,⁵ stating in defence that "the existence of a discoverable and perfectly definite thesis in a poet's work by no means depends on the completeness of his own intellectual consciousness of it."⁴ The same treatment and explanation from the same hand we have already observed.⁵ The followers of the aesthetic movement, however, were not so willing to accept Ibsen wholesale, any more than they had Wagner. The symbolists, advocating "all its [life's] desires, and all the joys of living,"⁶ eagerly embraced Ibsen's doctrine of individual freedom, ignoring the attendant doctrine of individual responsibility. Nor did they wholly accept Ibsen's implication that prose could achieve the heights of poetry, no matter how much they might admire his subtle and

¹Letter to John Quinn, 15 February 1905, Letters, 448: "It will be a fight like that over the first realistic plays of Ibsen"; this was written before The Playboy was even conceived by Synge.

²Quintessence of Ibsenism, 206-10; "Wagner in Bayreuth," English Illustrated Magazine, October 1889, 49-57.

³Cf. Ibsen's letter to Brandes, quoted by Gosse in "Ibsen's Social Dramas," Fortnightly Review, 45 (1889), 109: "The State is the curse of the individual," etc.

⁴Shaw, Preface to first edition of Quintessence of Ibsenism, xxii.

⁵The Perfect Wagnerite, etc.

ingenious mastery of the stage. Symons preferred Wagner's method of expressing "the subconscious life" with heroic characters and "continuous, unresolved melody" to the "too probable people" of Ibsen's plays, who "speak a language exactly on the level of their desks and their shop-counters." Yeats, charitably admitting their aims in attempting to achieve a new theatre of beauty based on contemporary actuality to be similar, could not feel that the means justified the end. He recognized Ibsen as "the one great master the modern stage has produced," and admired the "provincialism" of Ibsen's characters, the only excuse he would accept for writing about modern educated people, but could never forgive the "stale odour of spilt poetry" he sensed in Archer's "hygienic" translations. To Yeats, Ibsen's characters were imprisoned in their commonplace circumstances and everyday language, although he grudgingly admitted that Ghosts "has its place among the necessary plays. The dramatist should cast the light of his conscience in dark corners." Synge, on the other hand, while insisting upon reality, disowned the "joyless and pallid

Symons, "A Theory of the Stage," Plays Acting and Music: A Book of Theory (London: Constable, 1909), 205: "In the end beauty revenged itself upon him by bringing him to a no-man's land where there were clouds and phantasms that he could no longer direct."

Notes on Wagner at Bayreuth," Plays Acting and Music, 310-11.

"The Play of Modern Manners" (1906), Essays and Introductions, 276.

"The Tragic Generation," Autobiographies, 280


"The Play, the Player, and the Scene," Samhain, 1901, 7.


"The Play, the Player, and the Scene," Samhain, 1904.

Interview with the San Francisco Examiner, 31 January 1904.
words" of Ibsen and Zola. However, in an unpublished farce written after The Playboy riots, he acknowledges that he and Ibsen were, in his own manner, fighting for the same liberties. And surprisingly, AE possessed a copy of A Doll's House in 1891.

Martyn and Moore were far more generous in their praise of Ibsen. Moore, at this time still chief apostle of naturalism in England, had been profoundly impressed by Antoine's production of Ghosts, as we have seen, and hailed Ibsen as a modern Sophocles working on scientific principles:

The tragedy of fate Ibsen has taken out of the empyrean of Olympus and hexameters, substituting the empyrean of science, and in the simple language of a plain Norwegian household, we learn that though there be no gods to govern us, nature, vast and unknown, for ever dumb to our appeal, holds us in thrall.

Appreciating Ibsen's dialogue more than any "message", Moore felt that "the psychological drama" of Ibsen was "the only possible literary drama in the 19th century." Here at last was the unusual spectacle of human nature on the stage — human nature moving in its own strange, irregular metre, obeying the terrible logic of destiny, the calm and inscrutable logic which we catch sight of now and then working like a worm through the maze of inherited tendencies.

Converted to Wagnerism by Martyn, Moore also recognized the similarity in the public's reaction to both foreign giants: "Both were regarded

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1 Preface to The Playboy of the Western World.  
3 Gibbon, The Early Years of George Russell, 115.  
4 Moore, "Note on 'Ghosts,'", Impressions and Opinions, 176.  
5 Quoted by Goodwin, Conversations with George Moore, 171: "There is only one man who can write dialogue, and that is Ibsen."  
6 Introduction to The Heather Field and Maeve, x.  
7 "Our Dramatic Critics," Pall Mall Gazette, 10 September 1891, 2.
with oblique looks, and few were quite sure that the new music and
the new drama were not an immorality, which it was perhaps the duty
of the state to stamp out. For Moore, this antipathy on the part
of the public was one more reason to praise the combination of poet,
philosopher, and dramatist he found in Ibsen as he and his colleagues
had found it in Wagner.

Martyn's enthusiasm exceeded even the temporary extravagances
of Moore, settling into a lifetime cult of "this greatest and most
original of dramatists" which, although providing a model for his
own plays, eventually ousted him from the theatre he did so much to
found. It is only natural that he appreciated in "the subtle, mighty
Norwegian" those qualities he had most approved of in Wagner: "the
effect of a symphony where idea grows naturally from idea; where
each theme is "exhibited, and made recur and explained, and
coloured with turns which are like changes into varied keys; and
where "outer action is all subordinate to the tremendous strife of
wills and emotions, which work out to their inevitable conclusions
with a mastery of art that intellectually delights a thinking
audience." Like Moore, also, Martyn recognized Ibsen's affinity with
Greek drama. Even more than Moore, he saw in the "the master" the

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1 Introduction to The Heather Field and Maeve, viii.
2 Ibid., ix.
3 Essay on Little Eyolf, written about 1899, reprinted by Gwynn,
Edward Martyn, 142.
4 "Little Eyolf and The Lady from the Sea at the Theatrical Club,"
Irish Review II, 23 (February 1913), 611.
5 Essay on Little Eyolf, Gwynn, op. cit., 142.
6 Essay on The Lady from the Sea and Rosmersholm, about 1899,
Gwynn, op. cit., 148.
7 Ibid., 144.
8 Ibid. Cf. Moore, "Note on 'Ghosts'", Impressions and Opinions, 166.
9 Gwynn, op. cit., 147.
same "symphonic beauty" and music-drama he had found in Wagner, simply moving through another medium. Unlike Yeats, he approved of Ibsen's dialogue, "where subtle mental poetry finds expression in the most direct realism of speech"; Martyn preferred this "invention" of "the drama of the mind." And again contrary to Yeats, Martyn envisaged in the work of Ibsen his ideal theatre, which should be "a centre of education and refinement like a museum or a picture gallery" as well as a palace of intellectual pleasure and beauty. "Every great drama, every work worthy to be thought Art, must be founded on some philosophical idea," he believed. And so it is only natural that Martyn should admire the "dramatic psychology coming in logical sequence" which separated Ibsen from "the miserable decadence of serious drama throughout England and America, and of course, worst of all, throughout Ireland," "with its low aim at only making money by amusing the mob."

But although Martyn admired Ibsen's technique, he could not accept all of Ibsen's opinions, and disapproved of the later plays, finding even in Little Eyolf "the beginning of a decadence" that led Ibsen in When We Dead Awaken "almost to travesty his life work." It was those opinions, Martyn felt, that were responsible for such "monstrosities"
as Mrs. Warren's Profession, among other modern "imitations" of Ibsen. 1 Instead, he preferred the "beautiful prose poem drama" of The Lady from the Sea, Rosmersholm, The Master Builder, and Little Eyolf, and it is these plays that he chose as his models when he came to write his own plays. 2 In these plays also, Martyn found Ibsen's most intense nationalism, which may have affected his choice of models, for Martyn, too, believed in internationalism through nationalism. 3

The socialist colours have perhaps clung most firmly to Ibsen in England, 4 but the early reaction to Ibsen was probably due more to the enthusiastic support of the aesthetic and naturalist movements. Eagerly accepting him as a powerful exponent of their cause (or, as in the case of Yeats, a co-opponent: "though we and he had not the same friends, we had the same enemies") 5, his champions aroused in the public the same distrust accorded themselves. As late as 1911 Shaw could still refer to Ibsen as "one of the curiosities of the coterie theatre" in England, 6 and the tendency towards aloofness the aesthetes had always shown, preferring to perfect their arts within a circle of aristocratic solitude, tinged Ibsen as well. Furthermore, he was a

1Ibid., 146. Cf.similar criticisms of Shaw's play by Archer, "Mr. William Archer disowns me because I 'cannot touch pitch without wallowing in it.'" Also J.T.Grein, Dramatic Criticism (London:John Long, 1904),IV,7-11.
2Gwynn, op.cit., 142; cf. ibid., 118.
3Ibid., 145; "I thought that I had developed something from [the art of Ibsen] in my Maeve...."
4Cf. Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 22 November 1959: "His English admirers... regarding these works as calls to revolt against an evil society and vicious systems of ethics."
5"The Tragic Generation," Autobiographies, 279.
6Preface to Three Plays by Brieux (London:A.C.Mifield,1911),xxx.
foreign dramatist, and could never be accepted with the same sympathy the general public (and even the actors) could muster for its own artists. And so we find the paradoxical situation of a dramatic skill so powerful the experience becomes personally uncomfortable, yet, even in translation and with English actors, retaining a mystery and foreign spirit which at times heightened the spectator's self-consciousness even more. Ibsen's effect in England, then, remained iconoclastic rather than remedial. After this "shattering collision,"\(^1\) drama was to start out in a different direction again, with the partnership of Shaw and Granville-Barker in the Court Theatre. Ibsen's influence \textit{per se} turned, instead, and followed Martyn, Moore, and Yeats to Ireland.\(^2\)

\[\text{Le Théâtre de l'Oeuvre}\]

Although Antoine's theatre was founded first in reaction to the conventional commercial theatres of Paris, it was Lugné-Poë's company, the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, which with its predecessor had in turn been founded as a protest against Antoine's naturalism, that attracted most attention among the "experimentalists" in England. The Théâtre de l'Oeuvre had its roots in an earlier company the Théâtre d'Art. Founded in 1890 by the symbolist poet Paul Fort (1872–1960), the Théâtre d'Art for three years precariously held its own with productions of classics\(^3\) and unpublished modern symbolist dramas.\(^4\) As Antoine's theatre became the vehicle for the naturalists, Fort's acted for the poets, abolishing all details that might interfere with the spoken word; and substituting symbolic designs which would blend with the poetry.

\(^1\) Shaw, "An Aside," \textit{Myself and my Friends}, 1.
\(^3\) Shelley's \textit{Cenci}, Marlowe's \textit{Faustus}, and an adaptation of the first book of the \textit{Iliad}, among others.
\(^4\) Mallarmé, Van Lerbergh, Verlaine, Rachilde, Maeterlinck, and Fort himself.
The spoken word creates the decor as it does all else....It is enough that the settings do not disturb the illusion and for that they must be very simple,

read the 1890 manifesto. Among the company of unpaid actors who were in many cases more enthusiastic than experienced, was the young Lugné-Poë (who directed some of the productions); and in 1893, when the Theatre d'Art experiment disbanded, Lugné-Poë founded the Theatre de l'Oeuvre in order to continue the cosmopolitan and experimental ideas advanced by Fort. The Théâtre d'Art had introduced the earlier symbolist dramas of Ibsen to Paris, and Lugné-Poë followed tradition by opening his new theatre with Rosmersholm. From then on he introduced an impressive roll call of foreign dramatist, including Hauptmann, Schnitzler, d'Annunzio, Wilde, Synge, and Tolstoi. Among his most important contributions to French drama were productions of the works of Paul Claudel, Alfred Jarry, and Maurice Maeterlinck. Alfred de Musset (1810-1857), whose plays were still being "discovered" among the files of Le Revue des Deux Mondes as late as the 1860's, had led the revolt of the poets in the French theatre;

2Amy Lowell, Six French Poets (NY:Macmillan, 1915), 280 quotes Sarcey: "These studio farces took until two o'clock in the morning to finish."
3His real name is Aurélien-Marie Lugné.
4Miller, Independent Theatres of Europe, 75-76 et passim; Antoine, Le Théâtre, 251-53.
5Claudel's L'Annonce faite à Marie, a mystery play produced by Lugné-Poë in 1912, was one of the theatre's greatest successes; Claudel's greatest influence on theatre has been in the twentieth century, after Maeterlinck's had waned. Cf. Martin Lamm, Modern Drama, trans. Karin Elliott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 152-54.
6A Belgian by birth, Maeterlinck wrote for the French theatre and with a French public in mind, although his work was strongly influenced by his experiences with Flemish peasants as a boy, and an apt comparison can be traced with the works of the Flemish painters, cf. an early short story, "The Massacre of the Innocents," trans. in 1894, by Mrs. Edith Wingate Rinder, and reprinted in The Dome, II, 1 (January 1899), 49-58. Cf. Alfred Sutro, introduction to Wisdom and Destiny (London: Allen and Sons, 1910), xxii.
showing no concern either for theory or moral purpose, his plays represented perhaps the first attempt to free modern French drama from rigid structural and thematic techniques, blending playful fantasy with lyrical language.\(^1\) He was followed into the world of fantasy by the still more fantastic Alfred Jarry (1873-1909), who, by accepting the doctrines of the aesthetic school and then turning them upside down, produced in *Ubu Roi* a grotesque satire on the bourgeoisie which extended the boundaries of symbolical drama and at the same time achieved the immediacy and power of which symbolism in the theatre could be capable. Yeats, who was present at this first performance, offers in his description some explanation for its rowdy reception:

> The players are supposed to be dolls, toys, marionettes, and now they are all hopping like wooden frogs, and I can see for myself that the chief personage, who is some kind of King, carries for sceptre a brush of the kind that we use to clean a closet.

"Comedy, objectivity, has displayed its growing power once more," he felt,\(^2\) not recognizing through the "gesticulation of a young savage of the woods"\(^3\) the same urgency and invention which would lead Yeats himself to more extreme and individual experiments. And, although Jarry intended to present a "Guignol," in a letter to Lugne-Poe, later published as a preface to the play, he offers suggestions which were to be eagerly adopted by later symbolists in the theatre: the use of masks for principal roles; one catchall backdrop to eliminate the curtain, and the introduction of a suitably costumed figure to bring in signs indicating the scene, as in puppet shows; the substitution of one symbolic figure of "the mass" for

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\(^3\) Symons, *Studies in Seven Arts*, 236-40. It might most aptly be called the *Look Back in Anger* of its decade.
crowds; the adoption of an accent or special tone of voice for the principal character; and costumes which would place the characters out of time and history. But *Ubu Roi*’s violence and force might well have prevented Yeats and Symons from momentarily recognizing their affinity with this strange young dramatist, and instead they turned their attention to another symbolist playwright of the Théâtre de l’Oeuvre, Maurice Maeterlinck.

It was for these productions of the poetic, mysterious dramas of Maeterlinck that the Théâtre de l’Oeuvre was chiefly known in England. The Belgian mystic, who, as we have seen, acknowledged Villiers de l’Isle Adam as his master in theory, was strongly influenced in his early plays by *Axel*; and the basis of his revolutionary conception of drama can be traced to the contempt for reality exhibited in Villiers’ work, where even the events taking place on the stage are to be interpreted symbolically rather than at face value. Like other symbolists, he was dissatisfied with the "anachronistic" drama of the commercial stage, which he felt dated back "as many years as the art of sculpture".

Indeed, when I go to a theatre, I feel as though I were spending a few hours with my ancestors, who conceived life as something that was primitive, arid and brutal....I am shown... all the sublimity of tradition, but alas, how superficial and material! Blood, surface-tears and death! What can I learn from creatures who have but one fixed idea, and who have not time to live, for that there is a rival, or a mistress, whom it behoves them to put to death?

Instead of this primitive picture of violence, Maeterlinck wished for "one of the strange moments of a higher life that flit unperceived through my dreariest hours"; for "the solemn voice of men and things, the voice that issues forth so timidly and hesitatingly, cannot be

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2 Cf. Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, chapters 7 and 8. *Ubu Roi* was produced by the BBC Third Programme in their "Art — Anti-Art" series, 23 February 1960.
3 Cf. Shaw’s review of the company’s visit in March 1895, *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, I:76-77, where he compares "the artistic superiority of M. Lugné-Poe’s company to the Comédie Française."
heard amidst the idle uproar of acts of violence.¹ For, as he 
expressed in his mystical writings, it is in "passive silence" that 
the soul can be heard most clearly.²

Like the other members of the aesthetic movement, Maeterlinck 
tended to look to the past for justification, and advocated a return 
to the "tragedies without movement" of Aeschylus.³ He wanted, in fact, 
a static drama which would eliminate all unnecessary action and throw 
emphasis upon the language and the "inner dialogue" of silence.⁴

I have grown to believe that an old man, seated in his armchair, 
waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him, giving unconscious 
ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting, 
without comprehending, the silence of doors and windows and the 
quivermg voice of the light, submitting with bent head to the 
presence of his soul and his destiny -- an old man, who conceives 
not that all the powers of this world, like so many heedful 
 servants, are mingling and keeping vigil in his room, who suspects 
not that the very sun itself is supporting in space the little table 
against which he leans, or that every star in heaven and every fibre 
of the soul are directly concerned in the movement of an eyelid that 
closes, or a thought that springs to birth -- I have grown to believe 
that he, motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more 
human and more universal life than the lover who strangles his 
mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or "the husband who 
avenges his honour."⁵

Many of these ideas came from Villiers de l'Isle Adam, but they reached 
England through the frequent translations of Maeterlinck, and were read

Puritans?", preface to Three Plays for Puritans.

²"Silence," loc. cit., 5-7; see above, chapter 3, p. 105.

loc. cit., 143.

⁴"The Tragical in Daily Life," op. cit., 98, 111. Cf. Aglavaine and 
"We are waiting for the silence to speak"; "look you, it is not only 
the ear that listens."

⁵"The Tragical in Daily Life," op. cit., 105-06.
and quoted with approval by Symons, Yeats, and Synge.¹

Maeterlinck's early plays might be considered a prologue to his philosophical writings.² In them we see this emphasis on the contemplative life of the soul, the preoccupation with the mystery of life and death,³ the haunting shadow of Fate,⁴ man's unsuccessful and incomplete efforts to reach out to the Infinite, and the uncertainty and insignificance of all that is tangible in the presence of the great Unknown.⁵ And the preference Maeterlinck shared with Mallarmé for allusion and suggestion rather than direct statements of fact was reflected not only in the incoherent and childlike simplicity of many of his characters, but also in his choice of situation and scenery.⁶ The unattainable and unknown were represented on stage by an atmosphere of mystery through which the helpless characters stumbled towards their fate with mute cries, an atmosphere which would in turn react upon the emotions of the audience.⁷ Thus, in both L'Intruse and Les Aveugles


²Le Trésor des Humbles was not published until 1896 (translated 1897). Serres Chaudes, a book of poems (1889), La Princesse Maleine (1889, trans. 1890), Les Aveugles and L'Intruse (1890, trans. U.S.A. 1891, England 1892), Pelleas et Mélisande (1892, trans. 1892), Three Plays for Marionettes: Alladine et Palomide, l'Intérieur, La Mort de Tintagiles (1894 trans. 1899). In addition, he adapted Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore for the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in 1895.


⁴Ibid., 128: "fatality...is perhaps the distinguishing note of the new theatre."

⁵Cf. Lamm, "The First Symbolists," Modern Drama, 152-78.


⁷Symons, "A Theory of the Stage," Plays, Acting and Music, 206: "a visionary of moods...he has brought back mystery to the stage."
the audience was made to feel as one with the blind beings groping through a Platonic cavern towards an unknown and perhaps fearsome reality. There is a similarity of character -- whether nobility (Pelléas et Méliande) or peasant (Les Aveugles, L'Intérieur) -- and of helpless situation, a repetitive use of scenery symbolizing mystery and doom -- towers, prisons, overhanging trees, stern cliffs, fountains, open windows (L'Intérieur), dark shadows-- and a corresponding monotony of speech and gesture.¹

Second in importance to the creation of an atmosphere of mystery was dialogue, or rather, the "unexpressed" impression which Maeterlinck attempted to convey through his almost inarticulate characters.² Often the dialogue is reduced to a monotonous repetition of broken phrases and seemingly prosaic utterances.³ The simplicity and thematic variation of dialogue at times, however, is strongly reminiscent of Wagner⁴ (whom Maeterlinck knew through Villiers and Mallarmé), and at its most poetic approaches a heightened musical effect similar to vers libre. This antiphonal effect can perhaps be seen at its most effective in Aglavaine et Selysette. Indeed, throughout his plays, despite his fondness for stock situation and scenery, Maeterlinck depends upon the voice to create his mood and give body to his characters, an interest which we shall see reflected in the aesthetic followers in England.

In both theory and practice Maeterlinck's early work corresponds to the aesthetic school as seen in England and France. He acknowledges

²Vie May Daniels, The French Drama of the Unspoken (Edinburgh U.P., 1953), 15-17 et passim.
³Cf. "Mystic Morality," The Treasure of the Humble, 61. A different use of this type of repetitious dialogue can be seen in recent realistic plays, for example, Arnold Wesker's Roots.
⁴Maeterlinck's theory that the poet is the true voice of the nation also approaches Wagner's, "The Star," op. cit., 123.
as early influences Villiers, Wagner, and Mallarmé; indeed his efforts to achieve a unity of impression bear some resemblance, both in technique and effect, to the "totality of effect" demanded by Edgar Allan Poe, model for Mallarmé. For support of his theories he looked to works of the past, especially, as has already been noted, the static drama of the Greeks, and the chorus-like effect of much of his dialogue reflects this debt; for subject-matter, on the other hand, he is frequently indebted to medieval and celtic material, and one might even detect a similarity to the pre-Raphaelites, especially in La Princesse Maleine. Furthermore, Maeterlinck appeared to share with the aesthetic movement a disregard for open communications with the ordinary public, for none of his early plays except Pelléas et Mélisande, produced by both Bernhardt and Duse, appear to have been successful on stage. The depersonalized tendency of plays emphasising atmosphere and the inner life at the expense of character and humanity finally culminated in his "plays for marionettes" where he sees his "puppets against the permanent darkness...[and] has given them supreme silences." His characters, like Wilde's, are essentially puppets, dolls who "do not themselves know what they are." And although Maeterlinck himself

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2 Many of his characters' names are reminiscent of Mort Darthur.
3 Bithell, op.cit., 31, reports that at the time Maeterlinck was writing this play the walls of his study were covered with pictures taken from Walter Crane's books for children. Cf. H. Granville-Barker, introduction to Maurice Maeterlinck, Three Plays (London: Gowan and Gray, 1911), vi.
5 Speech of the Old Man to the Stranger, Interior, trans. Wm. Archer (1894) Three Plays, op.cit., 65. Wilde's Salomé, however, is a soulless doll.
claimed to be influenced most strongly by Shakespeare, he more clearly reflects the "high seriousness" with which the members of the aesthetic movement tended to take themselves. His early plays are singularly lacking in humour, as are the early Yeat's, and it was not until later in such plays of fantasy as The Blue Bird that we find any trace of whimsicality, although these too, despite Yeats's denunciations, were basically serious plays.

Later Maeterlinck emphasised the human personality at the expense of "fatality," as we have seen in the development of his philosophy, and turned towards Ibsen, Hauptmann, and Bjornson. But it was his earlier work that won for him his reputation in France and England, and especially his ability to communicate the nouveau frisson the symbolists felt belonged to art. Symons offered the following explanation for the "Maeterlinck vogue," which was recognised even by the urbanely severe critic Max Beerbohm:

The desire of the West is after variety, but as variety is the most tiring of all excesses, we are in the mood for welcoming an experience in monotone. And therein lies the originality, therein also the success of Maeterlinck.

The single note of fear, the single method of repetition admired by Symons, however, was not appreciated by George Moore, even though he required the same nouveau frisson in the plays for his projected English Theatre-Libre. "All one need say about Maeterlinck is that he

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1 Sutro, introduction to Wisdom and Destiny, xv.
2 Cf. letter to Lady Gregory, 9 December 1909, Letters, 541-42; Plays and Controversies, 216.
5 Symons, Dramatis Personae (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1923), 27.
7 Dramatis Personae, 31.
invented a formula and worked it to death....Burne-Jones, like Maeterlinck, invented a formula which everyone understood. And everyone was entranced until they became bored."¹ Yeats, on the other hand, appreciated this monochrome of atmosphere, while at the same time he questioned "this touching the nerves alone...the lack of revery."² However, Maeterlinck as theorist and revolutionary, "who took the red bonnet from the hands of Villiers de l'Isle Adam,"³ was "of immense value as a force helping people to understand a more ideal drama,"⁴ and as such was welcomed by the aesthetic writers in England.

As theatre-fare Maeterlinck's plays were eminently suited to the revision in production that Fort and Lugné-Poe were demanding. The artificiality of structure, mood, and characterization demanded a similar artificiality in stage production and a new approach to acting. In choosing settings, suggested distant time and place Maeterlinck had already indicated the type of staging he required; perhaps the device in L'Intérieur, where distance between audience and action is further emphasized by the double "fourth wall," illustrates most clearly the detachment and trance-like quality he demanded. Lighting effects could further enhance this dream-like atmosphere, but the most revolutionary departure concerned the acting technique necessary for Maeterlinck's plays. Both Symons and Shaw describe the impact this new type of acting made on the contemporary audience. Since the words and silent atmosphere were all-important, action had to be reduced to a minimum. Reviewing a production of Pelleas et Mélisande, Symons comments on "that fine monotony which is part of the secret of Maeterlinck," where the actors must submit passively "to the passing

¹Goodwin, Conversations with George Moore, 49n1.
²Letter to Olivia Shakespear, 7 April 1895, Letters, 255; review of Aglavaine and Séllysette in The Bookman, September 1897, 155.
³Review of The Treasure of the Humble, The Bookman, July 1897, 94.
⁴Letter to Olivia Shakespear, 7 April 1895, Letters, 255.
through them of profound emotions, and the betrayal of these emotions in a few, reticent, and almost unwilling words:  

"In the Theatre de l'Oeuvre there is not merely the ordinary theatrical intention, but a vigilant artistic conscience in the diction, the stage action, and the stage picture, producing a true poetic atmosphere, and triumphing easily over shabby appointments and ridiculous incidents,"

commented the even more perceptive Shaw.  

Twelve years later Joseph Holloway commented in similar vein on the Abbey Theatre production of Interior:

The players have to deport themselves like puppets speaking in awed whispers, any tone with a touch of nature in it would knock the whole dream-scheme out of focus, and give away the unreality of the poet's weird imaginings.

This emphasis on the stage pictures of static drama and the delicacy and clarity of speech required by the word-music takes us back once more to Wagner. In describing a visit to Bayreuth, Symons comments on the "grave regulated motion of the actors":

No actor makes a gesture which has not been regulated for him; there is none of the intelligent haphazard known as being "natural"; these people move like music, or with that sense of motion which it is the business of painting to arrest.

Even the technical devices employed by Wagner at Bayreuth could be applied to these early plays of Maeterlinck:

Distance from the accidents of real life, atmosphere, the space for a new, fairer world to form itself, being of the essence of Wagner's representation, it is worth noticing how adroitly he throws back this world of his, farther and farther into the background, by a thousand tricks of lighting, the actual distance of the stage from the proscenium, and by such calculated effects, as that long scene of the Graal, with its prolonged movement and ritual, through the whole of which Parsifal stands motionless watching it all.

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1 Plays, Acting and Music, 81.
3 Holloway Diaries, MS 1805, National Library of Ireland, 168.
4 "On Crossing Stage to Right," Plays, Acting and Music, 167.
Substitute the old man for Parsifal, and we have the situation of *L'Intérieur* and *L'Intruse*.

Lugné-Poe's *Theatre de l'Oeuvre* had in turn its own offspring. J.T. Grein, in his theatre magazine, *To-morrow*, mentions yet another art theatre which had even more abstract aims, the "House of Art" in Brussels, founded by a group of writers and artists, its aim:

To seek and express these things above the common life of art, the ideas, the work, and the men who, lifting themselves above daily routine, point the way to regions yet unexplored, instead of following the beaten path or living in a land already known.  

The theatre produced plays in the Hôtel de Ville, Brussels, and the general manager, M. William Picard, who chiefly directed the scenery and stage setting, was a well-known writer and publisher.

But it was directly through Lugné-Poe that the influence of the aesthetic theatre was felt in England, for his work was an important link both with the tradition of foreign plays and a similar new movement in the English theatre. In 1895 the *Independent Theatre*, now a limited society, offered official hospitality to the *Theatre de l'Oeuvre* productions of Rosmersholm, *Solness le Constructeur*, *L'Intruse*, and *Pelléas et Melisande*. The following year Lugné-Poe was again invited to England, this time by William Poel, one of the first theatrical producers to emphasize the need of a new approach to speech and a simplified stage production. For many years Poel had advocated a more literary approach to drama, especially to Shakespeare, and for this purpose had founded a Shakespeare Reading Society which concentrated on a "back to the text" attitude towards Shakespeare's plays. In 1894 he had interested a sufficiently large group to found the Elizabethan Stage Society, which specialized in productions of Elizabethan plays in a sincere attempt to reproduce conditions and

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1 *To-Morrow*, III, 6 (June 1897), 343-49.
2 Cf. *Revue indépendante*, to which most aesthetes contributed, including Swinburne and Moore.
dramatists' intentions. Poel recognized in Lugne-Poe's work at the Theatre de l'Oeuvre a similar concentration on simplicity and the important role of the voice, although the two directors dealt with dissimilar material (with the exception of Maeterlinck's adaptation of Ford). Lugne-Poe in turn advertised Poel in France, describing Poel's production of Two Gentlemen of Verona and his impressions of Poel's work in general in La Nouvelle revue, early in 1897.

William Poel's insistence on a more accurate and sympathetic production of Shakespeare bore some resemblance to the historical consciousness of the commercial theatre, and in time through the work of Gordon Craig and Harley Granville-Barker his plea for freedom from the bondage of Tree and company did bear fruit. At the same time his scholarly appeal to the source had some affinity with the naturalist movement. His basic philosophy of art and concentration on an "orchestration of voices," however, had strong links with the aesthetic movement. For Poel, as for Wagner and Maeterlinck, and as we shall see for Craig and Yeats, all art was founded on repose.¹ This approach naturally led to his second basic assumption, that the poetry of Shakespeare required "tuned tones" and an "exaggerated naturalness,"² by which he meant an inflected speech which, rather than distorting Shakespeare's language, simply exaggerated the elements already there. In order to practise this theory Poel chose his cast with definite vocal ranges in mind, not hesitating to cast a woman in a man's part in order to complete his vocal orchestra; for an E.S.S. recital in 1895 Lillah McCarthy read the part of Romeo, and the same principle of "tuned voices" led to his choice of an Abbey Theatre actress, Sarah Allgood, over another rising young actress, Sybil Thorndike, for the role of Isabella in Miss Horniman's production of Measure for Measure.

² Ibid., 62.
at Stratford in 1908.1 Robert Speaight describes Poel's orchestration for Twelfth Night, produced in 1897 by the E.S.S.:

Viola (Mezzo Soprano), Olivia (Contralto), Sebastian (Alto), Antonio (Basso Profundo), Sir Toby (Bass), Sir Andrew (Falsetto), Malvolio (Baritone), Maria (High Soprano), Orsino (Tenor), Clown (Tenor).2

Less than ten years later George Moore pointed out that the same principle could be followed for Synge's Well of the Saints.3

Poel's insistence on the importance of verse-speaking and upon simplicity and dramatic fidelity in production was followed by a movement from the poets themselves. But whereas Poel concentrated on the professional stage, the small group led by Yeats, John Todhunter, T.Sturge Moore, Arthur Symons, Edith Craig, Robert Bridges, and Florence Farr was striving for a "theatre of beauty" which would appeal to the understanding few. As has already been mentioned, there had been few isolated attempts to reintroduce verse drama to the popular stage, but none of them departed from the traditional form or theory of stagecraft.4 The "higher drama" this new order was seeking, on the other hand, would first appeal to "the refined and cultivated and well-read, elaborating piece by piece its convention, then widening its range and gathering converts slowly among the many like a new book, not going to the public, but drawing them to itself."5 Like Poel, they aimed at a unity of effect, although in their desire for a "triumph of beauty" which would "illustrate the reveries of a wisdom," they were more akin in spirit to Maeterlinck. As an example of this "new drama of wisdom," Yeats as self-appointed apologist for the group, pointed to the poetic dramas of Robert Bridges, and in  


2Ibid.,111.


4Cf., however, J.B. Yeats's letter to W.B. Yeats 20 December 1900, J.B. Yeats Letters, 64, on Tree's production of Phillips' Herod: "I do think that the staging...gave opportunities which, tho' all missed, are still opportunities." The italics are his.

Achilles in Scyros, The Return of Ulysses, and Prometheus he praised the "great tide of song" which flowed "through delicate dramatic verse." But Bridges' plays never found the theatre they required, and the first member to achieve production was Dr. John Todhunter, a leading figure in the little playhouse at Bedford Park, where his Helena in Troas was produced in 1888. Although he was later to dismiss Helena in Troas as "an oratorical Swinburnian play" with the appeal more of "a scholar to the scholarly," Yeats was however impressed by the "semi-religious effect new to the modern stage" which Todhunter achieved through his "sonorous verse, united to the rhythmical motions of the white-robed chorus, and the solemnity of burning incense." In 1890 Todhunter followed his first experiment with A Sicilian Idyll, the pastoral theme apparently suggested by Yeats, who by this time was becoming actively involved in the productions at the Bedford Park Clubhouse. Once more, he felt, the play appealed to "that circle of cultivated people who remain faithful to the rightful Muses, and have not bowed the knee to those two slatterns, farce and melodrama."
(Seventeen years later he was to use the same phrasing and tone in his defence of the artist against the public). 1 Yeats noted especially how the "beautiful scenery and picturesque costumes" contributed, along with the choice of subject, to the "mood that lifts the play out of the dust of common life and makes it poetry." 2 And the following year, still intrigued by the idea of a new verse form for the stage, he observed of The Poison Flower, "Much of this charm is in the play itself, but some comes, undoubtedly, from the form -- from the greater compression and suggestiveness that gives verse its advantage over prose as a dramatic vehicle." 3 Yeats's final comments on these two plays indicate his own early demands for a theatre of poetry:

This time he has had nothing to rely upon but dramatic poetry soundly acted; and he has gone near enough to success to make it seem probable that we shall yet have a genuine public, however small, for poetic drama, and that we may see once more the work of poets of heroic passion and lofty diction, instead of commonplace sentiments uttered in words which have at the very best no merit but successful mimicry of the trivial and unbeautiful phraseology of the streets and the tea table. We may again -- for genius can never be exhausted -- experience dramatic movements mighty as the last agony of Faustus. 4

Clearly this "higher drama" must be apart from the ordinary subjects of life, and as such directly opposed to the theatre of the realists:

We must go to the stage all eagerness like a mob of eavesdroppers and to be inspired, not amused, if modern drama is to be anything else than a muddy torrent of shallow realism. 5

The audience was not to be catered to, but developed:

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1 Cf. his speech to the audience over The Playboy riots, below, Part Three, chapter 9, pp. 571-92.
People needed, coming in fresh from the trivialities of the world of shops and tea tables, the "once upon a time" that begins the make believe of fairy tales... Once get your audience in that mood, and you can do anything with it.¹

Ten years later the same principle was practised by the Irish Literary Theatre: "We went on giving what we thought good until it became popular."² In 1893 the Independent Theatre produced Todhunter's *The Black Cat*³ and finally Yeats himself joined the ranks of producing playwrights, when in 1894 his play *The Land of Heart's Desire* was produced by Florence Farr at the Avenue Theatre as a curtain-raiser first to Todhunter's *The Comedy of Sighs* and later to Shaw's *Arms and the Man*.⁴

This new approach to the drama in England demanded, then, first a new method of speaking verse, and secondly, a different attitude towards stage decoration. Yeats became directly involved in experiments in both. Prominent among the speech reformers was Miss Florence Farr [Mrs. Emery],⁵ who had acted in Todhunter's pastoral drama, *A Sicilian Idyll* and impressed Yeats by her beautiful speech, which gave the poetry "a nobility, a passionate austerity that made it akin for certain moments to the great poetry of the world." "I had discovered for the first time that in the performance of all drama that depends for its effect upon beauty of language, poetic culture may be more important

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³ Produced at the Opera Comique, 8 December 1893; Ellis-Fermor, Appendix 4, *Irish Dramatic Movement*, lists the date of production as 1894.

⁴ Todhunter's play was not a success, so was replaced by Shaw's. Cf. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 280-83.

⁵ Described by Ricketts in his diary in 1901 as "a good-natured middle-aged actress...who has appeared in countless efforts to stage Ibsen, Shaw, etc.", *Self Portrait*, 63.
than professional experience," he commented later.¹ Convinced that Miss Farr had "the most beautiful voice on the English stage"² and becoming increasingly sensitive as a poet to the haphazard and inaudible manner in which verse was spoken, Yeats experimented with her in an attempt to develop some universal method of declaiming which could be musically annotated and thereby passed on to the others.³ Miss Farr, who like Yeats was a member of the Order of the Golden Dawn, strove in her experiments to achieve the "really magical power"⁴ which Yeats felt was essential to great poetry:

The more a poet rids his verse of heterogeneous knowledge and irrelevant analysis, the more he purifies his mind with elaborate art, the more does the little ritual of his verse resemble the great ritual of nature, and become mysterious and inscrutable. He becomes, as all the great mystics have believed, a vessel of the creative power of God.⁵

To aid her in these efforts, Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch, a specialist in sixteenth and seventeenth century music as well as a noted instrument-maker,⁶ invented a thirteen-stringed instrument attuned to her vocal range.⁷ And to the accompaniment of this psaltery, as the instrument was called, Miss Farr illustrated her method, and Yeats justified in essays and lectures this "revival of a lost art."⁸ Their partnership

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¹Autobiographies, 121.
²"The Play, the Player, and the Scene," Plays and Controversies, 131.
³The Music of Speech, containing the words of some poets, thinkers and music-makers regarding the practice of the Bardic art together with fragments of verse set to its own melody by Florence Farr (London: Elkin Matthews) 1909. In her dedication she refers to Yeats "who suggested to me the notation of speech."
⁷Farr, letter to the Editor, The Outlook, reprinted in The Music of Speech, 16-17. Mrs. Patrick Campbell also ordered a psaltery from Dolmetsch.
⁸Letter to Bridges, 20 July 1901, Letters, 384; to Lady Gregory, 22 December 1901, op. cit., 362. Even William Archer was carried away by this idea, cf. quotation from a review written in May 1902, in The Music of Speech, 2-3.
continued for some twenty years, and in 1909 Yeats was still sufficiently involved in the experiments to write to her of "our method." 1

Anxious like his contemporaries to justify his theories historically, Yeats explained their efforts as:

"an attempt to get back to primitive folk music. You must always go back to folk art if you want to get any real art at all; then you must bring your folk art into sympathy with the thought of the age. The greatest of all arts I hold to be the art of speech, and its secret has been lost for centuries. Greeks understood it; and we are trying to go back to the regulated declamations of the Greeks....We want to make the words live, and restore the art of impassioned speech." 2

For a modern example of this "folk-singing," Yeats refers to the traditional Irish singing of the country-women, who speak their little songs precisely as Miss Farr does some of hers, only with rather less drama....I imagine men spoke their verse first to a regulated pitch without a tune, and then, eager for variety, spoke to tunes which gradually became themselves the chief preoccupation until speech died out in music. 3

Later he was to distinguish between Sara Allgood's singing method and Florence Farr's, the one more closely allied to folk-singing, "beautifully humble and simple, whereas Florence Farr's was Greek and arrogant" 4; but the historical reference remained. Looking towards more modern examples, Yeats again found justification from others. "Even the music of Aucassin and Nicolette, with its definite tune, its recurring pattern of sound, is something more than declamation," he commented. 5

And in a letter to Miss Farr in 1909 he speaks with


2Interview with Miss Farr and Yeats reported in the Illustrated Standard, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.

3Letter to the Editor, The Academy, 7 June 1902, Letters, 373-74.

4Commentary on "The Great Clock Tower," The King of the Great Clock Tower (Dublin: Cuala, 1934), 15-19.

5Plays and Controversies, 185.
pleasure at having discovered in a book by Coventry Patmore the same theory.¹

Like most poets,² Yeats had his own method of chanting verse, stressing the rhythm and extending the vowels in a "wavering ecstatic song"³ which differed considerably from Poel's ideas but was essentially similar to Miss Farr's.⁴ If this method could be recorded as he suggested to Miss Farr, then the fixing of pitch would, he felt, give "more delicacy and beauty to the 'personal interpretation,' for it leaves the speaker free to preoccupy himself with the subtlest modulations."⁵ In theory and aim, then Yeats and Miss Farr were attempting to achieve on a personal lyric scale what Wagner had earlier tried to do on a grand opera scale. Both justified their theories with the same basic beliefs -- an emphasis on the essential mysticism of the arts, the necessity for the union of those arts, and an insistence that the new method be founded on a return to folk-art itself in which present culture, they felt, was so deeply rooted. Nor were these experiments limited to the Yeats-Farr researches. In 1902

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¹March 1909, Letters, 526. The book he refers to is Poems by Coventry Patmore, 2nd collective ed. (London: George Bell, 1886), II, 252-35.

²Lillah McCarthy, Myself and My Friends, 35, describes Swinburne's "choric chant." Masefield, So Long to Learn, 128, describes William Morris' reading, and suggests that Yeats may have first received the idea from him.


⁴Robert Speaight, William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival, 95. In an unpublished letter to Yeats, 19 March 1908, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, Miss Horniman quotes William Poel: "He said that you are inclined to make people speak Shakespeare in a way which is only suitable for your own verse. He considers that your verse depends much on metre." See below, Part Three, Chapter 9, p. 558 ff.

⁵Yeats, letter to the Editor of The Academy, 7 June 1902, Letters, 373-74.
Yeats refers to the experiment of AE, who had "got a musician to record little chants with intervals much smaller than those of modern music." Edith Sitwell's Facade was based on the same theory, and more recently young composers such as Humphrey Searle, Matyas Seiber, and Marc Wilkinson have set the works of Eliot, Joyce, and Beckett to music, incorporating the speaking voice as one of the "instruments." It was perhaps only natural that Yeats, whose earliest publications evinced an interest in poetry for the theatre of beauty, should apply these theories of speaking verse to the related art of acting, as we shall see in his efforts to develop a literary theatre in Dublin. And again he turned to Florence Farr for an example of the grave, rhythmical gestures he required in his poetic dramas. But perhaps even more important to him was his search for a new type of stage decoration that "might keep the scenery from realism," thereby concentrating all attention on the poetry. Again he was influenced in his search by the work of two artists who were also seeking a "Theatre of Beauty," Edward Gordon Craig and Charles Ricketts.

Edward Gordon Craig (b. 1872)

Craig, a theatrical innovator of Wagnerian stature, not only reflected but influenced many of Yeats's ideas of the theatre. Famous son of a famous actress, he did not enter the theatre from the stalls as Yeats did; he began as an actor, playing his first role in 1885, and it was not until 1897 that he turned seriously to production. Consequently his early experience, especially the influence of Henry

1 *Samhain*, 1902, 5.
2 Cf. the Macnachtzen concert of modern music, reported in *The Times*, 12 December 1959, 9; the experiments by Christopher Logue in poetry with a jazz backing; the new group "Music To-day."
3 See below, Part Three, Chapter 9.
5 Yeats's preface to *Letters to the New Island*, ix-x.
Irving, clarified many of the physical problems of the stage which remained an enigma to Yeats, who knew what he wanted but in the early days did not have the practical experience his theories required. "Fundamentally I am a producer and an actor, not a theorist," Craig insists. "I acted and produced long before I dreamed of enunciating any theory -- even to myself." Just as important to the evolution of Craig's theory and approach to the stage picture was his interest in the work of his father, E.W. Godwin, whose papers on the architecture and costuming of Shakespeare's plays had been published in the 1870's. Like Wagner, Craig aimed at a union of the arts, all of them devoted to the Theatre of the Future:

The Art of the Theatre...consists of all the elements...: action, which is the very spirit of acting; words, which are the body of the play; line and colour, which are the very heart of the scene; rhythm, which is the very essence of the dance.

Nor could this unity be possible while the authority and experience in the theatre remained divided:

The relation of the stage director to the actor is precisely the same as that of the conductor to his orchestra, or of the publisher to his printer.

Like the aesthetic school in general, he was concerned with the unity of effect acquired only through the harmony of "spirit and matter," a

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2 Craig, On Eight Pages...., 11-12. "After the practice the theory" was the slogan of The Mask, founded in Florence in 1908 by Craig.


5 The Art of the Theatre, 26; cf. Craig's instructions to the young actor, "The Artists of the Theatre of the Future," The Mask, I (1908), 60: "the ideal stage manager....the nature of his position should make him the most important figure in the whole world of the theatre."

6 Craig, Towards a New Theatre (1912), quoted by Leeper, op.cit., 44.
union of the various theatre arts. Consequently he felt no need to conform to the established form or pattern of the commercial theatre:

I let my scenes grow out of not merely the play, but from broad sweeps of thought which the play has conjured up for me, or even other plays by the same author have conjured up....We are not concerned with short cuts. We are not concerned with what is to be effective and what is to pay....Therefore approach it from all sides, surround it, and do not let yourself be attracted away by the idea of scene as an end in itself, of costume as an end in itself, or of stage management or any of those things, and never lose hold of your determination to win through to the secret..., the secret which lies in the creation of another beauty.¹

The "Theatre of Beauty" Craig sought could not be achieved by the naturalist method attempted by the modern commercial theatre. "I don't want to imitate man or Nature or anything else on the boards of a theatre," he insisted. "I want to create a new world there -- not to copy the real world imperfectly."²

This tendency towards the natural has nothing to do with art....the naturalistic stepped in on the stage because the artificial had grown finicking, insipid;...but do not forget that there is such a thing as noble artificiality.³

And so the producer should ignore "any attempt to show the spectators an exact view of some historical period of architecture....all the great plays have an order of architecture of their own, an architecture which is more or less theatrical, unreal as the play."⁴ Craig's ideal theatre would replace such concern for detail with atmosphere:

Once let the meaning of this word "Beauty" begin to be thoroughly felt once more in the theatre, and we may say that the awakening day of the theatre is near. Once let the word "effective" be wiped off our lips, and they will be ready to speak this word Beauty.⁵

However, unlike the aesthetes who sought an art for the few, Craig was sufficiently a man of the theatre to desire a theatre for the many.

¹"The Artists of the Theatre of the Future,"op.cit.,63-64.
²Andrews, 15.
⁴Andrews, 16.
Consequently the spectacle was more important than the writer's intentions if the author becomes "complex and difficult." "I have to consider the whole public," he insists, "-- not the more advanced, intellectual, section of it alone." And so he blames the poet as well as the naturalist for the problems in the theatre:

The reason why the theatre is being kept back to-day is because the poet is pulling one way, saying they should only be given words; and the people are pulling the other way, saying they desire to see the sights, realistically or poetically shown, not turned into literature.

"The theatre must show them sights, show them life, show them beauty, and not speech in difficult sentences." The producer, or "stage director," should first "perceive things feelingly rather than thinkingly," and then "think out a method of making clear to the spectators" what he has felt and seen.

This unity of effect which Craig was attempting in the theatre was based essentially on the balance and proportion of line, space, light, shade, and colour. Although he made no effort to create realism of detail, he insisted upon stage design which would create the illusion of depth and proportion that were essential to his plan. In his productions, therefore, although he depended upon simplicity and proportion to gain this desired atmosphere, he demanded first a three-dimensional rather than the standard two-dimensional scenery, and second, an authentic richness of material and substance far beyond the requirements of the ordinary "realistic" productions of the most lavish commercial theatre. The first requirement led him to the invention of a set of "screens" which could replace the conventional scenery; the second led him to experiments with lighting and colour and materials.

1 A Production, 7.
2 The Art of the Theatre, 11-12.
3 The Art of the Theatre, 11.
4 A Production, 7-8.
Theoretically, ruined architecture would always be better for the actor than a perfect palace, because when a building is ruined it becomes more dramatic, less stilted, and you can see right through two, three, or four rooms and five passages to the farthest wall, he explained. 1 If the artist were to go one step further, therefore, and eliminate permanent sets altogether, this would in turn give the actor even more freedom. Working on this principle, Craig designed a set of screens which could be moved about to form different patterns on the stage and through the use of light and shadows create the various impressions and atmosphere demanded by the scene. These screens could be moved in a few moments to create a new scene without the necessity of a drop curtain. 2 And, by being shaped into turrets, walls or forests as necessary, could convey an impression of solidity impossible with the canvas sets of the "realistic" theatre. 3 But at the same time, by stretching into infinity, "hovering, hiding, advancing, retreating," 4 they helped create the impression of timelessness and motion in space a work of art demands. In order to illustrate this principle of "place," Craig designed a model stage on which he could then experiment with movable pieces of cardboard and a candle for lighting until he achieved the effect he desired. 5

Similarly, Craig experimented with colour and lighting. At a lecture on "The Reform of the Theatre," given at the time of his productions for Ellen Terry of The Vikings and Much Ado about Nothing in 1905, Craig illustrated his ideas about stage lighting and design on a small model theatre which much impressed W.G. Fay, who describes this "scene in a new style":

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1 Ibid., 8.
2 These screens were successfully employed for The Pretenders, cf. A Production, 17-18 and Plate XVII, and for The Hour Glass at the Abbey, cf. Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh and Edward Kenny, The Splendid Years (Dublin: Duffy, 1935), 34. The use of the screens is described in Leeper, op. cit., 18-20. See illustration page 204 below.
It was a simple horizon cloth with some rock and trees in the foreground, painted in monochrome, but lit in three different colours. For the first time it produced a feeling of atmosphere in stage lighting.\(^1\)

He concentrated on the impression of the stage as a whole rather than on details alone, as illustrated in his design for *The Masque of Love*, produced in 1901, described in detail by Arthur Symons:

Mr. Craig...has a genius for line, for novel effects of line... he works in squares and straight lines, hardly ever in curves. He drapes the stage into a square with cloths; he divides these cloths by vertical lines, carrying the eye straight up to an immense height, fixing it into a rigid attention. He sets squares of pattern and structure on the stage; he forms his groups into irregular squares, and sets them moving in straight lines, which double in themselves like two arms of a compass; he puts square patterns on the dresses, and drapes the arms with ribbons that hang to the ground, and make almost a square of the body when the arms are held out at right angles. He prefers gestures that have no curves in them; the arms held straight up, or straight forward, or straight out sideways... He links his groups by an arrangement of poles and ribbons, something in the manner of a maypole; each figure is held to the centre by a tightly stretched line like the spoke of a wheel.\(^2\)

Paying special attention to texture, he furthered the effect of line and colour through his choice of materials:

Most of the costumes...were made of sacking, stitched roughly together. Under the cunning handling of the light, they gave you any illusion you pleased, and the beggars of the masque were not more appropriately clothed than the kings and queens. All had dignity, all repose the eye,

Symons' description continues.\(^3\) And Craig's screens were designed for different materials depending on the effect required.\(^4\)

Frequently in his early productions Craig achieved this atmosphere

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\(^1\) W.G. Fay, "The Poet and the Actor," *Scattering Branches*, 133-34.


\(^3\) Symons, "A New Art of the Stage," *op. cit.*, 224.

\(^4\) Letter to the present writer from Edward Gordon Craig, 27 February 1960.
by lighting effects at the expense of the actors, who were left in shadow without footlights to balance the downward lighting and shadow effects.\(^1\) His ideas for the time being had outstripped his facilities, and it was not until he left England and went to Germany that he found the technicians who could visualize his aims.\(^2\) Frequently also the broad sweeping lines of his scenery tended to dwarf his characters out of proportion.\(^3\) However here at last was the artist in the theatre who could create the "new and distinct art" Yeats required, staging which "cannot even be separated from the figures that move before it." And the "severe, beautiful, simple effects of colour"\(^4\) which Craig achieved through his materials and lighting\(^5\) left the imagination "free to follow all the suggestions of the play."\(^6\) "The movement of the actor, and the graduation and the colour of the lighting," Yeats came to believe, "are the two elements that distinguish the stage picture from an easel painting"\(^7\); and in Craig's work lay the answer to his own problems of stage design and decoration.\(^8\) Further, it can safely be assumed that

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\(^1\) Hudson, *The English Stage*, 136: "The downward shadow cast on the actors' faces by the Vikings' voluminous headgear made facial play ineffective."

\(^2\) A Production, 14. The Swiss stage designer, Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) was meanwhile experimenting with electric lighting for Wagner's operas at Bayreuth. Like Craig, but independently of Craig, he too concentrated on lines and shadows. Cf. Craig, *On Eight Pages*, 10-11. Yeats read of Appia's work, but felt he was seeking "a more perfect realism." Cf. Letter to T. Sturge Moore, Correspondence, 187 and *Samhain*, 1904, 33.


\(^5\) Yeats, "At Stratford-on-Avon" (1901), *Essays and Introductions*, 100-101: "Gordon Craig's purple backcloth that made Dido and Aeneas seem wandering on the edge of eternity."


\(^8\) Although in 1902 he is careful to point out that they arrived at their ideas independently. "The Acting at St. Teresa's Hall," *United Irishman*, 26 April 1902, 3.
Craig's use of colours helped Yeats determine the principles he was later to quote to Sturge Moore when discussing his own requirements for the stage.¹

But Craig's influence on Yeats extended even further, for in his desire for simplicity he, like Yeats, eventually saw in the mask and dance the theatre he could not create with the average actor on the ordinary stage. They differed in their approach to the actor and concept of the actor's role, however; for while Craig considered the scenic design first,² Yeats was concerned primarily with the poetry; one attended to the ideal theatre with an artist's eye, the other with the poet's ear. Like Yeats, however, Craig found the ineptitude of the average modern actor almost insurmountable:

There is hardly any action which is right, there is hardly any which is natural. Action is a way of spoiling something, says Rimbaud....no action is better than little action....The actor as he is today, must ultimately disappear and be merged in something else if works of art are to be seen in our kingdom of the theatre.³

In his celebrated but frequently misunderstood essay,⁴ "The Actor and the Über-Marionette," he pleads for"a new form of acting, consisting for the main part in symbolical gesture. Today they impersonate and interpret; tomorrow they must represent and interpret; and the third day they must create."

The aim of the theatre as a whole is to restore its art and it should commence by banishing from the theatre this idea of impersonation, this idea of reproducing nature: for while impersonation is in the theatre, the theatre can never become free.⁵

¹Yeats, letter to T. Sturge Moore, 1903, Correspondence, 5-6, and below, Part three, Chapter 9, p. 580.
²Cf. The Mask, I(1908), 18, the editor, John Semar, criticizes Granville-Barker's reasons for refusing the New York New Theatre's offer: "We venture to suggest that "Atmosphere" is not dependent upon the actor so much as upon the play, and, curiously enough, upon the stage setting."
⁴Cf. new preface to 1924 edition of On the Art of the Theatre.
⁵The Mask I(1908), 4 and 9. The italics are his.
Scene for "The Hour Glass", drawing by Edward Gordon Craig, 1910
Like Maeterlinck, Yeats, and Poel, Craig envisaged a drama of repose, which would lead to stylized gesture and tableaux. He was in fact more akin to Maeterlinck than even Yeats:

I lean towards the drama of silence just because I believe in and long for a durable drama. And I cannot help but still believe that the most durable drama will be one of silence.¹

Craig, like Maeterlinck, envisaged a type of acting which would have as its basis the art of the marionette. "The Puppet is the Actor's Primer"; "in the Puppet we have all those elements necessary to interpretation and in the Puppet stage every element necessary to a creative and a fine art."² As the puppet is "a model of man in motion,"³ so the actor should depersonalize himself: "the actor plus fire, minus egotism; the fire of the gods and demons, without the smoke and steam of mortality."⁴ The "über-marionette," as he termed this actor of the future,

...will not compete with Life -- but will rather go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in Trance -- it will aim to clothe itself with a death-like Beauty, while exhaling a living spirit.⁵

The actor who had come closest to fulfilling the demands of Craig's "über-marionette" was Henry Irving:

He knew that it was his mask that was to be the great actor -- a mask which could be a hundred faces in one -- and he had to design, cut out, polish, and perfect that mask.⁶

The use of an actual mask was the natural next step in Craig's theory of acting. The actor in himself was mortal, his art temporary and

¹ "A Plea for Two Theatres," The Mask VIII(1918), 18.
² Puppets and Poets, 13 and 22. The italics are his.
³ Ibid., 17.
⁴ New preface to On the Art of the Theatre, 1924.
⁵ The Mask, I(1908), 11-13.
⁶ Henry Irving, 26, 32.
variable. For Craig, as for Jarry, the mask could make permanent the fleeting art of the actor:

The advantage of a mask over a face is that it is always repeating unerringly the poetic fancy, repeating on Monday in 1912 exactly what it said on Saturday in 1909 and what it will say on Wednesday in 1999. Durability was the dominant idea in Egyptian art. The theatre must learn that lesson....Let us again cover his face with a mask in order that his expression -- the visualised expression of the Poetic spirit -- shall be everlasting.2

"Every actor should wear a mask my dear man," he wrote to Yeats in 1910: "every actor -- just as every gentleman and thief should wear breeches."3 And with his designs for the Fool and Blind Man of Yeats's plays, as we shall see, Craig introduced a technique which would have far-reaching effects on Yeats's development as an artist.4

Craig never achieved his ideal theatre in England, and in 1904 left for the continent, where many of his theories had already preceded him. But he left behind a lasting impression on Yeats and the other leaders of the "new theatre" movement. Frequently his writings were misunderstood, in part because of the tendency of the critics to take his suggested designs as literal scenes, whereas Craig himself makes clear that all stage designs are merely ideas to be experimented with on the stage. "Plays being solely for acting purposes, it stands to reason that they must be conceived, made and shown in a theatre...for that is our workshop."6 The only test of a good stage play is whether it acts

1Shattuck, The Banquet Years, 195, quotes Jarry's comment on the mask: "the device best suited to displaying eternal attitudes of human character."

2Note by Craig, quoted by Leeper, op. cit., 46. Cf. Plates 22 and 23, Leeper, op. cit., and above, Craig's illustration of the Fool for The Hour Glass and On Baile's Strand.


4See below. Part Two, chapter 5, and frontispiece.


easily, and the business of the stage decorator was to conduct the entire orchestration. Yeats, on the other hand, instinctively recognized the importance of Craig's work. "The staging of Dido and Aeneas and of The Masque of Love will some day, I am persuaded, be remembered among the important events of our time," he wrote in 1902.\(^1\) Symons was no less enthusiastic over this "suggestion of a new art of the stage, an art no longer realistic, but conventional, no longer imitative, but symbolical."\(^2\) And when Yeats finally achieved a theatre of his own with which to experiment, he carried many of Craig's ideas with him. Yeats's interest in Craig's work remained, however.

Later, after Craig had founded his studio-school in the Arena Goldoni, Florence, he considered joining the group.\(^3\) And in 1913 Craig and an actress who had for a time performed in Yeats's plays at the Abbey, Miss Darragh, proposed to establish "a theatre for plays which appeal to the sense of beauty and admit of beautiful staging," the production and choice of players to be made by Craig, with Yeats acting as literary adviser.\(^4\) Neither scheme was followed through. In practice, Craig contributed designs for Deirdre, The Hour Glass, and On Baile's Strand, while his model stage and screens further aided Abbey productions.\(^5\) As an example, he contributed even more, for in his pioneer work Gordon Craig, more than any other artist in the contemporary theatre, proved that a theatre of beauty is possible.

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\(^2\) Symons, "A New Art of the Stage," *op.cit.*, 224.

\(^3\) Cf. Hone, W.B. Yeats, 252. This must have been about 1910.


\(^5\) See below, Part Four, Chapter 9, page 582.
Charles Ricketts (1866-1931)

Painter, sculptor, designer, wood engraver, lithographer, Ricketts was as like Craig in his eclecticism as he was unlike him in temperament. Like Craig, he subordinated all claims to beauty and art, "desirable in themselves, merely because they are what they are -- beauty and art."¹ Unlike Craig, he advocated tradition in art -- meaning for him Rossetti -- and emphasized in staging general decorative treatment over the complicated lighting effects Craig appreciated.² In a letter to Sydney Cockerell, Ricketts summarizes the difference between these two stage designers who were both working towards the new "Theatre of Beauty," at the same time indicating his theory as opposed to Craig's:

His designs are more "abstract" in character than mine, and in a sense more whimsical or inconsequent, but not always. The sketches are feeble in execution, they exaggerate also the possibilities of height and space obtainable in any London theatre. He does not realize that a figure is practically one-third of the height of the opening, therefore much of the element of surprise and originality might evaporate under execution. Nevertheless, one experiences an agreeable sense of novelty, a sense of an imaginative atmosphere which I have noticed only in my own work upon the stage.³

Whereas the theatre was Craig's palace of art, work for the stage was to Ricketts "a holiday task."⁴ And like Yeats he approached the stage with the eye of the painter rather than the actor; the delicate details he appreciated in his book designs, illustrations, and paintings were brought to his work for the theatre, often causing him to concentrate


²Diary note 29 December 1903, Self Portrait, 100.

³14 September 1911, Self-Portrait, 166-67. The letter concludes, "If Craig had not attacked me in the Press I should like to write an article on his work."

⁴Sturge Moore, introduction to Charles Ricketts R.A., xii.
on details which would never carry across the footlights. "A work of art is a whole in which each portion is exquisite in itself yet co-ordinate," he claimed, and this philosophy followed him into the theatre. In this sense Ricketts was a more "personal" artist than Craig, emphasising costume, scenery, and minute details in his efforts to create a stage picture, whereas Craig worked from the general effect to the particular. And perhaps also because of this, Ricketts' personality was an even greater influence on those about him than his work, influencing not only others, but his own taste in stage design.

Yeats described Ricketts as "one of the greatest connoisseurs of any age, an artist whose woodcuts prolonged the inspiration of Rossetti, whose paintings mirrored the rich colouring of Delacroix." And here is perhaps the secret of his influence and his theory. Ricketts was a traditionalist rather than an experimenter, concentrating on achieving an atmosphere of beauty and delicacy of effect within the conventional methods of the time. "When we studied his art we studied our double," Yeats continues.

"We, too, thought always that style should be proud of its ancestry, of its traditional high breeding, that an ostentatious originality was out of place whether in the arts or good manners."

(It is not surprising to find that among Ricketts' admirers was not only Yeats, but Oscar Wilde). If simplicity is required in stage decoration, "it should be a beautiful simplicity," he claimed; but sometimes simplicity is not the essential requirement. "A beautiful setting should 'seem' simple when this is the character demanded by the play, not otherwise." Instead, he suggested "concentration" as the

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1 Ibid.
2 A Bibliography, vii.
3 "Modern Poetry: A Broadcast" (1936), Essays and Introductions, 495. Cf. letters to Sturge Moore on Ricketts' resemblance to Rossetti, 7 November 1921 and Moore's reply, 8 November 1921, Correspondence, 40 and 42-45.
5 Ibid., 240-41.
essential quality of decoration, creating order and focus by emphasis where it is wanted, rather than too much elimination. And, like Craig, he constantly emphasised the need of "one designer to control the entire production, from the scenery to the smallest property."\(^1\) Wagner, he felt, despite his greatness,\(^2\) fails in his "tendency to over-explain, to underline unnecessarily," because he lacked this painter's sense of "visualizing his work beautifully," as a whole.\(^3\)

Although not a revolutionary, Ricketts was a practical man of the theatre, and many of his recommendations and designs were adopted by Yeats in his own theatre. In particular, Yeats appreciated Ricketts's eye for detail in stage effect and costume, which was as practical as it was imaginative. His letters to Yeats and Lady Gregory\(^4\) abound in sketches for costumes, including suggestions for "doubling" on costumes from other plays,\(^5\) details concerning the best inexpensive material for background and dresses, including advice concerning seamstresses and estimates of expenditure. Frequently his imaginative designs had the effect of giving new life to the players as well. Writing of the new costumes designed by Ricketts for The King's Threshold performance in London in 1914, Yeats comments,

The Company never did the play so well, and such is the effect of costume that whole scenes got a new intensity, and passages or actions that had seemed commonplace became powerful and moving.\(^6\) And on occasion a suggestion from Ricketts gave Yeats a new idea for

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\(^1\) Ibid., 247.


\(^3\) "The Art of Stage Decoration," op. cit., 234-36.

\(^4\) Unpublished correspondence in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.

\(^5\) A list of costumes for On Baile's Strand includes suggestions for costumes incorporated from earlier designs for The King's Threshold and The Green Helmet, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. Cf. Lady Gregory’s letter to Ricketts, June 1914 printed in Self-Portrait, 198.

\(^6\) Letter to Ricketts, 11 June 1914, Letters, 587.
his revisions. Nor did Ricketts' influence stop at the stage dressing; he was an acute critic of Yeats's theory of verse-speaking, and did not hesitate to offer his advice concerning the actual performances of the actors.

Ricketts' stage designs were not limited to the Abbey Theatre, however. From 1905 to 1928 he was active designing productions in London, as well, from the poetic dramas of Sturge Moore, Wilde, Masefield, Maeterlinck, Shakespeare, to Shaw, Barker, Bennett, Wilde, and even Gilbert and Sullivan. His influence extended in other ways, also, through T. Sturge Moore (1870-1944) who in turn dressed some of Yeats's plays, following Ricketts' style and manner, and his constant encouragement of the younger artists working for a theatre of beauty in London. In 1906 he and Sturge Moore founded the Literary Theatre Society, mainly for the production of Wilde's Salome, which Ricketts and Wilde had some ten years earlier planned for Paris. He had encouraged Yeats's and Florence Farr's idea of a little theatre somewhere in the suburbs for romantic drama long before the Irish Literary Theatre seemed possible. At one time, also, he proposed raising the funds for a production of The Countess Cathleen, to be staged by Craig.

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1 Unpublished letter to Lady Gregory in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, 7 May 1905, mentions an idea of Ricketts' concerning the magic harp which has led Yeats to a revision of Shadowy Waters.

2 Unpublished letter from Ricketts to Yeats, probably 1907, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, criticizes "the abominable performance" of Deirdre, especially the Chorus of Musicians.

3 Cf. index to Self-Portrait. He also wrote an opera, Nail, produced by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1919.

4 Moore was more concerned with designs for Yeats's books than designs for his plays, however. Cf. Correspondence, especially the early letters; Sturge Moore, Hark to these Three (London: Matthews, 1915), 15 et passim; F. L. Gwynn, Sturge Moore (London: Richards Press, 1952), ch. 2.


6 Cf. Our Irish Theatre, 2-3; Autobiographies, 396.

7 Cf. Yeats's letter to Lady Gregory, 6 January 1903, Letters, 394.
He, like Yeats, Moore, Symons, Edith Craig, Walter Crane, and Pamela Colman Smith, was involved in the formation of "The Masquers" in 1903, whose object was:

....to give performances of plays, masques, ballets, and ceremonies; and to produce only those works which convey a sentiment of beauty. One of its chief endeavours will be to bring the stage back again to that beauty of appropriate simplicity in the presentation of a play which will liberate the attention of an audience for the words of a writer and the movements of an actor.

And when the Masquers' scheme collapsed, Yeats once again turned to Ricketts with the hope of officially appointing him to the Abbey Theatre company. Even after Yeats turned away from the conventional stage and turned instead to the "two trestles and a board" and the designs and music of Edmund Dulac required for his Noh plays, the influence of Ricketts, "my education in so many things," who "always dealt en grand seigneur," remained. For Charles Ricketts, like Gordon Craig, William Blake, and William Morris, represented "the great myth-makers and mask-makers, the men of aristocratic mind" in Yeats's kingdom of art.

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1"Pixie Smith,"American designer and story-teller, who published The Green Sheaf, with contributions by Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory.

2Information from a leaflet among Yeats's papers in Mrs. Yeats's possession and a report of the inaugural meeting. Black and White, April 1903. Among the productions projected were Marlowe's Faustus, Congreve's Way of the World, Ford's The Broken Heart, Gilbert Murray's translation of Hippolytus, Jebb's translation of Oedipus Tyrannus, de Musset's Fantasio, Villiers' La Revolte, a ballet by Rameau, Purcell's Masque of Love, Peer Gynt, Les Aveugles, and works by d'Annunzio, Bridges, Yeats, Craig, Douglas Hyde, Laurence Irving. Cf. Hone, W.B. Yeats, 192, who quotes a letter from Gilbert Murray describing the society's collapse.


5Shaw's description of Ricketts, quoted by Sturge Moore, Self-Portrait, 18.

6Autobiographies, 550.
PART TWO

THE PLAYWRIGHTS AND THEIR PLAYS
CHAPTER 5 - WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

We were the last romantics -- chose for theme
Traditional sanctity and loveliness;
Whatever's written in what poets name
The book of the people; whatever most can bless
The mind of man or elevate a rhyme...

("Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931")

It would be fruitless to deny that Yeats was the product of his age and as such influenced by the ideas of his age. Son of an artist gifted with a restless enquiring mind, a fine flow of eloquence (J.B. Yeats was described by an admirer as one of the best talkers in New York)\(^1\), and the habit of friendship with artistic rebels of the time, the poet grew up in a household where the principles of the Pre-Raphaelites were established tradition and the claims of intellectual orthodoxy considered pernicious.\(^2\) John Butler Yeats deplored "the gospel of getting on" as a doctrine unfit for a gentleman; there were other more important things to attend to. And so he gave up a promising career as a barrister to become an artist, then financial security as a popular painter to follow his own desires in the world of art.\(^3\)

His son also found his work in art. In fact, except for a boyhood interest in natural history -- early training which he, like Synge, effectively made use of later -- Willie Yeats apparently never considered any other rôle but the artist's. He thought, acted, even dressed as the artist until finally, like Wilde, he became to a great

\(^1\) Cf. Yeats to J.B. Yeats, 10 October 1909, Letters, 536; Hone, W.B. Yeats, 254.

\(^2\) W.B. Yeats, "Reveries over Childhood and Youth," Autobiographies; Hone, op. cit., chs.1 & 2; Richard Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Masks (London: Faber, 1961), ch.2.

\(^3\) Hone, op. cit., 24-25. Cf. Yeats, " Estrangement" (1909), Autobiographies, 489: "A gentleman is a man whose principal ideas are not connected with his personal needs and his personal success." Also, J.B. Yeats to W.B. Yeats, 1 July 1908, J.B. Yeats Letters, 107.
extent his own creation. And, while painting with AE and modelling with Oliver Sheppard at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, he had already published several poems and made his first attempts in the dramatic form. "The arts are but one Art," he proclaimed in the first year of the Irish Literary Theatre, echoing Wagner. Almost forty years later he echoed himself:

Then too I would have all the arts draw together; recover their ancient association, the painter painting what the poet has written, the musician setting the poet's words to simple airs, that the horseman and the engine-driver may sing them at their work.

Poems, plays, short stories, novels, essays all reveal the same attitudes towards life, the same philosophy of art.

Like his father, also, Yeats found philosophizing and the workings of his own mind a constant fascination, his classifications and definitions "perpetually growing and dissolving" with each new source of knowledge. For his theories, like his father's portraits and his own poetry, were subject to continual revision in the light of his own

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1The ideal artist would also be "the cultivated man," as Yeats imagined Lionel Johnson to be. For his constant efforts to "re-make" himself into his own concept of the artist, vide Autobiographies, passim; his defence of Wilde as a poseur and AE's comments on his own pose, AE's letter to George Moore, quoted by John Eglinton in A Memoir of AE (London: Macmillan, 1937), 110-11. He dramatizes this process in The Player Queen.

2Hone, op.cit., 42. Sheppard completed the cycle by designing the statue of Cuchulain in the Dublin G.P.O., commemorating the Easter 1916 rebellion. Cf. The Death of Cuchulain.

3"The Theatre" (1899), Essays and Introductions, 167.

4"Introduction" (1937), op.cit., ix.

5Edward Dowden of J.B. Yeats, quoted by Ellmann, Man and Masks, 19.
experience and his search for a philosophical basis to his art. Each new concept, each stage of stylistic development underwent careful scrutiny and comment until either "hammered into the unity" he sought, or discarded as immalleable. Taking Blake's thesis "All progress is by contraries" for his motto, Yeats was loth to relinquish any theme or mood which he had found beautiful and sincere, even after it became no longer applicable. Each former conviction was incorporated into his vision of the whole until at last he arrived at the philosophical position which, with refinements, satisfied his concept of both art and life. A close study of Yeats's unified philosophy as outlined in A Vision is far beyond the scope of this dissertation; we are here concerned with his artistic doctrine alone, and that only as it is applicable to his work with the theatre. However, it is necessary to appreciate the fact that all Yeats's interests, whether literary, philosophical, or national, were subordinate to this driving need for the achievement of a unity which, in his eyes, would most fully express the self.

Yeats's Aesthetics

This celebration of "that little, infinite, faltering eternal flame that one calls oneself," carefully stripped of all external values, is the foundation of all Yeats's art. "Literature, when it is

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1Cf. Yeats, If I Were Four-and-Twenty (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1940), 1: "One day when I was twenty-three or twenty-four this sentence seemed to form in my head... 'Hammer your thoughts into unity.' For days I could think of nothing else, and for years I tested all I did by that sentence."

2Quoted by Yeats, letter to the Editor, United Irishman, 28 January 1905, 1. Cf. "Poetry and Patriotism" (1907), Poetry and Ireland: Essays by W.B. Yeats and Lionel Johnson (Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1908), 12: "The nobleness of the Arts is in the mingling of contraries." Also Samhain, 1901, 7: "The arts are at their best when they are busy with battles that never can be won"; introduction to The Resurrection, Wheels and Butterflies (London: Macmillan, 1934), 108-09. For a discussion of Yeats's adaptation of this theory of opposites, see Ellmann, The Man and the Masks.


4Cf. Dedication to AE, The Secret Rose (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1897). The italics are his.
really literature," does not deal with problems of the hour, but "with problems of the soul and character," he claimed: hence its business is not to convince or proselytize, for that leads to oratory and insincerity. "We must name and number the passions and motives of men," but for no other purpose. Art is "a revelation, and not a criticism." However, art should not be elevated into the "terrible queen" of the extreme aesthetes: "Literature must be the expression of conviction, and be the garment of noble emotion, and not an end in itself." One must ask oneself, "Is that exactly what I think and feel?" And only when the artist has made his work "a part of his own journey towards beauty and truth" does literature have "any right to exist."

All art, then, must be founded upon "personal vision" or experience, recording "the disengaging of a soul from place and history." This emphasis on the moods and passions leads in its

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1 "Literature and the Conscience," United Irishman, 7 December 1901.
3 Yeats's speech to the British Association, September 1908, printed in "First Principles," Samhain, 1908, 12.
4 "The Body of the Father Christian Rosencrux" (1895), Essays and Introductions, 197.
5 "Hopes and Fears for Irish Literature," United Irishman, 15 October 1892.
7 "Ireland and the Arts" (1901), Essays and Introductions, 207.
8 Letter to high school friend c.1887, Letters, 31. Cf. letters to Mrs. Clement Shorter, 21 June 1899 and to AE, c. May 1900, op. cit., 322 and 343; letter to Sturge Moore, March 1929, Correspondence, 144.
9 Samhain, 1905, 10.
10 "J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910), Essays and Introductions, 339.
11 Letter to the Editor, Daily Express (Dublin), 27 February 1895.
highest moments to "the creation of intense feeling, of pure life," out of the "energy and abundance" of men "who expressed themselves to the full." "Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from ... all that is of the brain only." "A feeling for the form of life, for the graciousness of life, for the dignity of life, for the moving limbs of life, for the nobleness of life, for all that cannot be written in codes, has always been greatest among the gifts of literature to mankind." But, lest we exalt the man of action at the expense of the man of thought, we are also reminded in a quotation from Coventry Patmore that "the end of art is peace"; "the following of art is little different from the following of religion in the intense preoccupation that it demands." The artist is essentially a lonely figure, seeking both vision and strength in himself, frequently having to "quarry his own stone." The artist is, in fact, a priest, labouring "to bring again the Golden Age" dreamt by William Blake. But here Yeats found himself in difficulties once more, for there appeared to be two paths literature...
might take; "upward: into ever-growing subtlety, with Verhaeren, with Mallarmé, with Maeterlinck, until ... what seems literature becomes religion; or downward, taking the soul with us until all is simplified and solidified again."¹ In terms of the aesthetic movement, the cult of the mystic or the cult of the Celt. His natural inclination led him towards the mystical, as we shall see; but his critical observations, encouraged by his nationalist sympathies, pointed towards "the book of the people," that "hereditary knowledge of the countryside."² "All progress is by contraries," however; clearly the new golden age must arise out of the mingling of both. "It may be ... that this Priesthood will spread their Religion everywhere, and make their Art the Art of the people."³ "We must baptize as well as preach."⁴ And so the artist-priest's duties became threefold: to sing with the lyric voice of "the highly disciplined individual kingly mind," of those "thoughts and emotions that were created by the community, by the common people"⁵ -- a yoking of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, the sun and the moon, "a marriage of Heaven and Hell"⁶ -- before an audience which he may himself have to create.⁷

¹"Personality and the Intellectual Essences"(1907), Essays and Introductions, 266. V.K. Naipana Menon in The Development of William Butler Yeats(London: Oliver and Boyd, 1942), 71 quotes P.R. Higgins: "There were for him only two commingling states of verse. One, simple, bucolic, rabelaisian; the other, intellectual, exotic or visionary."

²Note to Unicorn from the Stars(1908), Collected Works, III, 221.


⁴"Ireland and the Arts," Essays and Introductions, 203.


⁶Note to The Unicorn from the Stars, loc. cit. In 1898 Yeats was planning his novel, The Speckled Bird, in which the plot was to alternate between Aran and Paris, Ellmann, op. cit., 150.

⁷"Introduction"(1937), Essays and Introductions, x: "A poet is justified not by the expression of himself but by the public he finds or creates."
Grossly oversimplifying, one might trace the pattern of thought in this manner then: the celebration of the soul justified further exploration into the mysteries of the supernatural and a vehement rejection of the vulgarity of realism\(^1\); traditional myths discovered there found their modern counterpart in the tales of wonder and folklore of the Irish peasantry, amplified by the recent discoveries of Celtic scholars. Surely the noble peasant, his feet in the soil, his head in the clouds, held the secret of the ages which the commonplace man of the towns had bartered for his mess of pottage. The living tradition of Celtic myth in turn represented for Yeats the continuation of a belief and system of thought ratified by the philosophies of antiquity\(^2\); where could it be better preserved than in that most public of all arts, the drama, a form the subject matter naturally demanded? And so his dream of a national theatre became as well as an assurance of the preservation and propagation of Celtic heritage, a temple of the ascendancy not of man, but of the spirit. "I planned in those days to establish a dramatic movement upon the popular passions, as the ritual of religion is established in the emotions that surround birth and death and marriage,"\(^3\) he wrote of his early aims. Two decades later he entered in a diary these words:

I would found literature on the three things which Kant thought we must postulate to make life livable -- Freedom, God, Immortality.... Recent Irish literature has only delighted me in so far as it

\(^{1}\)Address at the National Literary Society's "At Home," reported in the Irish Independent, 19 February 1900. Cf. "The Irish Literary Theatre," Dublin Daily Express, 14 January 1899; Samhain, 1903; "The Play of Modern Manners" (1906), Essays and Introductions, 274. The same philosophy is proclaimed in "To all Artists and Writers," written by Yeats but not signed, Tomorrow, I (August 1924), 4.

\(^{2}\)Yeats's Preface, The Ten Principal Upanishads, by Yeats and Shree Purohit Swami (London: Faber, 1937), 9: "It pleases me to fancy that when we turn towards the East...we are turning not less to the ancient west and north." Cf. Preface to The Cat and the Moon and Certain Poems (Dublin: Cuala, 1924).

\(^{3}\)Preface to The Unicorn from the Stars and Other Plays (New York: Macmillan, 1908), v-vi.
implies one or the other, in so far as it has been a defiance of all else, in so far as it has created those extravagant characters and emotions which have always arisen spontaneously from the human mind when it sees itself exempt from death and decay, responsible to its source alone.  

**Mysticism, Magic, and the Myth.**

"Pure mysticism...is still too far away to be the staple and substance of common literature," wrote Lionel Johnson in his review of the Yeats-Ellis *Blake.* For Yeats, however, literature without spiritual belief was impossible, and he longed for the day prophesied by Blake when the poet, "acting as a poet," would seek the spiritual leadership of the race.

I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible Church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians. I wished for a world where I could discover this tradition perpetually.

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1 Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty (Dublin: Cuala, 1944), 49-50.


4 Autobiographies, 115-16. Cf. unpublished letter from AE to Sean O'Faolain, 1935, quoted by Monk Gibbon, The Early Years of George Russell, 389n: "It was, I think, to get rid of the sceptical element in himself so that he might have a whole faith that he adventured into magic and spiritualism hoping for the clear fact or experience, or sign, which would enable him to have an untroubled faith." Vide F.A.C. Wilson, W.B. Yeats and Tradition (London: Gollancz, 1958), 10: "By 'mysticism' Yeats could and did mean either of two things. He might mean the individual mystic's quite personal insight into the nature of things, or he might mean the great 'subjective' tradition of mystical philosophy, based as it is upon the correspondence of many of these insights." Most frequently he meant the latter.
By the time Yeats had begun his serious study of Blake in 1889, he had already been reading theosophy for several years, and had been instrumental in founding the Dublin Hermetic Society in 1885. 1 "I wished for a system of thought that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of the one history, and that the soul's." 2 Now, spurred by his work on Blake, he carried his explorations further, into the circle of Madame Blavatsky herself, that "great passionate nature, a sort of female Dr. Johnson." 3 But a series of experiments he conducted caused concern among her followers, and reluctantly he resigned. Next came an introduction to MacGregor Mathers, a man of "much learning but little scholarship, much imagination and imperfect taste." 4 In 1890 he was initiated into "The Order of Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn," a society for the practice of Christian Cabalism, and widened his experience from theosophy to magic. 5 Here at last was the freedom to experiment and -- even more important -- the method of ritual. In the unpublished first draft of his Autobiographies, Yeats spoke of this society as the chief influence upon his thought up to perhaps his fortieth year. 6

Just as religion and mysticism were interchangeable realities to Yeats, so were the roles of the priest and the mystical conjuror. As a boy he had been fascinated by the figure of the magician 7; now as

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1 Autobiographies, 89-92. Yeats was chairman at the first meeting; part of his opening address is quoted by Ellmann, op. cit., 142.
2 Dedication, A Vision (London: Privately printed by T. Werner Laurie, 1925), xi.
3 Autobiographies, 175.
4 Ibid., 107.
6 Ellmann, op. cit., 96.
7 Autobiographies, 46, Ellmann, op. cit., 29.
a young man he found further identification in the rôle of the artist-conjuror. Florence Farr, writing under her theosophical designation, S.S.D.D., published a description of the ideal adept:

To choose a life that shall bring him in touch with the sorrows of his race rather than accept the Nirvana open to him; and like other Saviours of the world, to remain manifested as a living link between the supernal and terrestrial natures.¹

Once more the rôle of intermediary between the spiritual and the earth-bound is made attractive. Legends of cults in Paris reached the ears of the young man; Villiers de l'Isle Adam had only recently died, and Mallarmé was still writing. "This new pride, that of the adept, was added to the pride of the artist."² Not forgetting his nationalism, he wrote The Secret Rose, and explained to John O'Leary: "It is at any rate an honest attempt towards that aristocratic esoteric Irish literature, which has been my chief ambition. We have a literature for the people but nothing yet for the few." There was even talk of a French translation.³

"An obsession more constant than anything but my love itself was the need of mystical rites -- a ritual, system of evocation and meditation -- to re-unite the perception of the spirit, of the dream, with natural beauty."⁴ By now Maud Gonne had entered his life, and together they planned a "Castle of the Heroes" as place of preparation and rest for those who would bring back to Ireland her ancient dignity and grandeur.

¹ A Short Enquiry Concerning the Hermetic Art, with introduction to alchemy and notes (London: Theosophical Pub. Soc. 1894), 13.
³ 30 May 1897, Letters, 286.
⁴ First draft of Autobiographies, quoted by Ellmann, op. cit., 125-26; cf. further quotation op. cit., 132-33.
to be built of Irish stone and decorated only with the Four Jewels of the Tuatha de Danaan [the ancient Irish gods] .... the universal symbols appearing in debased form on the Tarot... and foreshadowing the Christian Symbolism of the Saint Grail. 1

Much time was spent on the elaboration of ritual, with help from such noteworthy Celts as Lady Gregory and "Fiona Macleod" [William Sharp], but the dream shattered with Maud's marriage, and the Four Jewels of the projected Celtic Order -- the stone, the cauldron, the spear, and the lance -- together with the symbolism of the rituals, remained imbedded in Yeats's poetry instead. 2

The Celtic Twilight (1893) discussed magicians and magic, 3 but Yeats's most impressive public pronouncement appeared in an essay on magic in 1901:

I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed; and I believe in three doctrines, which have, as I think, been handed down from early times, and been the foundations of nearly all magical practices. These doctrines are:—

(1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols. 4

Just as "all symbolic art should arise out of a real belief," 5 art in turn, then, in its use of symbols, becomes a part of the ritual of

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3 "Drumcliff and Rosses," "The Sorcerers."
5 "Religious Belief Necessary to Symbolic Art" (1906), Essays and Introductions, 294.
evocation, an appeal to "the Divine Essence." ¹ Yeats's system of "chanting" his poetry, and his insistence on intoning to a specific pitch ² further intensify this impression of ritual. ³ And in 1902 he observed,

I...can hardly write at all unless I write about religious ideas. In "The Land of Heart's Desire," a dreaming girl prefers her own dreams and a wandering voice of the night to the priest and his crucifix. In "The Hour Glass"...it is the proud spirit that is defeated by the belief that has seemed folly to the wise. And in "The Countess Cathleen" the commandment of mercy is followed to the forgetting of all else. In "The Shadowy Waters" human love, and in "Cathleen ni Houlihan" love of country, become through their mere intensity a cry that calls beyond the limits of the world. In "Where There is Nothing," Paul, because he is a seeker after God, desires the destruction of all things. So far as I am a dramatist, so far as I have made these people alive, I watch them with wonder and pity, and I do not even ask myself were they right to go upon that journey. ⁴

Yeats's "adventures into magic and spiritualism," then, merely confirmed his belief in the necessity of faith, the role of the artist-priest, and the significance of tradition. Like his "Teachers" of A Vision, they gave more than they received, bringing him "metaphors for poetry" in abundance, and -- even more important for our purposes -- the technique of "visualizing" those symbols.

As you know, all my art theories depend upon just this -- rooting of mythology in the earth. ⁵

The step from mysticism to myth is as short as that from symbol to allegory, and for Yeats even more inevitable. "Allegory and, to a much

¹ Introduction to A Book of Images Drawn by W.T.Horton... (London: Unicorn, 1896), 10 and 15.
² See above, Part One, Chapter 4, p. 192ff.
³ He was fond of quoting Lionel Johnson, "Life must be a ritual.
⁵ "The Freedom of the Theatre," U.I., 1 November 1902. Cf. "The Subject Matter of Drama," Essays and Introductions, 285: "The more religious the subject-matter of an art, the more will it be as it were stationary, and the more ancient will be the emotion that it arouses and the circumstance that it calls up before our eyes."
greater degree, symbolism are a natural language by which the soul when entranced, or even in ordinary sleep, communed with God and with angels. They can speak of things which cannot be spoken of in any other language," he wrote in 1902. Art as a "revelation" has its roots in antiquity, "the accumulated beauty of the age," that "common mint." "Indeed all the great masters have understood, that there cannot be great art without the little limited life of the fable." "Once a symbolism has possessed the imagination of large numbers of men, it becomes, as I believe, an embodiment of disembodied powers, and repeats itself in dreams and visions, age after age." The artist, therefore, should seek traditional models, rather than attempt originality, if he wishes to achieve great art. It is only in "a return to the way of our fathers" that he will find security of both subject matter and style. "Supreme art is a traditional statement of certain heroic and religious truths, passed on from age to age, modified by individual genius, but never abandoned." And had not William Morris, his "King of men," once said of an eminent dramatist,

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1. "Edmund Spenser," Essays and Introductions, 368. Yeats accepted Blake's definitions: "Vision or imagination" -- meaning symbolism by these words -- 'is a representation of what actually exists, really or unchangeably. Fable of Allegory is formed by the daughters of Memory." Introduction to A Book of Images.


3. Samhain, 1904, 16.

4. "Emotion of the Multitude" (1903), Essays and Introductions, 216.


6. "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1900), Essays and Introductions, 163.

7. Note to At the Hawk's Well, Plays and Controversies (London: Macmillan, 1923), 416: "In literature if we would not be parvenus we must have a model." Cf. "A General Introduction to my Work" (1937), Essays and Introductions, 522: "I must choose a traditional stanza, even what I alter must seem traditional."

"He will never understand any art, because he does not understand that all art is founded upon convention!"¹

"In my heart," wrote Yeats looking back at his early years," I thought that only beautiful things should be painted, and that only ancient things and the stuff of dreams were beautiful."² The subject of art is not law, but passion and "the praise of life"³; the aim of art "the ecstasy awakened by the presence before an ever-changing mind of what is permanent in the world."⁴ However this does not necessarily imply a contradiction of the dream, for "so far from the discussion of our interests and the immediate circumstance of our life being the most moving to the imagination, it is what is old and far off that stirs us the most deeply." And as we have already seen, the dream or vision (as opposed to illusion) is a repetition of the symbolism of the past. Furthermore, it is this "antiquity of thought" which separates the man of genius, the truly "cultivated man," from the modern vulgar realist.⁵ Because "we come from the permanent things and create them," the artist remains aloof, aristocratic, despising "the mob" and if need be "suffering at its hands."⁶ In 1937, looking back over his life's struggle towards a working aesthetic, Yeats once

¹"The Acting at St. Teresa's Hall," U.I., 26 April 1902,²
²Autobiographies, 62. "Any bit of pedantry, a couple of hundred years old seems to him to have a kind of divine authority," AE wrote to George Moore in irritation at Yeats's manner, quoted by Eglinton, A Memoir of AE, 112.
³Samhain, 1904, 20.
⁴"The Two Kinds of Asceticism," Essays and Introductions, 287.
⁵"The Subject Matter of Drama," Essays and Introductions, 284.
⁶Autobiographies, 474. Cf. Samhain, 1904, 4: "The artists, the only aristocracy that has never been sold in the market or seen the people rise up against it." In his preface to Oliver Gogarty's Wild Apples (Dublin: Cuala, 1930), he praises the "sense of a hardship borne and chosen out of pride and joy," likening Gogarty to those other "solitaries," Swift, Berkeley, Shaw, and Synge.
again stated the same beliefs:

That it is not the duty of the artist to paint beautiful women and beautiful places is nonsense. That the exclusion of sex appeal from poetry, painting and sculpture is nonsense (are the films alone to impose their ideas upon the sexual instinct?). That, on the contrary, all arts are an expression of desire -- exciting desirable life, exalting desirable death. That all the arts must be united again, painting and literature, poetry and music. Bless synthesis; damn Whistler and his five o'clock.1

"Ireland - The Foundation of my Art"

John Synge, I and August Gregory, thought
All that we did, all that we said or sang
Must come from contact with the soil, from that
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.
We three alone in modern times had brought
Everything down to that sole test again,
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.
("The Municipal Gallery Revisited")

"When I began to write," Yeats commented in 1913, "I sought some symbolic language reaching far into the past and associated with familiar names and conspicuous hills that I might not be alone amid the obscure impressions of the senses."2 Reaching back to "that early phase of every civilisation...where everything is prescribed, as buried under dream and myth,"3 he found his source in that "oldest of the aristocracies of thought," folk art.4 "All folk literature, and all literature that keeps the folk tradition, delights in unbounded and immortal things, "having a passion one can no longer find in modern literature."5 Here one finds "expression in its first phase of energy, 

1Hone, W.B. Yeats, 458.
3Introduction to The Cat and the Moon, Wheels and Butterflies, 136. Cf. Introduction (1888) to Irish Fairy and Folk Tales (London: Walter Scott, 1893), xii.
4"By the Roadside," Mythologies, 139.
when all the arts play like children about the one chimney,"¹ mingling
"the common pleasures of common man"² with the "intellectual traditions"
of an ancient heritage, the golden dream of king and peasant.³ And
here at hand, he found that "living folk tradition,"⁴ the two passions
he sought, "love of the Unseen Life and love of country":⁵

Alone among nations, Ireland has in her written Gaelic literature,
in her old love tales and battle tales, the forms in which the
imagination of Europe uttered itself before Greece shaped a tumult
of legend into her music of the arts; and she can discover, from
the beliefs and emotions of her common people, the habit of mind
that created the religion of the muses.

Surely that habit of mind is still possible: "The 'Celt', as it seems,
created romance....would [it] not be wonderful if he should remould
romance after its oldest image, now that he is recovering his
possessions."⁶

He set out to see for himself. Stories of the countryside, of
"Them" and "Their" ways, had been told in the kitchen at Sligo.⁷ The
Celtic Folklore Commission, the new enthusiasm for translations, Sir
Samuel Ferguson, and the British Museum yielded a rich harvest of
legend. In 1888 he published Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry,
then followed it in 1893 with The Celtic Twilight, in which he wrote:

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²"The Rhymer's Club," The Boston Pilot, 23 April 1892, reprinted in
Letters to the New Island, ed. Horace Reynolds (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard
UP, 1934), 146. Cf. "The Literary Movement in Ireland," Ideals in
Ireland, op.cit., 100.
³"The Irish Literary Theatre, 1900," Beltaine, February 1900, 24.
Cf. "A General Introduction for my Work" (1937), Essays and Introductions,
516; Letter to J.B. Yeats, 7 August 1909, Wade Letters, 534.
⁴"Modern Poetry: A Broadcast" (1936), Essays and Introductions, 506.
Cf. Letter to Standish O'Grady, Christmas 1898, Letters, op.cit., 308;
Samhain, 1908, 6.
⁵"Ireland and the Arts" (1901), op.cit., 204. Cf. "The Irish Literary
National Drama" (1898), Literary Traditions in Ireland, op.cit., 19; "The
Celtic Element in Literature" (1902), op.cit., 185.
⁷Hone, W.B. Yeats, 39-40.
I have desired, like every artist, to create a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant, and significant things of this marred and clumsy world, and to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland to any of my own people who would look where I bid them. Lady Gregory’s *Cuchulain of Muirthenn* (1902), *Poets and Dreamers* (1903), *Gods and Fighting Men* (1904), and *Visions and Beliefs of the West of Ireland* (1920) led him further into the study of "that great Celtic phantasmagoria whose meaning no man has discovered nor any angel revealed." We had little scientific curiosity, but sought wisdom, peace, and a communion with the people....Dr. Hyde and his League...sought the peasant...but we sought the peasant's imagination." "She and I felt that we had got down, as it were, into some fibrous darkness, into some matrix out of which everything has come."2

Although disappointed that "the power of Faery" had dwindled to tales of the peasant only, Yeats was charmed by his "search for the religious life of other times among old Irish monuments and legends."6 "Everything seems possible to them," he observed, "and because they can never be surprised, they imagine the most surprising things."7 "They can hardly separate mere learning from witchcraft, and are fond

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1 "This Book," 1.
3 Introduction to *The Cat and the Moon*, op. cit., 136. AE, the "visionary" of *Celtic Twilight*, rebelled: "I am afraid it would be a futile task to try consciously for the Celtic traditional feeling. A certain spirit of it I have but I am not Celt inside, not for many lives." Unpublished portion of letter to Yeats, 3 April 1897, quoted by Gibbon, TCD PhD Thesis, op. cit., 327.
5 "Kidnappers," *Celtic Twilight*, 1905, op. cit., 118. The sentence is omitted from *Mythologies*.
of words and verses that keep half their secret to themselves"
(again justification for his own system of "incanting" verse).\(^1\)

It was, he felt, that fantasy which was "the unbroken character of
Irish genius," a fantasy he was later to recognise in Synge.\(^2\)

When he wrote his own plays and early poems, he chose to write of "the
paradise that the common people tell of about the fire...Tir-nan-og,
the Land of the Living Heart, the Grass Green Island of Apples"\(^3\)
and those "divine people" that "the simple of all times and the wise men
of ancient times" have seen and spoken to.\(^4\)

Delighting in a speech
which itself delighted in "rhythmical animation, in idiom, in images,
in words full of far-off suggestion"\(^5\)
reflecting the habit of mind and
poetical sayings of their former tongue, Yeats, with the help of
Lady Gregory, attempted a recovery of "the spirit of that great Celtic
phantasmagoria."\(^6\)

"I have worked at Irish mythology and filled a great many pages of
notes with a certain arrangement of it for my own purposes; and now I
find I have a rich background for whatever I want to do and endless
symbols to my hands,"\(^7\) Yeats wrote to a friend in 1899. But long before
he had systematized its mythology, Yeats's mind had turned towards
Ireland for subject matter. "England is old...but Ireland has still

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\(^1\) What is 'Popular Poetry'?" (1901), Essays and Introductions, 10.

\(^2\) "J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910), Essays and Introductions, 337.

\(^3\) "Literary Movement in Ireland," op. cit., 100–101.

\(^4\) Enchanted Woods," Mythologies, 64. Cf. Review of The Wanderings
of Oisin, Pall Mall Gazette, 12 July 1889: "He is very naïve, and very
primitive, and speaks of his giants with the awe of a child."

\(^5\) "What is 'Popular Poetry'?" loc. cit.

\(^6\) Cf. Preface to Lady Gregory's Gods and Fighting Men (1903),
Collected Works, 1908, VIII, 166.

\(^7\) Letter to Mrs. Clement Shorter, 21 June 1899, Letters, 322.
full tables," he commented in a review of Todhunter's play *The Banshee*.  
"Here in Ireland the marble block is waiting for us almost untouched, and the statues will come as soon as we have learned to use the chisel."  
And so he turned from London "where all the intellectual traditions gather to die," to his own country, where one could still find "a conception of the heroic life," of the soul rejoicing in itself."

It cannot be denied that Yeats's strong sense of nationalism—an emotion readily perceivable in any Irishman—played an important part in directing his thoughts along the pattern of mysticism, magic, and finally to Celtic folklore. He had already begun his study of folklore, however, before he attempted to fuse the two passions, nation and art.

(As one critic of the Irish Literary movement phrased it, "His occult mission, it seemed was to celebrate the wedding of Madame Blavatsky and Finn MacCumhail." And throughout his life he deplored the subordination of literature to any other aim.  
"I have always felt that my mission in Ireland is to serve taste rather than any definite propaganda," he wrote to Lady Gregory in 1901.  
I am a Nationalist....But if some external necessity had forced me to write nothing but drama with an obviously patriotic intention, instead of letting my work shape itself under the casual impulses of dreams and early thoughts, I would have lost, in a short time, the power to write movingly upon any theme.

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1"The Rhymer's Club"(1892), *op.cit.*, 148.
3"The Theatre"(1900), *Essays and Introductions*, 171.
5Samhain, 1904, 27.
7In 1904 he contemplated challenging Arthur Griffith (editor of *United Irishman*) to a public debate on the subject. Cf. letter to Lady Gregory, 2 January 1904, *Letters*, 421-22.
8*Letters*, 352.
One could say that for Yeats nationalism was in fact subordinate to art. We have seen how the aesthetes in their rebellion against Victorian materialism turned towards the past; Yeats in his turned to an Ireland he wished to create.

This nationality...is really a war between two civilizations, two ideals of life...We desire to preserve into the modern life that ideal, a nation of men who will...remember always the four ancient virtues...: first, honesty amongst one's friends. Second, courage amongst one's enemies. Third, generosity amongst the weak. Fourth, courtesy at all times.1

In other words, the ancient culture of the noble and beggarman. Coupled with this rebellion against the vulgarity of modern life was the disillusionment over the downfall of Parnell and the aims of a united Ireland, an earthquake as shattering to Irish hopes as the downfall of Oscar Wilde was to the doctrines of the aesthetic movement in England.2

It is also obvious from a study of his work that although Yeats spent a great deal of his life away from Ireland, his memory and imagination took him always back to the Irish countryside, and especially to the "wild beauty" of the west country, haunted by legends of the past and events of the near-present3: "I had a conviction, which indeed I have still, that one's verses should hold, as in a mirror, the colours of one's own climate and scenery in their right proportion."4 "We should make poems on the familiar landscapes we love, not the strange and rare and glittering scenes we wonder at," he wrote to his fellow-poet Katherine Tynan in 1888.5 Not only would this bring sincerity and originality to one's work, but greater interest as well. "One should love best what is nearest and most interwoven with one's life."6

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1From the unpublished manuscript of a speech given in New York in 1904, quoted by Ellmann,op.cit.,116-17.
3"Ireland and the Arts", op.cit.,205. Cf."A Note on National Drama, (1898),op.cit.,19. A brief glance at the titles of his poems and settings for his plays - the one exception Player Queen makes this self-evident.
4"What is Popular Poetry?" op.cit.,5.
6Letter to Miss Elizabeth White (Professor H.O.White's sister) 30 January 1889, op.cit.,104. Cf."One should have a speciality,"letter to Katherine Tynan, May 1888, op.cit.,71.
Furthermore, only then would one be able "to create [Irish character] from within." Indeed, he soon found that subject matter had given birth to a new style. "I could not now write of any other country but Ireland, for my style has been shaped by the subjects I have worked on, but there was a time when my imagination seemed unwilling, when I found myself writing of some Irish event in words that would have better fitted some Italian or Eastern event." But one writer alone could not create the Irish literature he dreamed of. A body of artists united in aim and an audience educated to appreciate them were also necessary. Here he would join efforts with Dr. Hyde's movement. "Wherever the old imaginative life lingers it must be stirred into life and kept alive, and in Ireland this is the work, it may be, of the Gaelic movement." For "the first thing needful if an Irish literature more elaborate and intense than our fine but primitive ballads and novels is to come into being is that readers and writers alike should really know the imaginative periods of history." "One wants to write for one's own people, who come to the playhouse with a knowledge of one's subjects and with hearts ready to be moved," he wrote to his American patron, John Quinn. Then the artist must take over. "What I myself did, getting into an original relation to Irish life, creating in myself a new character, a new pose -- in the French sense of the word -- the literary mind of Ireland, as a whole." "If we would express Ireland we must know her

1 Criticism of minor Irish novelists, letter to the Editor, Daily Express, 27 February 1895, op. cit., 248-49.
2 "Ireland and the Arts," op. cit., 208.
3 Samhain, 1906, 7.
5 28 June 1903, Letters, 406.
6 Samhain, 1908, 6.
to the heart and in all her moods...Absorb Ireland and her tragedy and you will be the poet of a people, perhaps the poet of a new insurrection."1 Having achieved this, literature will then once more become folk art, "the possession of a people,"2 and her artists once more be honoured as the spiritual leaders of the age, speaking "out of a people to a people."3

Because of this belief Yeats wrote "as an Irish writer and with Ireland in my mind."4

His Dramatic Theory and Practice

Writing of his revised version of The Shadowy Waters in 1906, Yeats pointed out, "It is to be judged, like all my plays, as part of an attempt to create a national dramatic literature in Ireland, and it takes upon itself its true likeness of a Jack-a-Lantern among more natural and simple things, when set among the plays of my fellow-workers."5 From his first meeting with Lady Gregory in 1896 to his final open letter to her in 1917, more of Yeats's energy than he later cared to admit was spent on this dream of a national theatre, his personal solution to "the seeming needs of my fool-driven land."6 "In 1897 a new scene was set, new actors appeared," Yeats wrote to

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Olivia Shakespear many years later. But long before 1897 his mind was turned towards the theatre.

Early in 1889 we find him writing enthusiastically to Katharine Tynan about his "new poem," The Countess Kathleen:

A Drama founded on the Countess Kathleen O'Shea in Folklore book.... This new poem of mine promises to be my most interesting poem and in all ways quite dramatic, I think. I shall try and get it acted by amateurs (if possible in Dublin) and afterwards try it perhaps on some stage manager or actor. It is in five scenes and full of action and very Irish.2

Several weeks later, in a more hesitant mood, he reports that he and Maud Gonne "had some talk as to the possibility of getting my 'Countess O'Shea' acted by amateurs in Dublin and she felt inclined to help, indeed suggested the attempt herself if I remember rightly."3 Although the planned collaboration with Miss Gonne did not materialize (her only appearance in Yeats's plays was in 1902 as the old woman in Kathleen ni Houlihan for the first production of the Irish National Dramatic Society, of which she was Vice-President),4 it is important to realize that Yeats already considered himself a playwright, not merely a "dramatic poet."5 Nor is it perhaps mere coincidence that one of the plans for publicizing the National Literary Society's projected lending library scheme (suggested by Yeats) was a small travelling theatre which would perform plays on patriotic subjects.6

And we have already seen that The Land of Heart's Desire was produced by Florence Farr, with Miss Horniman's financial backing, in London in 1894, on the same bill with a play by Dr. Todhunter, whose earlier

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1 27 February, 1934, Letters, 820.
3 21 March 1889, ibid., 117.
4 St. Teresa's Hall, Clarendon St., 2 April 1902.
5 Yeats always considered The Countess Cathleen one of his most effective plays. Cf. Letters, 674.
6 Ellmann, op. cit., 107.
productions at Bedford Park had impressed Yeats. ¹

As Richard Ellmann points out,² both The Countess Cathleen and The Land of Heart's Desire are in Yeats's sense "miracle plays," a form he had proposed to Katharine Tynan and Fiona Macleod as well.³ It is not difficult to accept Ellmann's theory that Yeats's first plans for the Irish Literary Theatre were, unknown to his colleagues, part of his larger plan for a Celtic Mystical Order. However, although the dramatic form would naturally appeal to one impressed by ritual as a "manifestation of the invisible world,"⁴ this does not explain his choice of the dramatic medium in the first place. For long before the foundation of the Irish Literary Theatre movement, mystically based or not, and even before his serious study of the occult, Yeats was writing plays with production in mind. "To me the dramatic is far the pleasantest poetic form," he confided to Miss Tynan in 1889.⁵ And later, he recalled having "the dream of an Irish theatre... in 1892 certainly."⁶ While still at art school, he and AE were writing poetic dramas (about magicians in Asia) in rivalry; AE wrote to a friend about 1886, "His great drama, The Equator of Olives, is finished. The episode of the Sculptor's Garden is in it."⁷ But by that time Yeats had written five other poetic dramas, two of them, "Vivien and Time" and "The Island of Statues," for an early love to act,

³Letters to Miss Tynan, May 1890 and 1 July 1890, Letters, 152 and 153-54.
⁴Ibid.
⁵21 April 1889, Letters, 122.
⁷Hone, W. B. Yeats, 43. The tragedy was variously entitled The Blindness The Epic of the Forest, and The Equator of the Olives, Ellmann, op. cit., 48.
though the latter play "soon grew beyond the scope of drawing-room acting."¹

Of these early poetic dramas Yeats recalls, "I had begun to write poetry in imitation of Shelley and of Edmund Spenser, play after play -- for my father exalted dramatic poetry above all other kinds -- and I invented fantastic and incoherent plots."² One plot, Love and Death (dated April 1884), had "a mortality rate comparable to that in Thomas Kyd's works," but is indicative of the "Gemini myth" which was to haunt Yeats's poetry throughout his life, as well as his basic theme of the attraction and mingling of opposite qualities: "a god and a mortal are twin brothers," a king's daughter falls in love with the god, seen in the luminous sky above her garden in childhood, and to be worthy of him and put away mortality, becomes without pity and commits crimes, and at last, having made her way to the throne by murder, awaits his coming among her courtiers. One by one they become chilly and drop dead, for, unseen by all but her, her god is in the hall. At last he is at her throne's foot and she, her mind in the garden again, dies babbling like a child.

The fable was suggested to Yeats by one of his father's early designs.⁴ The remaining early dramas all centre about the magical and the struggle between this and another world, with the other world triumphant.

"I was then living a quite harmonious poetic life. Never thinking out of my depth. Always harmonious, narrow, calm. Taking small interest in people but most ardently moved by the more minute kinds of natural

³Ellmann, op. cit., 37.
⁴Autobiographies, 74-75. Cf. Note to "Anashuya and Vijaya," "a little Indian dramatic scene [which] was meant to be the first scene of a play about a man loved by two women, who had the one soul between them, the one woman waking when the other slept, and knowing but daylight as the other only night," Poems (London: Macmillan, 1927), 321-22.
⁵See "An Epilogue to 'The Island of Statues' and 'The Seeker'" ("The Song of the Happy Shepherd," Collected Poems, 7-8): "Words alone are certain good."
beauty." The Island of Statues was, he conceded, "good of its kind."

All have the "Shelleyan" Arcadian note, relieved however by a sharp dramatic twist foreshadowing his later theatrical ability.

First that sea-rider Oisin led by the nose Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams, Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose, Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems, That might adorn old songs or courtly shows...

("The Circus Animals' Desertion,"1939)

"Since I have left the 'Island', I have been going about on shoreless seas," Yeats wrote to Miss Tynan in 1888. "Nothing anywhere has clear outline*. Everything is cloud and foam.... The clouds began about four years ago. I was finishing the 'Island'. They came and robbed Naschina [shepherdess-heroine of The Island of Statues] of her shadow."2 This "cloud and foam" was to haunt Yeats's work for many years, for with it came his first genuine Irish subject-matter, seen first in The Wanderings of Oisin, a long epic poem or "series of incidents"3 which "endeavoured to set forth the impress left on my imagination by the Pre-Christian cycle of legends."4

Oisin is important to a study of Yeats's development as a dramatist for two reasons; his symbolism and his deliberate choice of form.

Looking back, Yeats recognised this:

For years I have been preoccupied with a certain myth that was itself a reply to a myth. I do not mean a fiction, but one of those statements our nature is compelled to make or employ as a truth though there cannot be sufficient evidence. When I was a boy everybody talked about progress, and rebellion against my elders took the form of aversion to that myth. I took satisfaction in certain public disasters, felt a sort of ecstasy at the contemplation of ruin, and then I came upon the story of Oisin in Tír-nan-óg and reshaped it into my Wanderings of Oisin. He

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1 Letter to Miss Tynan, September 1888, Letters, 87.
2 Letter to K. Tynan, 1 January 1889, Letters, 106.
3 Preface to The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892),
rides across the sea with a spirit, he passes phantoms, a boy following a girl, a hound chasing a hare, [actually it is a deer]. emblematic of eternal pursuit, he comes to an island of chorale dancing, leaves that after many years, passes the phantoms once again, comes to an island of endless battle for an object never achieved, leaves that after many years, passes the phantoms once again, comes to an island of sleep, leaves that and comes to Ireland, to St. Patrick and old age. I did not pick these images because of any theory, but because I found them impressive, yet all the while abstractions haunted me.1

Although Yeats may not have had a specific theory in mind, it is interesting to note that many of the personal symbols he uses here for the first time recur throughout his later plays and poems. And even then he felt their strength and the necessity of veiling their meaning from the uninitiated:

In the second part of 'Oisin' under disguise of symbolism I have said several things to which I only have the key. The romance is for my readers. They must not even know there is a symbol anywhere. They will not find out. If they did, it would spoil the art. Yet the whole poem is full of symbols — if it be full of aught but clouds.2

His art was not for all.

The first symbolic alteration Yeats made from the original legend was his use of the three islands, which, he admits, "are wholly my own, having no further root in tradition than the Irish peasant's notion that Tir-n-an-oge [the Country of the Young] is made up of three phantom islands."3 To the initiated he explains further: "There are three incompatible things which man is always seeking — infinite feeling, infinite battle, infinite repose— hence the three islands."4

1Introduction to The Resurrection, Wheels and Butterflies, 101-102.
3Letter to the Editor, The Spectator, 29 July 1889.
This "chase after the ideal" came to represent for Yeats man's hunger for the peaceful eternal love of the gods (Shadowy Waters, Deirdre); the truth and wisdom of the spiritual life (The Hour Glass, Where There is Nothing) and poetry (The King's Threshold, The Player Queen); and finally, the mastery of his opposite, his "mask", his unconquerable self (Cuchulain cycle, The Player Queen). (One of the initiation rituals for Yeats's Celtic Mystical Order, the "sword initiation," is sub-titled "The Chase after the Ideal"; the candidate is warned of the Black, White, and Red Dogs which are illusions on the path as he follows "the Fawn to the Land of the Blessed." 1)

My deer and hound are properly related to the deer and hound that flicker in and out of the various tellings of the Arthurian legends, leading different knights upon adventures, and to the hounds and to the hornless deer at the beginning of, I think, all tellings of Oisin's journey to the country of the young.

Yeats explained in a note to his poem "He Mourns for the Change that has come upon him and his Beloved" (1897).

This hound and this deer seem plain images of the desire of the man 'which is for the woman,' and 'the desire of the woman which is for the desire of the man,' and of all the desires that are as these. I have read them in this way in The Wanderings of Oisin, and have made my lover sigh because he has seen in their faces "the immortal desire of Immortals." 2

The same vision "flickers in and out" of his own myth. Forgael, in an early draft of The Shadowy Waters, speaks of "the shadows...that are in the waters and the winds always/The shadows of unappeasable desire,/ A boy that follows upon flying feet/A girl that has an apple in her hand." 3 Similarly, the red hound running from a silver arrow

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1Moore, The Unicorn, 74-75.
3Unpublished MS. in National Library of Ireland, MS. 8762 (9). Cf. his description of a Hermetist's vision in "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1900), Essays and Introductions, 30.
in *Shadowy Waters* symbolizes, according to Ellmann, "the passionate Dectora fleeing the silver (and therefore lunar, idealizing) love of Forgael."\(^1\) The same picture of eternal, unappeasable desire is recalled by Yeats' description of Tir-rain-Oge in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* (1935).\(^2\) The blossoms Dectora imagines she sees over a steam symbolize "dawn and air and earth and resurrection";\(^3\) the apples of precious stones are "perhaps emotions made eternal by their own perfection."\(^4\)

In this long epic poem, too, we see a deliberate choice of form when compared with its "counter-truth,"\(^5\) *The Countess Cathleen*, published three years later. Yeats felt this choice worthy of comment in his 1892 Preface:

> The chief poem [The Countess Cathleen] is an attempt to mingle personal thought and feeling with the beliefs and customs of Christian Ireland; whereas the longest poem in my earlier book endeavoured to set forth the impress left on my imagination by the Pre-Christian cycle of legends. The Christian cycle being mainly concerned with contending mood and moral motives, I thought, a dramatic vehicle. The tumultuous and heroic Pagan cycle, on the other hand, having to do with vast and shadowy activities and with the great impersonal emotions, expressed itself naturally -- or so I imagined -- in epic and epic-lyric measures. No epic method seemed sufficiently minute and subtle for the one, and no dramatic method elastic and all-containing enough for the other.\(^6\)

Here at last we find Yeats coming to terms with the question of dramatic form and its necessity for the treatment of "contending mood and moral motives." From this point on we see him consciously formulating ideals

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3. Quoted from an occult diary dated 13 July 1899, Ellmann, op.cit., 83.
6. Preface to *The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (London: 1892). Cf. Note to *Deirdre*, *The Arrow* 1, 2 (November 1906), 2: "I have selected certain things which seem to be characteristic of the tale as well as in themselves dramatic, and I have separated these from much that needed an epic form or a more elaborate treatment."
and theories concerning the drama. And although he was to make many experiments within the dramatic convention before he satisfied those theories, his concept and demand of the dramatic form varied little.

Some of my friends, and it is always for a few friends one writes, do not understand why I have not been content with lyric writing. But one can only do what one wants to do, and to me drama -- and I think it has been the same with other writers -- has been the search for more of manifold energy, more of cheerful acceptance of whatever arises out of the logic of events, and for clean outline, instead of those outlines of lyric poetry that are blurred with desire and vague regret. All art is in the last analysis an endeavour to condense as out of the flying vapour of the world an image of human perfection, and for its own and not for the art's sake,¹

he wrote in 1906. Four years earlier, defending not his choice of form but his choice of subject, he had stated his position in similar terms:

Drama is a picture of the soul of man, and not of his exterior life.... Drama describes the adventures of men's souls among the thoughts that are most interesting to the dramatist, and therefore, probably most interesting to his time....We are interested in religion and in private morals and personal emotion, and so it is precisely out of the rushing journey of the soul through these things that Ibsen and Wagner got the tumult that is drama.²

And in 1904 he analysed his own dramatic method:

What attracts me to drama is that it is...what all the arts are upon a last analysis. A farce and a tragedy are alike in this that they are a moment of intense life. An action is taken out of all other actions; it is reduced to its simple form....The characters that are involved in it are freed from everything that is not a part of that action; and whether it is, as in the less important kinds of drama, a mere bodily activity...or as it is in the more important kinds, an activity of the souls of the characters, it is an energy, an eddy of life purified from everything but itself. The dramatist must picture life in action, with an unpreoccupied mind, as the musician pictures her in sound and the sculptor in form.³

³"First Principles," Samhain,1904,19. Cf.Report on a lecture on dramatic ideals by WBY,6 May 1899 preserved by W.A.Henderson, National Library of Ireland, MS 1729,11: "...The aim of the drama was action wedded to lovely and majestic words....Such a drama would not be dull, because there was no excitement so intense as spiritual excitement."
Except for one brief excursion with Lady Gregory into the "less important kind of drama" (The Pot of Broth, 1902), Yeats left the "popular" aspect of the theatre to others, and concentrated on the "activity of the souls of the characters," and more specifically, "the rushing journey of the soul" through religion, private morals, and personal emotion as he himself viewed them in conflict with the modern world. And as time went on, he discovered his own achievement of the ideal in the co-operation of both musician and sculptor to "picture life in action." ¹

Yeats's aesthetic theory, as we have so far traced it, was eminently relevant to the dramatic form. From Pater and Wilde he had learned the importance of style, and now he observed the relationship "between discipline and the theatrical sense": "Active virtue as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a current code is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask." ²
"A wise theatre" might, in fact, "make a training in strong and beautiful life the fashion, teaching before all else the heroic discipline of the looking-glass."³ As we have seen, in his personal life Yeats consciously strove for this discipline, "the wearing of a mask." Now he applied it to the theatre as well. "Life in itself is a war of forces," he advised Lady Gregory during a time of crisis.⁴ Might not art then, founded as it is upon personal vision, clarify and extend this discipline?⁵ "In the shaping of an agate, whether in the

¹ Cf. On the Boiler (Dublin: Cuala, 1938), 33-34: "Masterpieces, whether of the stage or study, excel in their action, their visibility."
² Autobiographies, 469, quoted in Mythologies, 334.
³ "Discoveries" (1907), Essays and Introductions, 270.
⁴ Unpublished letter dated 18 May 1905 in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. In a letter a few days later, he relates this to himself: "I am always so afraid of the sensitiveness, created by imaginative culture, making one overyielding that I perhaps push things the other way."
⁵ Samhain, 1905, 10.
cutting, or in the making of the design, one discovers...thoughts that seem important and principles that may be applied to life itself."1

"Perhaps one can explain in plays, where one has much more room than in songs and ballads, even those intricate thoughts, those elaborate emotions, that are one's self."2 And so we find the proud hero, no matter what his guise -- Seanchan, Cuchulain, Deirdre, Naisi, Conchubar or Congal -- actively striving with his own opposite and finally achieving success with the acceptance of his own defeat.3 Occasionally success itself is an activating quality; Dectora becomes queen, and the poet's creation in turn creates.4

The doctrine of the mask, therefore, the struggle of the self for the self, became one of the essential themes in Yeats's work. So, too, Yeats discovered that this theme bred another which was in


3 At one time Yeats contemplated a play about Judas, whose betrayal he saw as necessary to the fulfilment of Christ; letter to Lady Gregory, 14 January 1918, Letters, 645. Cf. his description of The Hunchback, Phase 26 of A Vision, 1937, 176-79. Richard Ellmann, in "The Art of Yeats: Affirmative Capability," The Kenyon Review XV, 3 (Summer 1953), 377-78, quotes from an essay, "Seven Propositions" which Yeats never published. Propositions IV and V read: "IV. The emotional character of a timeless and spaceless spirit reflects itself as its position in time, its intellectual character as its position in space. The position of a Spirit in space and time therefore defines character. V. Human life is either the struggle of a destiny against all other destinies, or a transformation of the character defined in the horoscope into timeless and spaceless existence." This theory closely approximates the principle of "synchronicity" as upheld by the I Ching philosophy of Ancient China.

4 This interpretation of the mask or opposite cuts across T.R. Henn's brief discussion of the central themes of the plays as he sees them, The Lonely Tower (London: Methuen, 1950), 259-60: the Cuchulain Legend, the tragedy of love, the soul and God, Ireland and the eighteenth century tradition. These are situations only, through which Yeats wove his own doctrine.
itself dramatic, "the war of spiritual with natural order." 1 "All progress is by contraries," Blake had said. Not only by overcoming one's self, then, but by overcoming one's opposite can one find truth. Paul Ruttledge battles against conventional society, which prevents the soaring of the personality, 2 and conventional religion, which forbids the laughter of the soul, 3 and comes at last to the truth that "where there is nothing, there is God." 4 The wise sceptic gains insight through the eyes of the fool: "One sinks in on God; we do not see the truth; God sees the truth in us." 5 Cuchulain's soul seeks its first, "soft, featherlyshape," freed by a blind man's desire for

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2 Where There is Nothing (London: Bullen, 1903), Act I, p. 3: "You see it is a beautiful comb: but the wings are very short. The poor creature can't fly." Blake's words were: "without contraries there is no progression."

3 Ibid., IV, p. 90: "I have learned that one needs a religion so wholly supernatural, that is so opposed to the order of nature that the world can never capture it."


5 The Hour Glass, prose version. Cf. "We perish into God and sink away/Into reality -- the rest's a dream," new version, Collected Plays (London: Macmillan, 1952), 322. In his preface to the new version, The Mask, V, 4 (April 1913), 327, Yeats states: "I took the plot of 'The Hour Glass' from an Irish Folk Tale but tried to put my own philosophy into the words." For similar treatments of the same theme see Padraic Colum's "The Foley's -- A Play in One Act," U.I., 10 May 1902, 3 (never acted at the Abbey), and Lady Gregory's The Travelling Man: A Miracle Play, in which Yeats had a hand.
twelve pennies: "And is not that a strange shape for the soul/Of a great fighting-man?" And Congal, "That wise, victorious, voluble, unlucky/Blasphemous, famous, infamous man," dies at the hands of a fool — himself. Perhaps, after all, the lost cause is the best cause.

The importance of style, the drama inherent in the doctrine of the mask lead inevitably as well to the dramatic value of the ritual and the symbolic significance of the actor in a theatre which is a temple to the soul of man. The actor becomes a symbol, a puppet, in fact, his speech and gestures carrying him and the audience to the world of the spirit evoked by the poet's words. A discussion of actor and ritual belongs to an examination of structure, but once again we are involved with Yeats's concept of the poet as a magus who through his imagination creates the myth by which characters and audience achieve spiritual truth. If the actor is in a sense his created image, then he is the master puppeteer, a combination of the arch-priest and the cultivated whole man. It is through the artist, who uses the world of reality as material for the spiritual world, that unity of being can

1 Collected Plays, 702.
2 Collected Plays, 676.
3 In the first edition of A Vision, 1925, 243, Yeats enlarges upon this doctrine: "The Ghostly Self... an emotion which becomes a supernatural contemplation. I so picture my own Deirdre and Naisi when at the spectacle of triumphant evil and the approach of death they sit and play chess, and I wrote my 'Hour Glass' to describe such contemplation.... In the one case natural love is brought to its greatest height, and in the other intellectual search, and both reduced to nothing that the soul may love what it hates, accepting at the same moment what must happen and its own being, for the Ghostly Self is that which is unique in man and in his fate."
4 See below, p. 307ff.
5 For Yeats, "unity of being" implied both spiritual perfection (in the theosophical-Cabbalistic sense) and worldly savoir-faire (in the Edwardian sense).
be achieved. He creates the dream, and, paradoxically, as Blake's "spiritual leader," can give that dream reality. As a dramatist, then, Yeats was in turn able to dramatize himself: the magician-poet-creator, his world the spiritual, his audience, which in turn provided material for his pen, Ireland. In an early draft of *The Player Queen* he gives this ambition of the artist-creator to his heroine:

**Player Queen:** Let me become all your dreams. I will make them walk about the world in solid bone and flesh. People looking at them will become all fire themselves and they will change, there will be a last judgment on their souls, a burning and dissolving. Perhaps the whole age may change, perhaps the whole age may learn. It is only by continual struggle, by continual violence, we force the gates of heaven, that no one is worthy of art, worthy of love whose [sic] not always like great kings and queens in soul and body like a runner, like a racer....

**Yellow Martin:** [the poet:] We shall become like Tom the Fiddler.

**Player Queen:** Yes, like Tom the Fiddler, that's what I want.¹

The Subject-Matter of Drama.

"Any knot of events, where there is passionate emotion and clash of will, can be made the subject matter of a play, and the less like a play it is at the first sight the better play may come of it in the end," Yeats advised playwrights who contemplated production at the Abbey Theatre.² One must choose the subject-matter and situations which suit one's own theme, "but those themes we share and inherit, so long

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¹ Unpublished MS. of *The Player Queen* (before 1915), National Library of Ireland, MS 8764. Cf. Ellmann's quotation from a somewhat later draft, *The Identity of Yeats*, 108-09: "Septimus told me once that no one finds their genius [until] they have found some rôle, some image, that gives them a pose towards life, that liberates something within them, that had else been deaf and numb. Only by images, he said, do we make the eternal life a part of our ephemeral life."

² Henderson collection, National Library of Ireland MS 1732, 259.
as they engage our emotions, come first."¹ The world Yeats chose was an intellectual as well as an emotional one (although "philosophy is a dangerous theme"),² balanced by the plays of his fellow-workers, Lady Gregory and Synge.

I write of the tragic stories told over the fire by people who are in the comedies of my friends, and I never see my work played with theirs that I do not feel that my tragedy heightens their comedy and tragi-comedy, and grows itself more moving and intelligible from being mixed into the circumstance of the world by the circumstantial art of comedy. Nor is it only the stories and the country mind that have made us one school, for we have talked over one another's work so many times, that when a play of mine comes into my memory I cannot always tell how much even of the radical structure I may not owe to the writer of 'The Lost Saint,' or of 'The Shadow of the Glen,' or more than all, to the writer of 'Hyacinth Halvey': or that I would have written at all in so heady a mood if I did not know that one or the other were at hand to throw a bushel of laughter into the common basket.³

But no matter how he might justify the laughing comedies of his friends, Yeats had himself in mind when in 1899 he wrote, "Our plays will be for the most part remote, spiritual, and ideal."⁴ Looking back over sufficient distance, Yeats tended to interpret his choice of subject in terms of the national situation in Ireland after the fall of Parnell: "Repelled by what had seemed the sole reality, we had turned to romantic dreaming, to the nobility of tradition."⁵ However, as we have seen, reaction to the political situation was only a small part of the myth he wished to express. "Great art, great poetical drama is the utmost of nobility and the utmost of reality comportable with it," he wrote in a diary in 1913. "The persons of a drama fall into two groups

¹Introduction (1937), Essays and Introductions, ix.
²Preface to The King of the Great Clock Tower (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1934).
³Preface to Poems: 1899-1905.
⁴"The Theatre," Essays and Introductions, 166.
⁵Introduction to Fighting the Waves (1934), Wheels and Butterflies, 71.
commonly: the group where nobility predominates and the group where reality predominates. If there is too much of the first, all become sentimental, too much of the second, all become sordid. Nobility struggles with reality, the eagle and the snake.\textsuperscript{1} Two years later he further developed this concept of the subject matter of drama, once more linking it with the theory of conflict between two worlds:

Now the art I long for is also a battle, but it takes place in the depths of the soul and one of the antagonists does not wear a shape known to the world or speak a mortal tongue. It is the struggle of the dream with the world -- it is only possible when we transcend circumstances and ourselves, and the greater the contest, the greater the art....But it is not only the mere speech that must be heightened, there must be whole phantasmasoria through which the lifelong contest finds expression. There must be fable, mythology, that the dream and the reality may face one another in visible array. Even when real life moves us deeply...we cease to be realists....Only the intellect...is content with what the eye sees and the intellect only wishes to understand....We can only become conscious of a thing by comparing it with its opposite. The two real things we have are our natures and the circumstances that surround us....It is a sudden sense of power and peace that comes when we have before our mind's eye a group of images which obeys us, which leaves us free, and which satisfies the needs of our soul. But we must believe in it and if we left out a single painful fact, we would be unable to believe in those images.\textsuperscript{2}

"There must be fable, mythology, that the dream and the reality may face one another in visible array." As we have seen, Yeats had already chosen Irish legend as the tapestry through which he could work his themes. "The old Irish poets wove life into life, thereby giving to the wildest and strangest romance the solidity and vitality of the Comédie Humaine, and all this romance was knitted into the scenery of the country," Yeats observed in a letter to Robert Bridges.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1}Unpublished MS. quoted by Ellmann, \textit{Identity of Yeats}, 316n106.

\textsuperscript{2}"The Poet and the Actress," unpublished dialogue (1915), quoted by Ellmann, \textit{op. cit.}, 105-06.

\textsuperscript{3}20 July 1901, \textit{Letters}, 353-54.
As early as 1897 he had a similar "long-cherished project -- a poetical version of the great Celtic epic tale, Deirdre, Cuchullin at the Ford, and Cuchullin's death, and Dermot and Grainne." When I was twenty-five or twenty-six I planned a Légende des Siècles of Ireland that was to set out with my Wanderings of Oisin, and show something of every century. But Yeats knew little or no Gaelic, and translations were rare. With the publication of Lady Gregory's folk histories, however, he felt that here was "the book of the people" he had been waiting for. And with the exception of The Unicorn from the Stars and The Player Queen, both fantastic, philosophical farces, Yeats drew his material from his own and Lady Gregory's research into Irish folklore and knowledge of the Irish peasant. The Countess Cathleen was suggested by Maud Gonne and based on a story Yeats included in his Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry in 1888; The Land of Heart's Desire was inspired by Maud Gonne and based on a story Yeats included in his Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry in 1888.

1 Letter to Fiona Macleod, op. cit., 280.
2 "Estrangement" (1909), Autobiographies, 493.
3 In a letter to the Editor of The Gael (NY), December 1899, Letters, 328, Yeats writes: "I have taken up Gaelic again, and though I shall never have entire mastery of it, I hope to be able to get some of the feeling of the language." He never did master it.

Yeats, Hyde and Lady Gregory wrote the first rough version of Where There is Nothing in a fortnight to prevent George Moore from stealing the plot, cf. postscript to "The Freedom of the Theatre," U.L., 1 November 1902. However, from a correspondence preserved in National Library of Ireland concerning the collaboration and production of Diarmuid and Grania, it would appear that Moore did have some justification for his claim, even though the original idea may have come from Yeats. In a letter dated July 3rd (probably 1901) from Ely Place (where he moved in March 1901), Moore sends Yeats a detailed scenario in five acts describing the astonishing activities of a professor who renounces the university (no doubt Trinity College) for the life of a tinker, writes verses and founds religions, spends some time in Paris, returns to marry "the dirtiest girl in the village," escapes once again to become a circus clown, eventually becomes a hermit in a ruined monastery and is killed by the rabble who have been roused against him by the priests for "reviving the ancient religions" of Eire, including Druidism. The action includes a carousal on porter, a scene which is found in both versions of the Yeats-Gregory play.

4 Yeats learned later that the story had its origin in a German legend. Cf. section on controversy, Part IV, ch. 9, p. 588.
was in part the result of a quarrel with Maud Gonne and based on his study of the Irish belief in faery. Cathleen ni Houlihan, written in 1902 for Maud Gonne to act, took as its subject "Ireland and its struggle for independence." "My play, 'The Land of Heart's Desire,' was, in a sense, the call of the heart, the heart seeking its own dream; this play [Cathleen ni Houlihan] is the call of country, and I have a plan of following it up with a little play about the call of religion," he explained in a newspaper interview. The Hour Glass, the third variation on the same theme, was once more based on Irish folklore, and the plot for The King's Threshold, although again expressing personal feeling ("It was written when our Society was having a hard fight for the recognition of pure art."), was based on a middle Irish story recorded by Lady Wilde and reprinted in his Irish Fairy and Folk Tales. All of the plays included in the Cuchulain cycle -- At The Hawk's Well, The Green Helmet, On Baile's Strand, The Only Jealousy of Emer, and The Death of Cuchulain -- are founded (with variations) on Lady Gregory's translations, as is the third Noh play, The Dreaming of the Bones. But by then Yeats had completed his own mythology, and A Vision took precedence as his source book.

1Ellmann, The Man and the Masks, 111.
2Cf. his Irish Fairy Tales (1892), and The Celtic Twilight (1893).
3United Irishman, 5 April, 1902, 5. Sarah Allgood, most famous "Kathleen," always believed that this play was Lady Gregory's work. Letter to the present writer from Mrs. Dorothy McAuliffe, 29 May 1961.
4I., loc. cit.
6Note to The King's Threshold, Poems 1899-1905, op. cit., 279-80.
The Poet and the Image.

Seek those images
That constitute the wild,
The lion and the virgin,
The harlot and the child.
("Those Images", 1938)

The image was central to Yeats's view of the artist and dramatist, for here artist-priest parted company from scholar-saint.

We live with images, that is our renunciation, for only the silent sage or saint can make himself into that perfection, turning the life inward at the tongue as though it heard the cry Secretum meum mihi; choosing not, as we do, to say all and know nothing, but to know all and to say nothing. Debarred from that final spiritual communion, it was only by images the artists could "make the eternal life a part of our ephemeral life." And in the creation of those images the poet achieved the "unity of being" peculiar to his art: "It is a sudden sense of power and peace that comes when we have before our mind's eye a group of images which obeys us, which leaves us free, and which satisfies the needs of our soul."3

As with the symbol and the myth, Yeats appears to have received his interpretation of the image through his studies of Blake, for it is in a review of Richard Garnett's William Blake in 1896 that we encounter his first full discussion of the subject:

"The word image," says "The Way of Christ," a compilation from Boehme and Law's interpretation of Boehme, published at Bath when Blake was eighteen, "meaneth not only a creaturely resemblance, in which sense man is said to be the Image of God; but it signifieth also a spiritual substance, a birth or effect of a will, wrought in and by a spiritual being or power. And imagination, which we are apt erroneously to consider an airy, idle, and impotent faculty of the human mind, dealing in fiction and roving in phantasy or idea without producing any powerful or permanent effects, is the magia or power of raising and forming such images or substances, and the greatest power in nature."4

1 Preface to Poems 1899-1905, xiii.
2 Unpublished MS. of The Player Queen, quoted by Ellmann, Identity of Yeats, 109.
3 "The Poet and the Actress," unpublished dialogue quoted by Ellmann, ibid., 105-106.
4 "William Blake," Bookman, April, 1896, 21. Ellmann in "The Art of Yeats: Affirmative Capability," Kenyon Review, 5:2 (Summer 1953), affirms the view of the image later developed by Yeats. It represents the object but does not, so with the superficial modifications induced.
If we recall his interpretation of Blake's definition of imagination ("'Vision or imagination' — meaning symbolism by these words — is a representation of what actually exists, really or unchangeably."), we discover that for Yeats, the "image" was the visualized, -- or, in his case, the dramatized-symbol. The dramatist chose his images from the vast storehouse of the past and from "the book of the people" he discovered about him:

I would, if I could, add to that great and complicated inheritance of images which written literature has substituted for the greater and more complex inheritance of spoken tradition, to that majestic heraldry of the poets some new heraldic images gathered from the lips of the common people.

And by "re-charging" them with his own imagination, they in turn take on a personal, more powerful meaning. "When I wrote these poems," he writes of The Wind Among the Reeds in 1909,

I had so meditated over the images that came to me..., and other images from Irish folk-lore, that they had become true symbols. I had sometimes when awake, but more often in sleep, moments of vision, a state very unlike dreaming, when these images took upon themselves what seemed an independent life and became a part of a mystic language, which seemed always as if it would bring me some strange revelation.

It is with these images in his mind, then, that the dramatist begins to create.

He has felt something in the depth of his mind and he wants to make it as visible and powerful to our senses as possible. He will use the most extravagant words or illustrations if they suit his purpose. Or he will invent a wild parable and the more his mind is on fire or the more creative it is, the less will he look at the outer world or value it for its own sake. It gives him metaphors and examples, and that is all.

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1 Introduction to A Book of Images, op. cit., 7.
2 A definition ratified by The Oxford English Dictionary: "a symbol, emblem, representation...a mental picture or impression; an idea, conception."
3 Preface to Countess Cathleen (1901), Collected Works, 1908, III, 212.
5 Has the Drama of Contemporary Life a Root of its Own?" (1907), Essays and Introductions, 276-77.
The more powerful the imagination, the more significant the image; the less "realistic" the material, the greater the art. "What is literature but the expression of moods by the vehicle of symbol and incident?" Furthermore, whatever is of reality should, in the work of art, be consumed in the interaction of these images. "We should not as a rule have to say things for their own sake in a play but for the sake of emotion. The idea should be inherent in the fable."2

"The greatest art symbolizes not those things that we have observed so much as those things we have experienced."3

In Christianity, what was philosophy in Eastern Asia became life, biography and drama. A play passes through the same process in being written. At first, if it has psychological depth, there is a bundle of ideas, something that can be stated in philosophical terms; my "Countess Cathleen" for instance was once the moral question, may a soul sacrifice itself for a good end? but gradually philosophy is eliminated until at last the only philosophy audible, if there is even that, is the mere expression of one character or another.4

The essence of drama for Yeats, therefore, is character in action, and that character is valuable not for its sake alone, but for the mood, emotion or idea of which it is an image.5 However, the dramatist must beware of the dangers of the modern commercial theatre, whose "personages do not transcend our common actions any more than our common speech,"6 for there "the central persons...had not characters of any kind, being vague ideals, perfection as it is imagined by a common-place mind."7 The aim of the dramatist should be "to rediscover

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1"A Teller of Tales"(1893),Celtic Twilight,1905,6-7; this passage is omitted from Mythologies.
2Letter to Brinsley MacNamara, 22 June 1919, Letters,657.
3Samhain,1905,11.
4"Estrangement" (1909), Autobiographies,468.
5Later he felt that one of the advantages of the Noh convention was the neglect of character, by which "they have made possible a hundred lovely intricacies." "Certain Noble Plays of Japan" (1916), Essays and Introductions,235.
6Samhain,1904,26.
7Samhain,1905,7.
an art of the theatre that shall be joyful, fantastic, extravagant, whimsical, beautiful, resonant, and altogether reckless," "a drama of energy, of extravagance, of fantasy, of musical and noble speech." And the characters that will produce such a drama of "strong, imaginative energy" must of necessity themselves be "excessive, extravagant, fantastic." "It is only by extravagance, by an emphasis far greater than that of life as we observe it, that we can crowd into a few minutes the knowledge of years." "I want to see the people shown up in their naked hideousness," a learned village shoemaker, Pat Dirane, once said to him, deploving the sentimentality of certain Irish novelists. And Yeats agreed.

Dramatic characters, therefore, as well as being true distillations of the artist's mind, should be deliberately divorced from the average man's idea of everyday reality. "Art delights in the exception, for it delights in the soul expressing itself according to its own laws and arranging the world about it in its own pattern." This might occasionally, as in Synge's case, require deliberate effort on the part of the audience.

Great art chills us at first by its coldness or its strangeness, by what seems capricious, and yet it is from these qualities it has authority...The imaginative writer shows us the world as a painter does his picture, reversed in a looking-glass, that we may see it...as if we were Adam and this the first morning.

Above all, the artist must have sincerity in his vision and freedom in his creation; only then will his images live. "When one creates a character one does it out of instinct," Yeats commented to Frank Fay.

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1 Samhain, 1904, 27-28.
2 "The Irish Literary Theatre, 1900," Beltaine, no. 2 (February 1900), 22.
3 Samhain, 1905, 11-12.
4 Samhain, 1905, 6.
5 Samhain, 1904, 26-27.
"It is as though the character embodied itself. The less one reasons the more living the character."\(^1\)

One might assume from his insistence on the "joyful, fantastic, extravagant, whimsical" qualities of drama that Yeats would be concerned mainly with developing an art of comedy that would satisfy his particular requirements as a dramatist. But it was only very slowly that Yeats learned to trust himself to the comic style, helped no doubt by his observations of the "new comedy" developed by Synge and Lady Gregory, as well as by his own increasing self-assurance.

However Yeats was demanding extravagance and fantasy long before The Playboy. And the comedy Yeats did finally develop differed both in treatment and technique from that of his colleagues. As we shall see, both Lady Gregory and Synge wrote in the stringent, bitter-sweet manner one usually associates with Jonson on the one hand and O'Casey on the other, sweeping from tenderness to cruelty with one flowing brush. However Yeats, reflecting a balanced world in a Hegelian mirror, could never accept the hazy "no-man's land" of tragi-comedy.\(^2\) "Tragedy must always be a drowning and breaking of the dykes that separate man from man, and...it is upon these dykes comedy keeps house."\(^3\) If Lady Gregory and Synge turned to the seventeenth century for their tradition, he by nature turned to the eighteenth, and at last found his justification in Congreve's definition of "humour" (which to Yeats was the foundation of comedy): "the singular and unavoidable way of doing

\(^1\)Letter to Frank Fay, January 1904, Letters, 425. Cf. Lady Gregory's comment concerning comedy, where the character "puts out little feet and takes his own way." Notes to New Comedies (London: Putnam's, 1913).

\(^2\)He could appreciate it, however, and in unpublished letters to Lady Gregory in Mrs. Yeats's possession, postmarked 18 and 22 May, 1905, he describes having seen The Silent Woman and The Knight of the Burning Pestle in London: "the most joyful, laughable, wonderful cup of youth"; "just such extravagant joyous comedy as we are trying to make."

\(^3\)"The Tragic Theatre" (1910), Essays and Introductions, 241.
anything peculiar to one man only, by which his speech and actions are distinguished from all other men."¹ For Yeats, comedy, being the antithesis of tragedy, as character is in opposition to personality,² could never sufficiently detach itself from the reality on which it fed³ to achieve the heroic ecstasy of tragedy.⁴ Or in terms of his doctrine of the mask:

Tragedy is passion alone, and rejecting character, it gets form from motives, from the wandering of passion; while comedy is the clash of character. Eliminate character from comedy and you get farce....Comedy is joyous because all assumption of a part, of a personal mask, whether of the individualised face of comedy or of the grotesque face of farce, is a display of energy, and all energy is joyous. A poet creates tragedy from his own soul, that soul which is alike in all men. It has not joy, as we understand that word, but ecstasy, which is from the contemplation of things vaster than the individual and imperfectly seen, perhaps, by all those that still live. The masks of tragedy contain neither character nor personal energy.... and I think the motives of tragedy are not related to action but to changes of state.⁵

"To express character, which has a great deal of circumstance, of habit, you require a real environment; some one place, some one moment of time; but in tragedy, which comes from that within us which dissolves away limits, there is need for surroundings where beauty, decoration, pattern -- that is to say, the universal in form -- takes the place of accidental circumstance."⁶ It was perhaps this consciousness of "place" or situation in comedy which first made Yeats distrust the

¹Ibid. The same definition is quoted by Yeats in an address delivered before the Dramatic Club of Harvard University the following year, "The Theatre of Beauty," Harper's Weekly, 11 November 1911, 11.


³"Character can only express itself perfectly in a real world," "The Tragic Theatre," op. cit., 243.

⁴"For comedy is passionless," "A People's Theatre," Plays and Controversies, op. cit., 206.

⁵"Estrangement" (1909), Autobiographies, 470-71. Cf. Preface to Plays for an Irish Theatre (London: Bullen, 1913), viii, a revised version of the same essay.

comic form; clarity of situation would, he felt, detract from the heroic moment when "nobility struggles with reality, the eagle and the snake." It was this fear of indignity which had made him distrust the art of Aubrey Beardsley many years earlier: "I see his art with more understanding now than when he lived, for in 1895 or 1896 I was in despair at the new breath of comedy that had begun to wither the beauty that I loved, just when that beauty seemed to have united itself to mystery." Heroic man was more important than action, for with action itself came the danger of indignity, the sharp flash not of insight but of spectacle. Furthermore, the comic situation demanded more detail, a conscious effort on the dramatist's part to "block in" the characters according to their type, thereby detracting from their power and value as images of the creator's imagination.

It might be said that Yeats simply did not have "comic vision." Life to him was serious business, and although he certainly was not lacking in humour, that was a quality to be consumed, rather than preserved, in his art. The comic element was, in fact, a part of style, and as such a conscious effort:

The style is in the arrangement of events as in the words, in that touch of extravagance, of irony, of surprise, which is set there after the desire of logic has been satisfied and all that is merely necessary established, and leaves one, not in the circling necessity, but caught up into the freedom of self-delight.... If it be very conscious, very deliberate, as it may be in comedy, for comedy is more personal than tragedy, we call it fantasy, perhaps even mischievous fantasy, recognizing how disturbing it is to all that drag a ball at the ankle.

1From an unpublished notebook, quoted by Ellmann, Identity of Yeats, 316n106. Cf. above, p.250.
2Autobiographies,333. Cf. letter 3 April 1902,Letters,368, to Lady Gregory concerning his efforts to eliminate the "wild humour" of the opening of Cathleen ni Houlihan, a contrast Synge or O'Casey would have deliberately employed.
3Samhain,1904,23.
4In her autobiography, Life and the Dream(NY: Doubleday,1947),423, Mary Colum writes, "He was not averse to a little gossip, and his humor could be very penetrating. I never saw any wit in him but he had that different thing, humor."
5"Poetry and Patriotism"(1907), Poetry and Ireland: Essays by W.B. Yeats and Lionel Johnson(Dundrum:Cuala Press,1908),11.
Style and comedy require thought; "passion and not thought makes tragedy." Comedy sharpens the intellect, tragedy reveals the soul: Tragic art, passionate art, the drowner of dykes, the confounder of understanding, moves us by setting us to reverie, by alluring us almost to the intensity of trance. The persons upon the stage... greaten till they are humanity itself. We feel our minds expand convulsively or spread out slowly like some moon-brightened image-crowded sea. Comedy belongs to the cloudless light of day, and as soon vanishes. Tragedy "lifts us into a world of knowledge and beauty and serenity... Melodrama can make us weep more; farce can make us laugh more; but when the curtain has fallen, they leave nothing behind. They bring us nothing, because they demand nothing from us." Yet Yeats did write comedies. He could in all conscience abandon himself to the farce and was sufficiently satisfied with "that trivial, unambitious retelling of an old folk-tale," to include it among his Collected Works. But The Pot of Broth was an occasional play, written for Fay's company, produced in music hall style complete with "gags", and not considered important enough for revision. "Farce is comedy with character left out," and Yeats

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1 Note to The Player Queen, Plays in Prose and Verse (London: Macmillan, 1922), 429.
2 "The Tragic Theatre" (1910), Essays and Introductions, 245.
4 Autobiographies, 452.
5 In a letter to Bullen’s secretary concerning the projected Collected works, 14 September 1907, Letters, 492, Yeats was inclined to drop the play, but changed his mind.
6 Cf. letter to Lady Gregory concerning the London performance, 4 May 1903, Letters, 400. A property list included in W.G. Fay’s prompt copy (now in the possession of the National Library of Ireland, MS 10, 955), lists the usual stage properties for conventional "Irish" farces. A photograph of the New York Irish Literary Society’s production in 1903 bears this out, The Gael (NY) September, 1903, 51. However, "Cuguan" [Arthur Griffith], editor of U.I., 8 November 1902, hailed The Pot of Broth as "the first Irish piece which is not a caricature," and the play is still popular.
7 The Pot of Broth is the only play Yeats never revised.
emphasised this attitude by altering the original title, *The Beggarman*. Again, his early collaborations, *Diarmuid and Fionia* and *Where There is Nothing* have comic elements which, deliberately or not, border upon farce. But in both cases the wayward pull of opposing attitudes is recognisable.

Although in no other sense a comedy, the first version of *The King's Threshold* had the traditional ending of comedy, with the poet winning through in both worlds. Yeats tried to rationalize the compromise between his inclination and his attitude towards stage requirements in a prologue written for the first production:

**Old Man:** First, he who told the story of Seanchan on King Guaire's threshold long ago in the old books told it wrongly, for he was a friend of the king, or maybe afraid of the king, and so he put the king in the right. But he that tells the story now, being a poet, has put the poet in the right.

And then...Some think it would be a finer tale if Seanchan had died at the end of it, and the king had the guilt at his door, for that might have served the poet's cause better in the end. But that is not true, for if he that is in the story but a shadow and an image of poetry had not risen up from the death that threatened him, the ending would not have been true and joyful enough to be put into the voices of players and proclaimed in the mouths of trumpets, and poetry would have been badly served.2

However, the play "remained always of the nature of tragedy and so subject to vicissitude"3; later he revised the play and gave it the ending it demanded:

1 Letter to Frank Fay, 7 September 1902, Letters, 377.

2 "A Prologue: written for the first production of "The King's Threshold" in Dublin, but not used, as, owing to the smallness of the company, nobody could be spared to speak it." The King's Threshold and On Baile's Strand: Being Volume Three of Plays for an Irish Theatre (London: Bullen, 1904), 5-9. See Appendix B.

3 "Note on the New End to The King's Threshold," Seven Poems and a Fragment (Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1922), 24.
I have given the play the tragic end I would have given it at the first, had not a friend advised me to "write comedy and have a few happy moments in the theatre." My friend meant that tragic emotion, depending as it does upon gradually deepening reverie, is so fragile, that it is shattered by a wrong movement or cadence, or even by a light in the wrong place. 

So Seanchan the poet at last regained the "tragic joy" of his death.

Gradually Yeats did learn to "work into" comedy, but always creating the comic situation deliberately and as a support to a serious theme. One function of the Fool and the Blind Man in On Baile's Strand is to provide a comic framework to the tragic action of Cuchulain, heightening by contrast the "pure aimless joy"2 evoked by the hero's fight with "the ungovernable sea." Comedy here is a device to glorify the tragic hero. Yet, still following his particular scheme of dramatic logic, Yeats makes the comedy ironical by using the folk characters as foils to Cuchulain and Conchubar: passion and strength (the champion and the fool) are governed by power and cunning (the king and the blind man); both champion and fool are mentally "blind" as the beggar is physically blind (Cuchulain fails to recognize his own son; the Fool does not discover that the fowl has been eaten); both king and fool are supernaturally acute (Conchubar traffics with the Druids; the fool is teased by the voices of Faery); both champion and blind man are bound by their own limitations to their appointed leaders, whom in turn they govern through their own passions (the king is forced to put his unruly subject under double oath; the Blind Man

1Note to The King's Threshold, Plays in Prose and Verse, 1922, 423-24. It is probably to this play Yeats is referring in his letter to John Quinn, 15 May 1903, Letters, 403-04: "I have not sent you the last play for the little book of short plays because I cannot make up my mind about it. I started it on one plan and re-wrote it on quite a different one, and I have got so confused about it that I shall not be able to judge it for a few weeks, I suspect."

2On the Boiler, 35. Cf 276-277 below.
must keep the Fool in awe of his mental agility).  

The subtitle to The Green Helmet: An Heroic Farce is itself an indication of Yeats's changing attitude towards comedy as a vehicle for his images. Farce he had defined as "comedy with character left out," by "character" meaning the personal characteristics by which one judges a type, "the shape of the vessel" by which a man's "speech and actions are distinguished from all other men." In this play he successfully combines that exuberance which is necessary to great art with his own personal image of the hero," one of those that God has made reckless."  

Here the heroic figure gains strength by acting as mediator, and retains his proud and lonely stature by being alone willing to bear the consequences of his race. He takes upon himself the roles of both governor and champion: "He played and paid with his head, and it's right that we pay him back, And give him more than he gave, for he comes in here as a guest." The Hero will defend his honour against threat of death, public betrayal, and loneliness.

The Golden Helmet was first published in 1908, the year following The Playboy riots in which Yeats was battling for his dream against both friends and the public. It is not perhaps too fanciful, then, to see in the endurance and pride of Cuchulain the qualities demanded of Yeats during his prolonged battle with "this Proteus/That turns and changes like his draughty seas." And, like Cuchulain, Yeats felt himself responsible for the shortcomings of Paudeen. The second,

1For further discussion of the significance of the fool and blind man images, see below, p.268ff.
3"The Tragic Theatre" (1910), Essays and Introductions, 241.
4The Golden Helmet, first prose version, Collected Works, 1908, IV.
7See: "To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if It were Proved the People Wanted Pictures" (1912), Collected Poems, 119-20; "Paudeen" (1914), ibid., 122; "On Those That Hated 'The Playboy of the Western World; 1907" (1911) ibid., 124.
poetic version of the play, published two years later, is less topical, more symbolic. (This expansion into the more conventional myth might also have been responsible for the alteration of title; Yeats was no doubt aware of the similarities between the Irish myth as told by Lady Gregory in her Cuchulain of Muirthemne and Sir Gawain's encounter with the green knight). But the Red Man's final exchange with Cuchulain in the earlier version refers directly to the "excessive individualism" which prevents any successful union between Irishmen:

Red Man: If my debt is not paid, no peace shall come to Ireland, and Ireland shall lie weak before her enemies. But if my debt is paid there shall be peace.

Cuchulain: The quarrels of Ireland shall end....

Red Man: I will not harm you, Cuchulain. I am the guardian of this land, and age after age I come up out of the sea to try the men of Ireland. I give you the championship because you are without fear, and you shall win many battles with laughing lips and endure wounding and betrayal without bitterness of heart, and when men gaze upon you, their hearts shall grow greater and their minds clear; until the day come when I darken your mind, that there may be an end to the story, and a song on the harp-string.

The irony of On Baile's Strand has strengthened into satire. Stirred to action by the nation he was striving to help, he replied, as he had five years earlier in The King's Threshold, with his most powerful weapon -- his art.

Somewhat surprised, Yeats discovered himself a comic dramatist. In 1909 he wrote to his father, "I find that my talent as a stage manager is in the invention of comic business, in fact I am coming to the conclusion that I am really essentially a writer of comedy, but very personal comedy. Wilde wrote in his last book, 'I have made drama as personal as a lyric,' and I think, whether he has done so or not, that it is the only possible task now."^1 And looking back a dozen years

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later, he still felt *The Green Helmet* a satisfactory play: "[It] gives an animated gay objective stage not too far from the mood of the world and could be made a very phantastic picture."¹ In a theatrical sense, he had at last achieved his ideal image:

An exciting person, whether the hero of a play or the maker of poems, will display the greatest volume of personal energy, and this energy must seem to come out of the body as out of the mind....I even doubt if any play had ever a great popularity that did not use, or seem to use, the bodily energies of its principal actor to the full.²

Yeats's last "comedy," *The Player Queen*, has perhaps the longest history of all his plays. Grateful for her fine performance in his *Deirdre*, he began work on another tragedy, "a strange little play about the capture of a blind Unicorn,"³ intending to offer it to Mrs. Patrick Campbell for production. But as his philosophy of the mask developed in his mind, so, too, the concept of the play altered, and "abstractions...substituted themselves for the play [he] had planned."⁴

I began in, I think, 1907, a verse tragedy, but at that time the thought I have set forth in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* was coming into my head, and I found examples of it everywhere. I wasted the best working months of several years in an attempt to write a poetical play where every character became an example of the finding or not finding of what I have called the Antithetical Self; and because passion and not thought makes tragedy, what I made had neither simplicity nor life. I knew precisely what was wrong and yet could neither escape from thought nor give up my play.⁵

¹Letter to Allan Wade, 18 October 1921, *Letters*, 674.
²"Personality and the Intellectual Essences" (1907), *Essays and Introductions*, 266.
⁴Dedication to *A Vision*, 1925, xii. Cf. Wilde, *De Profundis*, 111: "Those who want a mask must wear it."
⁵Note to *The Player Queen* (London: Macmillan, 1922), 59.
Still struggling to force his material into his own definition of tragedy, "passion defined by motives," he worked and re-worked his theme, "that the world being illusion, one must be deluded in some way if one is to triumph in it." But he could not escape from his own allegory until Ezra Pound suggested he "mock in a comedy [his] own thought." What he had meant for tragedy became instead "a wild comedy, almost a farce, with a tragic background — a study of a fantastic woman."

Besides his basic theme that "a man always tried to become his opposite, to become what he would abhor if he did not desire it," Yeats included his own observations on the role of the actor. In an early unpublished draft of Act II the palace servants, waiting for the play to begin, discuss the joys and hazards of the actor's life, these people who, like "mortar that never hardens," take on many shapes in a lifetime. We shall see that Yeats in his ideas of acting closely followed Gordon Craig's concept of the actor as an "über-marionette." The player-puppet, obedient to the whims of the poet-juggler, symbolizes the images in the poet's mind. Sufficiently divorced from reality by the protective masks of the parts in which they are cast, they live only in his words. They are, in fact, the "bridge" between reality and the dream. An old servant quotes "Aristotle of the books or another": "to know your own true shape that's what a wise man has to do and what he's here to do and when he's found it he's free of the Court." Free, that is, of reality. "If you would have obedience," the Chancellor

1 Letter to Lady Gregory, probably 1909, Our Irish Theatre, 106.
2 Letter to J.B. Yeats, 7 August 1909, Letters, 534.
4 "Anima Hominis" (1917), Mythologies, 333-34.
5 Letter to J.B. Yeats, 12 September 1914, Letters, 588.
6 Introduction to The Resurrection, Wheels and Butterflies, 103.
7 National Library of Ireland MS 8764(1).
advises the Queen, "you must seem to be all the greatness your people
dream of being and have not might of soul to be, all that their
shivering heart denies them."¹

"The Player Queen is the only work of mine, not mere personal
expression, written during these last twenty years, which is not
avowedly Irish in its subject matter being all transacted in some
No-Man's Land."² (An early draft sets the play in "the country of
Surrico" with a "suggestion of a Spanish street in the architecture
but nothing very definite." ) Looking back, Yeats explains this as
one more debt to Gordon Craig, who designed a set of screens for the
Abbey Theatre in 1910. "If it is gayer than my wont it is that I
tried to find words and events that would seem well placed under a
beam of light reflected from the ivory-coloured surface of the screens,"³
"where every line must suggest some mathematical proportion, where
all is phantastic, incredible, and luminous."⁴ So, too, he claims,
the players have no nationality, in keeping with the fantasy of the
architecture.

Instead the players and the scene are perhaps Yeats's most
successful attempt to symbolize the images of his mind on the stage.
In some cases we can trace the actual development of the image: a note
in 1899 describes an old man of Sligo who "used to fall down in a fit
and rave out descriptions of the Battle of the Valley of the Black Pig⁵;

¹Early unpublished draft of Act I, scene ii, ibid.
²Preface to Plays in Prose and Verse, 1922,vi-vii.
³Ibid.
⁴Note to The Player Queen, 1922,59. A contemporary review suggests
that the Abbey production bears these aims out, the costumes being "more
elaborate than usual for the Abbey Theatre -- might suggest anything from
a mediaeval masquerade to a modern lunatic asylum." Irish Times, 10
December 1919,6.
⁵Note to "The Valley of the Black Pig," Wind Among the Reeds,1899.
in an early draft of the play "Rat-hole," the "ghost-ridden man," falls into a trance and the voice of the Queen's dead father speaks through him; in the final version a depersonalized Old Beggar brays and rolls on straw when "the crown changes." From this one example we can see Yeats's philosophy developing from a direct use of Irish legend to the incorporation of all legend in his own personal myth of the growth of a new age out of the old. In *The Player Queen* the new age will arise out of the coupling of the harlot player queen with the hitherto chaste unicorn. (In Golden Dawn symbolism the unicorn was the soul, hence "the Unicorn from the Stars" is the godhead; "The Adoration of the Magi" describes a new age arising from the birth of a unicorn by a harlot-priestess).

**The Wise Fool and the Image-Maker**

And when the Fool and Blind man stole the bread  
Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea;  
Heart-mysteries there, and yet when all is said  
It was the dream itself enchanted me.  

("The Circus Animals' Desertion," 1939)

Throughout these plays, from *The Shadowy Waters* in 1900 to *The Player Queen* in 1919, two images are constant, the "wise fool" and the "image-maker"; and, dancing in the shadows behind them, that greatest of all image-makers, creative imagination, which embodies both the wisdom of the "natural" man and the control of the poet-creator. By tracing these images, we can in turn observe Yeats's developing technique as a craftsman as he experiments with a form which will satisfactorily express his philosophy of the theatre.

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4. One might perhaps compare Yeats's device of transferring image/characters from one play to another with Shaw's and Ibsen's.
The "wise fool" could be either an heroic or a folk character, but both forms have their origin in Irish tradition. In some cases, indeed, the one learns from the other, and is his mask or reversed reflection. This is true of Cuchulain, the reckless, solitary man who acts before thought and whose pride is his heroic virtue as well as the "tragic flaw" which brings about his downfall. The hero places duty above all else, and his strength is most clearly seen in his pursuit of some abstract quality such as love. Thus, in an early draft of Deirdre, Yeats notes, "Naisi is heroic endurance in love's pursuit and he looks to his endurance rather than to love and the respect of men. Deirdre is love."

When Conchubar's treachery is at last evident, Naisi is grief-stricken at this betrayal of the pledge of the Warriors of the Red Branch and seeks revenge, not against himself, but against the treachery to the heroic values for which he stands. So, too, his self-control and endurance in the chess scene (for Yeats "the central scene of the play") represent his heroic qualities at their finest. Cuchulain in The Green Helmet refuses to lower himself to the threat of ridicule, and Congal, in The Herne's Egg, exults in his triumph over the god by taking his own life, "at my own will, not yours," thereby ennobling Tom Fool's farcical weapons, the kitchen spit and the cauldron lid. And in his last play, Cuchulain binds

1National Library of Ireland MS. 8760(3).
2In an early draft Naisi rushes out after Conchubar shrieking "Beast! Beast!"
3Yeats is here once again "mocking his own philosophy" by suggesting not merely the Red Man's helmet of discord but the four symbols of the Castle of Heroes, the cauldron, the stone, the spear and the sword.
4Early draft, op. cit.- Cf. Naisi's speech to Deirdre, Collected Plays, 189-90:
And I would have you die as a queen should --
In a death-chamber. You are in my charge.
What need have I, that gave up all for love,
To die like an old king out of a fable,
Fighting and passionate? What need is there
For all that ostentation at my setting?
I have loved truly and betrayed no man.
I need no lightning at the end, no beating
In a vain fury at the cage's door.
himself to a pillar-stone that he might face death on his feet.\(^1\)

Pride however is not restricted to the warrior. The Wise Man of The Hour Glass sets intellectual pride above spiritual humility; Seanchan the poet demands first place at the King's table; Paul Rutledge contemptuously models his hedge according to the "breeders of fools" surrounding him; the drunken Septimus glories in his player-playwright craft. (Has he not played before Kubla Khan?) Like Naisi, Cuchulain, and Congal, out of their pride they have created their own image. And it is this pride that places them in the power of the fool, makes them, in fact, fools themselves. The Wise Man must learn what Teigue the Fool knows instinctively; Cuchulain must submit to the Blind Man; Naisi is trapped in a net "like a bird or a fish"\(^2\); Congal must meet his death at the hands of a fool by the Great Herne's decree and is re-born a donkey; Martin Aherne (Paul Rutledge) is shot by a stray bullet when his tinker-apostle (who follows him in mistake for someone else) struggles to protect him.\(^3\)

The "fictitious traditional Fool" is perhaps the most interesting of all Yeats's images, and is certainly the most persistent. Like the proud hero, he, too, plays many roles. A jester walked in the garden of Yeats's dreams in the early 1890's and wins his love by the offertory not of his heart and soul, but of his cap and bells.\(^4\) (Although the meaning of "The Cap and Bells" varied from time to time, it always meant a great deal to Yeats).\(^5\) "The fool of the woods" gives Porgael the "harp of Aengus" in the 1900 Shadowy Waters. The 1903 version reminds us that, life-ridden, "at the end of all/We have been no better

\(^1\)The Death of Cuchulain, Collected Plays,699.
\(^2\)Deirdre, Collected Plays,194.
\(^3\)The Unicorn from the Stars, ibid.,382.
\(^4\)"The Cap and Bells"(1894), Collected Poems,71-73.
Teigue of The Hour Glass and the Fool of On Baile's Strand are more at home with the creatures of the other world than with those of this world. The Red Jester of The Green Helmet comes from the gods of the sea to demand his debt. In "The Hour Before Dawn" (1914) "a cursing rogue with a merry face" flees from "a great lad with a beery face" who awaits the "nothing that is God" in drunken stupor. The same year a beggar-fool runs to paradise. Five years later a fool prays to God that He ease his "great responsibilities," and holds prisoner in his hands the "great purple butterfly" that "once-lived a schoolmaster/With a stark, denying look. In 1922 the Fool by the Roadside comments on the Girl and the Hero, and the "all-destroying sword-blade" is "carried by the wandering fool." And ten years later Crazy Jane, the heroine of Words for Music Perhaps, sings of her wise folly in company with "old Tom the lunatic." Congal then battles with Tom Fool, and Cuchulain loses his head to the Blind Man who "stood between A Fool and the Sea at Baile's Strand" when he went mad. (It is perhaps significant that Lady Gregory's play, The Jester appeared in 1918, her "Cracked Mary" and the "innocent" Davideen in 1910).
Traditionally the figure of the fool represents nobility, order and freedom, for the fool held a special position in the king's household, where his cap and bells granted him special immunity and privileges of speech. The Fool and the Blind Man belong to Cuchulain's retinue; he acts as mediator and final judge in their quarrels; yet at the same time they are not answerable to him for their tricks and thefts. But the Fool as Yeats saw him belongs to a far older tradition still, "the fool of faery." The Fool of The Hour Glass has the faery's touch and protection, and Forgael's "fool of the woods" is identified by Yeats as "the fool of the Rath, the fairy fool of modern Irish folklore, from whose touch no man recovers -- the divine fool." Writing of the Fool of The Hour Glass and On Baile's Strand, Yeats says, "The Fool in both plays is perhaps the Fat Fool of Folk-lore, who is 'as wide and wild as a hill' and not the Thin Fool of modern romance." And to identify their relationship further, he commissioned Gordon Craig to design a mask which could be used in both plays and which makes him seem less a human being than a principle of mind.

But Yeats had encountered the "fool of Faery" much earlier, when he was collecting stories of "Them" for his Celtic Twilight:

I have heard one Hearne, a witch-doctor {one who has knowledge of the Faery and may even have had "the touch"}, who is on the border of Clare and Galway, say that in "every household" of Faery "there is a queen and a fool," and that if you are "touched" by either you never recover, though you may from the touch of any other in Faery. He said of the fool that he was "maybe the wisest of all," and spoke of him as dressed like one of "the mummers that used to be going about the country."

1 Peter Ure in Towards a Mythology (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), 102, points out that Gerald Heard, whose writings Yeats knew, has argued that the Fool type "shares the awful distinction of the Delphic prophétesse: both are antennae of a submerged consciousness, valued by a highly ordered society precisely because it has lost the knowledge of that consciousness."

2 Quoted by Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, op. cit., 82.

3 Notes to Plays in Prose and Verse, 1922, 424.

4 See illustration of Fool's costume, page 2, reproduced by courtesy of Mr. Edward Gordon Craig. Notes to Plays in Prose and Verse, 1922, 422.
Obviously, then, in fairy tradition as well, the fool occupies a privileged position in the court. Later in the same essay Yeats re-tells the story of a boy who was co-opted by a troop of faery to battle against another troop and won:

But about three years after that he was cutting bushes in a wood and he saw the Amadan\(^1\) coming at him. He had a big vessel in his arms, and it was shining, so that the boy could see nothing else; but he put it behind his back then and came running, and the boy said he looked wild and wide, like the side of the hill. And the boy ran, and he threw the vessel after him, and it broke with a great noise, and whatever came out of it, his head was gone there and then. He lived for a while after, and used to tell us many things, but his wits were gone.

It is to the race of this fool, with his "shining vessel of some enchantment or wisdom or dream: too powerful for mortal brains" that Yeats's fools belong.\(^2\) In a distinction between the two types of symbolism in poetry, Yeats considers "the fool of Faery with his shining cup full of dreams" an intellectual rather than an emotional symbol.\(^3\) Writing of his "king of men" in The Trembling of the Veil, he describes a portrait of William Morris by Watts:

Its grave wide-open eyes, like the eyes of some dreaming beast, remind me of the open eyes of Titian's Ariosto, while the broad vigorous body suggests a mind that has no need of the intellect to remain sane, though it give itself to every fantasy: the dreamer of the Middle Ages. It is "the fool of Faery...wide and wild as a hill," the resolute European image that yet half remembers Buddha's motionless meditation, and has no trait in common with the wavering, lean image of hungry speculation, that cannot but because of certain famous Hamlets of our stage fill the mind's eye.\(^4\)

\(^1\)The Amadán-na-Breacna, or fool of the fort. It is this expression which gives rise to the Anglo-Irish "omadhaun" or foolish character.

\(^2\)"The Queen and the Fool" (1901), Mythologies, 112-16.

\(^3\)"The Symbolism of Poetry" (1900), Essays and Introductions, 162.

\(^4\)Autobiographies, 141-42.
And in *A Vision* the fool occupies phase twenty-eight, "natural man" who is next to the phase of complete objectivity, "primary man."

He is but a straw blown by the wind, with no mind but the wind and no act but a nameless drifting and turning, and is sometimes called 'the Child of God'. At his worst his hands and feet and eyes, his will and his feelings, obey obscure subconscious fantasies, while at his best he would know all wisdom if he could know anything...his thoughts are an aimless reverie; his acts are aimless like his thoughts; and it is in this aimlessness that he finds his joy.¹

Teigue the Fool retains the "foolishness" of communion with the angels, while the Wise Man attempts to overthrow the three worlds of the unlearned with the seven sciences of the learned.² And to Teigue is granted the vision of the Wise Man's soul in the clasped hands of the Angel from Paradise. "Fools may get...glimpses of much that sanctity finds at the end of its painful journey."³

Yeats drew upon the tradition of the half-crazed wit, as well, for his image of the fool, and perhaps here he comes closest to the vision of Lady Gregory and Synge. He had early learned to incorporate in his plays his experiences with the country folk about him, and a note to *The Pot of Broth* reads:

The words and the air of "There's Broth in the Pot" were taken down from an old woman known as Cracked Mary, who wanders about the plain of Aichne, and who sometimes sees unearthly riders on white horses coming through stony fields to her hovel door in the night time.⁴

This is perhaps the same "Cracked Mary" on which Lady Gregory bases her play *The Full Moon* (1910). He had been intrigued by the character

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¹ *A Vision*, 1937, 181-82.


"Peg Inerny" in Martyn's Maeve, "the curious witch, who was beggar woman by day and a Queen of Fairy by night," and who "typified Ireland." Crazy Jane is more or less founded upon an old woman who lives in a little cottage near Gort. She loves her flower-garden -- she has just sent Lady Gregory some flowers in spite of the season -- and has an amazing power of audacious speech. One of her great performances is a description of how the meanness of a Gort shop-keeper's wife over the price of a glass of porter made her so despair of the human race that she got drunk. The incidents of that drunkenness are of an epic magnitude. She is the local satirist and a really terrible one.

One recalls the great powers of the Irish poets who could kill a man by the strength of their satires.

But Teigue's vision of Heaven is qualified by the pre-Christian Heaven of Tir-na-nOg. In an early correspondence with AE, Yeats conjectured that the fool was associated with Aengus, the god of lovers, either his messenger or "some lower manifestation of him." Hence "the wood" which shelters Forgael's fool would symbolize the union of the lovers. Aengus Og, the old Irish god of love, poetry and ecstasy, is associated with the symbols of the harp and white birds. The harp was made by his love Etaine from strands of his golden hair; the birds were four of his kisses transformed. It is the ambition of Aengus Og to lure all lovers to Tir-na-nOg, the Land of Eternal Youth, where their love may remain fresh and undimmed forever. This image of the white bird symbolizing ideal love can be traced through much of Yeats's poetry, and the bird itself has great significance to Yeats. Just as the fool represents the closest man can arrive at complete

2 23 November 1931, Letters, 785-86.
3 Ellmann, Identity of Yeats, 62.
4 Ibid.
5 For example "The White Birds," Collected Poems, 46-47. Wilson in W.B. Yeats and Tradition, 173, observes that the white bird is a symbol for the purified soul in Egyptian theurgy, in Platonism, and in Kabbalism, as well as in Irish folklore.
objectivity on the Wheel of Life, so "certain birds, especially...

such lonely birds as the heron, hawk, eagle, and swan, are the natural symbols of subjectivity."¹ (Cuchulain's symbol was the eagle: "my soul's first shape, a soft feathery shape."²) Forgael sees grey birds flying, the souls of those killed; and in an early unpublished draft to The Shadowy Waters, the Seabar (called Fomór in a later draft), "aquiline people," grey-robed creatures with eagle heads, demand sacrifices of him.³ In the Byzantium poems, the bird has become golden, a symbol for objective creative art, in opposition to the living birds of subjectivity. (Perhaps here Byzantium is the artist's rather than the lover's Tir-na-Ögê). The image of the harp symbolizes the jester-fool's association with poetry as well as love; Aengus Ög is god of both.

A storm-beaten old watch-tower,
A blind hermit rings the hour.

All-destroying sword-blade still
Carried by the wandering fool.

Gold-sewn silk on the sword-blade,
Beauty and fool together laid.

("Symbols", 1922)

Linking fool of faery with the proud hero is the image of the Blind Man, who shares the Fool's sins in On Baile's Strand⁴ and later, like Tom Fool, carries off the prize of the hero's head. In one sense

¹ "Note on Calvary," Plays and Controversies, 459.
² Death of Cuchulain, Collected Plays, 702.
³ National Library of Ireland MS 8762(9). In his Autobiographies, 73-74, Yeats describes how as a boy he rose before dawn to hear the sea-birds, for the poem that years later became The Shadowy Waters. For an interesting comparison and contrast, see the optional prologue spoken by hawk-headed Ra, Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra (1912).

⁴ In a note to On Baile's Strand, Poems 1899-1905, 1906, 278, Yeats comments, "The present play is a kind of cross-road where too many interests meet and jostle for the hearer to take them in at a first hearing unless he listen carefully, or know something of the story of the other plays of the cycle." Cf. above, p. 262.
the Blind Man acts as foil to the Pool, in another, foil to Cuchulain. Where the Pool is "natural man" with a true mask, innocent, wayward, and finding joy in his aimlessness, the Blind Man is "natural man" with a false mask, cunning, sly, and malicious. He resents the Pool, yet cannot exist without him. The Pool in turn depends upon the Blind Man's wits but cannot control his malice. Like the blind man and cripple of The Cat and the Moon (1917-1924) they are two halves of the one whole, or, in other words, the body and the soul. The one, blind in body, is keen enough to recognize the significance of the strange challenger; the other, "blind" in the wits, can "see" past this world to the next. Together they act as Nemesis in the unfolding action; together they open Cuchulain's eyes to the tragedy of his situation. Further, both Teigue the Fool and the Blind Man beg for pennies; unhampered by the possessions of this world, they place no value on the qualities the tragic hero values most. Tom Fool and the Blind Man cut off heads for a few pennies; "And when the Fool and Blind Man stole the bread/Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea." To the fools of this world, all things are equal.

Finally, the Blind Man might be considered a variant of the "hunchback image", phase twenty-six on Yeats's Wheel of Life, separated from the Pool by the Saint. "The deformity may be of any kind, great or little...He commits crimes, not because he wants to, or...because he can, but because he wants to feel certain that he can; and he is full of malice because, finding no impulse but in his own ambition, he is made jealous by the impulse of others." The Blind Man is earth-bound, the Pool is not. "If he live amid a theologically minded people, his greatest temptation may be to defy God, to become a Judas who betrays, not for thirty pieces of silver, but that he may call

1 Notice that Poor Tom Fool of The Herne's Egg also has a rival, "Johnny from Meath." Collected Plays, 672.
2 Collected Plays, 461ff.
3 Introduction to The Cat and the Moon, Wheels and Butterflies, 138.
himself creator.” The tragedy of Cuchulain’s fight with the sea, the murder of his own son, is foretold and hence inevitable, yet in acting as the hero’s insight, the Blind Man creates the tragedy Conchobar ordains.

The image-maker, although also appearing in various forms throughout the plays, is closely involved with the image of the fool. The most obvious connection is through the god Aengus, who is god of love and ecstasy and of poetry. It is the harp of Aengus that Fergael receives from the fool of the wood; this harp in turn represents the magical power of poetry (or perhaps "poesy") in the early poems and plays. Oisin plays a silver harp on the Island of Youth and Dancing, but his song is of mortal dreams, and saddens the eternally joyful immortals. In Book II of The Wanderings of Oisin the promise of Aedh’s harp of gold alone will bring deliverance. The young bard Aleel is "so wrapped up in dreams of terrors to come" that he can bring no aid to the Countess Cathleen in her struggle against the demons but can offer her consolation by distracting her thoughts to other dreams. So, too, the musicians offer consolation and distraction to Deirdre and Naisi as they sit at chess and await their deaths. In an early draft of Deirdre the musicians reply to Fergus:

They call us the Love-praisers, 
Because we have no other theme than love. 

... We earn our living by this trade, and know Of nothing that's delightful to all ears But an immoderate passion that buoys up Two lovers, and before ebb tide has come, Smothers them wretchedly.  

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It is the poet who most strongly represents the image-maker, however. Seanchan of The King’s Threshold is in fact "but a shadow and an image of poetry"¹ and by his gesture of defiance upholds the Art of which he himself is an image. Replying to his catechism, his oldest pupil explains why poetry is honoured:

...the poets hung
Images of the life that was in Eden
About the child-bed of the world, that it,
Looking upon those images, might bear
Triumphant children. ...

If the Arts should perish,
The world that lacked them would be like a woman
That, looking on the cloven lips of a hare,
Brings forth a hare-lipped child.²

Like The Green Helmet, The King’s Threshold was in one sense an occasional poem:

It was written when our Society was having a bad fight for the recognition of pure art in a community of which one half was buried in the practical affairs of life, and the other half in politics and a propagandist patriotism.³

Like The King’s Threshold, The Green Helmet also transcends the occasion and speaks for the image-maker. For the Red Man is also a creator, working with man’s spirit to create discord and concord, playing with the spirits he has created in man to achieve the championship he, as "Rector of this land," requires. To a certain extent Paul Ruttledge and Martin Aherne also belong to this category, for as seekers after a dream, they must destroy the temporal images man has created in order to achieve the eternal image of truth.

¹Prologue to The King’s Threshold (1903), Appendix B. Cf. Yeats’s introduction to Words upon the Window-Pane, Wheels and Butterflies, 24: "We poets and artists may be called, so small our share in life, 'separated spirits,' words applied by old philosophers to the dead."

²The King’s Threshold, Collected Plays, 111-12.

³Note to The King’s Threshold, Poems 1899-1905, 1906, 279-80.
But Yeats finally achieved the culmination of his own image as the poet-creator in Septimus, the drunken, inspired poet of The Player Queen, who unites the poet's disdain for the mediocre\(^1\) (the "bad, popular poets," Happy Tom and Peter the Purple Pelican) and the inspiration which leads the Player Queen, his "image" in the sense that she is the player-creator of his verses, to achieve her opposite:

"When she was got," my mother sang,
"I heard a seamew cry,
I saw a flake of yellow foam
That dropped upon my thigh."

How therefore could she help but braid
The gold upon my hair,
And dream that I should carry
The golden top of care?

Septimus created the poem; Decima created the part.\(^2\) "Man is nothing till he is united to an image."\(^3\) And it is the poet-creator who alone is worthy to herald the new age, "the coming of a New Dispensation, that of the New Adam, that of the Unicorn."\(^4\) But Septimus is drunk, and cannot control his frenzy. He therefore remains the image-seeker; he, in turn, is deluded by his own images and is himself the pawn of creative imagination. Similarly, Decima's very ability to become the Player Queen limits her because she is angry at losing Septimus; therefore the gain of one dream, the role of Queen, is qualified by the loss of another dream, the love of Septimus.

\(^1\)"It is necessary that we who are the last artists -- all the rest have gone over to the mob -- shall save the images and implements of our art." Player Queen, Collected Plays, 419-20.
\(^2\)Cf. The Morrigu's speech, Death of Cuchulain, Collected Plays, 703: "Gonall avenged him. I arranged the dance."
\(^3\)Player Queen, op. cit., 407-08, 420.
\(^4\)Ibid., 416-17.
The Black Jester

When one constructs, bringing one's characters into complicated relations with one another, something impersonal comes into the story. Society, fate, "tendency," something not quite human, begins to arrange the characters and to excite into action only so much of their humanity as they find it necessary to show to one another, Yeats wrote in his diary in 1907. It is this "something" which controls the images of the poet, the player, the hero, and the fool. Dancing in the shadows behind the plays, always just out of reach, this elusive "master image-maker" or juggler pulls the strings. Too objective to be the poet himself, too personal to be the image, he draws into himself the basic images of dream-maker and fool, and directs the action of the myths of which they are a part. Occasionally he rises to the surface: the jester in the garden wins his lady's love when he offers his "life" — the emblems of his trade, his cap and bells — as well as his heart and soul; "that old Red Juggler" with the prize of the Green Helmet exults in his powers of discord and concord before he returns to the sea; the Player Queen exercises her regal authority over the poet's images; the divine jester re-creates King Congal in a donkey.

Once he almost appeared. Yeats, dreaming of a master story-teller, the minstrel "who differs from his audience in nothing but the exaltation of his mood, and who is yet as exciting and as romantic" as the minstrel of the middle ages, commissioned Ricketts to design a costume for this

2"The Cap and Bells" (1894), Collected Poems, 71-73.
3The Green Helmet (1907-1910), Collected Plays, 243.
4"Wherefore spin ye, whirl ye, dance ye,/Till Queen Decima's found her fancy." Player Queen, op. cit., 416.
5"All that trouble and nothing to show for it,/Nothing but just another donkey." The Herne's Egg, op. cit., 678.
"jester with black cockscomb and black clothes." He was one of the characters in a play then being written. But the design was never used, and the figure of the Black Jester does not appear in any of the plays. But Yeats was working on _Deirdre_ at the time, and among the unpublished papers and early drafts of the play are sketches by Yeats of scene blockings which include the Black Jester. And in an early prose scenario this figure enters, to offer Naisi "the robe of honour" after Conchobar's hired warriors have fled. More important still, among the unpublished papers is a prologue, to be spoken by the Black Jester himself.

It would appear from these early drafts that the Black Jester was associated in Yeats's mind with Manannan, son of Lir, the Irish god of the sea, "as some say, the sea itself." These drafts closely follow the legend as related by Lady Gregory in _Cuchulain of Muirtheimne_, including among the characters Naisi's brothers Ardan and Ainnle, the sons of Fergus Ruimne and Iollan, and Lavarcham, Deirdre's old nurse. Lavarcham bears the burden of most of the opening exposition:

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2 Letter to Charles Ricketts, _ibid._

3 See illustration above, p. 281, reproduced with the permission of Mrs. W. B. Yeats. The original papers are in the possession of the National Library of Ireland, MS. 8760(16).

4 MS8760(15). The lines occur at the bottom of a page and are almost illegible.

5 See Appendix C. The original pages are in someone else's hand, probably Frank Fay's, and it was dictated at Woburn Buildings, London. Occasional slips of the pen, such as "me" for "him" and close comparison with samples of Fay's handwriting bear this supposition out, as the letter to Ricketts, _op. cit._, makes clear that Fay was to wear the Black Jester's costume. I am indebted to Mr. Alf McLochlain of the National Library of Ireland for assistance in identifying the hand.

6 Lady Gregory, Notes to _Cuchulain of Muirtheimne_ (London: John Murray, 1902), 356.

7 _Ibid._, ch. VII. Her version does not include the prophecy of Manannan.
Musician: And is she the daughter of the god or indeed
But mortal like us all?

Lavarcham: None knows for right
But it may be that Manannan came up
As many say out of his wealthy streams
And laying a new born child upon the ground
Before King Conchubar, with a loud cry
As though he had seen all years that were to come
Began, "This weakling shall grow up a woman
So coveted by the proud kings of the world
They shall blow all to quarrel and in that quarrel
Your country and all the countries of the west
Shall go to rack and ruin"; and thereon
He folded his sea green cloak upon his head
And vanished.¹

A prose version dated 5 October 1904 continues the action of this early
draft. The game of chess, already the central scene of the play, includes
further exposition. Manannan presented Conchubar not only with the child
Deirdre, but with an iron bowl which held a further prophecy:

Iollan: Then he took an iron bowl from under his cloak and gave
it to Conchubar with these words:— When all these evils
are then about you call upon me and give this bowl to
who you will, and I will give him peace....Who knows how
many of the strong kings of Ireland and of the fair queens
and of the good lovers he has brought to their peace with
him in the Land of Promise.

But the Cup of Manannan is missing from its place of honour beside the
chess board in the House of the Red Branch Warriors. Alarmed by her
dreams and the omens of betrayal, Deirdre pleads with Naisi to come away,
"come to the floods and to the waste places for there you shall be the
more mine." But Naisi is determined not to let their love "unman" them,
and the game of chess continues.

The ending of this early version draws together the promise of Manannan,
the betrayal of the Sons of Usna, and the theme of enchantment. Buinne,
son of Fergus, decamps; his brother Iollan dies defending his father's
charge; Naisi and his brothers re-enter entranced by Manannan, who has

¹MS8760(18), National Library of Ireland, MS. in Yeats's hand.
answered Conchubar's prayer for help. Deirdre speaks to the Sons of Usna in vain; her voice comes to them from another world:

**Naisi:** She is coming over the sea, she is coming by herself in a little boat! She is coming to join us in the happy Plain, the many coloured plain!

**Ardan:** Our father the strong son of the sea who brought us so safely to this place of peace will bring her to us safely. **Naisi:** Come to this place Deirdre where there are fruit and flowers on the one tree...Yes, let us go, let us make ready the sunny house for Deirdre. Let us make the pillars of the silver-stemmed trees. Let us roof it with the blossoming boughs, let us spread silk and needlework under her white feet. In our house upon the great plain age will never come, lover will never grow old....

And so Naisi and his brothers go to their death joyfully, to prepare the home they could never grant Deirdre in life.¹ Manannan's promise of help for Conchubar becomes the promise of peace for the lovers.

An examination of this early draft indicates, then, that Yeats had at first intended a much more expanded version of the Deirdre myth, "the most famous of all Irish legends."² According to Yeats's letter to Charles Ricketts, the prologue can be dated approximately 1904, the same year the above early draft of Deirdre was composed, and just one year after the revised version of The Shadowy Waters was published. The Black Jester prologue evidently owes much in detail and use of symbolism to both plays. Aengus and Edaine as divine lovers leading Dectora and Fergaenl to the eternal land of youth and love feature in both versions of Shadowy Waters, although the symbolism is less obvious in the revised version. Dectora dreams of pale apple-blossoms over a stream, "symbols of dawn and of air and of earth and of resurrection"; Fergaenl describes the country of faithful lovers, where the fruit is of precious stones, symbolizing "perhaps emotions made eternal by their own perfection."³ Naisi tells Deirdre of fruit and flowers on the same tree. Around his head the Jester wears ever-blossoming flowers made of precious stones; in his world emotions are perfected, love is eternal, morning and the resurrection

¹MS8760, pages dated 5 October 1904.
²Note to Deirdre, The Arrow, I,2(November 1906),2.
³See above,p.242.
are past. ("Once out of nature I shall...sing...of what is past, or passing, or to come."1) Forgael charts his course by the grey sea-birds who are the souls of the dead on their way to the Land of the Ever-Living; they promise him "love of a supernatural intensity"2; his harp belongs to Aengus Og. Like Aengus, the Black Jester "would like to lead everybody out of the world away to the waste places where there is nothing but my beasts." He is the messenger not only of love (Aengus), but of peace (Manannan). It is from these "waste places" that the Black Jester comes; Deirdre pleads with Naisi to seek the "waste places" of the earth; Naisi prepares a home for her in "the great plain, the many coloured plain" where "age will never come, lover will never grow old."

Some of the Jester's figures were picked up "on the wayside"; some he made himself. But even those he carves himself have their origin "in the old Irish books." The Irish poet, too, seeks his images from the wayside, from the folklore about him, and carves others himself out of his own imagination. But even though he may make them himself, the inspiration frequently comes from that same wayside, the ancient book of the poets and people, mythology. And mythology is the temporal form of permanent truths, part of that great repository of the memory of the world, Anima Mundi, the "desert places," from which and to which all truths, all gods, all passions, arrive and eventually return.3 Nor are the Jester's figures all pleasant ones; he must accept even those he fears. These "beasts" have appeared earlier as well. Oisin passes a hound forever pursuing a deer, "the immortal desire of Immortals." The sailors in The Shadowy Waters see a red hound running from a silver arrow, passion fleeing from idealizing love,4 will from reason.5 Stage directions and scenery for the 1900 version of the play include "three rows of

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3Cf. "The Second Coming."
4See above, p. 242.
5Programme note, Inis Fail, 1905, quoted by Ellmann, Identity of Yeats, 81.
hounds, the first dark, the second red, and the third white with red ears, making a conventional pattern upon the sail." In a programme note Yeats suggests that these may "correspond to the Tamas, Rajas, and Sattva qualities of the Vedanta philosophy, or to the three colours of the Alchemists." Ellmann, calling upon Max Müller's Six Systems of Indian Philosophy, which Yeats knew, glosses the passage as symbolising "thesis, antithesis, and reconciliation." Yeats later identified Tamas as darkness and exhaustion, Rajas as activity and passion, Sattva as brightness and wisdom, the hounds therefore suggesting pursuit of death, of life and passion, and a fusion of the two. But in an essay on the symbolism of Shelley's poetry, written in 1900, Yeats himself explains their significance. He describes a Hermetist's vision of a man led through a wood by a black hound, then the black hound lying dead at "the Meeting of the Suns," the man then followed by a red hound which is in turn pierced by a spear, then, watched by a white fawn, led by a white hound. "But the seer knew that he would follow the fawn at last, and that it would lead him among the gods." "I have little doubt," Yeats comments, "that when the man saw the white fawn he was coming out of the darkness and passion of the world into some day of partial regeneration." If we recall that Dectora's apple blossoms are symbols "of dawn and of resurrection," then the Jester's deer, the "impossible things" his pale dog "can never overtake," lead to the Land of the Ever-Living, "the Meeting of the Suns," Aengus's Tir-na-nOgge, the "desert places" from which the Jester himself comes to lead his audience "away, away, away," into an

1. These hounds caused Sturge Moore much trouble. Cf. Correspondence, 5-6.
2. Inis Fail, 1905, op. cit.
3. (NY: Longman's, 1899), 147.
4. Ellmann, Identity of Yeats, 81-82.
everlasting dream, the world of the eternal imagination. And a
glance at the ritual of the sword initiation in Yeats's Celtic Mystical
Order confirms the Jester's fear of his beasts. The Black, White, and
Red Dogs are illusions on the candidate's path as he follows "the Fawn
to the Land of the Blessed," Tir-na-nOghe. Similarly, Pamela Colman
Smith's drawing of Number 18 of the Tarot Greater Trumps indicates three
other "beasts" of the same natural order: a dark-coloured dog and a
light-coloured wolf; "the fears of the natural mind in the presence of
that place of exit, when there is only reflected light to guide it," and a red crab-like creature, "that which comes up out of the deeps,
the nameless and hideous tendency which is lower than the savage beast."
The card itself, the merciful moon, "represents life of the imagination
apart from life of the spirit."2

But the Black Jester himself is more than the messenger of the gods
of youth (love and eternity) and the sea (life and material world). He combines as well the qualities of the image-maker and the wise fool.
As poet he carves his own images, choosing his material where he wishes,
pulling the strings as they dance. As dream-maker, also, he carries the
harp of Aengus (the magical quality of poetry) and leads the audience away
to Tir-na-nOghe, just as the fool of the woods leads Forgael across the
seas to eternity. As the "proud" fool he remains independent: "It's no
use shaking your hand at me there. I am going to do just as I like."
As the "natural" fool he has intimate knowledge of the supernatural, for
he belongs to "the waste places," the Anima Mundi. But unlike the image-
maker and fool of this world, his home is beyond. He is subject to the
laws of that world while this world is subject to his whims; he fears
the beasts, but controls the audience. He is, in fact, part of the dream

2Arthur Edward Waite, The Pictorial Key to the Tarot (NY: University
Books, 1959). Waite and Pixie Smith were, like Yeats, members of the
3The sea in Platonic symbolism represents life; hence a boat would
represent the soul of man journeying through life to eternity. Cf.
The Shadowy Waters, "Sailing to Byzantium."
he creates: he is the black dog when overwhelmed by the darkness of
the temporal, material world; he is the red dog when conquered by
passions and will; as the pale dog he strives after the perfection of
emotions in the eternal world of the spirit. "They too are myself
but that is a great mystery." The Black Minstrel was perhaps "the
terrible Amadan-na-Breena himself"; or perhaps "he has been so long in the
world that he can tell of ancient battles"; mysterious and from far-off,
yet he was recognizable by the audience as one of them.

An essay on
style, written in 1907, gives us yet a further clue:

In life courtesy and self-possession, and in the arts style, are
the sensible impressions of the free mind, for both arise out of
a deliberate shaping of all things, and from never being swept
away, whatever the emotion, into confusion or dullness.... A writer...
should never be without style, which is but high breeding in words
and in argument. He is indeed the creator of the standards of
manners in their subtlety, for he alone can know the ancient records
and be like some mystic courtier who has stolen the keys from the
girdle of Time, and can wander where it please him amid the
splendours of ancient Courts.

Sometimes, it may be, he is permitted the licence of cap and bell,
or even the madman's bunch of straws, but he never forgets or leaves
at home the seal and the signature. He has at all times the freedom
of the well-bred, and being bred to the tact of words can take what
theme he pleases;....Who should be free if he were not? for none other
has a continual deliberate self-delighting happiness—style....It
is the playing of strength when the day's work is done, a secret
between a craftsman and his craft, and is so inseparable in his nature
that he has it most of all amid overwhelming emotion, and in the face
of death.

This, then, is the Black Jester: not only the Artist, but the Artist's
Creative Imagination; not only the Images, but the ecstasy of the self-
surrender, the great mockery, the high breeding, the heroic defeat, of
each Image at the point of exultation and self-development: the Master
Image-Maker and Magician, creating out of himself and in spite of himself.
He is a Jester because he represents the traditional, aristocratic order

2"Poetry and Tradition," Essays and Introductions,253-54.
of the Juggling Minstrel-Fool at the Court; he is Black because although rooted in this world he transcends and controls it, as complete objectivity, the dark side of the moon, contrasts with the wayward subjectivity of the sun. And, like the Fool of the Tarot, whose dazzling white inner robe of perfect wisdom is almost wholly concealed by the black coat of ignorance, lined with the red of passion and material force, he is composed of all things, "the deathless, fadeless life-principle, subsisting eternally behind all modes of existence."^2

In "Hodos Chameliontos" Yeats refers to "that multiplicity of interest and opinion, of arts and sciences, which had driven me to conceive a Unity of Culture defined and evoked by Unity of Image."^3 In his image of the Black Jester he unified all those qualities most important to him in both life and art, for indeed, for him as much as for Wilde, the artist himself was but one more creation: emphasis upon control and style, pattern, "the deliberate shaping of all things"; the necessity of freedom and subtlety which came from high breeding and mysticism; the "deliberate self-delighting happiness" which resulted in

^A Vision,1937,80ff. In her comments on "The Black Tower," The Unicorn,439,Dr. Moore states:"The Black Pillar of Severity, in the Rosicrucian rituals, stands for justice, a thing easier to attain than the love symbolized by the White Pillar of Mercy." Giorgio Melchiori, The Whole Mystery of Art (London;Routledge and Kegan Paul,1960),25-26, points out that the fifth Tattva symbol, "the Quintessence, or spirit, or ether," is black.

^Paul Foster Case, The Tarot: A Key to the Wisdom of the Ages (NY:Macoy,1947),32. Cf. Yeats's explanations of the symbols of The Wind Among the Reeds,1899: "It is probable that only students of the magical tradition will understand me when I say that 'Michael Robartes' is fire reflected in water, and that Hanrahan is fire blown by the wind, and that Aedh, whose name is not merely the Irish form of Hugh, but the Irish for fire, is fire burning by itself. To put it in a different way, Hanrahan is the simplicity of an imagination too changeable to gather permanent possessions, or the adoration of the shepherds; and Michael Robartes is the pride of the imagination brooding upon the greatness of its possessions, or the adoration of the Magi; while Aedh is the myrrh and frankincense that the imagination offers continually before all that it loves."

^Autobiographies,269.
the artist's own self-sufficiency. Perhaps because the Jester was himself as well as his creation, his ideal as well as his art, the anti-mask as well as the mask, he could not be captured or revealed. And so the Black Jester returned once more to the waste places, inconceivable even to himself.

Dramatic Structure

"The principal difficulty with the form of dramatic structure I have adopted is that, unlike the loose Elizabethan form, it continually forces one by its rigour of logic away from one's capacities, experiences, and desires, until...there is rhetoric and logic and dry circumstance where there should be life," Yeats wrote concerning the revised 1907 edition of Deirdre.1 The fable of Deirdre and the Sons of Usna had, in fact, caused him great difficulty from the beginning, and by the time it was first produced at the Abbey in 1906 it had undergone many variations. As with The Shadowy Waters, he found it necessary to excise from the poem all its heavy-worked symbolism, "making the people answer each other, and making the groundwork simple and intelligible."2 And during the process of exorcism the Black Jester disappeared once more into the background. The Player Queen was still ten years in the future; Yeats had not yet discovered the theatrical form which would contain both his philosophy and his treatment of the image through situation. And so the functions of the jester remained separated in his characters, Porgael representing the lover-musician-magician, the Red Man of the Sea symbolizing control-concord-discord.

Yeats was constantly preoccupied with this problem of a synthesis of form and subject, but although he had by now mastered the struggle in his poetry, he would not give up the dramatic form:

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Yet I need a theatre; I believe myself to be a dramatist; I desire to show events and not merely tell of them; and two of my best friends were won for me by my plays, and I seem to myself most alive when a room full of people share the one lofty emotion.  

Gradually, as he gained experience in writing and defending plays, his treatment of the image and use of material broadened even more; paradoxically, however, this wider knowledge led him still further away from the established theatre conventions of the time, until eventually after much trial and error he developed a dramatic form which satisfied his demands of the theatre, his concept of the artist, and his treatment of the image. As we have seen, the dramatic form as a vehicle for his themes and personal philosophy had appealed to him from the time he first began to write. A brief examination of his pursuit of a satisfactory variation on that form should give us further insight into the development of his idea of a theatre.

"It seems to me that what plays best before a worthy audience, will read best," Yeats observed in 1912. And in his own experience he had noticed that dramatization could frequently make words come alive. Style remained his chief concern, but style involved both language and structure:

1"Note on the First Performance of 'At the Hawk's Well'"(1916), Plays and Controversies,416.

2Preface to A Selection from the Poetry of W.B.Yeats (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz,1913). Cf. George Moore's comment, "Note on 'Ghosts'", Impressions and Opinions (London:T.Werner Laurie,1913),163: "I find myself still unable to admit the possibility that a play that reads well should act badly."

3Letter to Lady Gregory, post marked 8 June 1905, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. Cf. letter to Sturge Moore, 26 January 1916, Correspondence 24: "It [Judith, Moore's play produced by the Stage Society, 23 January 1916] just wants to have those things taken out which as a matter of course are taken out of practically every prose play in rehearsal. The moment one goes into rehearsal one discovers, among other things, that the stage picture is so much more powerful than the words that there are whole passages which lose their weight. A shifting of gravity takes place and this involves minor changes."
I think it is only when one has so mastered construction that one is conscious of nothing but the subject that one is able to think of so arranging the story that one need never go beyond oneself. ¹

It is only natural that a mind like Yeats's, which looked upon the world and action as a series of theses and antitheses, should see dramatic construction as a problem of logic. "A play looks easy, but is full of problems, which are almost a part of Mathematics," he wrote to his father in 1918.

French Dramatists display this structure and 17th century English Dramatists disguise it, but it is always there. In some strange way, which I have never understood, a play does not ever read well if it has not this mathematics....It takes a lifetime to master dramatic form. ²

Nor could this logic be achieved by a delicate balance of words alone, for "all the finest poetry comes logically out of the fundamental action."³ One of the difficulties with Shadowy Waters, he felt, was that "there was no internal life pressing for expression through the characters."³ And one of the advantages to the one-act play was that here one could see the bare bones of the action.

Yeats, in fact, deliberately worked at the one-act form chiefly for this discipline, "because logic (and stage success is entirely a matter of logic) works itself out most obviously and simply in a short action with no change of scene."⁴ From his position as theatre director, he frequently criticized his play-writing contemporaries for unnecessary scene-changes,⁵ and a criticism of Wilde's Salome is particularly revealing for his own attitude towards structure:

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¹Letter to Sturge Moore, 4 October 1907, Correspondence, 13.
²14 June 1918, Letters, 649.
³Letter to Arthur Symons, 10 September 1905, Letters, 460.
⁴Letter to "Michael Field," 27 July 1903, Letters, 408.
⁵Samhain, 1901, 6; 1902, 6-7; 1903, 3.
The general construction is all right, is even powerful, but the dialogue is empty, sluggish and pretentious. It has nothing of drama of any kind, never working to any climax but always ending as it begun. A good play goes like this

but Salomé is as level as a table. Wilde was not a poet but a wit and critic and could not endure his limitations. He thought he was writing beautifully when he had collected beautiful things and thrown them together in a heap. He never made anything organic while he was trying to be a poet....No good actor will ever succeed in inorganic work and you will get yourself into the hands of the amateurs and the dilettante....

Good structure, then, means cumulative action, both in language and plot. "Remember that a play, even if it is in three acts, has to seem only one action," he warned Lady Gregory when she tackled the longer form for the first time in Kincora. No matter what the length, the principle remained the same.

The achievement of this cumulative effect required, Yeats felt, a strong plan of the action, simplification and conciseness of the symbols, and rigid control of the actors. He early learned to make use of the scenario, and advised other would-be playwrights to do the same:

1Letter to T. Sturge Moore, 6 May 1906, Correspondence, 8-9. He criticized Shaw's Man and Superman because "there was no cumulative effect except in the last act." Letter to Lady Gregory, post marked 22 May 1905, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. Cf. Letter to Lennox Robinson, 16 April 1929, quoted by Margaret O’Leary, Lightning Flash (London: Cape, 1939), 7-9.

221 January 1904, Letters, 427.

3He made two complete prose versions of The Countess Cathleen before writing any of it in verse. Cf. letter to John O’Leary, 7 May 1889, Letters, 125; Preface to Letters to the New Island, ix.
Young writers should remember that they must get all their effects from the logical expression of their subject, and not by the addition of extraneous incidents, and that a work of art can have but one subject. A work of art, though it must have the effect of nature, is art because it is not nature, as Goethe said. The Abbey Theatre is continually sent plays which show that their writers have not understood that the attainment of this unity, by what is usually a long shaping and reshaping of the plot, is the principal labour of the dramatist, and not the writing of the dialogue. Before sending plays of any length, writers would often save themselves some trouble by sending a "scenario," or scheme of the plot.

He constantly re-wrote his own plays, striving for balance of both action and myth. An early letter to Lady Gregory describes his difficulties with the monastery scene in Where There is Nothing: "I think that some comedy there will help the balance of the play. Every other act of the play has comedy. I wouldn't mind if one of the early acts was quite serious. They would balance then." Just as he tended to "see" his symbols in concrete form, so he saw the action of the characters as he created them. With the help of the little model stage designed by Gordon Craig, he "produced" his plays as he wrote them, moving the figures about as one would the

1 Probably he first learned this from Wilde rather than from Goethe.
3 His constant effort to "balance" action is a reflection of the same theory which resulted in the doctrine of the mask. In "The Emotion of Multitude," All—Ireland Review, 11 April 1913, 114-15, he discusses Shakespeare's use of the subplot to achieve contrasts and balance with the main plot.
4 Letter to Lady Gregory, 4 December 1902, Letters, 386. Cf. Note to Plays in Prose and Verse, 1922, 426: Where There is Nothing "became hateful to me because, in desperation, I had caught up from a near table a pamphlet of Tolstoy's on the Sermon on the Mount, and made out of it a satirical scene that became the pivot of the play. The scene seemed amusing on the stage, but its crude speculative commonplace filled me with shame and I withdrew the play from circulation."
men in a game of chess.\textsuperscript{1} He then sketched the action of each scene or tableau.\textsuperscript{2} As a rule, his construction was determined by the time the play was put into rehearsal. "You can ... see the opening rehearsals and the final ones which will, I suppose, be sufficient. One can only really chop about at the beginning," he wrote to Lady Gregory of the first production of \textit{The White Cockade}.\textsuperscript{3} Then, after the production, the process of revision began once more. On one occasion he deliberately gave \textit{Shadowy Waters} to Florence Farr for a Theosophical Convention in London\textsuperscript{4} so that he might see its faults more clearly before re-writing what he felt to be a bad poem, "obscure and vague",\textsuperscript{5} its "logic and circumstances" all wrong.\textsuperscript{6} His final aim was a dramatically effective poem, not a theatrical production, despite his concept of drama as "literature in the theatre." In turn, the play itself when completed was in one sense judged in the light of the remainder of the evening's entertainment: "No verse play of mine requires much more than an hour for its performance; and most, being intended for a theatre where every evening winds up with comedy or satire, are much shorter."\textsuperscript{7} And he encouraged other dramatists to work

\textsuperscript{1}Preface to \textit{Plays for an Irish Theatre},xiii. Apparently he started using a stage model before 1905, as that year he compared his to a more detailed model W.G. Fay had designed, according to an unpublished letter to Lady Gregory, 25 September 1905, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.

\textsuperscript{2}See illustration p.281.

\textsuperscript{3}Dictated letter dated 27 September 1905, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.


\textsuperscript{5}\textit{The Arrow},I,2(24 November 1906),3.


\textsuperscript{7}Preface to \textit{Plays in Prose and Verse},1922,vii.
on the same themes, bringing individual imagination to bear on a universal myth: "One of my fellow-playwrights is going I have hope, to take the other side and make a play that can be played after it, as in Greece the farce followed the tragedy," he wrote of The King's Threshold.¹

The Shadowy Waters continued to cause Yeats trouble. As early as 1894 he had written to his father, "In my struggle to keep it concrete I fear I shall so overload it with legendary detail that it will be unfit for any theatrical purposes -- at least as such are carried out at present."² Unwilling to give up the myth, however, he finally compromised by writing two versions, the poem and a stage version in prose, both published in his 1913 collection:

I am most anxious that this book, which I hope will go about among people who have a technical interest in the stage, should show that I understand my trade as a practical dramatist. It will injure me if it contains a play which is evidently unfit for the stage as it stands. I should not have minded if Shadowy Waters had been left out altogether. Indeed I had intended to leave it out...but now that it is in I must ask for stage version in Appendix or elsewhere....We are calling the book Plays for an Irish Theatre and that means actable plays or nothing.³

However, despite his precautions, the play is even less theatrically effective than Deirdre, his other attempt at a compromise between his symbolic inclinations and theatrical limitations. Yet both approached his ideal of the dramatic presentation of the soul of man. The only answer, then, was to keep searching for a dramatic form which would allow for the compression of statement and expansion of symbols.

¹Poems 1899-1905,1906,280.
²⁵ November 1894, Letters,236.
³Letter to his publishers, 15 August 1911, op.cit.,561-62.

Later he published two versions of The Hour Glass, but in that case the second version was the result of a change in theme and structure.
Language

As his prose and verse treatments of the same subject indicate, Yeats realized where the major difficulty lay:

If one does not know how to construct, if one cannot arrange much complicated life into a single action, one's work will not hold the attention or linger in the memory, but if one is not in love with words it will lack the delicate moment of living speech that is the chief garment of life.¹

And the noblest garment of all is poetry. "We have forgotten that the Drama began in the chanted ode, and that whenever it has been great it has been written certainly to delight our eyes, but to delight our ears more than our eyes," he had written in 1899 in defence of his theories of simplified stage decoration.² Once restore to words "their ancient sovereignty"³ and the magic and ritual of great drama would also return. "This is really a magical revolution, for the magical word is the chanted word."⁴

¹Samhain, 1903, 9. Cf. Preface to the First Edition of The Well of the Saint"(1905), Essays and Introductions, 300-301: "If one has not fine construction, one has not drama, but if one has not beautiful or powerful and individual speech, one has not literature, or, at any rate, one has not great literature."


⁴Letter to AE, November 1899, Letters, 327.

⁵"An Introduction for my Plays"(1937), Essays and Introductions, 529. Cf. Samhain, 1902, 5: "Even on a large stage one should leave the description of the poet free to call up the martlet's procreant cradle or what he will."
Yeats's ambition to restore words to their ancient sovereignty did not, however, mean a plea for what he referred to as "the modern idea of the poetic." "I avoid every kind of word that seems to me either 'poetical' or 'modern,'" he wrote to AE in 1900. "All ancient vision was definite and precise."¹ Nor, on the other hand, would he accept "the impersonal language that has come, not out of individual life, nor out of life at all, but out of necessities of commerce, of Parliament, of Board Schools, of hurried journeys by rail."² Just as the greatest play is that "in which there is the greatest abundance of life itself, of the reality that is in our own minds,"³ so the greatest language is that which must keep at all times "an even richness."⁴ "What the ever-moving delicately-moulded flesh is to human beauty vivid musical words are to passion."⁵ "A writer's 'purity' is his truth to his own mood," he wrote to Sturge Moore in 1911.⁶ The poet must be sincere and natural in his choice of words, writing out of his own thoughts, "in as

¹May 1900, Letters, 343. Cf. his criticism of the language in the poetry of Mrs. Clement Shorter (Dora Sigerson), letter to her, 21 June 1899, op. cit., 321-22. Cf. also "William Blake and his Illustrations to 'The Divine Comedy,'" note dated 1924, Essays and Introductions, 145.
²Preface to the first edition of The Well of the Saints" (1905), Essays and Introductions, 300. Yeats's main objection to Ibsen was the language of his translators. Cf. Samhain, 1904, 25-26.
³Samhain, 1904, 26.
⁴Preface to Plays for an Irish Theatre, 1913, x.
⁵Samhain, op. cit.
⁶28 July 1911, Correspondence, 21-2. In a letter to Yeats, December 1902, Frank Fay writes, "I was glad to see from a letter which you wrote recently to my brother that you agree with me in thinking Oscar Wilde and GBS the only dramatists of the nineteenth century whose plays are worth going to hear." Letter in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
nearly as possible the language we thought them in, as though in a letter to an intimate friend."

Although Yeats demanded "living speech," and this meant choice of language that would be true to the artist who uttered them, he worked laboriously to create the "personal language that the heart may still speak." "What I am trying to do in writing is to express myself without waste, without emphasis. To be impassioned and yet to have a perfect self-possession, to have a precision so absolute that the slightest inflection of voice, the slightest rhythm of sound or emotion plucks the heart-strings," he wrote to Mrs. Patrick Campbell in 1901. And later, "Tragic drama must be carved out of speech as a statue is out of stone."

With these aims in mind Yeats constantly revised his plays, and a careful study of many of his revisions will show alterations in language rather than in action or structure.

If we make it possible again for the poet to express himself, not merely through words, but through the voices of singers, of minstrels, of players, we shall certainly have changed the substance and the manner of our poetry. Everyone who has to interest his audience through the voice discovers that his success depends upon the clear, simple and varied structure of his thought. I have written a good many plays in verse and prose, and almost all those plays I have re-written after performance, sometimes again and again, and every change that has succeeded has been an addition to the masculine element, an increase of strength in the bony structure.

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1 Autobiographies, 102-03. Cf. letter to J.B. Yeats, 5 August 1913, Letters, 583: "of recent years...I have tried for more self-portraiture. I have tried to make my work convincing with a speech so natural and dramatic that the hearer would feel the presence of a man thinking and feeling."


3 November 1901, Letters, 360.

4 Preface to Plays for an Irish Theatre, 1913, x.

5 The variations to The Shadowy Waters in the Variorum edition alone bear this out. Collations to the earlier plays indicate the alterations better than the later plays, as Yeats did most of his revising to his later plays in manuscript.

In a letter to John Quinn concerning the hard-worked Shadowy Waters, Yeats tells of his latest revisions:

The very temper of the thing is different. It is full of homely phrases and of the idiom of daily speech. I have made the sailors rough, as sailors should be, characterized all the people more or less, yet not lost any of my lyrical moments. It has become a simple passionate play... ... I believe more strongly every day that the element of strength in poetic language is common idiom, just as the element of strength in poetic construction is common passion.

And he rejoices in the same letter in his use of "creaking shoes" and "liquorice-root" in a formerly abstract passage. Similarly, The Land of Heart's Desire was in revision thrown back in time "because the metrical speech would have sounded unreal if spoken in a country cottage now that we have so many dialect comedies."2

Besides striving for the exact word in the exact place, he experimented with the verse form, starting with blank verse and gradually developing a more tightened, stringent form which would more easily approach "the syntax of passionate speech"3 and at the same time suit the subject and mood:

The Countess Cathleen could speak a blank verse which I had loosened, almost put out of joint, for her need, because I thought of her as mediaeval and thereby connected her with the general European movement. For Deirdre and Cuchulain and all the other figures of Irish legend are still in the whale's belly.4

Still, in other words, clothed in the rougher garb of ancient Irish legend. Consequently he resorted to ballad metre for The Green Helmet, as more suitable to the Heroic Age. Deirdre and the Cuchulain cycle,

16 September 1905, Letters, 462.
3Interview with Yeats on the occasion of the Nobel Prize award, Irish Times, November 1923. Cf."J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910), Essays and Introductions, 335.
4A General Introduction for my Work" (1937), Essays and Introductions, 524-5.
on the other hand, demanded a variation of blank verse, which finally led him in his dance plays to a combined blank verse and lyric metre, the songs reflecting the tempo of the action and providing those moments of silent emotion Yeats felt so essential to drama. This "contrapuntal structure," the mingling and counter-balancing of song, dance, and dignified speech, led him at last to the form he was seeking, "where every speech would be short and concentrated, knit by dramatic tension." ¹

Although a full discussion of the Anglo-Irish dialect belongs to an examination of the work of Lady Gregory and Synge, mention must be made here of the fruitful collaboration between Yeats and Lady Gregory. In his preface to the 1922 collection of his plays, Yeats acknowledges his debt to Lady Gregory:

I have sometimes asked her help because I could not write dialect and sometimes because my construction had fallen into confusion. To the best of my belief "The Unicorn from the Stars," but for fable and chief character, is wholly her work. "The Green Helmet" and "The Player Queen" alone perhaps are wholly mine.²

Plays in which traces of Lady Gregory's help are most evident are Pot of Broth, Kathleen-ni-Houlihan, the stage version of Shadowy Waters, the comic servant scenes in the revised King's Threshold, the opening scene of On Baile's Strand, and Deirdre.³ (Diarmuid and Grania and Where There is Nothing have always been listed as collaborations). Perhaps their first collaboration was, however, in Yeats's Stories of Red Hanrahan:

¹Ibid., 521. Cf. "Introduction to 'Fighting the Waves,'" Wheels and Butterflies, 70-71.


³Lady Gregory lists some of these plays in Our Irish Theatre, 80 et passim. An unpublished letter to Lady Gregory, 14 January 1905 reads: "I cannot do the new 'Baile Strand' without your help with the opening conversation." Letter in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. Cf. also Letter to Lady Gregory, 1903, Plays for an Irish Theatre, 223-24; Preface to The Unicorn from the Stars and other Plays (New York: Macmillan, 1908), vi-ix.
Some years ago I wrote some stories of mediaeval Irish life, and as I wrote I was sometimes made wretched by the thought that I knew of no kind of English that fitted them as the language of Morris' prose stories -- the most beautiful language I had ever read -- fitted his journeys to woods and wells beyond the world. I knew of no language to write about Ireland in but raw modern English; but now Lady Gregory has discovered a speech as beautiful as that of Morris, and a living speech into the bargain,...It is certainly well suited to clothe a literature which never ceased to be folk-lore even when it was recited in the Courts of Kings.¹

Re-writing the stories with her help, they at last achieved "the emotion of folklore" he sought.²

They studied the idiom together, writing first in the "swift-moving town dialect" of Pot of Broth, then gradually perfecting "the slow-moving country dialect" of Kathleen-ni-Houlihan and Lady Gregory's own plays.³ "In those first years of the theatre we all helped one another with plots, ideas, and dialogue, but certainly I was the most indebted as I had no mastery of speech that purported to be of real life."⁴ The invaluable Joseph Holloway records a conversation with the Abbey secretary, W.A. Henderson, which further indicates the extent of their work together:

Henderson told us she is the boss of the show and approves of all Yeats's work before it sees the light of the stage. He rescued some passages discarded by her, from the waste paper basket, of the great WB's, and has them at home.²

As late as 1928 they were still collaborating, this time over his "plain man's Oedipus": "Lady Gregory and I went through it all, altering

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³Autobiographies,451.
⁴Note to Plays in Prose and Verse,1922,421.
⁵Diary of Joseph Holloway, 25 December 1907, National Library of Ireland, MS1805.
every sentence that might not be intelligible on the Blasket Islands," Yeats acknowledged in a newspaper interview. 1

"Let us learn construction from the masters, and dialogue from ourselves," Yeats had written in Samhain. 2 Much as he admired the country idiom, where "everything is old and everything alive and nothing common or threadbare,"3 Yeats recognized that his genius lay in another direction. With Lady Gregory's help he could develop the conversations of his plays, but the Anglo-Irish dialect, being a deliberate effort on his part, did not flow smoothly through the thoughts of his characters as it did in Synge's Riders to the Sea or Lady Gregory's Spreading the News.4 The use of country speech for a noble purpose, as in the work of Synge, Lady Gregory and Hyde, did "much for national dignity,"5 but he himself had to turn elsewhere. And, as usual, he turned in upon himself. "I have tried for more self-portraiture," he had written to his father in 1913. His fellow playwrights found their art in stepping outside themselves: he in his turn sought it within. "I always feel that my work is not drama but the ritual of a lost faith," he wrote to Sturge Moore.6 And in order to make credible the "strange events, elaborate words" of that ritual, he required sufficient distance from, rather than involvement in life.7

During his American lecture tour in 1911, Yeats stated his main concern in writing poetry for the stage:

21901, 7-8.
3Samhain, 1902, 8-9.
4Notes to Plays in Prose and Verse, 1922, 421.
5"J.M.Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910), Essays and Introductions, 335.
631 August 1929, Correspondence, 156.
7"Certain Noble Plays of Japan" (April 1916), Essays and Introductions, 221.
Being a writer of poetic drama, and of tragic drama, desiring always pattern and convention, I would like to keep to suggestion, to symbolism, to pattern like the Japanese.\textsuperscript{1}

His early interest in Japanese art is significant, for eventually he did find his model in the Noh play, but long before Ezra Pound had introduced him to this convention he knew what he required for his idea of a theatre. "The Stage Manager... says it must be simple, easy to understand, all about real human beings," confides the Black Jester to his audience. "But I am going to please myself this time." And Yeats sought what he called "reverie," "this twilight between sleep and waking" which was "the condition of tragic pleasure."\textsuperscript{2} "We should see certain men and women as if at the edge of a cliff, time broken away from their feet."\textsuperscript{3} His attitude towards the Celtic Mystical Order of the late 'nineties applied to his theory of dramatic language as well: "the need of mystical rites -- a ritual, a system of evocation and meditation -- to re-unite the perception of the spirit, of the dream, with natural beauty."\textsuperscript{4}

I desire a mysterious art, always reminding and half-reminding those who understand it of dearly loved things, doing its work by suggestion, not by direct statement, a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture, not space-pervading like the intellect but a memory and a prophecy.\textsuperscript{5}

And we recall that in 1899 he had written enthusiastically to AE: "This is really a magical revolution, for the magical word is the chanted word."\textsuperscript{6} But neither did he wish to return to what he now felt was the abstract vagueness of his early verse. There must be distance from the prosaic everyday reality; at the same time, however, there must be

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1]"The Poetry of Beauty," Harper's Weekly, 11 November 1911, 11.
\item[2]Preface to Plays for an Irish Theatre, 1913, ix.
\item[3]Introduction to "Words Upon the Window-Pane," Wheels and Butterflies, 26.
\item[4]Quoted from first draft of Autobiographies, Ellmann, The Man and the Masks, 126.
\item[5]"A People's Theatre" (1919), Plays and Controversies, 212-213.
\item[6]Letters, 327.
\end{footnotes}
precision and truth. "Tragic drama must be carved out of speech as a statue is out of stone."

Moreover, the art of the player can in turn encourage the poet, "for it is speaking or singing before an audience that makes us tell our stories well, and put our thoughts into some lasting order and set our emotions clamoring [sic] to some arduous climax." Had not all poetry originated in the art of the minstrel? But dramatic poetry involved this practical problem, finding and training actors to speak verse and on occasion intone it, an irony reflected in the Old Man who must once again teach beggars "the music of the beggar-man, Homer's music." Yeats was fortunate, for he found Frank Fay. And with Fay as his model he wrote The King's Threshold, Deirdre, and On Baile's Strand, all centred about "one player of genius." Nor without Fay could he have attempted Where There is Nothing, an experiment at unity "with no other device than one always dominant person about whom the world was drifting away."

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1 Preface (1912), A Selection from the Poetry of W.B.Yeats, 1913.

2 Prologue to The Death of Cuchulain, Appendix D. In a letter, probably 1907, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, Charles Ricketts complains of "the dreadful interpretations you have always met with (and to which you seem quite blind) [which] have spoilt your chances, so far, as a playwright."

3 The King's Threshold was dedicated to Frank Fay in memory "of his beautiful speaking in the character of Seancan."

4 Letter to Allan Wade, 18 October 1921, Letters, 674.

Cf. Prologue to Death of Cuchulain, "I could have got a dancer once, but she is gone."

5 Letter to A.B.Walkley, 20 June 1903, op.cit., 406. This loose construction is one reason for the failure of the play, which, unlike his other plays, has no "cross-pattern" or balance, The plot would have better served for a picaresque novel in Moore's inimitable manner.
The Musician and the Chorus

Yeats's experiments with speech and musical notation for his plays led to his use of the actor-musician and finally to the chorus. "As long as drama was full of poetical beauty, full of description, full of philosophy, as long as its words were the very vesture of sorrow and laughter, the players understood that their art was essentially conventional, artificial, ceremonious."¹ The artifice and convention of the minstrel led him in turn to the convention of the chorus as a device that would not only "check the rapidity of the dialogue"² and formalize the action, but create even further the distance between drama as ritual and the audience. In this sense, Aileach, the poet in The Countess Cathleen, and the sailors in The Shadowy Waters had functioned as a chorus; later the Fool and Blind Man acted as a commentary on the heroic action. However, by the time he wrote Deirdre, he had had sufficient experience with musical instruments to trust their introduction into his dramatic structure, and here the three Musicians (reduced from five in an earlier draft)³ not only contribute to the exposition and commentary, but play an integral part in the development of the action: they warn Deirdre, provide her with a knife, and later sing the funeral dirge.⁴ Like the Fool and the Blind Man, they serve to lift the action of the fable from the particular events to the universal myth of heroic life and death. Unlike their earlier counterparts, they remain sufficiently detached observers to reflect the emotions of the onlookers as well. "It is always allusion, never illusion," Yeats had said of the medieval minstrel⁵; the chorus of musicians, by serving as a bridge

¹Samhain, 1904, 28-29.
²"J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910), Essays and Introductions, 333.
³See illustration, p. 281.
⁴The "singing women" in Baile's Strand are purely a dramatic device for the sake of atmosphere, rather than a part of the functional structure. Characteristically, however, even though a great portion of their song is not heard, Yeats took great care with its composition. Cf. "Note to "On Baile's Strand," Poems 1899-1905, 277-78.
between the audience and the action, further heightens the action and increases the distance from "the pushing world" of everyday reality. With his discovery of the Noh convention, Yeats felt further justified in his introduction of the chorus, and here through their songs the musicians provide the scene and setting as well as the exposition (and in later cases some of the dialogue). Then, gradually, as he simplified further still, the musicians once more took upon themselves the dual role of choric-commentators and character-symbols. His last play, The Death of Cuchulain, draws in with a fine flourish not only the Cuchulain legend and Noh convention, but the earlier character-symbols heightened to become commentators not only on the action of this play, but on his entire dramatic history. The Old Man of the Prologue, jester and creator, meets the Blind Man, Cuchulain's anti-self, and the harlot sings to the beggar-musicians. The noble is reflected in the beggarman; the epilogue joins with the prologue; the creator again becomes a part of his creation. Language and structure are once more one.

1 At the Hawk's Well (1917), The Only Jealousy of Emer (1919), The Dreaming of the Bones (1919), Calvary (1920), The Resurrection (1931).
2 The Cat and the Moon (1926). In The Herne's Egg (1938) the soldiers act as a chorus in a manner reminiscent of The Silver Tassie.
3 The musician-attendants of The King of the Great Clock Tower (1935) and A Full Moon in March (1935). The function of the chorus in his translations differs. There its main purpose is "to preserve the mood while it rests the mind by change of attention," Preface to Sophocles' King Oedipus (London:Macmillan,1928),vi. Yeats evidently considered his use of the chorus quite different from his Greek predecessor's. For further discussion of his use of the chorus see below, Part Three, chapter 10, p.601.
CHAPTER 6 - AUGUSTA, LADY GREGORY

... but we are "image-makers," and must carry out our dreams. (Letter to Sir Hugh Lane)

What we wanted was to create for Ireland a theatre with a base of realism, with an apex of beauty. (Note to Damor's Gold, 1912)

Lady Gregory's first play was produced by the Irish National Theatre Society in 1903; she was fifty years old. Her last play was produced at the Abbey in 1927; last "without advice save from the almanac, and rather from pride than modesty." She brought to the Irish literary movement not only a fierce nationalism, strong friends, and a natural enthusiasm, but a philosophy already formed, and a great deal of experience to draw upon. She received much in return: direction for her nationalism and energy, life-long friendships with fellow-workers, and more important still, a form of expression for her ideals and observations.

Towards the end of her life Lady Gregory wrote in her diary:

If I had not married I should not have learned the quick enrichment of sentences that one gets in conversation; had I not been widowed I should not have found the detachment of mind, the leisure for observation necessary to give insight into character, to express and interpret it. Loneliness made me rich — "full" as Bacon says. Company gave me swiftness in putting thought into a word, a sentence.

But Lady Gregory had already begun writing before her husband died. Sometime during the early 'eighties she wrote An Emigrant's Notebook, a series of anecdotes describing her life at Roxborough and already

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3 Cf. the last entry recorded in her Journals, 340: "I sometimes think my life has been a series of enthusiasms."


5 Ibid., 338-39.
containing hints of her strength in peasant characterization. Shortly after her marriage and trip to Egypt, she published a small pamphlet in the defence of the Egyptian revolutionary, Arabi Bey. In 1892 Wilfred Scawen Blunt, friend of the Gregorys, suggested Lady Gregory as political leader writer for To-morrow, a Woman's Journal for Men, a new paper which was to come out every two months, an indication of Lady Gregory's own intention of becoming a serious writer. And although nothing came of this suggestion, she was by then editing her husband's journals and was later to publish Mr. Gregory's Letter Box, a selection of letters concerning Sir William's grandfather's work when Undersecretary in Ireland. Writing, then, had already been chosen as her career; it was simply a matter of waiting for direction.

The direction itself did not come from any former interest in the theatre itself, for in her early biography of the theatre she comments, I had never cared much for the stage, although when living a good deal in London, my husband and I went, as others do, to see some of each season's plays. I find, in looking over an old diary, that many of these have quite passed from my mind, although books I read ever so long ago, novels and the like, have left at least some faint trace by which I may recognize them.

Instead, we must turn to her nationalism to find the directing force. As we have seen, she first met Yeats in 1896, and had already been deeply impressed by his writing. She, too, wished to do "something for Ireland," but neither she nor Yeats at first realized that her

1 Portions are quoted by Elizabeth Coxhead, Lady Gregory A Literary Portrait (London: Macmillan, 1961), 30-31. Miss Coxhead dates this unpublished essay as 1884, the winter Sir William was away on his first visit to Ceylon, and suggests that the title indicates that Lady Gregory considers London her home. Since the memoir is obviously written for her husband, it is more likely the title simply refers to her move from the Roxborough world to his world.

2 Arabi and his Household, 1882.


5 Mr. Gregory's Letter Box (London: Murray, 1898).

6 Our Irish Theatre, 83.
contribution would be more than fund-raising or "creation in an inverse method to that of Genesis," the journalism she had earlier considered. However, from the beginning she acted as a catalyst for the literary movement, as later she would for Yeats and other dramatists, and "things seemed to grow possible as we talked." The combined interest in the theatre as a national vehicle and in Yeats's own work remained the criterion by which she judged all her work for the Abbey Theatre:

The plays that I have cared for most all through, and for love of which I took up this work, are those verse ones by Mr. Yeats The Countess Cathleen with which we began, The Shadowy Waters, The King's Threshold, and the rest. They have sometimes seemed to go out of sight because the prose plays are easier to put on and to take from place to place; yet they will always be, if I have my way, a part of our year's work. I feel verse is more than any prose can be, the apex of the flame, the point of the diamond.

And, as we shall see, these abiding interests helped contribute to the detachment apparent in her own plays and towards her own creative processes, a quality which allowed her to distinguish more clearly than Yeats between the play and the player, the creation and the production. Chronologically, the theatre came first for Lady Gregory, only secondly her own plays. By the time she began to write herself she had become involved in the problems of production and, through her collaboration with Hyde and Yeats, the problems of construction and dialogue. Consequently her attitude towards the theatre itself and the productions was already established by the time she came to write her own plays. And, since by then the theatre was organized, she wrote with production at the Abbey in mind, tending at first to restrict

1 Autobiographies, 380.
2 Journals, 325.
3 Cf. Lennox Robinson's notes, Journals, 54, and her own frequent references to collaboration with Yeats on both plays and speeches, Journals, 86 et passim.
4 Our Irish Theatre, 6-7.
5 Ibid., 78.
her work to the requirements of the Abbey stage and players. Furthermore, since the Abbey was synonymous in her mind with nationalism, playwright, player, and audience must be for her indomitably Irish: "All working to create, a fine drama, fine acting, a theatre giving opportunity to every talent in it"; and always and only for "the dignity of Ireland." In 1919, when the first offer of their theatre was made to the government, she wrote in her diary:

I told Robinson, in speaking of the Theatre, that we must have two horizons, one the far one, the laying of it "on the threshold of Eternity": the nearer one the coming of Home Rule or whatever the new arrangement that must come may be when the Irish from America and elsewhere will come back to see their Country. We must keep the Theatre something we should be proud to show.

Nor did her nationalism limit her vision of the theatre as she wished to see it. "In matters of art the many count less than the few," and the Abbey directors, as self-appointed arbitrators of art for Ireland, must first remain true to their own aesthetic beliefs. "I have found that peace comes, not from trying to please one's neighbours but in making up one's own mind what is the right path and in then keeping to it," she wrote to "one who left us but has since returned." And in an article in Clandeamh Soluis, she wrote concerning another debate:

Sinn Fein -- "we ourselves" -- is well enough for the day's bread, but is not Mise Fein -- "I myself" -- the last word in Art?

Early during their friendship she had said to Yeats, "The only wrong act that matters is not doing one's best work," and occasionally even these

1*Journals*, 326-27.
2Our Irish Theatre, 37 and 245; cf. Lady Gregory, Hugh Lane's Life and Achievement (London: John Murray, 1921), 45n. In an unpublished letter to Yeats, Miss Horniman writes: "Lady Gregory told me long ago that she only was interested in the theatre on its Irish side and as performing to Irish people." Letter dated 15 March 1907 is in Mrs. Yeats's possession.
3*Journals*, 61.
4Our Irish Theatre, 114.
5Ibid., 49.
6Probably 1904, quoted by Lady Gregory in Hugh Lane, 62.
7Autobiographies, 408.
two fellow-workers disagreed over policy. Much of this internal disagreement was a result of "hidden persuasion" within the theatre itself and as such belongs to the discussion of theatre policy; however it is important to realize here that at no time did Lady Gregory act simply as "seconder" to Yeats's ideas of the theatre: "I should like the memory of our theatre to be at least almost as free from compromise [as the work of her nephew, Hugh Lane]. One should try and take the whole question before 'the long-remembering harpers' and their eternal audience."¹ She, like Yeats, was jealous of her passport to eternity. And, like Yeats, she felt that her mission was in part a didactic one: "We went on giving what we thought good until it became popular."² Believing once that they had compromised, she objected, "We have been humouring our audience instead of educating it, which is the work we ought to do...the theatre...being intended 'for art and a thinking Democracy.' It is just what we set out to do, and now we are giving in to stupidity in a Democracy."³ Five years before her death, having seen one of Shaw's plays at the Abbey, she wrote in her diary this characteristic comment:

I did feel proud and satisfied -- a Theatre of our own, Irish plays, such a fine one by our countrymen--company playing it so splendidly, all our own -- something to have lived to see! But there is a good deal of slackness at the Abbey.⁴

Lady Gregory carried the dream of an Irish theatre even further than Yeats, however, as she herself admits in Our Irish Theatre:

I had had from the beginning a vision of historical plays being sent by us through all the counties of Ireland. For to have a real success and to come into the life of the country, one must touch a real and eternal emotion, and history comes only next to religion in our country. And although the realism of our young writers is taking the place of fantasy and romance in the cities, I still hope to see a little season given up every year to plays on history and in sequence at the Abbey, and I think schools and colleges may ask to have them sent and played in their halls, as part of the day's lesson.⁵

¹Hugh Lane, 52.
²Our Irish Theatre, 103.
³Ibid., 104, probably written in 1906.
⁴Journals, 103.
⁵Our Irish Theatre, 91-92.
Her first play, *Colman and Guaire*, was written not with a "stage production" in mind, but "a little play in rhyme [which] might perhaps be learned and acted by Kiltartan school-children."\(^1\) And she consistently saw the theatre as part of the same movement which had earlier given impetus to the Gaelic League:

> It was a movement for keeping the Irish language a spoken one, with, as a chief end, the preserving of our own nationality. That does not sound like the beginning of a revolution, yet it was one. It was the discovery, the disclosure of the folk-learning, the folk-poetry, the folk-tradition. Our Theatre was caught into that current, and it is that current, as I believe, that has brought it on its triumphant way. It is chiefly known now as a folk-theatre. It has not only the great mass of primitive material and legend to draw on, but it has been made a living thing by the excitement of that discovery.\(^2\)

Twenty years later she was still writing plays that children as well as grown-ups could enjoy. And so, unlike Yeats's, her dream of an Irish theatre was fulfilled, with her own work playing a far more important part than she had ever dreamed possible. In 1934 Yeats wrote that her plays "are constantly acted, not only in Dublin but by little companies in village halls. Their names are as familiar as old proverbs."\(^3\) And a visitor to Ireland will still find her work popular, both in English and in Irish dress, at the Abbey and in the provinces. With these aims in mind, then, she wrote her plays, writing of Irish people as she had observed them during her childhood and widowhood in Galway, of Irish history and folklore as she had collected it for her books, for the children and country folk of her nation.

**Kiltartan**

In 1899, before it had occurred to her to turn to playwriting herself, Lady Gregory wrote of Eleonora Duse's plan of building an open air theatre on the Alban hills, where Italian literary plays might be produced. She concluded her article by commenting: "We have, indeed,

\(^1\) My First Play (London: Elkin Mathews and Marrot, 1930), 1-2.
\(^2\) Our Irish Theatre, 76.
\(^3\) Yeats, The Irish National Theatre, 1934, 6.
no Duse as yet, but as in Italy the actress called forth the play, perhaps in Ireland the plays may bring an actress into being.\(^1\) As we shall see, the plays did produce the actors in Ireland, but the theatre in turn called forth more playwrights, including Lady Gregory herself. "I began by writing bits of dialogue, when wanted," she tells us. "Mr. Yeats used to dictate parts of Diarmuid and Grania to me, and I would suggest a sentence here and there. Then I, as well as another [Douglas Hyde], helped to fill spaces in Where There is Nothing."\(^2\) Later the two wrote Kathleen ni Houlihan together, Lady Gregory turning Yeats's dream into country speech.\(^3\) And by the time Pot of Broth was written, she was working on plot and construction as well.\(^4\)

In a sense, then, Lady Gregory approached play-writing through the ear. Acting as amanuensis for the peasants on her father's estate, later collecting folklore on her own estate, studying Irish with her son, and faithfully recording the stories and traditions she gathered from the country folk, had taught her her trade before she was even aware of her knowledge. Her people spoke a language distinctive of their own district, Kiltartan,\(^5\) the English words transposed from Irish thoughts through a grammatical formula peculiar to themselves, and frequently in language reminiscent of the King James version of the Bible and the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. In recording their stories and translating from Irish, Lady Gregory faithfully adopted their grammatical formulas as well, employing them perhaps with more frequency than one would observe.

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\(^1\) "An Italian Literary Drama," Dublin Daily Express, 8 April 1899, 3.

\(^2\) Our Irish Theatre, 80.

\(^3\) Dedication to Lady Gregory, Where There is Nothing (NY: John Lane, 1902), reprinted in Our Irish Theatre, 82.

\(^4\) Our Irish Theatre, 82-83. In a conversation with the present writer, Mrs. Yeats remarked that Yeats and Lady Gregory collaborated so smoothly that, as in the case of The Pot of Broth, they themselves could not say what belonged to whom.

\(^5\) Cf. Coxhead, Lady Gregory, 122-23; "Michael MacLiammoir... tells me that he overheard a new recruit to his company, of whose origins he knew nothing, talking in the green-room, and said to himself: that boy must come from East Galway, he talks like a Gregory character. The boy actually came from Kiltartan." Cf. Yeats "If I Were Four and Twenty, 21-22; Journals, 38.
in a realistic transcript, yet with the same construction. Hence, the "Kiltartan infinitive" which, as Miss Coxhead points out, is "almost her hallmark."\(^1\)

"What business would the people here have but to be minding one another's business?"

"Sure it's a terrible thing to go in it and to be bound to speak nothing but the truth."

"Whether or no, it will be a sharp grief to him, she to scatter and to go."

Similarly, inverted word order ("Putting me down the whole of ye do be, and saying I know nothing.") and constant use of adverbs and adverbial phrases such as "only" and "so" is taken directly from the original Erse. Her use of language can in many of these aspects be compared with that of her fellow director, Synge. Although Lady Gregory and Synge applied their observations to entirely different purposes, both were scrupulously accurate in their transcriptions and sincere in their use of the language they adopted. However, as well as using different dialects (Synge generally used the dialect of Wicklow), the two writers approached their characters and dramatic form from opposite directions: Synge elaborated, enriched, personalized his people until their speech spiralled into romantic poetry; Lady Gregory on the other hand was more concerned with outline and neatness, controlling the dialogue with balance and almost classical precision.\(^2\)

But Lady Gregory's use of "Kiltartan" extended beyond the accurate recording of picturesque phrases and turns of speech picked up in the "thatched houses" where she gathered her folklore and poetry.\(^3\) A comparison of the difficult iambic pentameter quatrains of Colman and Guaire with the rich and flowing imagery of her later plays indicates

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\(^1\) Ibid., 122.

\(^2\) Cf. Seven Short Plays, The Bogie Man, On the Racecourse, where the pattern of the dialogue is an important part of the structure and action of the play.

the natural and characteristic language of the peasant whose thoughts 
flow easily into hyperbole and similes drawn from the life about him. 
In the opening scene of *Colman and Cuaire*, Eoghan, an old servant, 
describes his master's hospitality:

> His tables are still spread with food; he bade me 
> Welcome all strangers coming to his court. 
> His name goes far beyond the bounds of Aídu. 
> Cuaire, whose bounty gilds the name of Gort.  

In *The Bogie Men*, Darby the sweep describes his mythical cousin, "He that 
is as straight and clean as a green rush on the brink of the bog," and 
his vision of a grand house in images drawn from his trade:

> A house would be the capital of the county! One door for the rich, 
one door for the common! Velvet carpets rolled up, the way there 
would be no dust from the chimney fall upon them. A hundred wouldn't 
be many standing in a corner of that place!  

Similarly, Taig the Tailor swears vengeance on the fearful dragon who 
dares to threaten the little Princess Nuala:

> I'll cut him crossways and lengthways the same as a yard of frieze! 
> I'll make garters of his body! I'll smooth him with a smoothing iron! 
> Not a fear of me! I never lost a bet yet that I wasn't able to pay it!  

Mike McInerny defends himself: "It is a mean thing for a man that is 
shivering into seventy years to go changing from place to place."  

More subtle and yet no less effective, are the contrasts between the 
questions asked by the new English Magistrate of Cloon and the laconic 
replies of Jo Muldoon, setting the scene and mood for *Spreading the 
News*:

**Magistrate.** So that is the Fair Green. Cattle and sheep and mud. 
No system. What a repulsive sight!  
**Policeman.** That is so, indeed. 
**Magistrate.** I suppose there is a good deal of disorder in this place? 
**Policeman.** There is. 
**Magistrate.** Common assault? 
**Policeman.** It's common enough.  

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1 My First Play, 11.  
3 *The Dragon, Three Wonder Plays* (London: Putnam's, 1923), 70. 
4 *The Workhouse Ward, Seven Short Plays*, (Dublin: Maunsel, 1909), 158.
Magistrate. Agrarian crime, no doubt?
Policeman. That is so.
Policeman. There was one time, and there might be again.
Magistrate. That is bad. Does it go any farther than that?
Policeman. Far enough, indeed.
Magistrate. Homicide, then!

And we are left to assume that the Magistrate will find all he seeks: "The same story -- or if it was not altogether the same, anyway it was no less than the first story."¹

Nearly always the language of the plays fits the characters like a glove: the direct, incisive language of the policeman in *The Rising of the Moon*; the more relaxed, "visionary" speech of the character-building community of Hyacinth Halvey and *The Full Moon*; the "second-leader" debate between Mineog and Hazel in *Coats*; the spare, homely imagery of *The Gaol Gate*; the rich indulgence of the family quarrels in *Damer's Gold*; the swift "hawking" exchange in *On the Racecourse*; the simple sincerity of *Dave*. In her folk-histories, she ran into slightly more difficulty, for although dramatic restrictions enabled her to justify the elimination of the "middling class," at times, and notably in *Kincora*, the leap from peasant talk to noble grandeur is awkward. She solved this problem in *The Canavans* and *The White Cockade* by portraying nobility through peasant eyes and comic horseplay, but *Dervorgilla* demanded almost too much use of peasant chorus to bridge the gap. *Grania*, on the other hand, being an experiment in technique as well as character portrayal, to a great extent escapes this danger; the three characters maintain a restrained, highly personal tone throughout, with just occasional lapses into Kiltartan rusticity. And in all her plays, as we shall see, the use of the flexible, rich Kiltartan dialect enabled a smooth passage from a sharp Molièresque exchange of dialogue into song.

¹*Spreading the News, op.cit.*, 3 and 21.
In the notes to her Irish passion play, *The Story Brought by Brigit*, Lady Gregory reveals the importance of this dialect to her knowledge of the peasant life portrayed in her plays:

I knew I could best write it through the voice, as it were, of our own people, and so I have given the story as I think it might have been told by Brigit, "the Mary of the Gael," our great Saint, had she been present during the last days of Him who, tradition tells us, she cherished in his early days.¹

In a fund-raising lecture on "making a play," given in London in 1921, she elaborates on the necessity of a "living speech," and the resultant tendency towards myth-making as found in the Irish character:

Literary speech would not do. The Irish in their ordinary living speech, had the art common to Hebrew poets of repeating in the second part of the sentence an idea embodied in the first. That sometimes led to an embellishment of the truth.²

This is in effect the method Lady Gregory herself uses in constructing her plays. "One must before writing choose the fable and stick to it," she comments in the same lecture. "A playwright must keep to essentials, and remember that the play must ascend to a climax." Nearly all her plays follow this method of development: some notion or commonplace incident occurs to her -- a quarrelling old couple are reunited in the workhouse (*The Workhouse Ward*); the death of a young man just before he is to leave gaol (*Gaol Gate*); well-meant but useless "good advice" (*Damer's Gold*); a fund-raising imposter (*The Image*); a performance of *The Dumb Wife* in New York (*Hanrahan's Oath*); childhood memories of Galway gaol (*The Rising of the Moon*); "ordinary circumstances of life" forcing reconciliation between quarrellers (*Coats*); a glimpse in the stalls of a well-dressed young man with a well-established character (*Hyacinth Halvey*); rumour-mongers exulting over the "defeat" of *The Playboy* (*The Bogie Men*); half-forgotten memories of children's stories (*The Dragon*, *The Jester*, *The Golden Apple*); a stray verse from folklore (*Aristotle's Bellows*) -- and the fable begins to wind itself

¹Notes to *The Story Brought by Brigit* (London: Putnam's, 1924), 91.
about her characters. Once her character has drawn breath, "he has more than a word to say," frequently altering the original springboard out of all recognition.\(^1\) And the creator herself, like her guileless, gullible, breathless inhabitants of Cloon, sits back in amazement at the wonders of "the wide world": "It's hard to know what might happen from when we get up in the morning to when we go to bed at night; or half that time."\(^2\)

**Myth-Making**

One might safely say, in fact, that the foundation of all Lady Gregory's work, whether in its final form comedy or tragedy, fiction or history, is that "delight in our incorrigible genius for myth-making, the faculty that makes our traditional history a perpetual joy, because it is, like the Sidhe, an eternal Shape-changer."\(^3\) Her first insight into this "craving for talk" and the resulting fantasy occurred during her search for folk tales "among the imaginative class, the holders of the traditions of Ireland," the country people in the fields and the workhouses:

But as I listened, I was moved by the strange contrast between the poverty of the tellers and the splendours of the tales. These men who had failed in life, and were old and withered, or sickly, or crippled, had not laid up dreams of good houses and fields and sheep and cattle; for they had never possessed enough to think of the possession of more as a possibility. It seemed as if their lives had been so poor and rigid in circumstance that they did not fix their minds, as more prosperous people might do, on thoughts of customary pleasure. The stories that they love are of quite visionary things; of swans that turn into kings' daughters, and of castles with crowns over the doors, and lovers' flights on the backs of eagles, and music-loving water-witches, and journeys to the other world, and sleeps that last for seven hundred years.\(^4\)

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\(^2\)*The Wren*, *The Image and other Plays* (London: Putnam's, 1922), 228.

\(^3\)Notes to *The Bogie Men, New Comedies*, 155-56.

"I never could know the meaning of that word 'impossible,'" says the Jester; and Don Quixote insists, "The business is that without seeing, you believe and confirm, affirm and maintain it!" At times the imaginary world becomes more real than the world about them; Dall Glic, the Blind Wise Man (who is only half-blind, and less wise), speaks for all: "It might be best for me the two eyes to be withered, and I seeing nothing but the ever-living laws!"

For these people, "the talk" is all; that is the secret of the workhouse ward, the bogie men, the rival editors, the townsfolk of Glon, as it is for the worshippers of the Playboy.

All that I am craving is the talk. There to be no one at all to say out to whatever thought might be rising in my innate mind! To be lying here and no conversible person in it would be the abomination of misery! whimpers Michael Miskell. And Hanrahan, transported from Yeats's Celtic Twilight to the glaring moonlight of Glon, discovers "the curse of dumbness, for that is the last curse of all!"

Poets and Dreamers

Speaking of Hyacinth Halvey, one of her most lively creations, Lady Gregory discloses the genesis of this community of breathless wonder:

As one must set one's original a little way off to get a translation rather than a tracing, he found himself in Glon, where, as in other parts of our country, "character" is built up or destroyed by a password or an emotion, rather than by experience and deliberation. Her characters are in a double sense "make-believe," for she creates an entire world which has its own semblance of logic and thus in turn

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1 The Jester, Three Wonder Plays, 178.
2 Sancho's Master, Three Last Plays, 75.
3 The Dragon, Three Wonder Plays, 68.
4 The Workhouse Ward, Seven Short Plays, 156.
5 Hanrahan's Oath, The Image and other Plays, 132.
6 Notes to Hyacinth Halvey, Seven Short Plays, 205.
its own capacity for "make-believe." "Matches!" exclaims the Ogre to the five little princes, "What are you talking about? Matches won't be invented for the next seven hundred years."1 And Celia squashes her uncle's praises of the industrious Penelope by replying, "Ah, that was in the ancient days, when you wouldn't buy it made and ready in the shops."2 Darby Costello explains his "image-making" in final tones: "And sure when we had to believe it, we must believe it."3 It is this capacity for believing in their own inventions which causes the travesties of the County of Cloon. "If there's any misfortune coming to this world, it's on myself it pitches," moans Bartley Fallon, and before the play is over Mrs. Tarpey has the entire town, including the "murdered" man, believing in his destiny as a murderer and wife-stealer. Hyacinth Halvey arrives armed with testimonials that are nothing compared with the character-building Mrs. Delane and Mr. Quirke evolve by the time he is chaired through the town as guest-speaker on "The Building of Character." (It is significant that the first comedy she translates is The Doctor in Spite of Himself). Suspicious Michael Cooney engages Joseph Nestor's help in a scheme to save Mrs. Broderick from her creditors, but it is he himself who gets caught in the Jackdaw's net. The Coeys accept the cursing Hanrahan as a saint, and then adjust their vision of the saintly to include the sinner. But it is in The Image that we see this theme of the imaginary developed most fully: Peggy Mahon, the old midwife, dreams of her "poor-looking little creature" of a stuttering husband made beautiful by the separation of death; Malachi Naughton, "the crazy mountainy man," wears the livery of the fabulous Hugh O'Lorrrha; the meddling, ineffectual Darby Costello dreams of universal peace and good will; Thomas Coppinger the stone cutter leaves space on his headstone for the glory that will come to his name; his wife talks of the glories of America instead;

1The Jester, Three Wonder Plays, 187.
2Aristotle's Bellows, op. cit., 117.
3The Image, The Image and other Plays, 92.
Brian Hosty from the bogs and stones of Connaught boasts of the beauties of his province across the mering wall.

This "make-believe" world Lady Gregory creates is a consistent one, in that all of the characters belong and actively participate in the fable; there is no touchstone of reality, even in the realistic Peter Mannion, to prick the bubble of wonder until it collapses under the weight of its own unrealistic proportions. The characters themselves are lightly sketched, taking on size and colour from their speeches and active imaginations. They accept the myth and then live and act within it, enjoying with amazed gullibility themselves as well as the object of wonder, their imaginations eagerly soaring to meet and surpass the excitement of the event. And when the bubble finally bursts, they pick up the pieces and drive off on their own dreams once more: "Sure it is only supposing the whole of us were. We were not meaning anything at all." The result is a conjunction of personal fables, which momentarily meet to form one grand story, each character all the while retaining his own image. Nobody really makes contact with anyone else: Bartley Fallon busily works in the corner of the station shed at his own device for protecting the rest of the community from his "madness"; all of Hyacinth's testimonials are actually self-praise. Mr. Quirke happily pursues his sympathetic trade; Mrs. Delane continues to dispense the private news of the world; Fardy Farrell, the "miserable slack lad, that rose in poverty," receives no testimony for his helpful advice. Everybody accepts everyone else, but nobody really believes in the reality of anyone else: Mrs. Tarpey, the "deaf" applewoman, spreads the news; Damer is not a real miser after all and his watch dog has no teeth; the giant follows his trade on stilts; the evil witch must wear a mask to retain the ugly appearance mankind bestows upon her; the Blind Wise Man has one good eye; Joseph Nestor, who "slept in the one bed with two boys that were learning Greek," gains all wisdom and knowledge from the latest edition of "Tit-Bits." The characters do not change; instead the situation simply works itself out. Only Hyacinth.

1The Image, p.47.
learns his lesson, and this too comes from belief in the wild imaginings of "Cracked Mary" and the simple Davideen. Yet these characters themselves, although static, have life. Each is created out of a mood or humour, but each in turn (with the possible exception for obvious reasons of the English magistrate) expands beyond the limitations of type-casting into humanity. From the particular they grow into the universal through the saving glory of their individual imaginations. They may not have brains, as one critic has suggested, but they have boundless delight in their own separate worlds. Meanwhile the delighted creator looks on, at one with the audience, at the antics of the characters she has summoned into Cloon.

Comedy

Geographically speaking, Cloon lies on the border between County Clare in the province of Munster and County Galway in the province of Connaught, on the main line from Ennis to Loughrea. It is Gort, and nowhere; Ireland, and everywhere; it is the boundless country of comedy. In contrasting her work with other Abbey plays Yeats commented:

Lady Gregory alone writes out of a spirit of pure comedy, and laughs without bitterness and with no thought but to laugh. She has a perfect sympathy with her characters, even with the worst of them, and when the curtain goes down we are so far from the mood of judgment that we do not even know that we have condoned many sins. He attempts to explain her predilection for comedy by invoking his own theory of the mask:

I have sometimes told one close friend that her only fault is a habit of harsh judgment with those who have not her sympathy, and she has written comedies where the wickedest people seem but bold children. She does not know why she has created that world where no one is ever judged, a high celebration of indulgence, but to me it seems that her ideal of beauty is the compensating dream of a nature wearied out by over-much judgment.

2 "Samhain," 1905, 4-5.
3 "Anima Hominis" (1917), Mythologies, 326.
Perhaps Yeats is correct in his distinction between Lady Gregory's comic vision and Synge's; there is little harshness in her work, and even in The Deliverer, the nearest she comes to satire, the attack is too direct and explicit to be considered a comic guise. Preferring to "sport with human follies, not with crimes," she moves one step further than Jonson by removing the sting altogether from her "image of the times." When her comic vision does extend beyond the borders of what Yeats terms "pure comedy," it moves not towards judgment of society, but into the realm of human tragedy, or backwards into farcical situation.

Throughout her notes Lady Gregory herself insists upon Hobbes' definition of comedy as that which gives rise to the "sudden glory, the Passion which maketh those Grimaces called Laughter." Comedy must "play merrily," but she insists at the same time that it must not be farce, which she defines as "comedy with character left out." And if we distinguish between comedy as "the humour of character" and farce as "the humour of situation," few of her plays can be labelled merely farcical. As she states in her notes to The Wrens, she is concerned with "human comedy," in this particular case "the changing of sides of man and wife," involving the reactions of others to the situation as it works out. It is true that she begins with a particular situation or idea, and then introduces her characters into it. But the play is a result of the reactions of the characters because they are as they are, and these individual reactions bring about the final situation. It might be said that she approached her peasant characters in the opposite direction from Synge: she recognized the universality of the themes which appealed to her and then wrote of them through the framework of Kiltartan; Synge on the other hand, like Yeats, felt first, observed particular qualities and characteristics which appealed to him, and then

2Our Irish Theatre,106.
3Notes to The Wrens, The Image and other Plays,252.
expressed them in terms of the universal. She worked from without; Synge and Yeats from within out. Her notes to *The Wrens* further emphasize this process of deliberate "endistancement":

Sometimes in making a plan for a play I set the scene in some other country that I may be sure the emotion displayed is not bounded by any neighbourhood but is a universal one. And I see upon a forgotten stray page that the persons of the play in my mind were at one time an Athenian who is for the *victory* of his city and quarrels with his wife who belongs to Sparta. But he is too fond of the wine cup to be of much use to the one or the other side, and hearing that the Spartans are at the very gates of Athens he is persuaded to abstain from the juice of the grape or barley until their victory is declared, and this he is assured, will be before nightfall. Then the wife turns around and is all for Athens in order that his pledge may be forever kept, and so "they work against each other and upset each other's plans and the plans of others, and she is said to be 'a good woman for her husband,' but others said she was a bad woman for the country."

In other terms, it might be said that Lady Gregory was more of the story-teller in her approach to drama, whereas her two colleagues were more the poet. She speaks of the play *in her mind*, and throughout her work, with the exception of *The Gaol Gate*, *The Story Brought by Brigit*, and less in *Dave*, it is to the mind she appeals in the audience, concentrating upon the fable or structure before the emotion or feeling which first gave rise to the idea. Consequently in her notes to *Shanwalla* she admits doubt as to the suitability of "spirits invisible" for dramatic treatment, and even during the writing, found herself working against her own feelings in her efforts to convince the audience:

But as to proof of the return, "How shall they believe if one rose from the dead?" When I was working at this play, where the spirit of the wife returns, imperceptible indeed to the Court where she gives her message, yet able to give it and so to save her man, reason told me that all in that Court should be convinced, that Magistrate and husband and officials would go on their knees in prayer, or call out their belief in this triumph of one of "the

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^1^Notes to *The Wrens, The Image and other Plays*, 252-53.
cloud of Witnesses." But when it came to writing the scene, I suppose it was either intuition or experience that took the pen and brought it to its present end.¹

Similarly, her reasons for re-creating the harmless little Twenty-Five into The Jackdaw and finally into On the Racecourse, although the final result is well worth it, follow the same vein:

It Twenty-Five was rather sentimental and weak in construction, and for a long time it was an overflowing storehouse of examples of "the faults of my dramatic method." I have at last laid its ghost in "The Jackdaw," and I have not been accused of sentimentality since the appearance of this.²

It is significant that none of the early criticisms available complain of the sentimentality of the play; instead, the players feared that it might encourage emigration. She herself is the sternest critic. And so Lady Gregory's plays continued to appeal to the mind before the heart; pity is banished unless it arouses the tragic fear as well. Even the hypercritical Miss Horniman recognized the value of these little comedies, and she writes to Yeats in 1906:

Lady Gregory's work must be well treated -- she is the best "draw" of the lot of you. I am so proud of her because she makes the people laugh in a witty manner.³

Perhaps because of her high regard for the poetic dramas of Yeats and Synge, Lady Gregory tended to underrate her comedies. She self-depreciatingly explained, "I had been forced to write comedy because it was wanted for our theatre, to put on at the end of the verse plays,"⁴ and frequently reiterated that tragedy was easier to write than comedy, implying her own preference for the latter.⁵ (The Gaol Gate and The Image appear to have been her favourites among her own plays).⁶

But if we observe the notes she wrote concerning the genesis and

¹Notes to Shanwalla, The Image and other Plays, 222-23.
²Note to The Jackdaw, Seven Short Plays, 206.
³Unpublished letter dated 26 November 1906, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
⁴Note to Dammer's Gold, New Comedies, 159.
⁶Cf. Note to The Gaol Gate, Seven Short Plays, 209; Journals, 80 and 83.
structure of her plays, it is apparent that even when the idea appeared first as a tragedy, it willingly adopted the comic form:

The idea of this play [Spreading the News] first came to me as a tragedy. I kept seeing as in a picture people sitting by the roadside, and a girl passing to the market, gay and fearless. And then I saw her passing by the same place at evening, her head hanging, the heads of others turned from her, because of some sudden story that had risen out of a chance word, and had snatched away her good name. But comedy and not tragedy was wanted at our theatre to put beside the high poetic work, The King's Threshold, The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand, The Well of the Saints; and I let laughter have its way with the little play.¹

In practically all her plays, laughter tends to find its way to the surface. And a further test of comedy, the remarks of the characters themselves, is evident throughout: "I don't wish to be killed, where I was not brought up to it like Kings' sons," remarks Simon Maor, the steward in The Golden Apple.² The aunts in The Dragon explain their care of the young Prince of the Marshes with similar common sense: "Kings and princes are getting scarce. They are the most class is wearing away, and it is right for them keep in mind their safety."³ Hazel and Mineog mourn for the easy editorial life of the past: "In the years past there used always to be something happening such as famines, or the invention of printing. The whole world has got very slack."⁴ The characters consistently remain true to their creator, "too true to be put in the ball".⁵ But the final test of all remains with the audience, and Lady Gregory notes with satisfaction the collapse of a northerner into helpless laughter: "And even a Dragon may think it a feather in his cap to have made Ulster laugh."⁶

¹Notes to Spreading the News, Seven Short Plays, 204.
³The Dragon, Three Wonder Plays, 18-19.
⁴Coates, New Comedies, 70.
⁵The Image, The Image and other Plays, 95.
⁶Notes to The Dragon, Three Wonder Plays, 84-85.
Fantasy

I found a certain rest and ease of mind in having turned from a long struggle... for exactitude in dates and names and in the setting down of facts, to the escape into a world of fantasy where I could write my own,

Lady Gregory writes of *Aristotle's Bellows*, which appeared shortly after the biography of her nephew Hugh Lane. And perhaps this is a natural step from the community of bewildered peasantry outside the post office and on the fair grounds of Cloon (the Irish substitute for the public square of Goldoni or Molière, as Miss Young remarks), to a world of the fantastic where little or no effort is made to retain the reality of the Kiltartan boundaries. As she herself observes, the door into the world of wonder is always ajar to the Irishman, and more readily accessible than the gateway to heaven:

But in later days religion, while offering abundant pictures of an after world of punishment... has left Heaven itself far off, mysterious, intangible, without earthly similes or foreshadowings. I think it is perhaps because of this that the country poets of to-day and yesterday have put their dream, their vision of the Delectable Mountains, of the Land of Promise, into exaggerated praise of places dear to them.

We find this same spirit of pagan beliefs mingled with Christian references throughout the cycles of Irish mythology and the early poetry of the bards; perhaps then it is only natural to find it as well in the language of her (and Synge's) wonder plays. Here again, also, comedy forces its way to the surface: "Character comes in, and why it is so I cannot explain, but as soon as one creates a character, he begins to put out little feet of his own and take his own way." But, just as in *Spreading the News* one could detect a more serious undercurrent, there remains this impression that her wayward puppets have barely escaped being caught in the undertow. Damer is not a real miser, but he might have been; the giant is a fake on stilts, but his trade is a gruesome one; Bartley is not mad, but Cracked Mary has been in the

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1 Notes to *Aristotle's Bellows*, Three Wonder Plays, 155.
4 Notes to *Damer's Gold*, New Comedies, 159.
asylum; the little wren boys are long-lost princes, but ragamuffins still beg on St. Stephen's Day; and the Imagists' dreams are shattered. Gradually, as her work gained strength, this seriousness increases in direct proportion to the element of fantasy, and we see the first signs of this tragic-comedy in three plays still bound to a certain extent by the community in which they are placed, *The Image* (1909), *The Full Moon* (1910), and *Dammer's Gold* (1911-12).

*The Full Moon* most clearly marks this move towards greater freedom. But here as well, although soaring into the other world, the play is firmly moored within her own peculiar brand of realism, the boundaries of Cloon, and it is dedicated "to all the sane people in or out of Cloon who know their neighbours to be naturally cracked or someway queer or to have gone wrong in the head." Here we have the same community, but "with a difference"; the same setting, but the hour has changed. Lady Gregory has drawn into the play those characters who represent the essential qualities of the earlier comedies: Shawn Early, the innocent chorus, and Bartley Fallon, the happy melancholic, wander in from the fair grounds of *Spreading the News*; the addle-pated but good-hearted Mrs. Broderick, who has gained considerable weight since she "left off fretting" over her shop, arrives from the scene of *The Jackdaw*; efficient, bustling Miss Joyce meets with Peter Tannian, whose dog once more threatens the good character of Hyacinth Halvey. And into this "sane" community dance Cracked Mary and her brother, the "innocent" Davideen. But from the broad, winking daylight of the earlier setting, we move to the shimmering, elusive clarity of the full moon. Their creator herself has apparently been touched by the community, as her notes to the play indicate:

> It had sometimes preyed on my mind that Hyacinth Halvey had been left by me in Cloon for his lifetime, bearing the weight of a character that had been put on him by force. But it failed me to release him by reason, that "binds men to the wheel"; it took the call of some of those unruly ones who give in to no limitations,

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1Dedication to *The Full Moon*, New Comedies, 25.
and dance to the sound of music that is outside this world, to bring him out from "roast and boiled and all the comforts of the day." Where he is now I do not know, but anyway he is free."

More wisely than she was to act in Shanwalla, she let her little people take their own way.

The play revolves around the question of madness, discussed with bewildering certainty by the "sane" characters who, each in his individual way, betrays his own daft qualities. In contrast, the "cracked" characters, under the lunar influence of their separate world, represent the voice of sanity. And twisted and turned, pushed in and out, Hyacinth Halvey in his topcoat (like Hanrahan with his boots) links the two groups, just as Tannian's dog changes shape and meaning under the influence of the imaginative rumour-mongers. It is Mrs. Broderick, cheerfully admitting her own propensity to daftness ("There to be any fear of me going astray, I give you my word I'd lose my wits on the moment.") who expresses the theme of the play: "Ah, miracles is gone out of the world this long time, with education, unless that they might happen in your own inside." But it is Halvey who illustrates the lesson. In fact, he calls in the lunar forces, whistling "The Heather Broom" which Davideen later sings, and recalling his own "real" life in Carrow before his greatness was thrust upon him by the eager townsfolk of Cloon. Significantly, the voice of truth, spoken by Peter Tannian, is ignored, and not until Cracked Mary appears does Hyacinth find his release.

The characters of Mary and Davideen represent the fullest expression of the wayward strain apparent throughout all of Lady Gregory's work. Cousins on the one side to Yeats's Pool (Mary also begs for the necessities of this life while maintaining contact with the life beyond), on the other to Synge's mad Owen and Old Mahon (who also speaks with

Notes to The Full Moon, op. cit., 156-57.
exaggerated frankness of his spell in the asylum\(^1\)}, they are permanent if disturbing inhabitants of the Gregory universe. Lady Gregory's attitude towards them is similar in some respects to Yeat's:

As to the fool in this world, the pity for him is mingled with some awe, for who knows what windows may have been opened to those who are under the moon's spell, who do not give in to our limitations, are not "bound by reason to the wheel."\(^2\)

But, just as she would not allow pity to clog the wheels of The Jackdaw theme, so she, like Synge, shrewdly penetrates to the reality of this frequent madness in the hills:

Miss Joyce: It is likely she was well content in it, and the friends she had being of her own class.

Cracked Mary: What way could you make friends with people would be always talking? Too much of talk and of noise there was in it, cursing, and praying, and tormenting; some dancing, some singing, and one writing a letter to a she devil called Lucifer. I not to close my ears, I would have lost the sound of Davideen's song....I was my seven months in it, my seven months and a day.

Fey though Cracked Mary may be, her insanity is a reality, and her companions in the asylum are part of the world outside. However, the "innocent" Davideen draws her to the world beyond as well. Just as Cracked Mary's sight is poor during daylight (which gives her an eerie feline quality), so Davideen's voice is "clogged through the daytime."

And although Mary's talk on her entrance meets the rather dull, commonplace level of Cloon conversation, as the moon ascends in the Cloon sky, so also does her speech, becoming richer, more pregnant and variable until at last she and Davideen are transformed from stumbling tattered humanity into nimble, graceful children of Faery:

Mary: Let you throw open the door, Davideen. It is not ourselves are in dread that the white man in the sky will be calling names after us and ridiculing us. Halha! I might be as foolish as yourselves and as fearful, but for the Almighty that left a little cleft in my skull, that would let in His


\(^2\) Cf. Malachi's speech in The Image, 70.
candle through the night time... Come on, Davideen, come out now, we have the wideness of the night before us. O golden God! All bad things quieten in the night time, and the ugly thing itself will put on some sort of a decent face! Come out now to the night that will give you the song, and will show myself out as beautiful as Helen of the Greek gods, that hanged herself the day there first came a wrinkle on her face!

And brother and sister dance out in a burst of song to the faery world of the full moon.

As the power of the moon increases, the earthbound folk of Cloon themselves give way before the power of the imagination: Hyacinth grows wilder at the thought of his imprisonment in character; Peter Tannian's jibes grow more vindictive; Mary Broderick abandons herself to sympathetic fatuity; Shawn Early lapses still further into blank repetition; Bartley Fallon reasons his way into a good case of pseudo-insanity until Hyacinth's assumed madness sends him, impressed, back to his former melancholia ("I declare I amn't worth a match."); only Miss Joyce escapes, but she has her spinster's mind on other affairs. It is Cracked Mary who provides Hyacinth with his release, when he deserts the "sane" people of Cloon for the freedom and joy of the world beyond:

You have the door open -- the speckled horses are on the road! -- make a leap on the horse as it goes by, the horse that is without a rider. Can't you hear them puffing and roaring? Their breath is like a fog upon the air... Make a snap at the bridle as it passes by the bush in the western gap. Run out now, run, where you have the bare ridge of the world before you, and no one to take orders from but yourself, maybe, and God.

This is the message of Synge's tramp and Playboy, tinker and beggar.

And, as we shall see, it is the call to freedom of Lady Gregory's Image-maker. But the folk of Cloon remain behind, bound once more to the wheel of their own little world, delightful as it may be: "and it is likely they may be talking of it yet; for the talks of Cloon are long talks, and the histories told there do not lessen or fail."¹ While The Full Moon was "in the making," Lady Gregory wrote in her diary:

¹Notes to The Full Moon, New Comedies, 157.
I am really getting to work on a little comedy, of which I think at present that if its feet are of clay, its high head will be of rubbed gold, and that people will stop and dance when they hear it and not know for a while the piping was from beyond the world! But no doubt if it ever gets acted, it will be "what Lady Gregory calls a comedy and everybody else, a farce!"\textsuperscript{1}

Surely this time at any rate, the dramatist was right.

Davideen and Cracked Mary are but two of a long line of strange characters who work their way through Lady Gregory's plays. All of them are poor in this world's goods, rich in the treasures of another world. Most of them are beggars, "scarecrow images,"\textsuperscript{2} some of them are daft; all bring a message to this world. First to appear is the "tattered, moon-mad beggar" of Kincora, who breaks in upon the quarrels of servants and kings to bid King Brian seek "the hidden key of heaven" at "the table of the angels":

\begin{quotation}
Come out before your candle will be spent,
At the asking of the Man beyond, the King of Sunday.
Make yourself ready for the day of the Mountain,
Before your lease will be out and your summons written!\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quotation}

And Brian, who earlier rejected the love song of Aoibhell of the Sidhe for the sake of his beloved Ireland,\textsuperscript{4} accedes to the strange half-chanted, half-sung, part-Pagan, part-Christian call to peace. But although the travelling woman of the roads brings him news of peace throughout the five provinces, she in turn is banished by Gormleith, "Crow of Battle," and Brian achieves his lasting peace not in the land of the Gael, but in the ever-living world beyond, won at great price in the Battle of Clontarf. "Those who serve Ireland take for their lot lasting battles -- lasting quarrels."\textsuperscript{5} The Gael are not yet ready for the company of

\textsuperscript{1}Our Irish Theatre, 95.
\textsuperscript{2}Young, The Plays of Lady Gregory, 236.
\textsuperscript{3}Kincora, rev. ed. (1909), Irish Folk-History Plays First Series (London: Putnam's, 1912), 105-06.
\textsuperscript{4}Prologue to Kincora, first version, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Maumset, 1905), Vol. II of Abbey Theatre Series.
\textsuperscript{5}Ibid.
Her next play, *The White Cockade*, again folk-history, once more introduces a messenger from the other world. But this time the message comes not of the kingdom of heaven, but of a new kingdom on earth. And once more hopes must be deferred, as the piteous Lady Dereen mourns the death of her king and the loss of her fortune. Here, too, is another call to Ireland, not of peace, but of war, and the half-mad old lady, who like Kathleen-ni-Houlihan has given her lands and her youth to her dream, is a tragic contrast to the wandering beggar of *Kincora*. Like Cracked Mary's, her destiny is the world of the moon, for her eyes are tired "watching for the sun to rise in the east." Like Cracked Mary, also, she sees what others cannot, and her rejection of James at the end is as prophetic as her recognition of "the smooth, white, unlucky Stuart hand" at the beginning. And the final touch of irony lies in the exaggerated contrast between the worldly, proverb-spouting Mrs. Kelleher, who regains not only her wealth but her lazy son, and the luckless, wandering, poor Lady Dereen, who has not even been allowed to keep her dream.

When next the raggedy beggar appears he acts not only as messenger, but as protagonist: the "ballad-singer" of *The Rising of the Moon*, the chattering Song-maker of *Dervorgilla*, the kingly beggar of *The Travelling Man*. As their importance to the plot increases, so does the significance of their message from the past to the lives of those about them. The rebel ballad-singer, by reminding the Sergeant of his own Fenian youth, instigates the battle in the policeman's mind between duty to his pledge and love of his country. The young bard from Connacht, singing "the sorrowful song" of Diarmuid's betrayal, calls down once more upon the

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1 Cf. criticism by "A Visitor" (?Edward Martyn), *Sinn Fein*, 20 February 1909: "The travelling woman was a sort of apparition and startled the audience....It looked as if Mr. Yeats had suddenly loosened from the wings Caitlin ni Houlihan and sent her in with a few chants and prophecies to save a very poor situation."


3 *The White Cockade*, 123.
unhappy Dervorgilla "the swift, unflinching, terrible judgment of the young."\(^1\) The soft-spoken, sweet-natured Travelling Man, in his refusal to judge, intensifies the tragic irony of the Mother's rejection of the King who gave her all. The device appears again in \textit{Grania}, where Finn disguises himself as his own beggar-messenger. Once more, in her last play, the beggar as "Servant of Poverty" makes a brief appearance, but by the time \textit{Dave} was put into rehearsal, the Beggarwoman had been excised from the text. The dramatist had learned to express the message of the other world through the imperfect humanity of this world:

I think it very much better with Kate as the "messenger," and left her as in the old, showing a little pettishness and human weariness after her ascent to "those high countries," and her message from them, which she had perhaps forgotten.\(^2\)

The second characteristic of Lady Gregory's "strange characters," their "daftness," is also developed throughout the plays, until it achieves psychological insight in her characterization of the Mother in \textit{Aristotle's Bellows} and Malachi Naughton of \textit{The Image}. We first recognize the touch of madness in Mrs. Broderick of \textit{The Jackdaw}, whose mind is "tossed" by the troubles of her shop-keeping. As we have already seen, she joins Cracked Mary in \textit{The Full Moon}, adding her scatter-brained advice to the chorus of insanity. The Mother in \textit{Aristotle's Bellows} (1919-1921) is another example of these psychological sketches. Of \textit{Aristotle's Bellows} the author writes,

\begin{quote}
If the play has a moral it is given in the words of the Mother, "It is best make changes little by little, the same as you'd put clothes upon a growing child."\(^3\)
\end{quote}

Throughout the play, the Mother as commentator rings the changes on this theme, although in terms of action she is actually a by-stander. With a memory "too weak...to be telling lies," she represents the voice of

\(^1\) Dervorgilla, \textit{Irish Folk-History Plays First Series}, 186.
\(^3\) Notes to \textit{Aristotle's Bellows}, \textit{Three Wonder Plays}, 155-56.
common sense -- although somewhat addled -- in contrast to her step-son, the cranky, idealistic Conan: "It's best leave the time under the mercy of the Man that is over us all." And in her sudden change at the blast of the bellows she amply proves the truth of her proverbs; until she is changed once more "to what I was before, and the town and the country wishing me well, I having got my enough of unfriendly looks and hard words!" However, in the raggedy mountainy man of The Image we find as well as a variation on the daftness which sends Cracked Mary to the madhouse, an interesting twist to the messenger theme. For here the harmlessly mad Malachi not only carries the message to others, but conceives it and is in turn affected by it himself. Where Mrs. Broderick and Conan's mother belong to the community, Malachi prefers to keep to himself:

The towns do be in uproar and do be crowded, and the roads to be wet, and wide; and as to the villages, there is spies in them, and traitors, and people you wouldn't like to be talking with. Too venomous they are and too corrupted with drink. I'd like to keep my own company, and I to have no way of living but the berries of the bush.2

And when he is driven among the people for love of his "own choice man," his message brings such confusion and chaos that in the end he returns "to the beasts and the birds that pay respect to him," applauded by old Peggy the midwife who in turn, like Malachi and Synge's blind people, rejects the community to follow her own dream.

The World of Wonder

In 1908 Lady Gregory translated Molière's L'Avare for the Abbey players. Several years later she returned to the theme of the miser, but as usual her comic vision took its own way, and the result is rather a Timon in reverse, with little similarity to his French cousin. In fact, in the original scenario, Damer was not to appear at all:

1Aristotle's Bellows, I, 99 and III, 152.
I pictured to myself...a young man, a mere lad, very sleepy in the
daytime. He was surrounded by people kind and wise, who lamented
over his rags and idleness and assured him that if he didn't get up
early and do his work in the daytime he would never know the feel of
money in his hand. He listens to all their advice, but he does not
take it, because he knows what they do not know, that it is in the
night time precisely he is filling his pocket, in the night when, as
I think, we receive gifts from the unseen. I placed him in the house
of a miser, an old man who had saved a store of gold. .... I did not
mean this old man, Damer, to appear at all. He was to be as invisible
as that Heaven of which we are told the violent take it by force.
...Then I thought it would have a good stage effect if old Damer
could just walk once across the stage in the background. His relations
might have come into the house to try and make themselves agreeable to
him, and he would appear and they would vanish. Damer comes in, and
contrary to my intention, he begins to find a tongue of his own. He
has made his start in the world, and has more than a word to say....
Damer has taken possession of it, turning it to be as simple as a
folk-tale, where the innocent of the world confound the wisdom of
the wise. The idea with which I set out has not indeed quite vanished,
but is as if "extinct and pale; not darkness, but light that has
become dead."1

Once more, then, we have the character wilfully setting out on little
feet of his own, but more significant here, he changes the entire nature
of the fable. The ogre is defeated by slow and not-so-simple Simon,
the conquered dragon leads the valiant hero to the buried treasure;
the wicked sister, promising eternal allegiance, gains a suitable reward;
and we have moved with Lady Gregory through one more gateway, into the
land of eternal wonder, the fairy tale. The functions of the "stranger"
are taken over by the magical devices of the enchanter.

In the wonder plays which followed these variations on the daft
inhabitants of Cloon County, Lady Gregory is again true to her ideal of
the theatre. Her earlier plays had stemmed from her observations of the
Galway peasant in particular and the Irish character in general; while
scholars were busily rejecting much of the earlier printed history, she
helped refill the vessel "by calling in tradition, or if need be our

1Notes to Damer's Gold, New Comedies,160-61.
own imaginings" in her six folk-history plays, which, if not always suitable for performances in schools, in Synge's words "made the writing of historical drama again possible." And now once more she dug deep into the folklore of the people in search of "the grimaces called Laughter." Nor was she disappointed.

And who can say whether these have travelled from east to west, or from west to east, for the barony of Kiltartan, in common with at least three continents, holds fragments of the wonder tales told in the childhood of the world, she commented on the similarity between many of her Kiltartan wonder tales and classical mythology. And so once again, Lady Gregory has rooted her plays in Kiltartan soil, while soaring beyond the boundaries of this world. "I long had it in my mind to write a play for children, put together from the folk-tales and fairy tales of Ireland," she writes in her notes to The Golden Apple (1915), the first of her tales of wonder. But it was not until she felt free of all earth-bound stage restrictions that she could give her imagination full rein. And the first difference we note in her plays from this point on is the dramatic license she allows herself: a well head and a weakly little tree are enough for the Garden at the World's End; the "Hag of Slaughter" dons a paper mask and cloak for her witching escapades; a few waving boughs and a cloud of smoke create the fearsome Wood of Wonders; the Giant openly plies his trade on wooden stilts with the aid of a step-ladder; a long grey gown and a cat's head transform the little Spanish princess into a cat. The dramatist is now sufficiently at home with her craft to become carefree; structure is mastered, and disbelief is willingly suspended. Indeed, the dramatist takes the audience into her confidence and openly laughs with us at these dressed-up, make-believe Kiltartanites.

1 Quoted by Lady Gregory in her Notes to The White Cockade, Irish Folk-History Plays Second Series, 194.
2 Note to The Kiltartan Wonder Book (Dublin: Maunsel, 1910), 105.
3 Note to The Golden Apple, 107.
For all of the characters are actually inhabitants of Cloon in disguise, and each, from the hot-tempered, ailing King of Ireland to the Witch’s Gardener, speak a richly embroidered Kiltartan. All of them, too, being familiar friends, have lost their bite. The Witch herself, faithfully carrying out her trade according to the diabolical code of witchery, is harried by her selfish, not-so-ugly daughter, Pampogue: “Have you no thought at all for her who cared and reared you, and gave in to everything you would ask?”1 The Giant, Fatach Mor, cannot bear the idea of swallowing “melodious lying Irishmen”; in fact, he has “had a weak stomach since a child” and his bustling wife must coddle him with boiled cabbage and nourishing porridge: “It is often I do be thinking since I turned to be a giant I might have followed some better trade.” His Connacht wife speaks slightingly of Pampogue, whose father was “but a well-looking Munsterman, coaxed the witch with a sweet note in his voice.”2 And so the play runs merrily on its way, crammed with harmless magic and frequent shape-changing, with all ending happily — except for the witch, who must suffer the consequences of her profession and crumble into old bones and dust.

The Golden Apple twinkles to a happy conclusion, and The Dragon (1917) soon takes its place. Once more we are in the not-so-strange world of the fable, but where the earlier play had been founded upon familiar folk and fairy tales, here we have one of Lady Gregory’s original myths, and as can be expected, there is an underlying hint of seriousness. Grief had entered her life; the beloved nephew Hugh Lane had gone down with the Lusitania, her son Robert was killed in action. And so her natural tendency to moralize was further emphasized, even in this "unseen inevitable kick of the swing towards gay-coloured comedy from the shadow of tragedy." She herself observes:

1The Golden Apple, I, 28.
2Ibid., II, 30.
It was begun seriously enough, for I see among my scraps of manuscripts that the earliest outline of it is entitled "The Awakening of a Soul," the soul of the little Princess who had not gone "far out in the world." And that idea was never quite lost, for even when it had all turned to comedy I see as an alternative name "A Change of Heart." For even the Dragon's heart is changed by force, as happens in the old folk tales and the heart of some innocent creature put in its place by the conqueror's hand; all change more or less except the Queen. She is yet satisfied that she has moved all things well, and so she must remain till some new breaking up or re-birth.¹

The framework, however, is laughter, and again the dramatist with a friendly wink warns us not to be taken in by the multi-coloured costume. Here, too, the comedy comes as much from the characters as from the situations in which they involve themselves, and there are frequent homely touches of Cloon. The governess-turned-Queen, indulging in her new authority, sends runners throughout the wide world advertising the position of cook at the castle, but does not neglect to put up tablets in the local Post Office. The poor king, fretting from hunger and the imminent death of his daughter by a devouring dragon, has a heart "as weighty as that the chair near broke under him."² Taig the Tailor cannot conceal his trade under the Prince's grand clothes, and the great coach he "borrows" for his approach to the castle is the local magistrate's, harnessed to two dray horses from the field. Opposed to these changeable Kiltartanites are the new Queen and Fintan the Astrologer who, although passingly sorry at the fate of the Princess, is enraged at the hinted slight to his profession: "It would be a deception and a disappointment out of measure, there to come no Dragon, and I after foretelling and prophesying him." But all works out to the satisfaction of everyone, and Fintan can depart with his name cleared: "Ye'll maybe believe me to have foreknowledge another time, and I proved to be right."³

¹Notes to The Dragon, Three Wonder Plays, 84-85.
²The Dragon, I, 16.
³Ibid., III, 64-66.
The joys of enchantment continue into Aristotle's Bellows (1919), where we have not only the mechanical magic of the old bellows, but two sardonic fiddle-playing cats as well. Once more the theme is change, but this time not for the better, and here Lady Gregory seems to be mocking herself as much as the feckless members of Conan's household. But the serious tone of the underlying structure remains, for the cranky Conan is far more human than the dragon-quelling prince of the earlier folk-fantasy, and his dream of an orderly world is a recurring theme throughout Lady Gregory's work. However the play remains comic in structure, effectively banishing the cloud of tragedy with the rhyming cats, a pigeon that turns into a crow, the cyclonic, house-cleaning Calia, the team of Rock and Flannery, who together with the innumerable songs give the play the quality of a ballad-opera. The reformed would-be reformer concludes the musical romp with a song and a timely observation:

Not a complaint! What call have I to go complaining? The world is a very good world, the best nearly I ever knew.1

Like Yeats, however, Lady Gregory tended to re-work her themes, examining them from all possible angles before moving on to fresh dramatic experiments. Consequently we find in her fourth wonder play, The Jester, many characteristics we have encountered before. Again, this is a children's play, written for her grandson's class at Harrow. But here the serious element is much closer to the surface, and the "message" snaps the slight bonds of musical comedy to take over the entire action and form of the play:

I was asked one Christmas by a little schoolboy to write a play that could be acted at school; and in looking for a subject my memory went back to a story I had read in childhood called "The Discontented Children," where, though I forget its incidents, the gamekeeper's children change places for a while with the children of the Squire, and I thought I might write something on these lines. But my mind soon went mucking as our people (and Shakespeare) would say, and broke through the English hedges into the unbounded wonder-world.2

1 Aristotle's Bellows, Three Wonder Plays, 154.
2 Notes for The Jester, on cit., 221.
Her usual procedure is reversed; what first took form in her mind as a light folktale, dons a different pair of boots. Many elements of the play do belong to the world of children's fantasy: the scene is the Island of Hy-Brasil, which surfaces once in seven years; the wren boys wear paper masks "such as one finds in a Christmas cracker"; the Ogre, receiving the punishment appropriate to his crime, is turned into the natural quarry of little boys, a rat; there is much good fun when the little princes struggle for their dinner and the little wren-boys scramble for theirs; the Dowager Messengers walk right out of Cinderella, and the old Guardian's rightful parents are Gilbert and Sullivan; Aristotle's enchanted cats reappear; and the numerous anachronisms would delight any small boy or larger adult. But the Jester himself belongs to a different world.

For once again we encounter the "ragged beggar" who brings word from beyond, but here the messenger himself has power over that other world while acting as protagonist in this one. At his first appearance, the mad jester, "a tramp class of a man," creates disorder amongst the Governor's well-regulated community, inciting rebellion and contributing to the confusion. He is a jester, and as such performs the tricks of the traditional fool; he wears ragged clothes and broken shoes, the costume appropriate to the wandering minstrel, who stops "in no place, but going through the whole roads of the world" with his songs, his tricks and his riddles. But, like Yeats's fool, he is more than a jester; and he is dressed in green, the colour we associate both with the land of faery (and the "nature" of folk tales) and Yeats's earlier Green Helmet. The connection with Yeats's image is stronger yet, for when the Jester reappears to bring order once again to Hy-Brasil, we learn that he is "the great Master of all magic and all enchantments, Manannan, Son of the Sea."

\[\text{Ibid., 222.}\]
Yes, I am Manannan, that men are apt to call a Jester and a Fool, and a Disturber, and a Mischief-maker, upsetting the order of the world and making confusion in its order and its ways....And now here is my word of command! Everyone into his right place!  

But the difference between Manannan as portrayed by Yeats and the Jester as seen by Lady Gregory is even more revealing, for both dramatists have here, as always, remained true to their own comic vision. As we have seen, Yeats's Red Jester, like his image of the Pool, belongs to Yeatsian mythology, and is a dramatized variation of his concept of the creative imagination. Lady Gregory's Jester, on the other hand, though like Cracked Mary an inhabitant of her personal vision of the world, has his feet planted firmly in Irish soil; he banishes the Ogre, but the princes and wren boys diagnose their own case and prescribe the remedy. Her Manannan does not change anything; his Mullein-dust merely makes observers "think themselves are blind/Or confused in the mind."

They must learn to see for themselves. And though, like the Sea-god of Yeats's fable, he acts in a sense as "Rector of this land," he in turn pays sacrifice to a more powerful deity:

And when I see a plan make  
The Birds that watch us frown,  
I come and toss the pancake  
And turn it upside down!  

In this I follow after  
Lycurgus who was wise;  
To the little god of laughter  
I make my sacrifice!  

Lycurgus, the legendary lawgiver of Sparta, celebrated by Plutarch as gentle of disposition, just and moderate in his government, concerned with the exercise of virtue and the concord of his people, -- it is, then, to this half-man, half-god we must look for Lady Gregory's parallel to the great Irish god of the sea. Lycurgus had himself dedicated a little statue to Laughter, and even more appropriate as a model for the schoolboys of Harrow (as he had been for Plato, Diogenes, and Zeno),

1 The Jester, op. cit., 218.
2 Ibid.
he considered the education of youth the most important and noblest work of a lawgiver. Mirth itself to the Lacedaemonians must be temperate and seasonable, to be considered not as an end in itself, but "as a pleasant sauce to ease the trouble of their strict and hard life."\(^1\) However Lady Gregory is yet more explicit about the humanizing process of her Jester figure, and we read in her notes to the play that she had a contemporary figure in mind as well as the legendary and half-legendary examples:

Yet it did not quite run out of reach of human types, for having found some almost illegible notes, I see that at the first appearance of Manannan I had put in brackets the initials "G.B.S."\(^2\) Thus the model Lady Gregory recommends is, after all, a human one:

the red-bearded myth-making Irishman, Bernard Shaw, gentlest of friends,\(^3\) helper yet stern critic of the Abbey Theatre,\(^4\) who as puritan and economist had much in common with the legendary Spartan, and who, like the Jester, "for all his quips and mischief and 'tricks and wonders,'"\(^5\) devoted his life to the creation of order in a disorderly world. And introduced as runner-up is that other almost legendary Irishman, AE, who with Shaw and Lady Gregory, had never forgotten "the lands of Immortal Youth which flush with magic the dreams of childhood."\(^6\)

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\(^2\)Notes for *The Jester*, op.cit., 221.

\(^3\)Cf. the dedication of *The Golden Apple*: "To George Bernard Shaw: The Gentlest of my Friends."

\(^4\)Shaw lectured on behalf of the Theatre, wrote *John Bull's Other Island* for the company, although for lack of a Broadbent it was not produced there until 1916, severely reprimanded them for rejecting *The Silver Tassie*, and throughout retained a warm interest. Lady Gregory in turn gave him her lifelong friendship, and they enjoyed discussing each other's work. It was she who suggested the page's sneeze in *Saint Joan*. Cf. *Journals*, 199-216; 110-111; 66-67.

\(^5\)Notes for *The Jester*, 221.

\(^6\)Ibid., 222.
Strong People of the World

As we have seen, the base to Lady Gregory's personal theatre was the little community of Kiltartan, where through restricted dialect and characterization she managed to express her universal comic vision. Closer examination reveals two basic themes which are both universal and persistent: the idealist and his shattered dream. As all who knew her attest, and as can readily be observed from her writings, Lady Gregory had a deep sympathy with the "image-maker," the rebel who must stand alone, apart from his community and yet bound to it by his dream.¹

"To think like a wise man, but express oneself like the common people" was her favourite quotation from Aristotle; perhaps she, too, felt the inevitable loneliness of the leader who must take his own way. For as Yeats has said, "always her wise man was heroic man."²

It is not surprising to discover in her first folk-histories, therefore, an emphasis far more personal than historical in her examination of three "strong people of the world"³: the tragic heroines of Irish history, Gormleith, Dervorgilla, and Grania. Kincora, (1904-1909), revised many times with the help of Yeats and Synge,⁴ was one of her first plays; it was also her first tragedy, for in her plays the "strong people" are conceived within a tragic framework of the struggle between those few who believe, and the many who can not. Despite her frequent revisions, Kincora itself remains an unsuccessful play although


²Yeats, Introduction to "Fighting the Waves," Wheels and Butterflies, 70.

³Dedication to Irish Folk-History Plays First Series: "These three plays concerning strong people of the world I offer to Theodore Roosevelt one of the world's strong men."

in a sense her most successful rendering of folk history. However the key figure, Gormleith, rises above the rather stiff historical personages assembled at King Brian's court to become the personification of Kathleen ni Houlihan in warlike dress, the Morrigu or Irish war goddess herself. The tragedy here is Ireland's, pursued by an "ungovernable heroic emotion" which in its strength gives Ireland her greatness, and in its weakness subsides into petty hatred:

Ireland has been fighting these ten thousand years, and that custom to be changed, it is likely she would go to nothing, claims Gormleith, queen of battle. And Malachi, the High King wisely foretells:

In my opinion you will not see entire peace or the end of quarrels in Ireland, till such time as the grass stops growing or talk comes to the thrush, a prophecy perhaps still sadly true. But the comment made by an Irish peasant who travelled from Killaloe (near the site of Kincora) to Dublin for the Abbey production expresses most clearly the dramatist's ability to infuse history with a sense of immediate personal urgency: "It's a great pity," he said of King Brian to the man next to him, "that he didn't marry a quiet girl from his own district."

It is this quality of personal tragedy that pervades Dervorgilla (1907) and Grania (1911), the latter perhaps too personal a commentary, for Lady Gregory refused to have it produced during her lifetime. In

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1 Cf. Yeats's letter to John Quinn, 29 June 1905, Letters, 452 and his later comment concerning the revised version in 1909, Autobiographies, 483.

2 Yeats's memorandum to Horace Plunkett for the patent enquiry in 1904, "Plays Produced by the Irish Literary Theatre and by the Irish National Theatre Society," in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.

3 Kincora, op. cit., III, 135.

4 Ibid., I, 94-95.

5 Quoted by Yeats, Samhain, 1905, 5, and reprinted by Lady Gregory in her notes to Kincora, op. cit., 204.
these two plays, as in most of her work, the history of Ireland is made a means to an end, the working-out of a personal theme of the dramatist, in this case the tragedy which must inevitably follow those who like Synge's Deirdre reach out for the joys and sorrows of a fully-expressed life. But Lady Gregory's heroines are cast in a far different mould, as can be expected of one whose comedy even rejects the softening quality of pity:

I think I turned to Grania because so many have written about sad, lovely Deirdre, who when overtaken by sorrow made no good battle at the last. Grania had more power of will, and for good or evil twice took the shaping of her life into her own hands.

This deep personal tone sounds throughout both plays, and unlike her earlier folk dramas, the epic framework is shot through with the immediacy which comes from deep psychological probing; the characters of Grania and Dervorgilla are not woven into a tapestry of heroic tradition as in the cycles from which they come, but rather set in stark relief against a sombre background of proven inevitability. History has already judged, the author merely examines. Nor is there any overtone of a deliberate cramming of dates and events, as Lady Gregory willingly admits; "a question tempts one more than the beaten path of authorised history."¹

The form of Grania is almost symbolic. There are three characters, but five protagonists, for Love and Jealousy play equal roles in this heroic epic tale; and the power of Fate, the "Woman in the Stars," is felt throughout this fable of three lovers, "one of whom had to die."

The path taken is from the beginning preordained:

Grania: I asked the old people what love was, and they gave me no good news of it at all. Three sharp blasts of the wind they said it was, a white blast of delight and a grey blast of discontent and a third blast of jealousy that is red.

Finn: That red blast is the wickedest of the three.²

This theme of love and loss colours the entire play, introduced in a cautious duet between Finn and Grania, taken up by Diarmuid ("And what is a home or a house without a wife and a companion at the heart?"³).

¹Notes to Grania, Irish Folk-History Plays First Series, 195.
²Grania, op.cit., I, 7.
³Ibid., I, 12.
sounded in chorus by all three at parting ("But understand well, it is not as a wife I will bring you, but I will keep my faith with Finn."\(^1\)), developed once more between the two lovers ("For it is certain it is by the respect of others we partly judge even those we know through and through."\(^2\)), reaching new heights on the re-appearance of Finn, who comes begging for the sign of their faith ("He trusted me and he could trust me, and now he will never put trust in me again."\(^3\)), and resounding in full chorus throughout the last act, where, although Finn and Grania hold the stage, the shadow of Diarmuid bears equal weight. Again and again she sounds the chords of love-hate, pride-jealousy, faith-suspicion. The characters interchange, the balance remains. Grania woos Diarmuid away from Finn, but her victory is a sham one. Hatred replaces love for Diarmuid in Finn's heart, but it is Finn who achieves his lasting loyalty. The union of Grania and Diarmuid comes too late to soften Grania's bitter pride, and it is the mockery of Diarmuid's shade that drives her to Finn at the end. The one time Finn appears bearing only hatred in his heart, he comes as Half-Man and masked. And in the final scene, when Grania rejects the memory of her love for her dead husband, it is not out of love for Finn, but because that love had only been half-given:

Grania: He had no love for me at any time. It is easy know it now. I knew it all the while, but I would not give in to believe it. His desire was all the time with you yourself and Almhuin. He let on to be taken up with me, and it was but letting on. Why would I fret after him that so soon forgot his wife, and left her in a wretched way?...Does any man at all speak lies at the very brink of death, or hold any secret in his heart?...And I have lost all on this side of the world, losing that trust and faith I had, and finding him to think of me no more than of a flock of stairs would cast their shadow on his path.\(^4\)

One had to die and Fate cast for Diarmuid. But the two left remain only half-alive, for with Diarmuid went their love and trust, the only reality:

\(^1\)Ibid., I, 20.
\(^2\)Ibid., II, 32.
\(^3\)Ibid., II, 36.
\(^4\)Ibid., III, 61-62.
Finn: I thought to leave you and to go from you, and I cannot do it. For we three have been these seven years as if alone in the world; and it was the cruelty and the malice of love made its sport with us, when we thought it was our own way we were taking, driving us here and there, knocking you in between us, like the ball between two goals, and the hurlers being out of sight and beyond the boundaries of the world. And all the three of us have been as if worsted in that play. And now there are but the two of us left, and whether we love or hate one another, it is certain I can never feel love or hatred for any other woman from this out, or you yourself for any other man. And so as to yourself and myself, Grania, we must battle it out to the end.1

Perhaps it is Diarmuid who wins after all.

Dervorgilla is a variation on the same theme, or rather its counter-theme. Once again history ends on a question, but here the contest goes on within Dervorgilla's mind, long after the echoes of battle have faded away. And where Grania was almost ritualistic in its balanced symbolism, Dervorgilla is almost completely realistic, the answer fully stated at the beginning of the play. We know that the onetime Queen of Breffny can only atone for her crime by facing the final judgment of her race. The action winds surely to its inevitable fulfilment, and throughout the play the sins of the past are re-enacted in the present: the young people at their sport strive to emulate the heroes of Dervorgilla's youth; the English bowmen, an essential background to the personal tragedy of Dervorgilla, kill a harmless crane in flight and the blood stains her cloak; forty-two years of Dervorgilla's life were devoted to wilful pride and pleasure, forty-two to prayer and pain; a young apprentice songmaker innocently echoes his blind old grandfather's wisdom, and the inexperienced youths at play must in the end pass judgment on a crime committed long before they were born. The play reaches its climax when the wisdom of age bravely accepts the consequences of youth:

1Ibid., III, 66.
For there is little of my life but is spent, and there has come upon me this day all the pain of the world and its anguish, seeing and knowing that a deed once done has no undoing, and the lasting trouble of my unfaithfulness has brought upon you and your children for ever. There is kindness in your unkindness, not leaving me to go and face Michael and the Scales of Judgment wrapped in comfortable words, and the praises of the poor, and the lulling of psalms, but from the swift, unflinching, terrible judgment of the young:

God might forgive, but a crime against the people cannot die unless they too are willing to forgive. And so Dervorgilla must pay for her disloyalty to her husband and race, just as Finn, Grania, and Diarmuid face the consequences of their own disloyalties to each other. True to her own inexorable dramatic logic, Lady Gregory has once more particularized the universal, making the myth human and the fable real:

Cuchulain's bravery, and Deirdre's beauty "that brought the Sons of Usnach to their death" find their way, indeed, into the folk-poetry of all the provinces; but the characters of the Fianna, Grania's fickleness, and Conan's bitter tongue, and Oisin's gentleness to his friends and his keen wit in the arguments with St. Patrick, and Goll's strength, and Osgar's high bravery, and Finn's wisdom, that was beyond that of earth, are as well known as the characteristics of any noticeable man of modern times.

Her comic folk-histories are negative commentaries upon the strong hero, for both The White Cockade and The Canavans deal with weaklings who refuse to accept either the rôle put upon them by the people or the consequences of their own actions. Both are suitably punished by loss of dignity; James is rolled in a barrel, Antony Canavan collapses into hare-like trembling, and Peter the Miller romps to self-expression in a manner strongly reminiscent of The Playboy:

Isn't it the fool I was wasting time -- wasting the years -- looking here and there for the strongest? I give you my word, it was not till this present minute that I knew the strongest to be myself!"
Farce, too, must answer to the same laws.

**Tragedy**

It is perhaps inevitable that the celebration of the rebellious individual should appear under the mantle of tragedy, for in Lady Gregory's universe, as in Yeats's, such is the fate of those who take destiny into their own hands. But as we have observed in Yeats's heroic fool, clearly the struggle is worth it, for only in controversy against inevitable Fate or overwhelming odds does he realize his full strength. This is the message of Grania, Cormleith, the penitent Dervorgilla; it is the message of Ireland's history. And when we turn from her tragic "tragic-comedies" to her "pure" tragedies, *MacDonough's Wife* and *The Gaol Gate*, we find the same stirring call to inner strength and the independent spirit.

The world in which Lady Gregory's plays have reality is very much a peopled world, inhabited by characters who are all gifted with loquacity and infinite capacity to believe, their individuality a result of fertile imagination. Consequently she rarely scales the heights of heroic tragedy, for as Yeats pointed out, the spirit of laughter is a great deflater, and once Lady Gregory allows her little people to take on their wayward personalities, she is no longer in control:

I had been forced to write comedy because it was wanted for our theatre, to put on at the end of the verse plays, but ...I think tragedy is easier. For...tragedy shows humanity in the grip of circumstance, of fate, of what our people call "the thing will happen," "the Woman in the Stars that does all." There is a woman in the stars they say, who is always hurting herself in one way or other, and according to what she is doing at the hour of your birth, so will it happen to you in your lifetime, whether she is hanging herself or drowning herself or burning herself in the fire....Well, you put your actor in the grip of this woman, in the claws of the cat. Once in that grip you know what the end must be. You may let your hero kick or struggle, but he is in the claws all the time, it is a mere question as to how nearly you will let him escape, and when you will allow the pounce. Fate itself is the protagonist, your actor cannot carry much character, it is out of place. You do not want to know the character of a wrestler you see trying his strength at a show.  

1Notes to Damon's Gold, New Comedies, 158-59.
Her three tragic folk histories, then, were originally intended to celebrate strength; as we have seen, the author's sympathy and natural inquisitiveness got in the way, and the wrestlers, even though their final throws were ordained, called forth the exaltation of the tragic hero, but little of the fear and even less of the pity. The bard McDonough is of the same mould; and here the dramatist herself is tempting fate, for in this case her figure does not have the safe veil of centuries wrapped about him. She knew McDonough personally; he had piped at the great sheep-shearing festivals of Roxborough (Gregoostha) had followed her to Coole for her wedding celebrations, and had returned for her son's coming of age. But as always the "fascination of things difficult" tempted; and the story of McDonough was equally appealing because of the opportunity to observe the Irishman's "incorrigible genius for myth-making" in action. "He was so great a piper that in the few years since his death myths have already begun to gather around him," she commented in her notes to the play. And so the mastery of great grief becomes overwhelmed by "the lastling pride of the artist of all ages:

We are the music makers
And we are the dreamers of dreams...."¹

McDonough's grief for his wife becomes a part of the art he shares with Yeats's Seanchain, and his stirring cry is one with his pride: "But I am of the generations of Orpheus, and have in me the breed of his master!"²

In The Gaol Gate, on the other hand, the human spirit holds sway over the simple parable of the two ignorant country-women who are helpless against the machinery of the "over-government." In this poem of the same classic simplicity as Riders to the Sea, Mary Cahel,

¹Notes to McDonough's Wife, New Comedies,164.
like Synge's Maurya (and Shakespeare's Volumnia), represents not only the great grief of a mother's labour with death, but through her "tragic joy" the heroic reality of the son. Like Riders to the Sea, the play has a musical structure: the note of grey uncertainty as the two women approach the great walls of the prison; the sombre tidings of an unheroic death expressed through the self-pity of Mary Cushin's caoine; and the final upward surge of redeemed honour in the old woman's thrilling paean of joy: "It was not a little thing for him to die, and he protecting his neighbour!" Rarely can a dramatist capture through strong characterization the unhindered qualities of heroic tragedy, made personal through the impersonal, universal because immediate. Lady Gregory and Synge succeeded; Yeats, bound by his own great genius for myth-making, could not. His was greatness of another cast.

Strength comes to those who can believe; tragedy touches as well the lives of those who cannot believe. This is the sorrow of the Mother in the miracle play, The Travelling Man, written in collaboration with Yeats, but unmistakeably belonging to Lady Gregory's vision of the world. Their collaboration over this play perhaps most clearly distinguishes the difference between the methods of the dramatists. They had originally written the scenario together, based on an idea of Lady Gregory's which she had in turn adapted from Irish folklore; Yeats then took the same theme for a pagan play, The Black Horse, according to his usual concept of the mask and the anti-mask; but dissatisfied with the result he once more passed it back to Lady Gregory. The stranger's song was written by Yeats; the description of the Golden Mountain (Paradise) sounds familiarly Yeatsian as well:

"There is a garden in it, and there is a tree in the garden that has fruit and flowers at the one time...There are birds of all colours that sing at every hour, the way the people will come to

1 The Gaol Gate, Seven Short Plays, 193.
their prayers. And there is a high wall about the garden....
There are four gates in the wall: a gate of gold, and a gate of silver, and a gate of crystal, and a gate of white brass.¹

If we recall that The Travelling Man was first attempted in 1902, the year of The Shadowy Waters revisions and the year of Yeats’s long essay on Edmund Spenser, the debt in this part, at any rate, is clear.² An exchange of letters further indicates their close collaboration as well as their differences; Lady Gregory objected to the idea of the Rider’s song:

I am not sure about your idea, for if the Stranger wanted the child to be content with the things near him, why did he make the image of the Garden of Paradise and ride to it? I am more inclined to think the idea is the soul having once seen the Christ, the Divine Essence, must always turn back to it again. One feels sure the child will through all its life. And the mother, with all her comforts, has never been quite satisfied, because she wants to see the Christ again. But the earthly side of her built up the dresser, and the child will build up other earthly veils; yet never be quite satisfied. What do you think?”³

Yeats’s reply is as consistent with his philosophy:

I do not think the Ride to Paradise changes the motive of the little Christ Play from what I suggested. Paradise is happiness, the abundance of earth, the natural life, every man’s desire, or some such thing.⁴

Clearly the Christian message of the miracle play belongs to Lady Gregory’s vision of the world, not to Yeats’s, as does the ternary musical form which ties it to The Gaol Gate on the one hand, and the tragedy of self-delusion, which looks forward to The Image on the other. Just as Yeats in his last play finally achieved complete union of philosophy and theme through form, so too did Lady Gregory in her final morality plays, The Story Brought by Brigit (1922-24) and Dave (1926-27).

¹ The Travelling Man, Seven Short Plays, 171-72.
³ Quoted by Lady Gregory in Our Irish Theatre, 105.
⁴ Letter 27 November 1902, Letters, 384. A similar correspondence was carried on concerning Hyde’s play, The Marriage, whose scenario was also written by Yeats and Lady Gregory. Cf. Yeats’s Letters to Lady Gregory, 27 November and 6 December 1902, Letters, 384 and 391.
Image-Makers

Ups and downs, ups and downs; and we know nothing till all is over. He is surely the winner who gets a great tombstone, a figured monument, cherubs blowing trumpets, angels' tears in marble — or maybe he is the winner who has none of these, who but writes his name in the book of the people. I would like my name set in clean letters in the book of the people.¹

Sarsfield here speaks for all of those dreamers who aspire to free their people and fail, and the figure of the image-maker was dear to Lady Gregory's heart. For she, too, was an image-maker, as she reminds her nephew,² and must, like the leaders, reformers, and idealists she celebrates who gave heed "to the lasting cry of luckless Ireland," accept the consequence of failure. This is the significance of the motto which appeared on the programme at the first production of The Image at the Abbey Theatre in 1909 and which threw all the critics into confusion.

In an open letter to D.P. Moran, another Image-maker, Lady Gregory explained "Secretum meum Mihi":

I had but given a 'heart-secret' into the keeping of each of the persons of the play....And each of these images crumbled at the touch of reality, like a wick that has escaped the flame, and is touched by common air. And the more ecstatic the vision the more impossible its realisation until that time when, after the shadow of the earth, the seer shall 'awake and be satisfied.'³

Such is the fate of all the protagonists of the play, a fate shared by Brian of Kincora, Sarsfield of The White Cockade, Moses-Parnell of The Deliverer, Grania, Conan of Aristotle's Bellows, Don Quixote of Sancho's Master, and the hero of Twenty-Five/On the Racecourse. But it is developed and examined most thoroughly in one of her chief plays, The Image.⁴

¹The White Cockade, Irish Folk-History Plays Second Series, II, i, 115.
²Hugh Lane's Life and Achievement, 127 and 134.
³Notes to The Image, The Image and other Plays, 97-98. Cf. Yeats's Preface (1906) to Poems, 1899-1905, xii-xiii. Moran was one of the "candle-stick-makers" of Ideals in Ireland, contributing the essay "The Battle of Two Civilizations," 25-41.
⁴Journals, 80.
Ironically, the play itself, like her comic characters, outdistanced its creator's original plans. She informs us that the idea first came from a story told her by A.E.:

I meant to carry this out in the manner of "Spreading the News" or "The Jackdaw," but the "Image" took the matter into its own hands, and whether for good or ill-luck, the three-act play has grown. I think I have not quite failed, yet it also is not what I set out to do.¹

It is significant that this play, with the exception of history and chronicle plays, should be the first to be written in three acts, for the theme was one of major importance to her philosophy of life, and as such could not be restricted to the one act form. Nor could she restrict the treatment, and so we find each of the images examined carefully from all sides, each image-maker in turn cherishing his dream, exposing it to the unsympathetic eyes of others, then hugging it to himself once more. As Lady Gregory implies, this rhythm of the play is the natural rhythm of life, for the image-maker must tell his dream, even though it cannot be understood by others or suffers in the exposure; and the more the spoken dream is derided or the dreamer vilified, the more closely does the image-maker hold his private image to his heart.

Practically all the qualities of The Image echo her other plays as well. The entire plot is based on hearsay, elaborated and embroidered by the characters in much the same manner as the gullible, imaginative townsfolk of Cloon set to work. The reality of the background, a village street with thatched houses against grey sea and grey hills, is contrasted to the soaring visions of the inhabitants. The fierce loyalty of the provinces is reflected in Brian Hosty's praises of his beloved Connacht. The language grows naturally from the life about them ("and look at Darby Costello is running like a heifer had got a pick of a fly, or a rat there would be strong cats following") or with the tone and

¹Notes to The Image, op. cit., 99-100. The same theme, treated quite differently, is expressed in George A. Birmingham's novel, General John Regan (London: Stoughton, 1913).

²The Image, op. cit., I, 19.
phraseology of the scriptures ("It has not a hole made, but to settle itself it did, against such time as it would be called for and be wanting."\(^1\)). But the theme around which the plot revolves, the emotion for the structural fable, is man in relation to his dream, for each of these eccentric image-makers is a symbol in miniature of the strong image-workers of the earth, just as the setting of the play itself represents the microcosm. We are introduced to each of these dreamers in turn, almost in order of rank. First comes Thomas Coppinger, the stonecutter, whose life is spent inscribing headstones for the dead but who dreams of erecting a monument that would reflect glory upon him as well, "Some man so great his death would put away laughter in Ireland."\(^2\) His wife's dream of America is bound up in her husband's, for the success of his means the possible fulfilment of hers. Brian Hosty lives for the image of his loved Connacht, but it is his fate to be constantly reminded of the greatness of Munster. Darby Costello wistfully dreams of universal peace, but continually involves himself in the petty quarrels of his neighbours. Old Peggy Mahon has devoted her years to ushering the new-born into life ("Every baby is a present from God."), but dreams of reunion after death with the husband whom memory and time have glorified ("Brought away through death he was from this white world, and I myself left after him, a bird alone."\(^3\)). Malachi, the crazy mountainy man, rejects the lying company of the towns, but sees a message of great wonders on a stray bit of board salvaged from his hungry goat. The dream for this people is more real than the life about them, and colours that reality until it too takes on the quality of the dream: "Sure he must have lived in some place, or why would we be putting up a monument to him?" "There is dreams and dreams," says old Thomas chipping

\(^1\)Ibid., 32.
\(^2\)Ibid., 8.
\(^3\)Ibid., 27-28.
away at his headstone,

And at every thousand years some great thing is apt to happen,
such as the Deluge or the coming of the Milesians into Ireland --
I tell you there is dreams and dreams.¹

And because of his dream a statue is ordered and designs are sent all
the way from Dublin. "There's many things I forgot that I heard in my
lifetime. I only recollect things in the broad," Mrs. Coppinger explains
her poor memory of Hugh O'Lorrrha.² And when the illiterate old Malachi
reads a message in his "bit of a board" and attending angels in the
great whales and storm, he is excused, because "There is nothing left to
him in life but high flighty thoughts."³ "Old she is, and it's all in
her brain the things she does be talking of," says Darby of old Peggy's
meanderings.⁴ Malachi himself objects to the realization of his image
in the "concrete" form of a statue:

His name to be in a song, what would he want with stones or with
monuments? Wouldn't any man at all be well satisfied, his name
to be going through the generations in a song. My grief that I
haven't the wit to make a poem for him or a ballad, and it is a
great pity I am not prone to versify.⁵

But the dream of Hugh O'Lorrrha brings magic into his world and raises
him to the poetic heights of the visionary: "Take care but it was no
dream! Let you go out looking yourself so in the night time. And if
you do go, it is likely you will see nothing but the flaggy rocks and
the clefts, for it's not all are born to see things of the kind."⁶ The
world of wonders has taken precedence over the world about them:

¹Ibid., 9
²Ibid., 13.
³Ibid., 17.
⁴Ibid., 28.
⁵Ibid., 51. Cf. "Jacobite Ballads," Poets and Dreamers, 3rd ed., 69:
"For the Munsterman have always been more 'prone to versify' than their
leaner neighbours on the bogs and stones of Connaught."
⁶The Image, 72.
Coppinger: Well, I have brought you tidings you will wonder at, and that will raise and comfort your heart!

Mrs. Coppinger: There is nothing would make me wonder after all happened in these days past. I to rise up in the morning under lofty rafters in Boston, I give you my word I'd take it as simple as a chicken would be hatched out of the shell!¹

But once they have told their dreams, calamity befalls all of them. The statue which never will be to a hero who never was becomes an embarrassment. Malachi turns in scorn from those who belittle his hero: "And I'll know him when I will see him, and that is what you or the like of you will not do. And another thing, I tell you I'd sooner he not to be in it, than he to be in it, and to be what you are making him out to be!"² And Old Peggy Mahon has the final word against those who cast a blemish upon her "comely Patrick":

A queer race ye are, a queer race. It is right Malachi was quitting you, and it was wise. Any person to own a heart secret, it is best for him hide it in the heart... Oh yes, oh yes, I'll be wary this time and I'll be wise, very wise. I'll be as wise as the man that didn't tell his dream!³

So the two great myth-makers return to their solitude, leaving behind the minor stars of the imaginary universe to take what comfort they can: "Let you not fret, Thomas," comforts Darby Costello. "There did no badness of misfortune every come upon Ireland but someone was the better of it. ... Let you comfort yourself this time, for it is likely you would have failed doing the job."⁴ Mrs. Coppinger looks with satisfaction to the full times ahead: "We'll not be scarce of talk for the rest of our years anyway. For some do be telling the story was always in it, but we will be telling the story never was in it before and never will be in it at all!"⁵

¹Ibid., 73.
²Ibid., 84-85.
³Ibid., 94.
⁴Cf. Mrs. Broderick's comforting remarks at the end of The Full Moon.
⁵The Image, 96.
Despite the cherished dreams of the image-makers, however, there is an atmosphere of futility about the play. This is comedy of situation, but the characters border on the tragic. All of the images are fated, as are the greater dreams of the strong image-makers of the world. One is left wondering whether perhaps the implication of Aristotle's Bellows is not the safest route through life after all. But Conan, Malachi, and Peggy have much in common, for all are dissatisfied with the world about them. "Isn't it terrible to be seeing all this folly around me and not to have a way to better it!" moans Conan.1 "And why would I do that for any common person, would be maybe as ugly as the people I do be seeing every day, and as cross and as crabbit? What call would I have going through hardship for a man would be no better maybe, and no better looking, than myself?" demands Malachi. And Peggy echoes both:

Why would any person go set their mind upon the hither side of the grave, and not upon the far side? I have seen them come and seen them go, the scores and the hundreds, the same as if they came on a visit to a neighbour's house, and went from it again the time their clothes would be wore out and tattered.2

Surely to hold a dream is better than to live with caution, so once again Lady Gregory echoes the call of Synge's tramp, peasant, and playboy:

And so with my sisters' sons, to whom I have dedicated this play. John Shawe-Taylor and Hugh Lang3...Yet I fancy it was a dream beyond possible realisation that gave each of them the hard patience needed by those who build, and the courage needed by the "Disturber" who does not often escape some knocks and buffetings. But if the dreamer had never tried to tell the dream that had come across him, even though to "betray his secret to the multitude" must shatter his own perfect vision, the world would grow clogged and dull with the weight of flesh and of clay. And so we must say "God love you" to the Image-makers, for do we not live by the shining of those scattered fragments of their dream?4

This is the message of Christianity, of the Abbey Directors, and the message as well of her last "tragic-comedy," Sancho's Master (1927):

1 Aristotle's Bellows, Three Wonder Plays, 99.
2 The Image, op. cit., 40-41.
3 Notes for The Image, op. cit., 98-99.
Quixote's story belongs to the world, and some of us have whispered his name, fitting it to one or another dreamer who seeks to realise the perfect in a community not ready for the Millenium, and where he is likely to meet with anger that strikes or ridicule that scorches, or to have the word flung at him that was flung by Festus at St. Paul.¹

Allegory -- Personal and Political

Those who serve Ireland take for their lot lasting battles -- lasting quarrels. They are building, and ever building; and ever and always ruin comes upon them before the house is built. Those who would be most their friends, turn to be most their enemies, till the heart grows dry with bitterness; dry as the heads of the mountains under the summer heat.²

Aíobhail's warning to the young Brian is in a sense the warning to all image-makers whose dream is love of their country, and one which rings most clearly throughout all the work of the Image-maker herself. Her first publication for the literary movement was a collection of essays by these image-makers or "candlestick-makers."³ For Lady Gregory's nationalism not only led her to the theatre, but dictated the themes of her plays. Constantly we are reminded that these are plays not only for Ireland, but of Ireland. Jo Muldoon of Spreading the News represents all of those who are in the employ of the "over-government," torn between loyalty to their masters and loyalty to their country. The problem of conflicting loyalties carries through Grania and serves as the entire action of the little play, The Rising of the Moon.⁴ As Lady Gregory implies in her notes to The Canavans, "the desire possessing Peter Canavan to be on the safe side, on the side of the strongest,... jumps to light more aggressively in [a country] which, like Ireland, has been tilted between two loyalties through so many generations."⁵

²Prologue to Kincora, 2nd ed. 1905, 6.
³Ideals in Ireland, with essays by A.E, D.P.Moran, George Moore, Douglas Hyde, Standish O'Grady, and Yeats.
⁴The Rising of the Moon, Seven Short Plays, 82: "They say he's a wonder."
⁵Notes to The Canavans, Irish Folk-History Plays Second Series, 189.
The same moon which symbolizes the vision of the new Ireland in The Rising of the Moon creates the dreams of Cracked Mary and Malachi Naughton; the personal tragedy of The Gaol Gate is overcast by the helplessness of the ignorant countryfolk in the grip of a foreign law which they cannot understand and which does not seek to understand them. The Wrens, although planned as a human comedy, in turn symbolizes the inner turmoil of Ireland, the singing vagabonds representing opportunism in contrast to the well-defined loyalty of servants and the simplicity of the Porter. The young stroller of Dervorgilla reflects the same theme, as he goes off in search of a better welcome from the English bowmen over the hill. And the political allegory continues to On the Racecourse. But the symbol of the patriot-dreamer which most frequently appears throughout the plays is the figure of Ireland's dead King, Charles Stewart Parnell.

As perhaps could be expected, the first open reference to Parnell occurs in The Image, when the wrangling between Hosty and Costello represents in miniature the great split which occurred over twenty years earlier in Irish politics. A year later The Deliverer (1910), was written, "a symbolical play ostensibly about Moses really about Parnell," a strange, bitter tragi-comedy, neither tragedy, comedy, or history, which reflects most clearly Lady Gregory's own attitude towards her country and the characteristics of her countrymen:

Malachi (laughing to himself): They were said to give him learning and it is bad learning they gave him. That young man to have read history he would not have come to our help.

1 The Rising of the Moon, op. cit., 96: "when the small rise up and the big fall down...when we all change places at the Rising of the Moon." Cf. Young, The Plays of Lady Gregory, 100.
2 Notes to The Wrens, The Image and Other Plays, 252.
3 Dervorgilla, Irish Folk-History Plays First Series, 176.
4 W.B.Yeats to J.B.Yeats, 24 November 1910, Letters, 555.
5 The Deliverer, Irish Folk-History Plays, Second Series, 182.
Set in Biblical times, the attitude of the peasants who speak for contemporary Ireland bears the mingled pre-Christian and mystic temperament of the folk tale; the setting is classical, but the atmosphere is romantic; the characters are symbolic, but the tone is almost bitterly personal. It is the cry of disappointment and sorrow felt by its creator at the tragic downfall of one more great leader and image-maker, and not until a dozen years later, in her Irish passion play, The Story Brought by Brigit (1922-24), is she able to universalize her bitterness:

Joel: That's the way of it....We wanted him, and we got him, and what we did with him was to kill him. And that is the way it will be ever and always, so long as leaves grow upon the trees!

Finally, the theme regains balance once more, in the poignant, gentle-sharp tale of still one more great Image-Maker, Sancho's Master (1927). But through all these fables of the strong people of the earth, the image-makers and weavers of dreams, can be seen Lady Gregory's personal observation of the passionate love of her countrymen for their country:

Love of country, tirgradh, is I think the real passion; and bound up with it are love of home, of family, love of God.

Their hearts are, as was Diarmuid's, always and ever with Almuin:

I am Ireland
Older than the Hag of Beara.

Great my pride
I gave birth to great Cuchulain.

Great my shame
My own children killed their mother.

I am Ireland
Lonelier than the Hag of Beara.


2. "West Irish Ballads" (1901), Poets and Dreamers, 3rd ed. 60 Cf. Note to Aristotle’s Bellows, Three Wonder Plays, 155-156.

3. Lady Gregory's translation from the Irish of a poem by Padraic Pearse, quoted in her Journals, 331.
The Framework of the Fable

"I usually first see a play as a picture," Lady Gregory informs us in her notes to Damer's Gold\(^1\) and illustrates in the development of her idea for Spreading the News.\(^2\) Consequently her approach to the actual construction was, like Yeats's, visual, and a scenario draft tended to be a series of "rough pen and ink sketches coloured with a pencil blue and red," which in turn might actually alter the form of the play itself.\(^3\)

This linear construction can be seen in the action of the plays, which tend to move out in straight lines from a focal point or in a series of interlocking circles; rarely does one find the spiral construction of Synge or Fitzmaurice. Lady Gregory's approach to her material was in fact classical, despite the romantic motivating forces of nationalism and idealism. Just as she watches with delighted interest the creation of her characters, so too she applies the same penetrating observation to the development of structure. Because of this ability to stand back and observe the dramatic form with a critical, almost impersonal eye, her plays tend on the whole to be clearcut in form, classical in simplicity. Frequently, as in On the Racecourse, Dave, Spreading the News, Coats, The Bogie Men, The Gaol Gate, The White Cockade, and Aristotle's Bellows, this results in a strict adherence to the three unities as well; nearly always the simplicity of form is followed by simplicity of setting and restriction of cast. At her best, (The Rising of the Moon, The Image, The Jester, Spreading the News, Grania, Dave), there is a highly skilled fusion of the theatrical qualities of surprise, suspense, and climax; at her worst, (Shanwalla, Coats) difficult material is forced into a readily observable form. As has already been mentioned, frequently she

\(^1\) New Comedies, 160.
\(^2\) Note to Spreading the News, Seven Short Plays, 204.
\(^3\) As was the case with the mechanical device of the bellows, which occurred to her when she observed a sketch of Conan defending himself with the umbrella. Cf. Note to Aristotle's Bellows, Three Wonder Plays, 155-56.
makes use of the ternary form, both in individual acts (Darne's Gold, The Gaol Gate, Dervorgilla, On the Racecourse) and in larger three-act plays (Aristotle's Bellows, The Jester, The Image). The Image is interesting for its wheel-like action, each of the image-makers moving out from the central theme like spokes in a wheel; the same interlocking structure is apparent in Dervorgilla, Hyacinth Halvey, The Full Moon. Occasionally she makes effective use of the "play within a play," as in The Rising of the Moon, The Jackdaw, and On the Racecourse (where there are actually two inner climaxes). She constantly experiments with form and numbers of characters, and a comparison of The Poorhouse with The Workhouse Ward, Twenty Five with On the Racecourse, illustrates her effort to throw the characters into relief against the situation and against each other by reducing the number in each case to three and by a corresponding simplification of action and motive. The result is greater clarity of situation and a strengthening of characterization. The "fascination of things difficult" led her to fresh experiments, as she admits in the notes to Grania:

When I told Mr. Yeats I had but these three persons in the play, he said incredulously, "They must have a great deal to talk about." And so they have, for the talk of lovers is inexhaustible, being of themselves and one another.  

Coats and The Bogie Men followed with only two characters to each, and she confesses to a desire at one time of "writing a play for a man and a scarecrow only." As Miss Coxhead points out, Samuel Beckett's

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1 According to Miss Coxhead, Lady Gregory, Damer's Gold was first planned in three acts, but Lennox Robinson persuaded her to cut it down to two.
2 Twenty-Five was published with the title A Losing Game in The Gael (New York), December 1902.
3 Irish Folk-History Plays First Series, 195-96.
4 Our Irish Theatre, 90.
experiment with a man and a tape-recorder would have delighted her, but she herself wrote only one monodrama, the dramatic poem *The Old Woman Remembers*, recited by Sally Allgood on the last day of 1925, and in itself an interesting conclusion to the dramatist's long association with the figure of Kathleen-ni-Houlihan.

"The balance of weight, the minute calculating of it in advance... comes into the building of a play, as does 'music' -- the balanced delight of sentences -- of words," Lady Gregory wrote in her revealing chapter on play-writing. Throughout her plays, in structure, dialogue, and characterization, there is ample evidence of this emphasis on balance. Mathematical precision is most obvious in those plays which depend on interaction between two groups of characters, such as *Coats, The Bogie Men, The Jester, The Workhouse Ward*, where the characters are really only half of the whole or "mirror-images," and where the theme is a variation on comradeship. It is apparent again in plays containing the more complicated concept of the mask, such as *The Rising of the Moon*, where the ballad-singer represents the policeman's antithetical self, and *Damer's Gold*, where young Simon symbolizes Damer's own youth; in both of these plays the Yeatsian element is made stronger by the juxtaposition of the image from the past and the image of the present. And frequently as well one finds the simple device of contrast: implicit

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1 Coxhead, *Lady Gregory*, 142. The play referred to is *Krapp's Last Tape*. One might add Ionesco's *The Chairs*, Yeats's *Purgatory* (1939) where the boy is only part of the man, and Strindberg's *The Stranger*.

2 *Journals*, 336.

3 Lennox Robinson in his biography of Lady Gregory expresses his dislike of both *Coats* and *The Bogie Men* because "In each case the play starts with a Molièreque misunderstanding, a misunderstanding which the audience understands only too soon and in each case the play is only rather dull dialogue between two men." Quoted by Lorna Young, *The Plays of Lady Gregory*, TCD Ph.D. Thesis, 224. Surely *The Bogie Men* is redeemed by the theatrical quality of the disguises and the poetry of the language; *Coats* on the other hand depends too much on a weak mechanical device.

4a Published in *The Irish Statesman*, 22 March 1924, 40-41.
in the situation of *The Rising of the Moon*, explicit in Damer's abrupt Timonesque transition, an essential part of the characterization of *On the Racecourse*, as it is also in *The Full Moon, The Image, The Gaol Gate, The Deliverer*, and *Dave*. Looking at the plays as a group, frequently we find this complementary device explored through several plays, an examination of the same theme from opposing angles: *The Bogie Men, Sancho's Master, On the Racecourse* compared with and contrasted to *The Image* and *The Deliverer*; the tossing of the poet in *Hanrahan's Oath* as opposed to the celebration of the artist in *McDonough's Wife*; the figure of the policeman in *Spreading the News* and *The Rising of the Moon*; the threatened realization of the image in *Hyacinth Halvey* and *The Image*; the adventures of the noble dreamer and his peasant companion in *The Golden Apple* and *Sancho's Master*. And on a larger scale yet, one might observe in her "human comedies" a natural complement to the plays of her colleagues: the treatment of hearsay in *Spreading the News* and *On Baile's Strand*; the patriot's call to the young man of the household in *The White Cockade* and *Kathleen-ni-Houlihan*; character-building in *Hyacinth Halvey* and *The Playboy of the Western World*; the preference for the dream in *The Image* and *The Well of the Saints*; the celebration of the heroine in *Grania* and the three *Deirdres, Dervorgilla* and *The Dreaming of the Bones*; the treatment of the poet-figure in *Hanrahan's Oath* (a development of Hyde's *The Twisting of the Rope*), *The King's Threshold* and *The Playboy*; the cry for freedom of *Grania* and *Nora of The Shadow of the Glen*; the brazen, wrangling delight of the tinkers in *Where There is Nothing* and *The Tinker's Wedding*; the tragic simplicity of *The Gaol Gate* and *Riders to the Sea*; and the treatment of the Passion in *The Story Brought by Brigit* and *Calvary*.

The dialogue frequently betrays a strong contrapuntal effect as well, especially in the rhythmic antiphonal speeches of the old hags in *McDonough's Wife*, and the balanced parallelism of the dialogue in *On the Racecourse*. But throughout the plays the echo and repetition of the
dialogue corresponds to her customary device of a quick series of successive encounters between different pairs of characters, as can be seen, for example, in *Spreading the News* and *Hyacinth Halvey*:

Hyacinth: Will you tell me, I ask you, what way can I undo it?
Fardy: What is it you are wanting to undo?
Hyacinth: Will you tell me what way can I get rid of my character?
Fardy: To get rid of it, is it?
Hyacinth: That is what I said. Aren't you after hearing the great character they are after putting on me?
Fardy: That is a good thing to have.
Hyacinth: It is not. It's the worst in the world. If I hadn't it, I wouldn't be like a prize mangold at a show with every person praising me.
Fardy: If I had it, I wouldn't be like a head in a barrel, with every person making hits at me.
Hyacinth: If I hadn't it, I wouldn't be shoved into a room with all the clergy watching me and the police in the back-yard.
Fardy: If I had it, I wouldn't be but a message-carrier now, and a clapper scaring birds in the summer time.
Hyacinth: If I hadn't it, I wouldn't be wearing this button and brought up for an example at the meeting.
Fardy: Maybe you're not, so, what those papers make you out to be?
Hyacinth: How would I be what they make me out to be? Was there ever any person of that sort since the world was a world, unless it might be Saint Antony of Padua looking down from the chapel wall? If it is like that I was, isn't it in Mount Melleray I would be, or with the Friars at Esker? Why would I be living in the world at all, or doing the world's work?
Fardy: Who would think, now, there would be so much lies in a small place like Carrow?

At other times, the minor characters serve as a chorus to this dialogue of give-and-take, as in the speeches of the two widows in *The Canavans*, who not only comment on the situation but provide background material as well. Just as Yeats made use of the musicians to create an impression of timelessness, Lady Gregory used her Kiltartan peasants as a choric comment on the universality of her themes.

Lady Gregory's natural tendency towards theatrical conundrums and duologues was increased and perfected by her translations of Moliere for the Abbey players. However, it would be a mistake to assume that

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1*Hyacinth Halvey, Seven Short Plays, 45-47.*
Lady Gregory simply adapted the French dramatist's methods to her own plays. As Shaw commented, Lady Gregory had a natural gift for writing dialogue, and the reason hers is so similar to Molière's work is that she writes about the Irish as Molière wrote about the French.¹ Technically speaking they have much in common, but they are more akin in spirit than in technique, as a comparison between Lady Gregory's translation of The Miser and Damer's Gold makes evident: the action in Molière's play marches, in Lady Gregory's the scenes blend; Harpagon is a real miser, intense and tenacious, whereas Damer is a sham miser and soon shifts sides, Delia and her chorus, Staffy and Ralph, are far more realistic than their French counterparts. A better comparison between the two might be the characterization of Bartley Fallon in Spreading the News and Geronte in The Rogueries of Scapin; for a time both are in two worlds at once.² But Lady Gregory, like Molière, knew how to adopt country dialect and country mannerisms for the stage; it was only fitting, then, that she should have been the dramatist to bring the greater French master of comedy to Dublin. "In vital translation," Yeats had written, "a work of art does not go upon its travels; it is re-born in a strange land."³ So it is with the Kiltartan Molière and Goldoni's Mirandolina.⁴

²Cf. Young, The Plays of Lady Gregory, 85.
⁴She also translated Sudermann's Teja and Maeterlinck's Interior; both MSS. were destroyed in the Abbey fire in 1951. It is interesting to note that during the summer of 1901 James Joyce translated two of Hauptmann's plays, Before Sunrise and Michael Kramer, making use of an Irish country dialect. Cf. Ellmann, James Joyce 91. Cf. Faye's description of the Abbey's decision to produce Molière, W.G. Faye and Catherine Carswell, The Fays of the Abbey Theatre (London: Rich and Cowan, 1935), 192-93.
Lady Gregory's notes in her diary concerning the adaptation and staging of _Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme_ indicate another characteristic of her plays:

I proposed making a feature of the songs, having French airs to them, and at the last, as we can't have the apotheosis of old Jordain, as Coquelin did, bursting into triumphant music....And I think of putting Sally and all the players who can sing on the stage as musicians in the first act, just wearing some of our heroic cloaks over their dress, and little paper hats made from Christmas crackers, that they may sing.¹

Her comic world was very close to the world of musical comedy, for both require that spirit which makes action more important than reading and which comes out of the dialogue as well as the situation. Miss Coxhead reports that _Spreading the News_ has been made into a comic opera²; in over half of her plays music and song are made an integral part of the plot and she exploits this even more in _On the Racecourse_, where the songs further the action and reflect the inner conflict and emotions of the characters. Occasionally, as in _The Rising of the Moon_ and _Dervorgilla_, the music-maker himself comes on; usually the characters burst into song to mark a shift in emphasis or break in tension. On the whole she adapted ballads to this use, and it is not surprising to learn that her favourite brother Frank's hobby was collecting Dublin street ballads.³ (As has already been mentioned, _Aristotle's Bellows_ is almost a ballad-opera). Two plays, _The Gaol Gate_, and _The Story Brought by Brigit_ include the cacine. The latter also contains a chorus for three women, to which the dramatist appended a note of instructions which is an interesting commentary on her theories as opposed to Yeats's:

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¹ _Journals_, 83.
² _Lady Gregory_, 80. _The Heart's A Wonder_, a musical version of _The Playboy_, is successful for the same reasons.
³ _Coxhead, Lady Gregory_, 10.
As to the verses given to the women, I wish them to be lilted rather than sung. For they have dramatic value, are a part of the play, and any musical setting, however beautiful, that is more complicated than that of the street ballad singer must delay the swift comprehension needed.\(^1\)

As well as music and song, Lady Gregory was fond of introducing costume and disguise into her plays. *The Bogie Men*, *Grania*, *The Golden Apple*, *The Jester*, *The Dragon*, *Aristotle's Bellows*, *On the Racecourse*, and *Sancho's Master* all employ the device of disguise and recognition. Mechanical devices abound in the wonder plays, which is to be expected; it is interesting to note that in *Hyacinth Halvey*, *The Jackdaw*, and *Aristotle's Bellows* the stage properties of caged thrush, dead sheep, jackdaw, and pigeon-turned-crow are all essential to the plot. In *Hyacinth Halvey* and *The Full Moon* the sound effects of the harmonium and train whistle also contribute to the theatrical effect. However, her last comedy, *On the Racecourse*, opens on an empty stage. Although she introduced the dance in only one play other than the translations (*The Full Moon*), choreographic effects are introduced frequently, especially the deliberate tableau effect which Lady Gregory's plays have in common with Yeats's; *Spreading the News*, *Hanrahan's Oath*, and *Kincora* all have this choreographic quality. Like Yeats, Lady Gregory "saw" her plays as she wrote them. Perhaps more than either Yeats or Synge, also, she learned from production, especially in her early plays, and her comment on play-writing most aptly applies to herself:

> Teaching people to write plays...is impossible -- but ... placing people in an environment where their early plays can be discussed, criticised, and given the acid test -- production.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Note to *The Story Brought by Brigit*, 84. Masefield in *Some Memories of W.B. Yeats*, 12, describes Lady Gregory's reading: "As always, she read very clearly and agreeably, with a just emphasis and a good sense of rhythm."

\(^2\) Quoted by Hallie Flanagan, *Shifting Scenes of the Modern European Theatre* (London: Harrap, 1929), 37. In the unpublished letters from Yeats to Lady Gregory on theatre business, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, there are frequent references to cuts in her early plays after they have been put into rehearsal.
But Lady Gregory gave as much as she received from the Abbey players. She once mentioned that "desire for experiment is like fire in the blood," and her own numerous experiments gave far more experience to the small company than either of her fellow-directors'. For it was nearly always with Lady Gregory that the company broke new ground; it was she who popularized the one-act play with its economy and concentration and fine theatrical effect, created a new form of history play that gave characters and incidents immediacy and life, and introduced a new universe, the "Gregorian" fantasy world of her wonder plays. Eventually she too moved away from the limitations of her actors into her powerful, strange, and moving last plays, The Story Brought by Brigit, Sancho's Master, and Dave, where, like Yeats, she entered a world demanding depth of understanding beyond the Abbey actors. The plays which are most frequently revived within the Abbey theatre itself remain her earlier comedies.

The spirit of Lady Gregory reigned longer than either Synge's or Yeats's at the Abbey Theatre, partly because she had learned her trade on its boards, more so because of her one driving ambition, the preservation and care of an institution which, she felt, could once more bring dignity to Ireland. However, never did she let the theatre or her nation infringe upon the essential dignity of the spirit, and if the bulk of her work does not represent "the apex of the flame, the point of the diamond," it is worthy of the base. And in that strange mingling of the ironic and the pathetic, the tragic and the comic, the clarity of vision which penetrated the dusk of Clon and the moon-drenched Galway quays, Lady Gregory deserves her place in the constellation so clearly marked by her friends and fellow image-makers who worked together for art and for Ireland.

\(^1\)Our Irish Theatre, 91.
CHAPTER 7  JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE

Life is flying from me, not stopping an hour, and death is making great strides following my track. The days about me, and the days passed over me, are bringing me desolation, and the days to come will be the same surely.

(Translation from Petrarch)

"Every life is a symphony and the translation of this sequence into music and from music again, for those who are not musicians into literature or painting or sculpture, is the real effort of the artist."

(From an unpublished play)

The story of Yeats's first encounter with Synge reads like a fairy tale, and has often been turned into one. The year was 1896; Yeats was in Paris with Maud Gonne on revolutionary activities; he had just returned from a tour of western Ireland with Arthur Symons, where he had stayed with Edward Martyn at Tulira, met Lady Gregory at Coole, and visited the Aran Islands. Synge, having renounced music for literature, had moved to Paris from Germany; he had just returned from a visit to Italy, and was studying Petrarch and French literature at the Sorbonne, reading Thomas à Kempis and works on socialism, dabbling in the occult with Stephen Mackenna. Lady Gregory had acted as a catalyst to Yeats; now Yeats in turn affected Synge. As he himself confesses, he no more recognized Synge's genius than he had Lady Gregory's, and at first encouraged him in his efforts to play "second fiddle" to Arthur Symons as a critic of French literature. But Yeats's imagination was full of "those grey

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1 The Imitation of Christ continued to interest him throughout his life; Greene and Stephens, J.M. Synge, record a fragment of an imaginary conversation between St. Thomas and Rabelais.

2 He attended at least one Theosophical Society meeting with AE. Cf. Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 69, 169. In his article on Loti and Huysmans for The Speaker, 18 April 1903, 57-58, Synge refers to the doctrine of esoteric theosophy as "this illusion of illusions."

3 Autobiographies, 380.

4 None, W.B. Yeats, 139 n1.
islands where men must reap with knives because of the stones,1 and soon he urged Synge to seek in Aran "a life that had never been expressed in literature, instead of a life where all had been expressed." Two years were to pass before Synge visited Aran for the first time; the rest is Abbey history, for his experiences there resulted in Riders to the Sea and heralded a new genius in world drama. Five years later he died at the age of thirty-nine, having published five plays (In the Shadow of the Glen, Riders to the Sea, The Tinker's Wedding, The Well of the Saints, and The Playboy of the Western World) and a book of essays on his life in Aran (The Aran Islands). His final unfinished play (Deirdre of the Sorrows), a slim volume of verse (Poems and Translations), and a collection of essays, many of which had previously appeared in periodicals (In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara), were published posthumously.

"All emotions have neither end nor beginning, they are part of a long sequence of impulse and effect. The only relative unity in art is that of a whole man's life time," Synge wrote in his diary in 1900.2 Certainly this is true of his own art and life: his poems reflect the man speaking,4 his essays reflect the man observing, his plays reflect the man feeling. Rarely do we find Synge exploring or elaborating a philosophical concept in his plays; rather he allows the world outside to play on his feelings and emotions as a violinist plays on his violin, reflecting and intensifying the mood and atmosphere to which he is attuned. All his work was subjective, coming out of moods in his own life, he once confessed to Padraic Colum.5 He preferred to look on life "as

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1"Preface to the First Edition of The Well of the Saints" (1905), Essays and Introductions, 299.
3E.M.Stephens, MS, 1197-99.
5Padraic Colum, The Road Round Ireland (NY: Macmillan, 1926), 365.
only a play, a dream, scened for my single delectation," rather than actively participate in it. It was this interested passivity which puzzled Yeats; "I really don't think him selfish or egotistical," he commented in a letter to Lady Gregory, "but he is so absorbed in his own vision of the world that he cares for nothing else." Whereas Yeats eagerly sought "correspondences" for his own work and frequently found them in unlikely places, Synge, "that meditative man," preferred to walk alone, disdaining the company of all but the Elizabethans, Burns, Villon, and Molière. Indeed, so anxious was he to assert and retain his independence that he might on occasion have been guilty of snubbing a fellow traveller. "For him," wrote Yeats, "nothing existed but his thought....I do not think he disliked other writers -- they did not exist.... In the arts he knew no language but his own." He was the man they needed; in turn, through them, Synge found the expression he had been seeking. But although his arrival was to alter the course of the movement, ideals and much of the practice had already been established. And, in turn, Synge's own basic tenets had already been formed. "Many of the older poets, such as Villon and Herrick and Burns, used the whole of their personal life as their material," he wrote in the preface to his poems, and in this remark we find the key to his own work. We must go back further than 1896, therefore, in our search for the foundation to his art.

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1 Notebooks, Stephens MS, 990.
5 Autobiographies, 511-512.
6 Ibid., 567.
Synge's childhood was in many ways similar to Yeats's. Neither had regular schooling, Yeats because of the family's frequent removals, Synge because of ill-health. Both early had a scientific curiosity in nature, and wandered at large collecting and observing where they wished. However, Synge's interest in nature study was carried further than Yeats's, leading him to join the Dublin Naturalists' Field Club when it was founded in 1886. He was more systematic in his scientific studies besides; he made an extensive collection of butterflies, moths and beetles, and could identify all of the bird life common to his part of Ireland. And he read Darwin. As well as creating an even greater gulf between him and his evangelical family, this interest in and keen knowledge of nature remained with Synge the rest of his life; he was always fond of walking and knew every path in the Wicklow valleys and mountains. His notebooks are full of careful observations made on his walks and cycling trips, and we shall later see how he makes use of this knowledge in his plays.

At the age of eighteen Yeats had entered the Metropolitan School of Art; at the same age Synge enrolled in the Royal Irish Academy of Music, "the paramount factor of my life for five years," and entered Trinity College, Dublin. His college studies were desultory, and except for a natural gift for languages which earned him prizes in Hebrew and Irish, he made little impression on that bastion of Anglo-Irish ascendancy. For the rest of his life, however, music remained an important influence; he became proficient in the violin, flute, and piano, studied musical theory and counterpoint, and joined a student orchestra which gave him "extraordinary pleasure":

The collective excitement produced in each player by a band working together with one will and ideal is unlike any other emotion. To be lost in a living tempest that wails round one with an always beautiful passion, to lose one's identity yet be greater than before, to build cathedrals with the purple waves of a hurricane, to play with mountains in the mist, yet be alive, human, are some of the sentiments I have experienced. And the Adagios! The suave balm that draws out intricate charities [sic] from places not open to the world.
To realise that all emotions depend upon and answer the abstract of ideal form, and that humanity is God, is but the first step towards a full comprehension of this art.\(^1\)

We shall see this inter-relationship between music and natural beauty as it affects the sensitive observer reflected in all of Synge's work. During his first visit to Aran in 1898 he commented in his diary,

> When the sun is covered six distinct and beautiful shades still blend in one another -- the limestone, the sea leaden at my feet and with a steel tinge far away, the mountains on the coast of Clare and then the clouds transparent and opaque....no pictorial wording can express these movements peculiar to our humid insularity unknown in the more radiant South -- today three delicious movements differ only from a symphony in that the finale is always the opening of a new design.

> There are these -- the dim adagio in six tones, the presto of the quick colourless rain followed by a glorious allegro con brio where sun and clouds unite in brilliant joy.\(^2\)

The same year in which he received his B.A. from Trinity Synge was awarded a scholarship in harmony and counterpoint from the Royal Irish Academy. During the next few years he composed music for both the violin and piano, and even began an opera based on Eileen Aruine.\(^3\)

Encouraged by a pianist cousin, he travelled to Germany in 1893 to continue his musical studies and to learn the German language, but this was his last effort to make music his career. In a letter to his translator, Dr. Max Meyerfield, he explains his defection: "I saw that the Germans were so much more innately gifted with the musical faculties than I was that I decided to give up music and take to literature instead."\(^4\) A further reason and more likely reason was his extreme nervousness in public\(^5\): the playwright is twice removed from the process.

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\(^1\) Autobiographical sketch, Stephens MS, 167.
\(^2\) 1898 notebooks, Stephens MS, 988-989.
\(^3\) Greene and Stephens, \textit{op. cit.}, 32 and 36.
\(^4\) 1 September 1905, National Library of Ireland MS 778, 9.
\(^5\) Greene and Stephens, \textit{op. cit.}, 25. Cf. C. H. H. (Mrs. Kenneth Horton, nee Cherry Matheson), "John Synge as I knew Him," \textit{Irish Statesman}, 5 July 1924, 532: "One afternoon he played for me a lovely wild memory of his own. While he was playing he lost himself absolutely in the music, and once or twice he groaned while playing."
of self-revelation, by means of his dramatization and through the actors; the performer has no place to hide. But like his passion for nature, Synge's love for music remained throughout his life. His keen ear contributed to his skill in languages as well as to his appreciation of the sounds of nature; his highly-developed sensitivity aided in his ability to evoke scenes and situations; perhaps even more important, his assiduous training in harmony and counterpoint was of special value in the rhythmical balance and structure of his plays. When Synge settled in Paris in 1895, then, he had breadth of artistic experience and training which would be of paramount importance to his future career. Yet still he had no idea of that career, nor that his next enthusiasms, language and the study of Celtic folklore, would lead him more surely along the path towards inevitable greatness.

About the same time that he began composing music, Synge became deeply interested in literature and began to write poetry. "When I was fiddling I mourned over the books I wished to read. When I was reading I yearned for all manner of adventures," he wrote years later in an autobiographical sketch. In 1893 Kottabos, the Trinity College magazine, published a Wordsworthian sonnet, "Glencullen," which had little to commend it other than his obvious feeling for the beauty of nature. About the same time Father Mathew Russell, editor of The Irish Monthly, more wisely rejected "A Mountain Creed," a poem in similar vein. It was perhaps of his own early verse Synge was thinking when he remarked to Yeats, "All our modern poetry is the poetry of the lyrical boy."

1 Of Martin and Mary Doul's speeches in The Well of the Saints.
2 Notebooks, Stephens MS. 771: "There are even natures who have no firm consciousness of an intellectual movement unless registered by some definite sound or melody, and for them the memory of voyages is but a medley of musical suggestion."
3 Stephens MS. 167.
4 Stephens MS. 577-78; several stanzas are quoted by Greene and Stephens op. cit., 33.
5 "J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910), Essays and Introductions, 328; A Packet for Ezra Pound (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1929), 8, section omitted in A Vision, 1937.
But he did not limit his interest in writing to poetry, for among the notebooks dating from his year in Germany in 1894 there are fragments of scenarios for two plays. Both plots are clearly autobiographical. The first, written in German, concerns a clever young Irish landlord who lives in London until he grows weary of city life and then returns to Ireland, where he falls in love with the daughter of a poor widow living in a cottage on his estate. More emphasis appears to be placed on the heroine's two brothers, who correspond to the two views of Synge himself at this time — his family's attitude towards him as "a Pariah" and his own concept of himself as the humanist poet.  

Although he never developed the plot, he was to retain much of the framework for his first finished play, which was rejected by Yeats and Lady Gregory seven years later and again after his death; here again the hero is a young landlord who returns to his Irish estate and falls in love with an unsophisticated girl of his own country. The other fragment also deals with a clever but penniless hero, this time in love with a spirited young heroine whose stern father prohibits an engagement.  

The rebellious nature of the heroine, who is determined to risk everything for happiness, strikes the chord which was to echo throughout all of his later plays. Long before he met Yeats, Synge had discovered the secret of projecting one's own emotions within the comparative safety of the dramatic framework. Later he considered the novel form as well, and after a minor operation planned one about nurses and the necessity of reforming their working conditions; perhaps it is just as well that

2 Scenario described in Stephens MS.655-56.
3 Stephens MS.659.
4 Stephens MS.659. The heroine replies to her father's speech: "Look here, Father, we are no longer children. If he was twenty and I eighteen you might talk as you are doing, but now it is different. I tell you, I am a woman now, and I love him with all my heart and soul, and I know and believe that he loves me ever so much."
5 Stephens MS.957-62.
by then Yeats had taken over. However, Padraic Colum recalls that Synge had given serious thought to the modern novel, feeling that the novelist, like the dramatist, should take his example from early models.1

Gradually Synge was developing his own aesthetic creed, and notes in his diaries indicate that here, too, he was taking his own path. Although much closer to the European literature of the time, he was influenced far less than Yeats by the contemporary aesthetic theories, and although he might find commendable qualities in Pierre Loti, for example, at the same time he remained sufficiently disinterested to criticize Loti's ignorance of the peasants of whom he wrote.2 Similarly, he denounced Zola, Ibsen, and "the Germans" for "dealing with the reality of life in joyless and pallid words."3 (He first read Ibsen in German.4) Villiers, Mallarmé and Huysmans were disdained for their "elaborate books that are far away from the profound and common interests of life"5 (although Huysmans was given a passing nod for his "curiously brutal slang"6), Coleridge and Shelley for "verse that was not always human."7 Wordsworth was preferred to any other English poet because he was "more at one with nature."8; Burns, Villon, and Herrick were commended.

1The Road Round Ireland, 367, Colum mentions Defoe as the example given by Synge.
2Notebooks from his first visit to Aran, Stephens MS. 1002-03.
3Prefaces to The Tinker's Wedding, and The Playboy of the Western World. Cf. letter from Stephen MacKenna, one of his closest friends, written about 1903-04, quoted in Greene and Stephens, op.cit. 156.
4List of Synge's reading compiled by E.M. Stephens, in the possession of Mrs. L.M. Stephens.
5Preface to The Playboy of the Western World; "La Sagesse et La Destinee," Dublin Daily Express, 17 December 1898.
6"Loti and Huysmans," The Speaker, 18 April 1903, 58.
7Preface to Poems and Translations.
for using "the whole of their personal life as their material,"¹ Jonson
and Molière for their timelessness.² Maeterlinck's La Sagesse et la
Destinée received praise for signs of "a virile — an almost transcendent
common sense of the greatest interest and importance"³; Anatole France
was also given tentative praise for his "exquisite prose style" in the
treatment "of a plain local mood."⁴ Borrow, Rabelais, Le Sage, Balzac,
O'Grady were read and enjoyed.⁵ Although he had seen very little theatre
in Ireland, he had doubtless taken note of the experimental theatres
of Paris and Berlin. It was as a cosmopolitan that Synge returned to
Ireland then, and throughout his life, although he wrote for Ireland
and chiefly of Ireland, he considered himself a European writer.⁶ It is
significant and appropriate that his were the first plays of the movement
to be produced in another language.⁷

Synge therefore felt free to develop his own aesthetic theory, although
he recognized that "all theorizing is bad for the artist, because it makes
him live in the intelligence instead of in the half-subconscious faculties

¹Preface to Poems and Translations.
²Preface to The Tinker's Wedding.
³"La Sagesse et La Destinée," op.cit.
⁴"Loti and Huysmans," op.cit.,58.
⁵List of Synge's reading and letter to MacKenna, 13 July 1905, both
in the possession of Mrs. Stephens. Yeats in a letter to The Nation,
6 April 1909, Letters, 528, and Masefield in John M. Synge, 31, both
mention Racine as one of his favourite authors, but there does not appear
to be any foundation for this.
⁶In his essays he frequently referred to Ireland as "the most
westerly point of Europe." Cf. In West Kerry, The Works of John M. Synge
(Dublin:Maunsel,1910),IV,70; The Aran Islands,op.cit.,III,10, et passim.
⁷The Well of the Saints,translated by Dr. Max Meyerfield, was
produced at the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin on 12 January 1906, and In
the Shadow of the Glen was translated into Bohemian by Pan Karel Musek
and performed at the Inchover Theatre, Prague, in February 1906. Cf.
Greene and Stephens, op.cit.,104. In 1912 The Well of the Saints
was translated into Dutch by Leo Simons. Cf. Conal O'Riordan, "Synge in
by which all creation is performed."\(^1\) He did acknowledge, however, that a certain amount of theory is necessary and inevitable, and that "by applying for ourselves, to our own life, what is thought in different ways by many, we are likely to hit on matters of some value."\(^2\) As can be expected, therefore, Synge rarely generalized; however, in three prefaces, illustrations in his critical essays, and comments from his notebooks, his attitude to art and life is stated clearly and succinctly. Moreover, "young and therefore living truths, views,...have a certain diffidence or tenderness that makes it impossible to state them without the accompanying emotional or imaginative life in which they naturally arise."\(^3\) It follows, therefore, that the expression of his general theory explains his own choice of material, the underlying themes of his plays, and the standard by which we must measure his skill and technique as a craftsman.

Three distinctions must be sought in a work of art, he felt; it "must have been possible to only one man at one period and in one place":

Although only two suffice to give us art of the first importance such as much of the Gothic architecture, folk songs and airs, Dutch painting, etc., the great artist [such] as Rembrandt or Shakespeare adds his personal distinction to a great distinction of time and place.\(^4\) It is the combination of personal originality with "the characteristic of a particular time and locality and the life that is in it," that gives a work its uniqueness or artistic value.\(^5\) Hence national art, which interprets the whole intellectual mood of the time, is "broad, serious, provisionally permanent" in contrast to the individual mood which is

\(^1\) Extract from notebooks, probably 1907, quoted in Plays by John M. Synge (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932), iv. The same reasons doubtless led him to state in "A Letter to a Young Man" [M.J. Nolan], Plays, 1932, viii, "I follow Goethe's rule, to tell no one what one means in one's writings."

\(^2\) Notebooks, probably 1908, Plays, 1932, v-vi.

\(^3\) Notebooks, c. 1907, Plays, 1932, iv.

\(^4\) Notebooks, c. 1898, Stephens MS, 1054.

\(^5\) Notebooks, c. 1907, Plays, 1932, ii-iii.
"often trivial, perverse, fleeting." This universality can be achieved by allowing our true emotions "free flow" rather than emphasizing instead the historical or naturalist details which either depend on artificial form with no sense of the immediate, or slice the immediate life so thin that the breadth and permanence disappear:

The emotions which pass through us have neither end nor beginning, are a part of eternal sensations, and it is this almost cosmic element in the person which gives all personal art a share in the dignity of the world.

Biography, even autobiography, cannot give this revelation, for the deeds of a man's lifetime are impersonal and concrete, might have been done by anyone, while art is the expression of the abstract beauty of the person.

Beauty equals perfection; "a thing perfect of its kind gives the sentiment of Beauty." But although Beauty is an attribute of art, it is not the end or essence of it any more than goodness is of life. Beauty, like goodness, is only a quality, and if sought instead of the essence of art itself, will lead only to the sickliness of the extreme aesthetes, in the same way that the search for health as the object of life leads to morbidity. "A dramatist has to express his subject and to find as much beauty as is compatible with that, if he does more he is an aesthete," he remarked to Yeats. The artist should therefore seek intensity and richness in his art, which will result in natural perfection or universality and lead to health or sanity, since all insanities in art, as in life, "are due to a one-sided excitement": "Sanity in sane conditions leads to beauty (art), goodness (morals), Health (bodily condition)." It is this wholesomeness which gives art its human value.

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1. Notebooks, 1898, Stephens MS, 1053. Cf. "Loti and Huysmans," op.cit., 59. However, he remarks in his notebook in 1907, Greene and Stephens, op.cit., 259, if a national tradition were still alive in the soul of the people, it might be used.
2. Extract from his first finished play, Christmas 1900, Stephens MS, 1258-59.
4. Quoted in Autobiographies, 345.
5. Notebooks, 1.1907, Plays, 1932, ii.
6. Notebooks, 1901 or earlier, Stephens MS 1415.
as opposed to the uniqueness which gives a work its artistic value. Only by combining the two can art remain permanent and universal. The criterion for the arts is therefore to be found in "testing art by its compatibility with the outside world and the peasants or people who live near it." And it is this healthy balance between the personal contribution of the individual and the richness drawn from the universal qualities which creates the synthesis of "stoicism, asceticism, and ecstasy" Synge felt so essential to great art. In his theory as in his drama Synge was striking off on his own, aiming at a union of the realist qualities of naturalism with the symbolism of aestheticism:

What is highest in poetry is always reached where the dreamer is leaning out to reality, or where the man of real life is lifted out of it, and in all the poets the greatest have both these elements, that is they are supremely engrossed with life, and yet with the wildness of their fancy they are always passing out of what is simple and plain.

(Hence Yeats's poetry is acceptable, but AE's is not).

The first step in attaining this union was, he felt, to discard all ideas of didacticism. "We should not go to the theatre as we go to a chemist's or a dram-shop....The drama, like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything," he wrote in his Preface to The Tinker's Wedding. And in a letter to MacKenna he objected, "The stage...would not regenerate -- or for that matter unregenerate -- Ireland any more than the symphonies of Beethoven can regenerate Germany." The theatre should, however, reveal the artist's vision, that expression of "ordinary life" as he sees it, "the reality, which is the root of all poetry" (Prefaces to The Tinker's Wedding and The Playboy). The artist's duty is to record, not judge or expound. (In following the Tramp, Nora is obeying a higher moral law, the call of her own nature; in worshipping the Playboy, Pegeen too is answering the gypsy's call).

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1. Notebooks, c.1907, Plays, 1932, iii-iv.
2. Quoted by Yeats in Autobiographies, 346 and 509. Yeats then applied the same "trinity of spiritual virtues" to Lionel Johnson, A Treasury of Irish Verse, 1900, reprinted in Works, 1908, VIII, 186.
3. Notebooks, probably 1908, Plays, 1932, vi.
If the artist is to read life truly and strike the balance necessary to wholesome art, he must be occupied with "the whole of life," "for although exalted verse is the highest, it cannot keep its power unless there is more essentially vital verse at the side of it." Only then can he provide "the nourishment, not very easy to define, on which our imaginations live" (Preface to The Tinker's Wedding). And that nourishment, the power of exalted verse, is found in the reality and zest of life, the "strong things of life" (Preface to Poems and Translations), rather than in the "seedy problems" of modern plays (Preface to The Tinker's Wedding). "On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy," Synge wrote in his Preface to The Playboy; we cannot find this union in the "joyless and pallid words" of Ibsen and Zola, or in the works of Mallarmé and Huysmans who are far away from "the profound and common interests in life." We must seek "the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality." It is when we combine the ecstasy of a life superb and wild with the stoicism and simplicity of the realities of life that we achieve art that is lasting. Such was the case in England, France, and Spain "when the drama was at its richest" (Preface to The Tinker's Wedding), "in the happy ages of literature" (Preface to The Playboy). Art in this sense escapes both the extremes of aestheticism and naturalism; rather, it brings the enlargement of a life detached from the ordinary problems of every day and yet with "strong roots among the clay and the worms" (Preface to Poems and Translations). Furthermore, by seeking to express the whole of life the artist will achieve not only the universality he requires, but the uniqueness as well:

1 Letter to Yeats, probably 1908, in the possession of Mrs. Stephens.

2 Cf. Yeats, "J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time," Essays and Introductions, 326-27: "He loves all that has edge, all that is salt in the mouth..."
The profound is always inimitable....Profound insight finds the inner and essential mood of the things it treats of and hence gives us art that is absolutely distinct and inimitable, — a thing never done before and never to be done again.1

But in choosing a life that is "superb and wild" one cannot expect to find only sweetness and light. When men preserve "their poetic feeling for ordinary life" and use "the whole of their personal life as their material," they preserve the bitter and the harsh as well as the sweet and the gentle; very often it is the bitter that makes the sweet. "It may almost be said that before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal," Synge wrote in his preface to Poems and Translations. And this may require the presentation of wildness as well as strength, evil as well as good, tragedy as well as humour.

We all of us delight in strength, whether we see it in other things, or feel it in ourselves. There is joy in the mad rush of a mountain torrent, in the flying foam of waves, and in the storm itself when it comes rushing to us through the terrified pine trees, he wrote in his diary in 1888.2 Almost twenty years later he commented concerning The Playboy, "the wildness, and if you will, vices of the Irish peasantry are due, like their extraordinary good points of all kinds, to the richness of their nature -- a thing that is priceless beyond words."3 "I notice that when anybody here writes a play it always works out, whatever the ideas of the writer, into a cry for a more abundant and a more intense life," Yeats wrote to Charles Ricketts in 1904.4

1Notebook, perhaps 1898, Stephens MS 1054. Cf. Synge's remark quoted by Yeats, Essays and Introductions,325: "The sciolist is never sad."

2Stephens MS. 367.


426 July 1904, Letters,436.
Similarly, the artist must accept life in the mixture in which it comes:

The man who feels most exquisitely the joy of contact with what is perfect in nature and art is the man who from the width and power of his thought hides the greatest number of satanic or barbarous sympathies.¹

Squeamishness was not only dishonest, but a disease: "Ireland will gain if Irish writers deal manfully, directly and decently with the entire reality of life. I think the law-maker and the law-breaker are both needful in society." "No drama can grow out of anything other than the fundamental realities of life,"² whether these realities are innocent or otherwise:

There are beautiful and interesting plants which are deadly, and others that are kindly. It is absurd to say a flower is not beautiful nor admire its beauty because it is deadly, but it is absurd also to deny its deadliness.³

Consequently the artist may find himself outside the sympathies of both orthodox religion and morality. In 1904 after reading Anatole France he commented in his diary:

In reading French literature one is tempted to wonder what nature literature is likely to take in the perhaps distant years when the science of men like Huxley and Haeckel...will have taken a place definitely in the intelligence of writers and readers....It makes one ask...what in the new literature I have dreamed of will be the conception of love for on it will depend a good deal of the fortunes of humanity....What form in this case would the new representatives...of St. Theresa and St. Thomas a Kempis take with an outlook on the world like Haeckel's? In what way will they create for us a romance of reality....Most important of all -- How will they rescue love -- the word is not too strong -- from the French?⁴

It was this "romance of reality" Synge sought in his own work, and to achieve it he was willing to reach not only towards the zest and joy of

¹Notebooks, 1890, Stephens MS, 411-412.
³Notebooks, probably 1907, Plays, 1932, v.
⁴Notebooks, about July 1904, Stephens MS, 1749-51.
life, but among the clay and worms. Like Yeats and Lady Gregory, he was willing to forego popularity and friendship for the sake of his belief, and before he died he had forsaken both family and friends. Like Lady Gregory and Yeats as well, he would defend the Samhain principles even against his fellow-directors. "I am prepared to stake everything on a creative movement even if we all go to the work-house at the end of four years," he wrote in a memorandum to Yeats over a disagreement in policy. 1

Art which deals with the whole of life will by its very nature encompass both tragedy and comedy, for "it is only the catastrophes of life that give substance and power to the tragedy and humour which are the true poles of art." 2 Humour, he felt, was "the essentially poetic quality in vital verse." 3 Moreover, humour is the true test of morals, both in art and in life, "as no vice is humorous":

"Bestial is, in its very essence, opposed to the idea of humour. All decadence is opposed to true humour. The heartiness of real and frank laughter is a sign that cannot be mistaken that what we laugh at is not out of harmony with that instinct of sanity that we call by so many names." 4

But the sorrows and bitterness of life will in turn leave their mark on humour, and again he points to "the frank philosophy of large classes among the French, who are kept healthy by an ironical attitude towards their own distress." 5 Comedy, like tragedy, will inevitably contain brutality as well as beauty, and as in life itself, the mingling of the two will provide the richness which nourishes.

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1 Memorandum in the possession of Mrs. Stephens. Cf. Fay and Carswell, The Fays of the Abbey Theatre, 211: after the row over The Shadow of the Glen, Synge said, "Very well, then; the next play I write I will make sure it will annoy them."

2 Notebooks, probably 1907, Plays, 1932, iii.

3 Letter to Yeats, probably 1906, in the possession of Mrs. Stephens.

4 Notebooks, probably 1907, Plays, 1932, v.

5 "Loti and Huysmans," The Speaker, 18 April 1903, 58. After the first production of The Playboy Synge commented, "We shall have to establish a society for the preservation of Irish humour."
But where can one find in this modern world the "strong things of life" that will make the drama the powerful nourishment it once was? Synge's wanderings among the hills of Wicklow, the wild wastes of Connemara, and the bare grey islands of Aran provided the answer — the peasant folk of Ireland, a people in whom there still remained "a popular imagination that is fiery, and magnificent, and tender" (Preface to The Playboy). "For the present the only possible beauty in drama is peasant drama," Synge wrote in his notebook. "For the future we must await the making of life beautiful again before we can have beautiful drama. You cannot gather grapes [put] of chimney pots." But in the lives of these people, in whom "the springtime of the local life has [not] been forgotten," there was ample material for his pen.

With these tenets in mind, then, Synge wrote his plays, seeking not the didactic interests of a particular moment in history, but the rich joy of a life "superb and wild," keyed much higher than the "overcrowded wretchedness" of the towns. Nor was his joy confined to comedy, his seriousness to tragedy, his reality to plays of modern life. Drama, whether tragedy or comedy, had to answer first as the expression of his sympathy and enthusiasm for life. His comment concerning The Playboy applies to all of his work:

I wrote [i] directly, as a piece of life, without thinking, or caring to think, whether it was a comedy, tragedy, or extravaganza, or whether it would be held to have, or not to have a purpose. Drama must first provide that "nourishment, not very easy to define, on which our imaginations live." What else it does depends upon the personal vision of the dramatist.

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1 Notebooks, 18 March 1907, Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 259.
According to Annemarie Aufhauser, Sind die Dramen von John Millington Synge durch französisiche vorbilden beingflussst? (Würzburg: Richard Mayr, 1935), 18, Synge was impressed by Jean-François Millet's paintings.

2 Note from his diary, 17 April 1892, Stephens MS, 513.

The Shock of New Material

Adieu, sweet Angus, Maeve, and Pand,
Ye plumed yet skinny Shee,
That poets played with hand in hand
To learn their ecstasy.

We'll stretch in Red Dan Sally's ditch,
And drink in Tubber fair,
Or poach with Red Dan Philly's bitch
The badger and the hare.

("The passing of the Shee")

"Is not style born out of the shock of new material?" Synge once remarked to Yeats,¹ and certainly in his plays we find much that, like the poitín of Inishmaan, brings "a shock of joy to the blood."² By his own admission, Synge found the material for his plays in his travels in Ireland; much of it, indeed, can be traced to his essays on Wicklow, Connemara, and the Aran Islands.

In 1898 I went to the Aran Islands — I had known the Co.Wicklow peasantry — we always spent every summer there — intimates for years -- and found the subjects of most of my plays there, he wrote to an American journalist.³ In another note he remarked, "Remember that the Kerry 'stuff' that is in the Shanachie is more or less raw material only."⁴ "No drama can grow out of anything other than the fundamental realities of life," he had written to MacKenna. It is to his essays we must turn, therefore, for the raw material of his plays. Yeats sought for subject matter in a world of his own creation; Synge, like Lady Gregory, achieved himself in this world. Like Lady Gregory, also, Synge transmuted his source material into the reality of a life that is timeless and of lasting truth. Reaching beyond his fellow folk-dramatist, he captured the spirit of lyrical beauty as well, moulding his raw material into his own personal cry for "what is best and richest, if it's for a short space only" on "the ridge of the world." A brief

¹Quoted by Virginia Moore, The Unicorn, 6.
²The Aran Islands, Works, 1910, III, 47.
³10 December 1907, Spencer Brodney collection, Trinity College, Dublin.
⁴24 December 1907, Spencer Brodney collection, TCD.
examination of these sources will be of value, then, for a deeper understanding not only of the plays themselves, but of the attitude and development of the dramatist who used them.

A study of his travel sketches reveals not so much a topographical survey as a personal record of the moods, atmosphere, and colouring of the Irish countryside and people reflected in a sensitive observer. "I have given a direct account of my life on the islands, and of what I met with among them," Synge wrote in the Introduction to *The Aran Islands*, "inventing nothing, and changing nothing that is essential." Throughout he remained the passive but sympathetic witness, reacting to each subtle alteration in weather and temperament, sharing briefly in the emotional climate of the life he was privileged to penetrate. We as readers see clearly because he felt intensely, and it is this strange but complete involvement rather than actual deeds or events which provided him with the material for his plays. A comparison with the plays indicates that, except for *The Well of the Saints*, Synge chose for dramatization plots that he had already recorded in his essays, and in this play as well we find reflected his experiences with the people and his personal feelings for the country he loved.

Although *In the Shadow of the Glen* was the first of his plays to reach the stage, Synge had already written *Riders to the Sea*, which is based almost entirely on incidents he observed on his first visit to Aran in 1898. The key to the figure of Maurya can be found in the following comments:

The maternal feeling is so powerful on these islands that it gives a life of torment to the women. Their sons grow up to be banished as soon as they are of age, or to live here in continual danger on the sea; their daughters go away also, or are worn out in their youth with bearing children that grow up to harass them in their own turn a little later:

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1 *The Aran Islands*, Works, 1910, III, vi.
2 Letter to Brodny (Brodzky), 12 December 1907, TCD collection.
On these islands the women live only for their children, and it is hard to estimate the power of the impulse that made this old woman stand out and curse her son.

Maurya's vision has its roots in a vision related to Synge:

When the horses were coming down to the slip an old woman saw her son, that was drowned a while ago, riding on one of them.

The atmosphere of doom pervading the play may have come from Synge's own feelings after witnessing the funeral of a young man drowned at sea:

As they talked to me and gave me a little poteen and a little bread when they thought I was hungry, I could not help feeling that I was talking with men who were under judgment of death. I knew that every one of them would be drowned in the sea in a few years and battered naked on the rocks, or would die in his own cottage and be buried with another fearful scene in the graveyard I had come from.

And old Maurya's final speech of acquiescence and reconciliation may have been born of the following comment in a letter from his Aran friend, Martin McDonough: "But at the same time we have to be satisfied because a person cannot live always." Out of these unrelated incidents and emotions Synge experienced as he watched these people pit their strength in a losing battle against the sea, he wrote his play.

His second published play, In the Shadow of the Glen, rose out of even earlier experiences in County Wicklow. It is set in Glenmalure, one of the longest and loneliest glens in Ireland. At the head of the glen stands an old cottage, and in this almost inaccessible setting Synge found the scene for his play. Mood and atmosphere come from his own feelings as he walked the lonely roads of Wicklow:

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1 Ibid., 81-82.
2 Ibid., 220-222.
3 The Aran Islands, Works, 1910, III, 216.
4 Quoted by Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 105. Lord Dunsany, "Irish Writers I Have Known," Atlantic Monthly, 1913, 66, remarks on the similarity to a stanza from Kipling's "The Gift of the Sea" (1890): "Be still," she said, "What more can ye do to me?" Pierre Loti's Pecheur d'Islande has a similar passage, but the approach of the two writers is entirely different. The Green Sheaf, no. 6, p. 12 (1903) includes "Cobus on Death," a translation by Christopher St. John from H. Heijermans' The Good Hope. Although Synge contributed "A Dream on Inishmaan" to the second issue in 1903, there is no other indication that he knew Heijermans' play when he wrote Riders to the Sea.
Among the cottages that are scattered through the hills of County Wicklow I have met with many people who show in a singular way the influence of a particular locality. These people live for the most part beside old roads and pathways where hardly one man passes in the day, and look out all the year on unbroken barriers of heath. At every season heavy rains fall for often a week at a time, till the thatch drips with water stained to a dull chestnut and the floor in the cottages seems to be going back to the conditions of the bogs near it. Then the clouds break, and there is a night of terrific storm from the south-west...when the winds come down through the narrow glens with a congested whirl and roar of a torrent, breaking at times for sudden moments of silence that keep up the tension of the mind. At such times the people crouch all night over a few sods of turf and the dogs howl in the lanes....This peculiar climate, acting on a population that is already lonely and dwindling, has caused or increased a tendency to nervous depression among the people, and every degree of sadness, from that of the man who is merely mournful to that of the man who has spent half his life in the madhouse, is common among these hills.¹

Again and again he refers to the "sense of desolation" and loneliness felt among the Wicklow hills,² and "the three shadowy countries that are never forgotten in Wicklow -- America (their El Dorado), the Union and the Madhouse." The madhouse is most frequently mentioned³; consequently his Wicklow sketches provide the material for the subplot of Patch Darcy's death as well, including the tale of a similar incident.⁴

The plot itself, however, was told to Synge in Aran in 1898 by Pat Dirane, one of the lineal descendants of the ancient seanachies.⁵ And although the story of a man who "plays dead" in order to test his wife's fidelity is an old one in world literature, Synge retained the form as it was told him by the old man of Inishmaan. Ten years later while defending The Playboy from violent Irish-American exiles, Lady Gregory was told by an old nurse that In the Shadow of the Glen was but "a fireside story" she had often heard in her youth in Ireland.⁶

³"The People of the Glens," op.cit., 27, 30, 33-34.
The source for *The Tinker's Wedding* again comes from Synge's sketches of Wicklow and his own observations on the life of the vagrants of the west. The main plot comes from a tale he heard while visiting a fair, in which two tinkers persuade the priest to wed them "for half a sovereign...and a tin can"; when they renge on the can, they are packed off by the priest as "a pair of rogues and schemers." The marriage customs among the tinkers were told to him by another traveller he met on the roads and supplied Synge with the relationship between Michael Byrne and Sarah Casey. The incident of tying the priest in a bag might be traced to "The Lout and his Mother," a poem in Douglas Hyde's *Religious Songs of Connacht* with which Synge was certainly familiar, but as we shall see, Synge has employed his sources in his own way.

*The Well of the Saints* takes us beyond Ireland to an old French farce Synge vaguely remembered. It has since been traced to a fifteenth century *mystère* Synge made notes of while reading for his courses at the Sorbonne. Although many sources have been suggested by diligent critics -- Clemenceau's *Le Voile de Bonheur*, Bulwer-Lytton's *Pilgrims of the Rhine*, Maeterlinck's *Les Aveugles* --, again we find

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5. Notes, probably spring 1903, record excerpts from "La Moralité de l'Aveugle et du Boiteau" 1496 by Andrieu de la Vigne, quoted in Petit de Julleville's *Histoire du Théâtre en France*, which Synge read in 1896.
incidents in his journals which suggest more of the main story and many of the details. "The Vagrants of Wicklow" records the great dismay and sorrow of an old man whose long white hair had been cut off in prison:

"What use is an old man without his hair? A man has only his bloom like the trees; and what use is an old man without his white hair?"1

The Aran Islands refers to the old ruined church of the Ceathair Aluinn (The Four Beautiful Persons) and the holy well near it famous for cures of blindness and epilepsy.2 Synge's first teacher on Aran was a "dark man," Old Mourteen, noted as much for his sly earthy humour as for his gift of the tongue.3 One might safely state, therefore, that although his main plot did not come from his notebook, Synge's experiences in Ireland again served to give the play its final form.

One of the greatest battles in twentieth century theatre occurred over The Playboy of the Western World, a fairly even match between those who vehemently denied and those who eagerly affirmed the author's sources and intentions. Once more Synge set his scene in rural Ireland, choosing this time a country shebeen or public house in the wilds of Mayo. And again we can find his material in the travel sketches. The story of "a Connacht man who killed his father with the blow of a spade when he was in a passion" was a familiar one in Aran4 and was told to both Yeats and Symons before Synge heard it5; in addition, the tale

1 In Wicklow, Works, 1910, IV, 3-4.
2 The Aran Islands, Works, 1910, III, 13-14.
3 Aran Islands, op. cit., 4 and 12-13.
4 The Aran Islands, Works, 1910, III, 88-89.
5 Cf. Autobiographies, 343-44, 569; Arthur Symons, Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands (London: W. Collins Sons, 1918), 307ff.; Thomas Johnson Westropp, Illustrated Guide to the Northern, Western, and Southern Islands and Coast of Ireland (Dublin: Antiquarian Handbook Series, 1905), 87; Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 79; Gerard Fay, "The 'Playboy' Riot," Manchester Guardian Weekly, 31 January 1957, 7: Denis Brogan, Senior told of "the man from his own village who was known as 'Bagdad,' not only because he had lived in the Middle East but because, infuriated at his father's longevity and the delay in inheriting the family farm, he had shot at the old man with both barrels of a shot-gun but had succeeded only in winging him. A well-known practice among the peasantry, according to Mr. Brogan." Holloway, 27 June 1907, National Library of Ireland MS 1805, 412-414, records the story as told to him by Michael Tighe.
paralleled a recent incident, "the Lynchehaun case," although Synge expressly states that he did not have this case in mind.\(^1\) However, the characterizations of the peasants, the Islanders' delight in roguery and romance,\(^2\) the strange combination of "wildness and reserve\(^3\)" which he observed in his travels, as well as actual phrases and expressions, can be found in his essays on Aran and the west of Ireland: "Listen to what I'm telling you: a man who is not married is no better than an old jackass"\(^4\); "'Well,' he said, when he was quiet again, 'isn't it a great wonder to think that those men are as big rogues as ourselves!'\(^5\); "Would any one kill his father if he was able to help it?"\(^6\); "They're like me so,' she said; 'would any one have thought that!'\(^7\); "Is there any war in the world at this time, noble person?"\(^8\); "Wishing you the best compliments of this season."\(^9\) Similarly, he transferred the Stooks of the Dead Women from Dingle Bay,\(^10\) racing from the sands of Kerry,\(^11\) and his "little hostess" from Great Blasket\(^12\) to the more advantageous setting of County Mayo. But as we shall see later, the importance of the play lies not in the original deed or the immediate environment, but in the development of the Playboy himself.

\(^1\)Letter to MacKenna, quoted by Greene and Stephens, *op. cit.*, 265. However, an early draft contains a reference to Lynchehaun.
\(^2\)The *Aran Islands*, *op. cit.*, 239; *In Wicklow, Works*, 1910, IV, 98.
\(^3\)Ibid., 136-39; 75; 65; 168-69; 218-220.
\(^4\)Ibid., 133.
\(^5\)Ibid., 239.
\(^6\)Ibid., 89.
\(^7\)Ibid., 122.
\(^8\)Ibid., 119; 20.
\(^10\)In *West Kerry*, *Works*, 1910, IV, 119.
\(^12\)Cf. Greene and Stephens, *op. cit.*, 189.
Deirdre of the Sorrows brought Synge directly into the mainstream of the Irish literary movement for the first time, and back into the folklore of his people as well. Lady Gregory had translated this tale of the Irish Helen, breathing Kiltartan life into those "rare and royal names/ormy sheepskin yet retains,"¹ and as we have seen later wrote her own personal myth round the variation of the tale in Grania; AE had conjured a spirited wraith wandering through Druid mists; more recently Yeats had added his heroic vision to the lovers' tale. Synge's departure began with choice of source. The earlier dramatists had made use of a fifteenth century version previously translated by Standish O'Grady and Douglas Hyde²; Synge on the other hand chose a version in modern Irish, which he had in part translated on a visit to Aran in 1901.³ However, he was also familiar with Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne, which he had reviewed in 1902.⁴ The same year, his article on Old Irish literature for L'European singled out the qualities in the saga which fulfilled his demands for the most exalted poetry:

Plusieurs récits qui y appartiennent, tel que le Sort Des Fils d'Uisneach, sont tous imprégnés de cette poésie particulièrement celtique qui réunit d'une façon inattendue une tendresse timide, un hérosisme rude et mâle et un amour infini pour les beautés de la nature.⁵

But the time had not yet come for him to turn away from the tramp life of the present to the heroic personages of the past. Just as he was not able to synthesize the irony of comedy with the tragic quality of the

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²Cf. Notes to Cuchulain of Muirthemne, 359-60.
³Andrew MacCurtin, Fate of the Children of Uisneach (Dublin: Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, 1898). The MS from which the text is taken was written in 1740. Synge's translation is in the possession of Mrs. Stephens.
⁴"An Epic of Ulster," The Speaker, 7 June 1902, 284-85. He also reviewed a version of A.E. Leahy in Heroic Romances of Ireland, "A Translation of Irish Romance," The Manchester Guardian, 6 March 1906, 5.
⁵"La Vieille Littérature Irlandaise," L'European, 15 March 1902, 11.
dream until he had written *The Well of the Saints*, he was not yet equipped to approach the lyrical and restrained moonlight beauty of the classical myth until he had passed through the vigorous, colourful, myth-making turbulence of *The Playboy*. Only then could he realize that past and present are one, and illuminate his personal observations and emotions within the formal ritual of a fate foretold. And then, only after deeper experiences in his own life as well as his observations of others, could he recognize the common bond between "Golden Deirdre" and "a tinker's doxy,"¹ "Friend of Ronsard" and "Lark of Ulster."²

When he did finally begin work on *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, Synge followed AE's example and wrote his play in three acts. Unfortunately the play was not completed when he died, and only the last act was deemed satisfactory by Synge. The remainder of the play was pieced together by Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge's fiancée Maire O'Neill (Molly Allgood).³ Although he was apparently intending to introduce several original elements into the plot, as it stands the play does not wander far from the original action of the saga. He follows Deirdre from the time she is twenty in Lavarcham's house in Slieve Fudh, to Alba with Naisi and his two brothers, and back to Emain Macha to meet her death and fulfill the prophecy. Within this framework Synge tells his tale; it is in characterization and general treatment of theme that we see the greatest freedom he makes with his material. And here, too, there is a consistent thread which follows from his first one-act plays through the riotous comedy of *The Tinker's Wedding* and deeper ironical strain of *Well of the Saints* to fruition in *The Playboy*.

²"On a Birthday," *op.cit.*, 225.
³Greene and Stephens, *op.cit.*, 300.
Life and the Dream

Woods of Cuan, woods of Cuan, dear country of the east! It's seven years we've had a life was joy only, and this day we're going west, this day we're facing death, maybe, and death should be a poor, untidy thing, though it's a queen that dies.

(Deirdre of the Sorrows, Act II, 321)

The basic themes underlying Synge's plays followed naturally from his theories of art and drama and his approach to material. For art which has its roots in "the clay and worms," yet seeks after what is "superb and wild in reality," implies a conflict. This conflict between the ordinary and the ideal, the bitter and the sweet, the real and the dream, reason and the imagination, reality and fantasy, Synge saw as basic both to life and to nature. The conflict takes two forms in his plays -- externally in nature, and internally in the heart and mind of man. In external nature there is the continual struggle between the beauty and joy of life and youth and the ugliness and sorrow of old age and death. In the soul of man this struggle is reflected in his eternal conflict between the illusion and the reality. Nature to man symbolizes power, wildness, and a dreadful joy; the "common, week-day kind of" life man has built around him symbolizes ugliness, boredom, decay, and eventually an unhappy death. By choosing to dramatize the life of the Aran Islanders and the vagrants of Wicklow, Synge was tearing away the veils of sophistication one finds in town life, and was dealing with reality in its more elemental form.

The continual passing in this island between the misery of last night and the splendour of to-day seems to create an affinity between the moods of these people and the moods of varying rapture and dismay that are frequent in artists, and in certain forms of alienation.... In Inishmaan one is forced to believe in a sympathy between man and nature.

All references to the plays will use the pagination of the 1932 edition of the Plays.

Cf. Entry 27 December 1888, notebooks quoted in Stephens MS, 367:
"We fear death it seems to me as we fear getting an old tooth out. Life and old teeth are unquestionably misfortunes but dentists and death beds are horrible."
he comments in *The Aran Islands*. Humanity, art, and nature are
inextricably bound in the conflict between the real and the ideal, life
and the dream. We can examine this basic conflict first as Synge
represents it in the power of external nature, second in the lives and
emotions of his characters, third in the most elaborate effect this
conflict has on his people -- the creation of the myth.

The religious art is a thing of the past only -- a vain and foolish
regret -- and its place has been taken by our quite modern feeling
for the beauty and mystery of nature, an emotion that has gradually
risen up as religion in the dogmatic sense has gradually died. Our
pilgrimages are not to Canterbury or Jerusalem, but to Killarney,
Cumberland and the Alps. In my plays and topographical books I
have tried to give humanity and this mysterious external world.2

The power of external nature is perhaps the first impression one
receives from Synge's plays. Nature actually effects the climax in both
*Riders to the Sea* and *In the Shadow of the Glen*; more subtly, it reflects
the motivation behind *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. Nature attracts -- yet
repels, heightens yet depresses, strengthens yet enfeebles, enriches yet
deprives, releases yet binds. For these strong, simple people whose
wisdom reaches back into the folk imagination of the past and yet whose
emotions are almost childlike in their spontaneity, nature is the one
dependable reality in a world which restlessly hovers between the ecstasy
of fulfilment and the tragedy of oblivion. Intensity of emotion merely
reflects this sharp clarity of nature's moods:

This procession along the olive bogs, between the mountains and the
sea, on this grey day of autumn, seemed to wring me with the pang
of emotion one meets everywhere in Ireland -- an emotion that is
partly local and patriotic, and partly a share of the desolation that
is mixed everywhere with the supreme beauty of the world.3

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*The Academy and Literature*, 6 September, 1902, 238.

2 Notebooks, probably 1907, *Plays*, 1932, iii.

3 In *West Kerry*, *Works*, 1910, IV, 71. Cf. note 7 May 1905 quoted in Stephens
MS., 1885: "Donegal, Lough Swilly -- morning, curious wistfulness and delicacy
of beauty, loneliness, illusions. Mulroy Bay -- tension of the isolation of
what is most divine." In a letter to Molly 28 August 1905, Greene and
Stephens, op. cit., 209, he wrote of the woods of Kerry, "It is good for anyone
to be out in such beauty as this and it stirs me up to try and make my
It is this mystical acceptance of nature which we find in all of Synge's plays.

The sea broods over Riders to the Sea from the opening speech of the young girls; they speak of their drowned brother Michael and examine his clothing; they are anxious about Bartley who insists on travelling when "the tide's turned to the wind." There is no synonym, no adjective, no personification for "the sea"; the words appear on every page until it becomes some irresistible power that lures away a woman's strong sons and leaves the old desolate. In the face of active nature the women are passive, and at the end Maurya's lifelong struggle against this acceptance of the powerful forces of nature is over: "They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me"(53). There is resignation, not to old age or to the coming of death, but a relief that at last the sea holds no terror. It is the sea that judges and condemns, that takes away life and bestows the peace of resignation: "No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied"(55).

But for the young men the sea has an attraction, and Bartley must go even at the cost of losing his mother's blessing. "It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over?"(42). They alone have the strength to challenge the sea, and they go to their deaths with the glory of nature's strength. Nature and the sea mean death but at the same time represent life, for there is no life without the acceptance of challenge even against the inevitable.

Similarly, nature provides the whole atmosphere and setting of In the Shadow of the Glen, and is directly responsible for the actions of the characters. Conversation centres on the rain and mist and bogs; the story of Patch Darcy, one of the strong men who eventually succumbs to the loneliness of the hills, haunts those who are still struggling;
"for isn't a dead man itself more company than to be sitting alone, and hearing the winds crying, and you not knowing on what thing your mind would stay?" (18) Nora has felt the oppression of the hills, has spent long days seeing "nothing but the mists rolling down the bog, and the mists again and they rolling up the bog, and hearing nothing but the wind crying out in the bits of broken trees were left from the great storm, and the streams roaring with the rain" (25); to marry Michael Dara would be to commit herself once more to a marriage of convenience and the same dreary solitude. The oppression of the mists and hills cannot be reversed by human action.

The action of *In the Shadow of the Glen* takes place on a miserable, wet, windy night. The setting of *Deirdre of the Sorrows* is also at the death of the day and the year. Darkness follows the travels of Deirdre and Naisi. "It's dark with the clouds are coming from the west and south," says Lavarcham on the night that draws Deirdre and the Sons of Uí Néill to a common fate (275); "the night will be the worst, I'm thinking, we've seen these years gone by" (286). The seven years in Alban are happy, but it is at the beginning of the darkness of winter that the lovers choose to leave:

I'm well pleased, Naisi, we're going forward in the winter the time the sun has a low place, and the moon has her mastery in a dark sky, for it's you and I are well lodged our last day, where there is a light behind the clear trees, and the berries on the thorns are a red wall (314-15).

And the flames of *Emain Macha* stand out against a black sky when the tragedy of *Deirdre* finally reaches its climax: "Deirdre is dead, and Naisi is dead; and if the oaks and stars could die for sorrow, it's a dark sky and a hard and naked earth we'd have this night in Emain" (346). Lavarcham's words call forth the grief of a sympathetic nature to meet the sorrow of humanity. In *Well of the Saints*, the bleakness of Martin's spirit is reflected in the darkness which returns to his eyes: "Is it a storm of thunder is coming, or the last end of the world?...The heavens is closing, I'm thinking, with darkness and great trouble passing in the sky" (142).
But with darkness comes relief to Martin and Mary Doul, and they can once more, like Nora, the Tramp, the youthful Deirdre, and the tinkers, appreciate the attractions of nature as well as its power. All feel the freedom of nature, and joyfully answer its call to farther horizons. The Tramp most clearly represents man who has discovered the solution to this tension in the external world; by accepting nature and bending with it, he has found peace:

We'll be going now, I'm telling you, and the time you'll be feeling the cold, and the frost, and the great rain, and the sun again, and the south wind blowing in the glens, you'll not be sitting up on a wet ditch, the way you're after sitting in this place, making yourself old with looking on each day, and it passing you by. You'll be saying one time, "It's a grand evening, by the grace of God," and another time, "It's a wild night, God help us; but it'll pass, surely (31).

Mary Byrne feels this oneness with nature as well: "It's a grand thing to be waking up a day the like of this, when there's a warm sun in it, and a kind air, and you'll hear the cuckoos singing and crying out on the top of the hills." Mary Doul also share this sense of intimacy and companionship with nature. The sounds and smells of nature are worked into the fabric of the play, and rejoicing in their safe return to blindness, the old couple rhapsodize on the sympathy of nature:

Mary Doul. There's the sound of one of them twittering yellow birds do be coming in the springtime from beyond the sea, and there'll be a fine warmth now in the sun, and a sweetness in the air, the way it'll be a grand thing to be sitting here quiet and easy, smelling the things growing up, and budding from the earth.

Martin Doul. I'm smelling the furze a while back sprouting on the hill, and if you'd hold your tongue you'd hear the lambs of Grianan, though it's near drowned their crying is with the full river making noises in the glen.

Mary Doul.... The lambs is bleating, surely, and there's cocks and laying hens making a fine stir a mile off on the face of the hill. (153-154).

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1David Greene, "The Tinker's Wedding: A Revaluation," 825, records a lyrical passage in the early drafts of the play: "What is it the Almighty God would care of the like of us? You'd never see the Almighty doing a thing to the larks or to the swallows or to the swift birds do be crying out when the sun is set, or to the hares do be racing above in the fine spring and what way would he be following us in the dark nights when it's quiet and easy we are, and we never asking him a thing at all." Here Molly Byrne identifies herself with nature and in opposition to Christianity.
Even the Saint mingles his Christian asceticism with the pagan ecstasy of nature-worship, praising "glittering seas, and the furze that is opening above, will soon have the hills shining as if it was fine creels of gold they were, rising to the sky"(161). Nature unites Deirdre and Naisi: "By the sun and moon and the whole earth, I wed Deirdre to Naisi.... May the air bless you, and water and the wind, the sea, and all the hours of the sun and moon"(301).

Images borrowed from nature constantly rise to the lips of Synge's characters. The smallest detail is not allowed to pass unnoticed, and becomes a characteristic part of their speech. A day may come in the west for Deirdre "that the larks are cocking their crests on the edge of the clouds, and the cuckoos making a stir"(330). Deirdre has kept Naisi's tent "these seven years as tidy as a bee-hive or a linnet's nest"(328). Naisi's return to Emain is as meaningless "as the thrushes come from the north, or young birds fly out on a dark sea"(314). Christy comes from "a windy corner of high, distant hills"(192) and would be "as happy as the sunshine of St. Martin's day"(199). "Let you tell us your story before Pegeen will come," admonishes the Widow Quin," in place of grinning your ears off like the moon of May"(213). The sun rises "to the noon of day," and Christy is "mounted on the spring-tide of the stars of luck"(258). Sarah Casey is "a terror since the moon did change"(82), for "the spring-time is a queer time"(62). There is a pastoral, almost liturgical quality in Deirdre's speeches:

Since that, Naisi, I have been one time the like of a ewe looking for a lamb that had been taken away from her, and one time seeing new gold on the stars, and a new face on the moon, and all times dreading Emain(296-97).

Old Lavarcham comments, "Birds go mating in the spring of the year, and ewes at leaves falling, but a young girl must have her lover in all the course of the sun and moon"(300). Naisi's eyes are described by Owen as "sheep's eyes"; the people of the glens frequently refer to their experiences with the herds: "the sheep were lying under the ditch and
every one of them coughing and choking like an old man, with the great rain and the fog"(16); and husband and wife attack each other with images drawn from their lives as shepherds. Deirdre, embroidering 'the green gap of wood," dreams of "a man with his hair like the raven, maybe, and his skin like the snow, and his lips like blood spilt upon it"(282).

This sympathy they feel with nature works the other way as well, and Synge's people in turn endow nature with human frailty. Christy was "born lonesome, I'm thinking, as the moon of dawn"(221). Mornings are lonesome for those exiled from Ireland, "with birds crying on the bogs"(310). The Saint speaks of a "bare starving rock"(117), and blind keen ears can hear "a soft wind turning round the little leaves of the spring"(167). Martin fears the return of blindness, "sitting alone in the cold air, hearing the night coming, and the blackbirds flying round in the briers crying to themselves"(148). "It's lonesome and cold you'll be feeling the ditch where you'll be lying down that night, I'm telling you," Sarah Casey warns Michael Byrne," and you hearing the old woman making a great noise in her sleep, and the bats squeaking in the trees"(65).

This appreciation of the external world is naturally accompanied by an admiration for physical beauty. It is this admiration which causes the pathos of the two old beggars in The Well of the Saints who receive the gift of sight only to have their illusions of beauty destroyed; consolation can come only when they replace the disillusion of the present by a fresh dream of the beauty of old age, long white hair, and a silken beard. Molly Byrne's "sweet beautiful voice you'd never tire to be hearing" must belong to "a fine, soft, rounded woman," thinks blind Martin (104). And the beauty of Molly and Pegeen gives rise in turn to the poetic flights of Martin and Christy:

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Martin Doul. I'm thinking by the mercy of God it's few sees anything but them is blind for a space....It's few sees the old women rotting for the grave, and it's few sees the like of yourself....Though it's shining you are, like a high lamp would drag in the ships out of the sea.

Christy. Isn't there the light of seven heavens in your heart alone, the way you'll be an angel's lamp to me from this out, and I abroad in the darkness, spearing salmons in the Owen or the Carrowmore? (251-52).

It is but a short step from a love and appreciation of the beauty of nature to the dread that beauty and the joys of the life of nature will eventually disappear, leaving ugliness and old age in their wake. Nora realizes that she and Michael Dara cannot escape the fate of old Dan Burke:

You'll be getting old, and I'll be getting old, and in a little while, I'm telling you, you'll be sitting up in your bed -- the way himself was sitting -- with a shake in your face, and your teeth falling, and the white hair sticking out round you like an old bush where sheep do be leaping a gap....It's a pitiful thing to be getting old, but it's a queer thing surely.

Mary Byrne, the old reprobate tinker, soliloquizes on the brevity of youth and the necessity of tasting the joy of life and nature while we can:

"Maybe the two of them have a good right to be walking out the little short while they'd be young" (78). She reserves the same rights for herself as well: "What's a little stroke on your head beside sitting lonesome on a fine night, hearing the dogs barking, and the bats squeaking, and you saying over, it's a short while only till you die" (79). Pegeen, like Nora, has hershare of "horizon-fever": "And myself, a girl, was tempted often to go sailing the seas till I'd marry a Jew-man, with ten kegs of gold, and I not knowing at all there was the like of you drawing nearer, like the stars of God" (253).

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3 Cf. The Aran Islands, Works, 1910, III, 171: "The black curagh working slowly through the world of grey, and the soft hissing of the rain, gave me one of the moods in which we realize with immense distress the short moment we have left us to experience all the wonder and beauty of the world": ibid., 63.
But in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* the dread of the ugliness and fatigue of old age and the desperate reaching out after life are woven inextricably into the theme. It is this dread that gives Deirdre and Naisi the strength to face an early death:

It's this hour we're between the daytime and a night where there is sleep for ever, and isn't it a better thing to be following on to a near death, than to be bending the head down, and dragging with the feet, and seeing one day a blight showing upon love where it is sweet and tender?(315)

There is "no safe place...on the ridge of the world"(315) against the onslaught of old age. Owen constantly reminds Deirdre that old age is no respecter of persons: "Queens get old, Deirdre, with their white and long arms going from them, and their backs hooping. I tell you it's a poor thing to see a queen's nose reaching down to scrape her chin"(306). Conchubor the High King has already reached this knowledge: "There's one sorrow has no end surely -- that's being old and lonesome"(337). Deirdre rejoices that death has erased the fear of old age for her three comrades, and it is this realization that gives her the courage to face death herself: "The dawn and evening are a little while, the winter and the summer pass quickly, and what way would you and I, Naisi, have joy for ever?"(314).

The importance of nature in the lives of Synge's people leads naturally to the second theme running through his plays, the conflict within these characters themselves between reality and the dream, the life they lead and the dream of escape into a world of beauty and joy which old age cannot wither. Some have the opportunity to reach out for that dream; some reach past the dream to a richer reality beyond. We have seen that nature constantly reminds us that life is short, beauty is transient, and old age brings ugliness and a withering into death. But nature in a friendlier mood symbolizes the freedom and joy of love and life. Nora in the freedom of the road, Pegeen in her dream of

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1 Cf. Lavarcham's warning to Conchubor in Act III: "There's things a king can't have, Conchubor....Fools and kings and scholars are all one in a story with her like."
the Playboy, Deirdre in her seven years of love, all reach out for the richness of a life that is "superb and wild." All three are keenly aware of the vanishing of beauty and the brevity of life; all seek something better than the dull, conventional life they lead. And so each chooses to give up the security of her ordinary surroundings and is willing to face the unknown in an effort to attain and preserve, if only for a little while, the ideal. Even the carefree tinkers sense the brevity of life and the need to taste the joys of life while they can; Mary Byrne, too, has a right to "her full pint when the night's fine, and there's a dry moon in the sky"(78).¹

But this spiritual conflict effected by external nature goes deeper yet. Nature itself can be either real or illusory. The Tramp's view of nature is realistic, but optimistic: "the rain is falling, but the air is kind, and maybe it'll be a grand morning, by the grace of God"(31). He prefers the risk to the settled life of the herd or even "the poor mountainy man." Nora, too, realizes that escape implies its own set of values: "I'm thinking it's myself will be wheezing that time with lying down under the heavens when the night is cold," she replies humorously(32). But "the like of her" could never be happy within the ugly man-made conventions of materialism, so it's with the Tramp she goes.

In The Tinker's Wedding we have this situation reversed, for Sarah Casey yearns for the symbol of materialism and convention: "I'll be married now in a short while; and from this day there will no one have a right to call me a dirty name, and I selling cans in Wicklow or Wexford or the city of Dublin itself"(85). But the tinker's law has more reality and joy than the semi-civilization Sarah aspires to, and here Mary Byrne represents the truth of the vagrant's world: "Is it putting that ring on your finger will keep you from getting an aged woman and losing the fine face you have, or be easing your pains...?"(86) Both Sarah and the priest are justly paid for their foolishness in meddling with worlds to which neither is constitutionally attuned. Sarah Casey, like Nora Burke, belongs on the roads, and for both the life that is a joy only comes with the freedom of the wanderer.

The risk Nora, Sarah, and Deirdre take in following their dream has its roots in the acceptance of the inevitable course of nature. All, like the Tramp, must be willing to accept complete commitment to nature's laws. For Sarah Casey this means a continuation in the way of the tinker's life and the hardships and joys represented by Mary Byrne. On the other hand, we leave Nora on the threshold: for her, the risk is greater because unknown; but whether the outcome is pleasant or not, it is infinitely preferable to the only other choice left open to her, "the fine Union below in Rathdrum." (Michael Dara is but a shadowy symbol of the insufficient consolation offered by life in the glens.)

In the evolution of Deirdre this whole conflict between life and the dream is both more sharply and more subtly drawn. In the first place, the framework is already established; we know the end of the saga; "the troubles are foretold." Furthermore, the characters themselves know that not only are they as human beings subject to the inevitable laws of nature, the surety of death and the ugliness of old age, but their own personal stories within that universe are also pre-ordained and irrevocable. Lavarcham, Deirdre's old nurse, acts as a chorus not only of present action but of future prophecy: "Who'd check her like was made to have her pleasure only, the way if there were no warnings told about her you'd see troubles coming when an old king is taking her, and she without a thought but for her beauty and to be straying the hills"(276). Yet within this framework of the mingling of two worlds -- that of ancient prophecy and the personal human note of mortal longings -- each character is given the choice of action and self-realization, the desperate reaching-out after the rich joys of life and youth. Impelled by their own natures, Deirdre, Naisi, Conchubar and even Owen give voice and meaning to their desires through the ancient words of the prophecy; the past mingles with the present, each illuminating and enlarging the

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1In a letter to Maire O'Neill, December 1906, Synge wrote, "My next play must be quite different from the P.Boy. I want to do something quiet and stately and restrained." Greene and Stephens, op.cit.,223.
significance of the other. Because each is what he is, the ancient prophecy merely reflects the inevitable outcome of this interaction of characters. Conchubar seeks the dream he has held for twenty years, "a place is safe and splendid," with a "light and airy" comrade whose gaiety and liveliness will ease the "store of knowledge that's a weight and terror." But his dream is false, for he cannot buy youth and happiness with all the glory and riches of Emain. "It's yourself has made a crazy story, and let you go back to your arms, Conchubor, and to councils where your name is great, for in this place you are an old man and a fool only"(342), cries Deirdre from the edge of Naisi's grave.

Conchubor's dream is limited to material happiness which can be bought and power which can be commanded with arms; Deirdre's dream is the realization of her own nature. Though she speaks with the dignity and command of a queen, she reveals the same longings and despair, the same sincerity that we find in all Synge's women characters from old Maurya to Mary Byrne. It is Deirdre who reaches out and grasps what all her peasant sisters have dimly felt. We meet her first as the young girl in sympathy with natural beauty and in love with youth. Conchubor's white hounds and grey horses can have no appeal for "the like of her": "I'm a long while watching the days getting a great speed passing me by. I'm too long taking my will, and it's that way I'll be living always"(285). The wilful young girl, having rejected her first offer of "reality," becomes in a few brief moments "the queen who is a master, taking her own choice and making a stir to the edges of the seas"(289). But whereas the Tramp remained merely a symbol of the richer, freer life Nora Burke was seeking, Deirdre's fulfilment depends upon Naisi's willingness to share the same dream. For he, too, enters the play with a private vision:

Deirdre. It should be a sweet thing to have what is best and richest, if it's for a short space only.

Naisi. (very distressed) And we've a short space only to be triumphant and brave (297).

1 Cf. Yeats's "Fergus and the Druid," Collected Poems, 34: "And what to me was burden without end."
In as brief a time we see the gay, careless comrade-at-arms, revelling in the "nights when a king like Conchubor would spit upon his arm ring, and queens will stick their tongues out at the rising moon" (293), accepting with Deirdre a greater reality well paid "with silence and a near death" (298). Even though he'll have dreams of old age and weariness, they remain dreams only until once more "the ridge of the world" loses its safety and peace. With the reality of death facing them, seven years seem but a dream in their turn:

We've had a dream, but this night has waked us surely. In a little while we've lived too long, Naisi, and isn't it a poor thing we should miss the safety of the grave, and we trampling its edge? (334)

The ridge of the world narrows once more, to the space of a narrow, new-made grave. The final reality for Deirdre and the Sons of Usna belongs once again to mythology, "a story told of a ruined city and a raving king and a woman will be young for ever" (343).

Creating the Myth

Nora and Deirdre have the courage to reach out to a life beyond and accept the rules of the nature they embrace. Nora, like the Tramp, chooses to become one with nature and face inevitable decay and old age. Deirdre, too, accepts nature's irrevocable law. "There is no way to keep life, or love with it, a short space only" (316); and so, unwilling to keep watch on "a love had no match and it wasting away" (316), she faces "the end that's come." Reality and nature demand payment in kind. But even with the risk Nora and Deirdre must take, perhaps they are better off than those who depend upon unrestrained imagination and not action to set them free from the horror and ugliness of their world. For these people, imagination becomes a refuge. It may deceive with simple fantasy, as it does in The Well of the Saints, or it may liberate, as it does in In the Shadow of the Glen, The Tinker's Wedding, and most of all in The Playboy.
The power of the imagination is a basic thread running through the pattern of both *The Well of the Saints* and *The Playboy*. Martin Doul and Christy Mahon are most affected by illusion and disillusion. In Martin, we see the destructive effect of the imagination; to regain happiness he is forced to create new illusions. In Christy, we see the constructive power of the imagination; it liberates the soul of Christy and creates him anew in the rôle of poet-hero that his admirers have granted him. Here the imagination and illusion of symbolism joins hands with the reality of the naturalist tradition. "In Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery, and magnificent, and tender," Synge wrote in his Preface to *The Playboy*. It is when the reins of this "fiery, and magnificent, and tender" imagination are loosened in an effort to escape from confining reality, that the myth — the most mature stage of this conflict in man between the dream and the reality — is created. *The Well of the Saints* examines man's need for the myth; *The Playboy of the Western World* deals with the actual creation of the myth; *Deirdre of the Sorrows* explores the myth already created as further material for creation.

Mary and Martin Doul live in a world of illusion created for them by those who live in the world of reality. Here Synge wanted to write "like a monochrome painting, all in shades of the one colour," Willie Fay reports. The entire play is built upon this contrast between "vision" and "insight": action and theme move backwards and forwards between the world of the blind and the world of sight, between deception and clarity, disappointment and realization. In turn, those who see are torn between bitterness and kindliness, self-deception and self-awareness; those who are blind balance and fulfil each other. Those who see have their sight sharpened — and their worlds darkened — by those to whom...

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sight has been granted: "But it's a queer thing the way yourself and Mary Doul are after setting every person in this place, and up beyond to Rathvanna, talking of nothing and thinking of nothing, but the way they do be looking in the face," remarks Timmy the Smith(135). The blind in turn enter a darker world once they are enabled to see:

For it's a raw, beastly day we do have each day, till I do be thinking it's well for the blind don't be seeing them grey clouds driving on the hill, and don't be looking on people with their noses red, the like of your nose, and their eyes weeping and watering, the like of your eyes, God help you, Timmy the Smith(130).

For both groups, the world becomes too real to be borne, and the great gift of sight, dreamed of and longed for by the blind, becomes instead a greater misery to both giver and receiver. Martin and Mary can regain their former happiness only by darkening their own minds once more, and this is not possible in the surroundings they themselves have made unbearable. For their disillusionment has in turn created bitterness amongst those who had contributed to the creation -- and destruction -- of their former dream; this second dream must be more powerful still, first because they create it in spite of their surroundings and the knowledge of sight, second because they must seek a world in which they can live their dream, and the risk is death.

The two blind people are an interesting complement and contrast to each other. Mary is complacent and easily satisfied, first in her illusion of beauty and "long yellow hair," later in her vision of "a face would be a great wonder when it'll have soft white hair falling around it"(151). Yet she has few illusions about the world and the people about her. "Well, the Saint's a simple fellow and it's no lie," she laughs to herself, for his belief that young girls are "the cleanest holy people you'd see walking the world"(112). And although she accepts the comforts of illusion, at the same time she never loses her hold on reality: "And what good'll our grey hairs be itself, if we have our sight, the way we'll see them falling each day, and turning dirty in the rain?"(155)
Martin on the other hand must enter completely into the dream if he is to believe it at all. He is nervously active and out-going, desiring to be with "those that have their sight" and "dreaming dreams" of the world he cannot see. When he does gain his sight, disillusionment is harsher for him, and so, like the poet, he strives to endow the world about him, strongly rooted as it is among the clay and worms, with the exaltation of the dream. But reality is too strong for him, and his dreams are shattered by further disillusionment of "the villainy of a woman and the bloody strength of a man"(146). When blindness returns, "the blackness wasn't so black at all the other time as it is this time"(147). And it is he who acts, at the end, in a desperate effort to preserve the new world he and Mary have created, even though it means the Saint's anger, the people's scorn, and isolation forever from the world he once took delight in imagining:

For if it's a right some of you have to be working and sweating the like of Timmy the smith, and a right some of you have to be fasting and praying and talking holy talk the like of yourself, I'm thinking it's a good right ourselves have to be sitting blind, hearing a soft wind turning round the little leaves of the spring and feeling the sun, and we not tormenting our souls with the sight of the grey days, and the holy men, and the dirty feet is trampling the world(167).

Like Nora, the Tramp, Sarah Casey, Mary Byrne, and Deirdre and Naisi, Martin and Mary Doul have a right to the world which gives them the rich joy and nourishment on which their imaginations live.

In contrast, the harsh world of Timmy the Smith and Molly Byrne offers as little beauty and happiness as Conchubor's, the Priest's, or Dan Burke's. There, reality is grey and dull and, it may be, just as full of illusion. Timmy and the Saint both pity those who "aren't the like of simple men, who do be working every day, and praying, and living like ourselves"(166). They are too involved in their world to see the ugliness and harshness revealed to Martin; "It's few sees anything but them is blind for a space"(140). Those who can see may have the doubtful pleasure of earning their bread, but those who are blind have the sensibility to appreciate the glories of the world of the imagination.
Thus Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge all deal with the theme of a miracle-changing world, each, as we have seen, treating it according to his own personal view of that world. Further, all three base their work on folklore, thereby retaining the element of simplicity and wonder necessary to the individual treatment. Yeats weaves "dark, mythical secrets" through *The Cat and the Moon*; Lady Gregory explores the myth, then discards it in *Aristotle's Bells*; Synge examines man's need for the myth, discarding the myth only to accept the truth behind it. And in *The Well of the Saints* the folklore element itself is adapted to this deeper level; for ironically, if man will not accept reality and recognize his own illusions, miracles can no longer help him to live within the world of reality.

In *The Playboy of the Western World* we see the power of the myth to create a reality out of the dream or illusion itself. The inhabitants of a small isolated village in the west of Ireland have had few opportunities to build myths from their simple lives, in "this place where you'll meet none but Red Linahan, has a squint in his eye, and Patheen is lame in his heel, or the mad Mulrannies were driven from California and they lost in their wits"(179). Their heroes are few and familiar, "Daneen Sullivan knocked the eye from a peeler; or Marcus Quin, God rest him, got six months for maiming ewes, and he a great warrant to tell stories of holy Ireland till he'd have the old women shedding down tears about their feet"(180). But Christy is braver than Daneen, for he has killed his Da, and a man "should have had good reason for doing the like of that"(191). This is no "common week-day kind of a murderer," but a man "should be a great terror when his temper's roused"(192): "Bravery's a treasure in a lonesome place, and a lad would kill his father, I'm thinking, would face a foxy divil with a pitchpike on the flags of hell"(193). Christy is also a greater storyteller than Marcus Quin, for "any girl would walk her heart out before she'd meet a young man was your like for eloquence, or talk at all."(251).
"I've heard all times it's the poets are your like -- fine, fiery fellows with great rages when their temper's roused," says Pegeen (197). A combination of "such poet's talking, and such bravery of heart" is fit subject for hero-worship, and with this welcome, Christy becomes a celebrity in their wishful lives, "when you'd be ashamed this place, going up winter and summer with nothing worth while to confess at all" (210).

In his own eyes as well Christy grows; the "loony of Mahon's" for the first time tastes the sweetness of respect and attention. A simple lad who never "did hurt to any saving only that one single blow" (261), he reasons that if others think so, it must be true; for the first time he experiences self-respect. "Is it me?...Oh, they're bloody liars in the naked parish where I grew a man" (196). To these new emotions come the joyousness and richness of a love returned; his shyness disappears, for the first time he expresses his love and feelings for nature, and out comes poetry. Like blind Martin, in turn his fascination and eloquence to a certain extent overcome his appearance until he grows in stature and beauty as well from the "slight young man...very tired and frightened and dirty" who begs refuge in the shebeen parlour (186):

Didn't I know rightly, I was handsome, though it was the divil's own mirror we had beyond, would twist a squint across an angel's brow; and I'll be growing fine from this day... (208-209).

Thus confident in his new-found daring and self-respect, Christy is only bewildered when a second attempt at killing his Da does not regain his former status with the hero-worshipping audience. The hero is real to him; he has proved to himself that he does have the courage to slay his father. The role of the poet has become real also. "If I am an idiot," he proclaims, "I'm after hearing my voice this day saying words would raise the top-knot on a poet in a merchant's town." (263). Disillusionment comes not to his picture of himself as the poet-hero, but to his faith in these people who had seemed so different from his earlier acquaintances. But disillusionment brings strength to Christy as it had to Martin Doul:
Shut your yelling, for if you're after making a mighty man of me this day by the power of a lie, you're after setting me now to think if it's a poor thing to be lonesome it's worse, maybe, go mixing with the fools of earth (263).

This new self-admiration can even compensate for the loss of Pegeen's love; he has more faith in the myth than she has, and there will be other conquests for this "likely gaffer in the end of all" (270). In the creation of Christy, Synge implies that there is a place for dreams in our lives and that the imagination may yield to us what is joyous and full in reality -- if only we have the courage to reach out and grasp it. 1 "My story -- in its essence [essence underlined four times] is probable given the psychic state of the locality," he remarked in a letter to MacKenna. 2 The "life-lie" is as real to Christy as it had been to Martin and Mary Doul and Ibsen's Hjalmar Ekdal.

The joyous moment of recognition ("Is it me?") is not limited to Christy, however. Christy is also the probable offspring of old Mahon who in turn represents the wonder-loving peasant at its fullest development. "Ain't I a great wonder to think I've traced him ten days with that rent in my crown?" (229) he asks as he proudly displays his bandaged head, with the same delight in romance that causes awe in the Mayoites at Christy, the "puzzle-the-world," and attracts while repelling Molly Byrne to the rapturous eloquence of Martin Doul. Christy's history has brought his prestige as well, "and I doing nothing but telling stories of the naked truth" (240). He accepts the Widow Quin's suggestion of madness with equal delight, for "a sniggering maniac" is also a wonder, and recalls "the terrible and fearful case" he once was, "screaming in a straightened waistcoat, with seven doctors writing out my sayings in a printed book" (248), a touch prepared for us by Christy in Act I. But whereas Christy's wonders reach the poetic heights of great comedy, Old Mahon remains a subject of farce, "a hideous, fearful villain, and the

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1 Cf. "Can we go Back into Our Mother's Womb?": "a young man...with blood in his veins, logic in his wits, and courage in his heart." MS, in the possession of Mrs. Stephens.

2 Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 265.
spit of you"(232). Christy's anger at this deceit parallels Martin's rage when he discovers the trick the villagers have played upon him:

To be letting on he was dead, and coming back to life, and following after me like an old weasel tracing a rat, and coming in here laying desolation between my own self and the fine women of Ireland, and he a kind of carcass that you'd fling upon the sea...(233).

But such is the power of the imagination that both Christy and Martin gain in stature over this shock of reality, while their realist opponents lessen in the eyes of the audience. The poetic fool triumphs here as well, and old Mahon re-works his dream into the fabric of Christy's: "Is it me?...Glory be to God!...I am crazy again."(270).

Hand in hand with Christy's blossoming, Pegeen is transformed as well, from "the fright of seven townlands" for her "biting tongue" into the sweet talker who is a fitting companion for this daring young poet: "Well, the heart's a wonder; and, I'm thinking, there won't be our like in Mayo, for gallant lovers, from this hour to-day"(253). But when put to the test of reality, Pegeen lacks the courage of her sisters Nora and Deirdre, and so she loses "the only Playboy of the Western World." Her loss is greater than Christy's however; for she is tied to the world of reality("Wouldn't it be a bitter thing for a girl to go marrying the like of Shaneen, and he a middling kind of a scarecrow, with no savagery or fine words in him at all?"255). Hurt and bewildered by the downfall of the hero her own dreams and sympathy have created, she reverts to her only defence -- a sharp tongue and brutal manner. Christy will "go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the Judgment Day"; Pegeen's fate has banned her from both the life of her dream and her former security. She has learned the lesson of reality:

I'll say, a strange man is a marvel, with his mighty talk; but what's a squabble in your back yard, and the blow of a loy, have taught me that there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed(266-67).

But that can never compensate for the loss of a wonder once tasted, a dream once lived. The greatest loneliness is the vision of what might have been.
The warning Pegeen could not heed resounds throughout Synge's next treatment of the myth, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. For here again, as we have seen, dream and reality conflict within man. Deirdre and Naisi reach out for a life of happiness and freedom; for seven years they enjoy the life that is "superb and wild in reality"; then, realizing that this life cannot last, they choose an early death rather than the withering of a lingering old age. About this theme Synge twines his other basic theme, the fear of the ugliness and loneliness of old age and the overshadowing of inevitable death as symbolized in the cycle of nature. As in *The Playboy*, we meet an heroic character who gains in stature and dignity as the play progresses; but instead of the riotous, joyful comedy of the earlier play, Synge gives us in *Deirdre* a picture of restraint and nobility and a much deeper awareness of the basic conflicts in man. She grows in stature from a young girl who identifies her freedom with the wildness of nature (the stage at which we leave *Nora*) to a mature woman who deliberately chooses to have an early death and the shortness of life rather than the ugliness of old age and the fading of energy. Here the best of two worlds are combined in the framework of the myth: the Celtic spirit with its sympathetic awareness of nature and the intensely human spirit of the two young lovers. The courage, light-heartedness, and nobility of Deirdre and Naisi arise like Christy's from their active attitude towards life; but they gain in stature after Christy ceases growing because of their awareness of the choice and action. The Irish folk spirit of the legend is reflected in the modern world of the unsophisticated peasant. By mingling these elements Synge has not only captured the timber of poetry, "strong roots among the clay and worms," but the essential truth of the myth. Deirdre and Naisi, two very human lovers of an earthy folk tale, become symbols of the striving of all humanity towards a life and love that will not die.
This too is an essential quality of the myth -- "a good story." Christy is aware of the value of his story and he "tells it lovely"; Shawn Keogh, but "a poor scholar with middling faculties to coin a lie," is no match for the romping poet. Deirdre and Naisi are constantly aware of their place in the saga; by "putting a sharp end to the day is brave and glorious," they assure their place in the story "told of a ruined city and a raving king and a woman will be young for ever." As Miss Sorg states, in Synge's work soul and imagination are virtually synonymous; in the work of the imagination the soul is not only regenerated but perpetuated. In a review in 1903 Synge had commented on Loti's "terrified search for some sign of the persistence of the person." In the power of the imagination, especially in the mature and permanent form of the myth, Synge had discovered the artist's assurance of that persistence. Writing of The Playboy in 1907, he stated:

It is not a play with "a purpose" in the modern sense of the word; but although parts of it are, or are meant to be, extravagant comedy, still a great deal that is in it, and a great deal more that is behind it, is perfectly serious, when looked at in a certain light.

So much could be said for all of his plays.

The Irony of Fate

Inevitably in any interpretation of nature's effect on man, the question of fate arises. In Synge's plays nature does create another conflict within man, between his awareness of nature as a power itself

1Draft F of Act I of The Playboy contains the following lines during the argument between Pegeen and the Widow Quin over Christy: "He'll not stir -- you're like to be the talk and terror of Mayo for ten years to come, but if you go along with her there isn't one in this place will give a thought to you at all." MS.in the possession of Mrs. Stephens.


3"Loti and Huysmans," The Sneaker, 18 April 1903, 58. Cf. Stephens MS. 1259 concerning a conversation E. M. Stephens had with Mrs. Synge concerning Synge's religious beliefs: "He had been on the verge of abandoning all belief in the spirit world when Yeats was sent to him by the spirits to show him his mistake. What Yeats had shown him Mrs. Synge did not know, but she said it had been enough to remove from his mind all doubt about our survival after death."

4Letter to the Editor, The Irish Times, 30 January 1907.
and his Christian faith. But at the same time, Synge recognized that the Irish peasant on the whole manages to maintain a balance, uneasy though it may be, between the depth of his feeling for his religious beliefs and the overwhelming influence of nature. "Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God won't leave her destitute with no son living?" asks Nora. But Maurya's reply reflects the essential conflict between nature and faith: "It's little the like of him knows of the sea"(50). In his essays Synge describes the irony of this truce between religion and fate when it is most apparent -- at the burial of the dead:

In Inishmaan one is forced to believe in a sympathy between man and nature, and at this moment, when the thunder sounded a death-peal of extraordinary grandeur above the voices of the women, I could see the faces near me stiff and drawn with emotion....This grief of the keen is no personal complaint for the death of one woman over eighty years, but seems to contain the whole passionate rage that lurks somewhere in every native of the island. In this cry of pain the inner consciousness of the people seems to lay itself bare for an instant, and to reveal the mood of beings who feel their isolation in the face of a universe that wars on them with winds and seas. They are usually silent, but in the presence of death all outward show of indifference or patience is forgotten, and they shriek with pitiful despair before the horror of the fate to which they all are doomed....There was an irony in these words of atonement and Catholic belief spoken by voices that were still hoarse with the cries of pagan desperation....I saw a line of old women....who were beginning to talk again of the daily trifles that veil from them the terrors of the world.2

The wail of the caoine echoes throughout Riders to the Sea; muted tones still remain in Deirdre's farewell to the world: "I have put away sorrow like a shoe that is worn out and muddy...."

The sympathy these people feel with nature and their awareness that nature means death as well as life lend them a dignity and simplicity that is reflected most powerfully in Riders to the Sea and Deirdre of the Sorrows. Although one is supposedly written within the Christian framework, the other within a pagan one, both plays are fundamentally

1Cf. The Aran Islands, Works, 1910, III, 62: "the fairies have a tenth of all the produce of the country," nature's tithe.

alike in the prevailing sense of fate. In neither play is the conflict between nature's fate and man's faith resolved; instead the natural tends to blend into the supernatural. Yet both heroines in a spirit of acquiescence transcend their narrow situations and touch what is most human and universal. "The dawn and evening are a little while, the winter and the summer pass quickly, and what way would you and I, Naisi, have joy for ever?" asks the heart-broken Deirdre. It is Maurya who provides the answer: "No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied." Death and nature take life, but the human spirit triumphs.

In this triumph the two plays achieve the quality of high tragedy. The old mother who, through her intense suffering and loss moves from a human figure to a symbol of universal motherhood, reflects the spirit of Sophoclean drama which accepts life because it cannot be otherwise. Yet in his concentration on an atmosphere of fate, Synge has written a lyrical tragic mood rather than a dramatic tragedy in which the characters actively move towards or struggle against their fate out of their own volition. Even Bartley's silent defiance of his mother is simply acquiescence in his role in this inevitable unfolding of tragedy: "It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over?" Maurya's final attitude is one of resignation, a chord blending the tones of fear, horror, and death-in-life heard throughout the play. She has not really struggled against the sea, but against the acceptance of a fate she knows is hers, and in the presentation of a weak mother overpowered by the strength of the sea, Synge has stripped even the bare powerful architecture of tragic drama to the essential lyricism of pity and fear. The suffering and emotion are no less intense; a sense of impending doom hangs over the play from the time the curtain rises until Maurya's

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1 Cf. ibid., 149-51.
2 Cf. notebooks, 1898, Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 71: "Is life a stage and all the men and women merely players, or an arena where men and women and children are captives of destiny to be torn with beasts and gladiators -- who appear only to destroy and be destroyed...."
3 Cf. entry in notebook (undated), quoted in Stephens MS, 1209: "Is Sophocles the Raphael of Drama?" Also Moore's description of Yeats's admiration for Synge, Vale, 202, and Dublin's witty reaction as described by Padraic Colum in The Road Round Ireland, 358-59.
last courageous speech, and intensifies the pathos of the play.\(^1\)

From the tragic lyricism of *Riders to the Sea* Synge moved to the tragic drama of *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. Through Deirdre, also, moves the feeling of inevitability — all is foretold,\(^2\) and although Deirdre can delay her fate, she cannot prevent it, in fact does not even appear to desire prevention. She will get her little grave as prophesied: "The gods send they don't set eyes on her," Lavarcham says of the Sons of Usna, "— yet if they do itself, it wasn't my wish brought them or could send them away"(275-76). Here the fate of external nature moves towards the fate of an unseen nature, the prophecy of pagan folklore and myth. The difference between the two plays can be traced in this difference in understanding between the two heroines. Maurya watches the sea take away her men one by one; she tries to delay Bartley's ride to death, but "it's the life of a young man to be going on the sea." Deirdre also realizes from the beginning that the end is foretold; but "it should be a sweet thing to have what is best and richest, if it's for a short space only." She takes her gift of seven wonderful years with Naisi, and at the end faces the consequences of reality. By thus stepping out to meet her fate Deirdre transcends Maurya as a tragic heroine. In both plays, the tragic quality is achieved, but neither ceases to be human as well.

The irony of fate as seen in Synge's tragic plays is softened to the gentler irony of man's own illusions in Synge's comic works. "The irony of it" is apparent everywhere in his writing, moving from quiet shades of grey in the heroic lovers' blindness to each other's fears although both are constantly aware of the doom awaiting them,\(^3\) to the multi-coloured

\(^1\) Cf. L.A.G. Strong, *John Millington Synge* (P.E.N. Books, London: Allen and Unwin, 1941), 32: "I remember, at a Drama Festival in the Highlands, which was held in a sea-side town, a company from an inland village played *Riders to the Sea*, and played it well. The audience was painfully moved, and afterwards protested that the play came too near the central terror of their lives. It was not right, they said, to perform such a play"; Pay and Carswell, *The Plays of the Abbey Theatre*, 153.

\(^2\) The expression "the troubles are foretold" occurs almost a dozen times in the play.

\(^3\) This irony gains momentum through the play until the final quarrel in Act III when Deirdre does not realize that part of Naisi's dream is still his loyalty to Aimmle and Ardan.
jesting of The Tinker's Wedding and The Playboy. There is tragic irony in the realization that the richness of life leads to death; there is comic irony in the fool's aspiration for beauty and the dream. Following immediately after Christy's elaboration on "the tap of a loy," his Da proudly shows his bandaged skull to the appreciative Widow Quin. "Well... it's great luck and company I've won me in the end of time...till I'm thinking this night wasn't I a foolish fellow not to kill my father in the years gone by," muses the Playboy in all seriousness as the curtain falls in Act I (207). "Oh, it's a hard case to be an orphan and not to have your father that you're used to, and you'd easy kill and make yourself a hero in the sight of all," mourns Shawn Keogh (226). There's a great difference to the Mayoites between "that murderer," the Widow Quin, and the "louty schemer," Christy. "Do you take me for a slaughterboy?" asks Christy, scandalized, when they suggest he murdered his father with "a hilted knife"(191). "And isn't it a poor thing to be blind when you can't run off itself, and you fearing to see?" whimpers Martin Doul as he scrambles away from the sound of the Saint's bell(155). Mary Doul laughs slyly at the Saint's great simplicity over the young girls, but willingly believes herself to be "the beautiful dark woman" of Ballinatone. Timmy the Smith complains that the blind couple have made the entire population self-conscious of their appearance, but concludes with "and I'd do right, maybe, to step in and wash the blackness from my eyes"(135). "The Lord protect us from the saints of God!" cries Mary Doul(154). Martin's primitive theology reflects the same element when he prays for a hell where he can see Timmy the Smith and Molly Byrne in torment, "and it's fine care I'll be taking the Lord Almighty doesn't know"(146).

The ironic vision is central to Synge's basic theme of the conflict between illusion and reality and is expressed most clearly, as we have seen, in Well of the Saints, where the entire fabric is shot through with

¹The entire passage, with its rapid-fire questions which grow in fantasy as Christy's seriousness increases, is doubly ironical, and foreshadows Christy's own embroidery of the truth.
the irony of the dream fulfilled and resultant disillusionment. Irony is implicit throughout *Riders to the Sea* from Maurya's first dismissal of the priest to the final ceoil with its pagan overtones. Again, the wish that is granted but then in turn implies further obligations is expressed throughout the tale of the lovers of Alban; in order to retain their love -- rooted deeply in their desire for a life that is rich and beautiful -- Deirdre and Naisi must die. There is further irony as well as pathos in the final meeting of the lovers with Conchubor; the presence of the grave for a moment dispels the temporary emotions of jealousy and hatred, yet at the same time the open grave represents the final stage in an action Conchubor is now powerless to prevent. The love of Conchubor itself -- half paternal as he bends over Deirdre's workbox or speaks of her rearing -- is but a shadow of passion, yet he too must play his part in the fulfilment of the ancient prophecy. Pegeen liberates the Playboy, but cannot follow him. The paradox implied in the risk of the dream follows Nora and the Tramp onto the Wicklow roads and sends the tinkers frolicking after them. But here irony has once more softened to the "sanity of laughter."

It is in "the heartiness of real and frank laughter" Synge felt so essential to art that we recognize the basic folk element in his plays. Like the folk humour he drew upon, Synge's laughter could be brutal, his comedy malicious. His description of old Mourteen, his blind guide on Aranmor, is typical of the Mayoites who adopt Christy only to disown him and of the Wicklow peasants who praise the Douls in order to mock them:

As we talked he sat huddled over the fire, shaking and blind, yet his face was indescribably pliant, lighting up with an ecstasy of humour when he told me anything that had a point of wit or malice, and growing sombre and desolate again when he spoke of religion or the fairies.

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1*Notebook, 1907, Plays, 1932, v.*


The simplicity Synge admired in the peasants and vagrants he met on his travels in Ireland is to a certain extent the simplicity of the child, where violence meets violence with equal cruelty, passing as quickly from hatred to camaraderie. In his diaries Synge admits the fascination of childhood -- especially the wild children of the Dublin slums -- held for him, and this same childlike abandon can be recognized in his characters. For them, as for children, life is unrestricted, emotions are unhampered, reality can be transformed by the imagination, and above all, laughter is unsophisticated. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that this studious, silent traveller could gain as much enjoyment out of a melodrama at the Queen's as he could poetry at the Irish literary theatre; perhaps he gained more. In an unsigned review of Bouicault's *The Shaughraun* in 1904, he remarks:

The characters of Conn the Shaughraun, and in a less degree those of Mrs. O'Kelly and Moya...had a breadth of naive humour that is now rare on the stage...One felt how much the modern stage has lost in substituting impersonal wit for personal humour.

It is this naive and personal humour Synge sought in his own plays, and achieved in the rough, roistering comedy of the *fabliau* as exploited in *The Tinker's Wedding*, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, *The Well of the Saints* and *The Playboy*.

Mary Byrne provides much of this knock-about farcical element in *The Tinker's Wedding*, from her first collision with the priest as she lustily sings "The night before Larry was stretched" to her hasty scramble away from the strong arm of Sarah Casey: "I'd be safer in the chapel, I'm thinking; for if she caught me after on the road, maybe

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1Cf. *In Wicklow, Works*, 1910, IV, 27.


3*The Academy and Literature*, 11 June 1904, 630. This was doubtless the occasion Jack Yeats refers to in "With Synge in Connemara," *Synge and the Ireland of his Time* (Dublin: Cuala, 1911), 41-42.


she would kill me then." Mary sympathizes with the hard lot of the priest:

It'd break my heart to hear you talking and sighing the like of that, your reverence. (She pats him on the knee.) Let you rouse up now, if it's a poor, single man you are itself, and I'll be singing you songs unto the dawn of day (72-73).

Her bland comment at the opening of Act II greets the day with laughter:

...it's a great stir you're making this day, washing your face. I'm that used to the hammer, I wouldn't hear it at all; but washing is a rare thing, and you're after waking me up, and I having a great sleep in the sun (81).

Although not as trenchant as the laughter of The Tinker's Wedding, In the Shadow of the Glen also has the robust gaiety of the fabliau. This humour is evident from the Tramp's quick aside, "There's great safety in a needle, lady of the house" (18), and his terror of the thirsting corpse, to the pantomime behind Nora as she describes the old man, his "teeth falling, and ...white hair sticking out round...like an old bush where sheep do be leaping a gap" (27). Michael's timid suggestion of the "fine Union below" is echoed again in Shawm Keogh's fear of Father Reilly and the Holy Father and "the scarlet-coated bishops of the Courts of Rome" (185). The humour throughout is the childlike delight of the vagrant rather than the bitterness of a Swift. And Synge's basic belief that drama should not be didactic further eliminated any possibility of satire. The primitive folklore element allows this exuberance of nature; the sympathy behind these dramas of human efforts and human limitations prohibits the irony from becoming bitter or sardonic. Similarly the serious theme interwoven with the comedy prevents collapse into slapstick farce.

In the greater part of Ireland, however, the whole people, from the tinkers to the clergy, have still a life, and view of life, that are rich and genial and humorous. I do not think that these country people, who have so much humour themselves, will mind being laughed at without malice, as the people in every country have been laughed at in their own comedies,

Synge had written in his Preface to The Tinker's Wedding. If the malice is there, he learned it from them.
But comedy which is ironic implies seriousness, as we have seen, and becomes instead tragi-comedy. The ludicrousness of Dan Burke "letting on to be dead" is balanced by the desolation of his young wife, a solitary, sensitive woman, torn between the appeal of the dream and the realistic dread of insecurity, confined to the oppressive existence of the glens, yet craving the adventure of freedom and youth. The joyful spirit of vagabondage in the actions and speeches of the tinkers is shadowed by the wistful if temporary desire of Sarah Casey for the pastures across the ditch. The gay, colourful comedy of The Playboy sweeps from the intrigues of that life-loving modern Wife of Bath, the Widow Quin, to Pegeen's tragic loss, from the gallant, gullible Christy to the thin, suspicious Philly. Nor are the heroes safe on their pedestals; even they are mocked while they are glorified.\(^1\) The genius of Synge's comedy is the genius of his tragedy -- while taking us into the horror of humanity, dehumanized and abstract, at the same time on another level he shows us real people with whom we can identify. Similarly in his comedies the extravagance and fantasy are placed within such a realistic framework that the audience can never completely escape into the pure enjoyment of comedy-fantasy as is possible with Lady Gregory's plays. The "bitter-sweetness" of Synge's comedies makes us care. Basically, perhaps, the irony in his plays is simply the irony of nature itself, which constantly reminds us that all good things must end. And this awareness makes us even more anxious to enjoy what we can while we may. This irony and appreciation of life provide Synge's tragi-comedies with "strong roots among the clay and worms."

The Poet and his Audience

All art is a collaboration......

(Preface to The Playboy of the Western World)

As we have seen, by the time Synge entered the Irish dramatic movement the drama had cut loose its ties with the earlier stage Irish character and was experimenting with new material -- the Irish peasant as he appeared to them rather than as he had developed into a particular mould over the

years, the language of the peasant as it sounded to them, and, most
important of all, a sympathetic treatment of the peasant rather than
the earlier custom of debasing him as a subject for the laughter of
the supposedly superior and refined taste of an English audience.
Synge's development in characterization is consistent with his theories
and themes; his use of language, although a development along the same
lines followed earlier by Douglas Hyde, Standish O'Grady, and Lady Gregory,
is at the same time consistent with his own theories and earlier
training as well. Here, too, he branched off on paths of his own,
endowing his peasant material with the sensitivity and sympathy he felt
as he moved among them. In this sense he is more realistic than his
forerunners: intimate details of household and custom are woven into
the experience of his plays; expressions are culled and hoarded for
their colour and expository qualities; incidents are keenly observed
and appreciated for the characteristics they reveal.

At the same time, however, like other dramatists, he selects and
discards according to his own peculiar vision. The qualities of
simplicity and natural refinement he admires are emphasized; that which
he himself is not in sympathy with is overlooked. He admires the
physical perfection of the Aran Islanders and highlights those qualities
in their lives that eliminate "the clumsy, foolhardy, or timid men."2

In contrast, a letter to Stephen MacKenna on the "congested districts"
of Connemara, refers to this process of deliberate selection:

There are sides of all that western life, the groggy-patriot-
publican-general-shopman who is married to the priest's half-sister
and a second cousin once removed of the dispensary doctor, that are
horrible and awful....All that side of the matter of course I left
untouched in my stuff. I sometimes wish to God I hadn't a soul and
then I could give myself up to putting those lads on the stage. God,
wouldn't they hop! In a way it is all heartrending, in one place the
people are starving but wonderfully attractive and charming, and in
another place where things are going well one has a rampant double-
chinned vulgarity I haven't seen the like of.3

Cf. "Mr. Synge Interviewed," Dublin Mail, after first night of
The Playboy: "Simply the idea appealed to me - it pleased myself, and I
worked it up." W. A. Henderson collection, National Library of Ireland.

Synge saw too clearly the ugly vulgar side of modern life; as a poet, therefore, true to his belief in a rich life "superb and wild in reality" as fit subject for art, he looked beyond and back to the life he, like his characters, grasped at as it passed away. "People like these," he commented on a tinker's camp he passed in his wanderings, "like the old woman and these two beautiful children, are a precious possession for any country, they console us one moment at least for the manifold and beautiful life we have all missed who have been born in modern Europe."

These are the people he chose to celebrate in his work, representatives of a life superb and wild. Their days are a continual struggle to maintain a livelihood. They have no time for the trivial in life. They look out on the world with great gusto and reach out for all they can grasp of the wildness that brings "a shock of joy to the blood." Life, love, and laughter are rough and undiluted. Even in his dramatization of an old legend Synge retains the joy in life and beauty that his people felt years ago and still admire, that essential Celtic spirit and delight in personality, the love for life and nature Gaelic poets had for centuries expressed with the same vigorous language. But the folk spirit of the tales told to Synge by the peasants also accounts for his selection of characters. His quality of imaginative insight transferred his plots from the individual experience reported in his notebooks into a knowledge of the lives of these people, as we have seen. This insight in turn gave depth and universality to his portrayal of the peasant character. And so in his characterization we find the elemental forces he believed in and discovered in the life of the Irish peasant: a love of beauty, youth and nature, and a constant search for the dream and a world where youth and love and beauty do not wither. We find in his forty characters, therefore, two main prototypes that appear and develop consistently through his plays: the woman who senses almost too deeply what could have been, and the tramp who follows the free life of the road and sings sweetly of it.

1902 notebook, Stephens MS, 1448-49.
Of the women of Aran Synge comments in his notebooks in 1898:
I have found a couple that have been turned in on themselves by some circumstances of their lives and seem to sum up in the expressions of their blue grey eyes the whole external symphony of the sky and seas. They have wildness and humour and passion kept in continual subjection by the reverence for life and the sea that is inevitable in this place. 

As early as the one-act plays we find the woman who reaches out for the unattainable and who suffers more deeply because she is aware of what might have been. Maurya, the universal mother, who has seen all her men perish in the battle with the sea, gains at the end a calm and stoic acceptance of what must be. As often happens, the lesser characters around her cannot understand, for they have not been given a glimpse of this deeper understanding. "It's fonder she was of Michael," whispers her youngest daughter to Cathleen," and would any have thought that?"(54) "It's a great wonder she wouldn't think of the nails, and all the coffins she's seen made already," comments an old neighbour (54). Nora of the glens realizes that to marry Michael would be a further commitment to the same life of mists and loneliness. She has realized too late that a life of security is no compensation for the loss of motherhood and freedom and the beauty of wild nature. Even old Mary Byrne is aware that the security of a wedding ring will not ease the restlessness of Sarah Casey. As we have seen, Pegeen and Deirdre represent the fullest development of this sensitive understanding woman who suffers more keenly because of her deeper insight into the real values of life. Pegeen discerns the potential for poetry in the strange young man and brings out all that is rich and exuberant in his nature. At the end of the play she alone of the Mayoites realizes most clearly their loss and knows that she can never again return to her former life. Deirdre, queenly as she is, reveals this same simplicity and sincerity of nature that Synge portrays in his peasant women. "Am I well pleased seven years seeing the same sun throwing light across the branches at the dawn of

1Greene and Stephens, op.cit., 82.
day?" she replies to Owen. Deirdre realizes her dream, and assures her earlier peasant sisters that the happiness of love and nature "will be a joy and triumph to the ends of life and time." Yet she, too, is mortal, and the greatness of happiness achieved is broken into by the human bitterness which separates the two lovers at the end. After her lover's death, Deirdre is left a lonely, broken-hearted woman; no queen about her then.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that these women most fully appreciate all the tramp stands for, and further, liberate the poetic spirit in him. Again and again in his notebooks and plays we see Synge's sympathy for the vagabond and his awareness of the "artistic health" the vagrant's life can represent:

In all the circumstances of this tramp life there is a certain wildness that gives it romance and a peculiar value for those who look at life in Ireland with an eye that is aware of the arts also. In all the healthy movements of art, variations from the ordinary types of manhood are made interesting for the ordinary man, and in this way only the higher arts are universal.

It is the tramp who most clearly balances the desolation and loneliness found in nature; "and it often happens that, in moments when one is most aware of this ceaseless fading of beauty, some incident of tramp life gives a local human intensity to the shadow of one's own mood." Similarly, the life of the tramp most clearly represents the revolt against a settled existence and a narrow life. And in the spirit of the vagabond can be

1Cf. Yeats' Deirdre: "Myself wars on myself."


3In Wicklow, op. cit., 6; 58-62. Cf. Notebooks, Stephens MS. 996: "It is a great gain to have learned to wander. If trouble overtakes me I set out and in new scenes becoming always a new soul, I am not any more the man who was suffering. I do not forget my grief, but ponder it continually with the tamed sympathy one may feel for a bereaved brother or sister, till it grows powerless to wound." Synge's wanderings with the vagrants might be compared to Augustus John's travels with the gypsies.
found the wild outburst of poetry that comes when one is in love with life and with that which is "rich and superb" in reality. In Nora's Tramp, the tinkers, Martin Doul, and Christy, Synge combines this love of the free and wild life of the roads with the poetry of a speech that is as unconfined as the life they lead. (Most clearly in In the Shadow of the Glen, the Tramp is a combination of the poetic-comic figure of the vagrant with the symbolism of the fine-talking stranger who opens the door to the life superb and wild.¹)

But there are variations on this portrayal of the poet-vagrant. As we have seen, Martin Doul experiences all of the desires for a rich and full life, but is doomed to failure and disillusionment, sending him back to the "second-best" life of unfulfilled and therefore safe illusion. Christy represents the fullest development of the poet-hero, but at the same time he acts as commentator on those who first worship and then deny him.² Both Martin and Christy, like the tinkers, are in this sense fools as well as wise men. They are both artists and audience, made aware not only of the joys but the pitfalls of poetry; for although poetry (and the corresponding life of the vagrant) elevates them, it also isolates them. In the characterization of Owen Synge not only departs from the conventional treatment of the Deirdre theme, but from his own "variations which are a condition and effect of all vigorous life." For here we have the freak of nature, the mad-man.³ On the one hand Owen's wildness and grotesqueness make him akin to the Jacobean concept of the fool; on the other he serves as Synge's strongest reminder that old age is accompanied by ugliness and the weariness of love:

I'll give you a riddle, Deirdre: Why isn't my father as ugly and old as Conchubor? You've no answer?...It's because Naisi killed him(309).


Owen represents the harshness of nature; "It's three weeks I am losing my manners beside the Saxon bull-frogs at the head of the bog" (307). Yet he, too, belongs to their world, for he has felt love and loneliness:

Yet there are many roads, Deirdre, and I tell you I'd liefer be bleaching in a bog-hole than living on without a touch of kindness from your eyes and voice. It's a poor thing to be so lonesome you'd squeeze kisses on a cur dog's nose (308).

But besides voicing Deirdre's hidden fears and acting as a contrast to Naisi, Owen's madness acts as foil to Conchubhar's simulated passion also. In neither is love complete or balanced; the illusion is divorced from reality, but where Conchubhar's almost paternal demands lead to the pathetic picture of a broken and lonely old man, Owen's unappeasable desires drive him to raging madness. "Men who'll die for Deirdre's beauty; I'll be before you in the grave!" (318) The importance of Owen is made clear in Yeats's notes to the play:

He felt that the story, as he had told it, required a grotesque element mixed into its lyrical melancholy to give contrast and create an impression of solidity, and had begun this mixing with the character of Owen, who would have had some part in the first act also, where he was to have entered Lavarcham's cottage with Conchubhar. Conchubhar would have taken a knife from his belt to cut himself free from threads of silk that caught in brooch or pin as he leant over Deirdre's embroidery frame, and forgotten this knife behind him. Owen was to have found it or stolen it.

When Owen killed himself in the second act, he was to have done it with Conchubhar's knife. 1

In Deirdre of the Sorrows as well, ecstasy must have its roots in the clay and worms. 2

Also isolated from the people about them are the priest and the Saint. The reference in Riders to the Sea is to a human young man not yet experienced in this battle with the elements to realize the nature of the force that broods over the fisherman's lives. The Saint in The Well of the Saints appreciates the mysticism of nature, but is cut off from the

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2 Frank O'Connor, "Synge," The Irish Theatre, 38 reports: "When Synge heard an English producer was to stage Deirdre, he said gloomily, 'He'll turn it into the Second Mrs. Conchubhar!'"
complementary love of the joys and beauty of life. But in *The Tinker's Wedding* we are given a vivid and sympathetic characterization of the peasant-turned-priest:

> It's a hard life, I'm telling you, a hard life, Mary Byrne; and there's the bishop coming in the morning, and he an old man, would have you destroyed if he seen a thing at all(72).  

Here the priest represents a Christian world the tinkers neither comprehend nor care for; but at the same time he is not a superhuman being. In this little sketch of the tinkers and the priest we glimpse Synge's sympathy, tinged with mordant humour, for the man underneath the mask.  

But Synge, too, was moving away from the peasant and the tramp. Deirdre of the Sorrows, he informed a friend, was "an experiment chiefly to change my hand." Yeats reports that while writing his last play, Synge commented "that he was sick of the Irish peasant on the stage, and that he was contemplating a play of Dublin slum life." Obviously he had no intention of cultivating a cult of "the noble peasant"; as we have seen, true to his theory of art, his peasants are a mixture of earthiness and lyricism in equal proportions. And Deirdre of the Sorrows, although much of it is couched in the language his peasants employ, reflects this tendency.

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1 Alan Price, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Drama* (London: Methuen, 1961), 129-32, overlooks this mingling of the Christian and pagan elements in the Irish peasant as represented by the priest. An interpretation comparable to Synge's is seen in Sean O'Casey's *The Bishop's Bonfire*.

2 Greene, "The Tinker's Wedding: A Revaluation," 827, quotes from an earlier draft of Synge's Preface: "In a great part of Ireland, however, to this day the whole people from the tinkers to the clergy have a life and a view of life that are rich and genial in themselves and I do not think these country clergy, who have so much humour, and so much heroism when they face typhus or dangerous seas for the comfort of their people on the coasts of the west, will mind being laughed at for half an hour without malice, as the clergy in every Roman Catholic country were laughed at through the ages that had real religion."

3 Letter to Brodzky, 10 December 1907, Spencer Brodney collection, TCD.

away from the glorification of the vagrant. By choosing an old familiar story of the Gael, Synge has shown that he was not dependent on his peasant material, and yet was still able to work with the knowledge he had gained from it. Deirdre is a queen, and yet, in her love for Naisi and her impulse for the dream, she displays the same intense characteristics of Nora and Pegeen. But where Nora and Pegeen have the same harshly impetuous nature of the peasant Synge observed in his travels, Deirdre displays the restraint and dignity befitting a queen. In his search for what he felt important in life, it is only natural that Synge should look to the unsophisticated peasant for his material, for here, "for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery, and magnificent, and tender" (Preface to The Playboy). But among the peasants, too, life was changing, an observation Synge made frequently in his essays. As a dramatist desiring to write out of his time and environment, Synge was prepared to move as well. Perhaps it would not be too presumptuous to suggest that he would find in the slum people he was so fond of observing on the streets of Dublin, the same desire for what is rich and wild in reality, and a wish to live life to the full.

"There's Talking!"

In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by any one who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry. (Preface to The Playboy).

Like Lady Gregory's characters, Synge's people took on a life of their own, speaking and acting almost independently of their creator. W.G. Fay once recalls,

I remember asking him once if he did not think that a certain speech might be improved. He replied, "I quite agree, but these were the words he used and I only set them down."1

1Fay and Carswell, The Fays of the Abbey Theatre, 136. Cf. Sara Allgood's reminiscences, The Weekly Freeman, 17 March 1909: "It must be said that all his characters are boldly and definitely outlined.... All Mr. Synge's conceptions spring, like Minerva, fully developed from his head."
With Synge, as with Lady Gregory, this process was carried further, for his characters speak a language not only true to themselves but true to the material from which they are developed. "I have used one or two words only that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland, or spoken in my own nursery before I could read the newspapers," he wrote in the Preface to *The Playboy*. But in the process of selection, heightening, and compression of that material as we see it in its final polished form in his plays, Synge raises that language to a poetic ecstasy far exceeding the language of any other playwright of the Irish dramatic movement.

Synge came to the movement with his theories of language already fully developed, and more important still, with a deep knowledge of the structure of language and musical form. As has already been mentioned, he had studied Erse and Hebrew at Trinity College, French, German and Italian on his travels on the continent. While in Paris he attended M. Paul Passy's lectures on "Les Sons du Français" at the Sorbonne and developed an interest in *patois*.¹ His interest in Breton was inspired by the lectures of Anatole le Braz, and led to a visit to Brittany in 1899.² He was interested in experimental phonetics,³ and had already begun his own experiments in the translation of Villon, Musset, and Petrarch.⁴ When he finally came into contact with the aims and work of the Irish literary movement, therefore, he had a working knowledge that prepared him for a ready reception of their ideas and work, especially that of

Douglas Hyde and Lady Gregory. But here again Synge developed his own theory and method, based on his personal experience. True to his belief that a work of art "must have been possible to only one man at one period and in one place," Synge claimed that "real works of literature" can only be achieved by a "special intimacy" with the language and the people who speak it. This is the advantage of the Anglo-Irish idiom. "With the present generation," he commented in an essay in 1902, "the linguistic atmosphere of Ireland has become definitely English enough, for the first time, to allow work to be done in English that is perfectly Irish in its essence, yet has sureness and purity of form." In addition, words themselves had a "cycle of life; the time came when they were too worn out for journalism even; then one might bring them back into dramatic speech again," thereby giving them new life and energy. For this reason he chose the idiom of the peasants, where language was still fresh and part of life, and although he experimented with verse drama, he soon abandoned it for his experiments with dialect. Here his method was similar to Lady Gregory's:

1Cf. Lady Gregory in an interview by The New York Sun, 10 December 1911: "He said he was amazed to find in my Cuchulain of Muirthemne his desired dialect." Notes to The White Cockade (1905), Irish Folk History Plays Second Series, 194: "When my White Cockade was first produced I was pleased to hear that J.M. Synge had said my method had made the writing of historical drama again possible."

2"Le Mouvement Intelectuel Irlandais," L'Européen, 31 May 1902, 12.

3"The Old and New in Ireland," Academy and Literature, 6 September 1902, 238-39. Cf. Thomas MacDonagh, Literature in Ireland: Studies Irish and Anglo-Irish, 47-48: "New images have to be supplied from current life in Ireland; the dialect at its best is more vigorous, fresh and simple than either of the two languages between which it stands. "Also Stopford A. Brooke, "Introduction," A Treasury of Irish Poetry in the English Tongue, vii-xxxvi.

4Quoted by Padraic Colum, The Road Round Ireland, 364-65.

5A fairly extensive section of the play referred to in his notes as "Vernal Play," written in the spring of 1902, is in rather loose rhymed couplets; a draft, "The Lady O'Conor," based on a story heard on Inishmaan and published in New Ireland Review, November 1898, 153-56, is written in verse also. (MSS in the possession of Mrs. Stephens). The latter includes the lines Yeats was fond of quoting: "While we live shut in ships that roll and pitch/We eating salt till our shin marrows itch."
I look on the "Aran Islands" as my first serious piece of work — it was written before any of the plays. In writing out the talks of the people and their stories in this book and in a certain number of articles on Wicklow Peasantry which I have not yet collected — I learned to write the peasant dialect and dialogue which I use in my plays.

he wrote in 1907. Language cannot be divorced from the characters who speak it; reality and joy must be found in language as well as in plot, characterization and theme if one is to achieve the synthesis of ecstasy, stoicism, and asceticism essential to great art.

The total rhythmic effect of the strange and musical language of Synge's world can be seen on every page of his work, and betrays the main influences behind the language as he adapted it from the peasants' speech: the grammatical construction of the Erse or Irish language, the vocabulary of the Elizabethan period, and the phrasing and imagery of the King James version of the Bible. His technique can be analysed under the following headings: vocabulary and imagery, syntax, emphasis, and the resulting effect of "cadenced rhythm." Even without a complete analysis of his use of language, it can be seen that the key to his technique is morphological rather than phonetic. There is no attempt at spurious pronunciation; except for the one word *police* ("police"), there is none of the "eye-dialect" often found in American literary dialects. Whatever Synge did was internal and organic and as necessary to the interpretation of his characters as the characterization and local colour are to the dramatic experience. Further, considering the wealth

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1Letter to Leon Brodzky, 12 December 1907, Spencer Brodney collection, Trinity College, Dublin.


3Rhythm here includes every possible aspect of a pattern of stresses, metre being a relatively small part of rhythm.

of vocabulary Synge's people employ, it is surprising to discover that very few words are actually dialect, and few of these, in contrast to Lady Gregory's, are local dialect words. Many are archaisms betraying the strong Elizabethan influence still seen in the Anglo-Irish of the peasant. In a letter to a young poet, Synge remarked, "Some of your lines are not quite grammatically or verbally accurate and do not quite say what they ought." In his own work the only grammatically incorrect expressions for which there are no Irish derivations are I amn't and yous, both necessary to the balance and rhythm of the speeches as he employed them. But most of his phrases and expressions take their peculiar colour and sound value from direct translation from the language in which the peasant still thought: adverbs and adverbial phrases such as "at all," "after," "only," "so," "all times," and "surely": use of "the time" for "when" and "the way" for "how" or "so that." Similarly the unconventional syntax is due to the structure of the original Irish taken over by the speaker into Anglo-Irish, frequently gaining terseness and speed in the process: frequent omission of the relative pronoun

1 e.g., curagh (Galway, "small boat"), Mountainy (Kerry and Galway, "mountain-dwelling"), hooshing (west. Ireland, "stealing"), kilt (west. Ireland, "hurt"). Many of the dialect words are listed by Wright's Dialect Dictionary as common to all Gaelic-speaking areas, as are the diminutives formed by the suffix een (Gaelic in), e.g., priesteen, supeen, Shaneen.

2 e.g., afeard ("afraid"), blathering ("foolish talking"), aile ("troubles"), bet ("beat"), shut of ("free of"), shift ("petticoat"), pandied ("struck" or "beat"), gallous ("mischievous").


4 Bourgeois, John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre, 228n1, comments that "surely" occurs a little too frequently in the plays.
use of the present participle in place of an adverbial clause ("he'd always
look in here and he passing up or passing down") the use of "and" in
place of most conjunctions ("what way would I live, and I an old woman").

The variety of forms is again a result of the comparatively few common
verbs in Irish: the verb "to be" is used to imply continuous action
("It's of little else at all I would be thinking"); in place of the
perfect and pluperfect tenses, "after" and the participial form follow
the verb "to be" ("I'm after bringing down a smart drop"). And, as has
already been observed in Lady Gregory's adaptation of the language,
syntactical redundancy is frequent: "it's" as an introduction to an
inverted sentence, ("when it's dead he is"); the additional "itself"
or "himself" after the noun ("if it is itself"), and the use of "himself"
instead of the common pronoun ("Isn't it yourself is after playing lies
on me").

The change in word order thus caused by these variations in syntax
is one means by which Synge creates the effect of musical cadence in
his speech, so that the emphasis falls in unexpected places: "But those
have a great love for yourself have a right to be in dread always"(303);
"but it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time, surely"(53); "and
it's not my blather you'll be hearing only, but you'll be hearing the
herons crying out over the black lakes, and you'll hear the grouse and
the owls with them, and the larks and the big thrushes when the days
are warm"(32). But emphasis and rhythm are also created through the
use of repetition. As well as the common inversion to conclude a
sentence ("in two weeks or three"), there is frequent use of alliterative
expressions ("facing hog, dog, or divil on the highway of the road"192;
"toiling, moiling, digging, dodging from the dawn till dusk"199; "Drink
a health to the wonders of the western world, the pirates, preachers,
poteen-makers, with the jobbing jockies; parching peelers, and the
juries fill their stomachs selling judgments of the English law"216).

From these examples it can be seen that Synge's delight in colourful

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1 Other means at hand were use of the diphthong vowel and
upturns at the ends of sentences, both common traits of Irish speech.
and exaggerated language abounds throughout all his plays. His language
varies from the simplicity of homely images of the kitchen and hearth,
the familiar countryside and animals, to the colour and phrasing
borrowed from the Bible. Often the homely images are reminiscent of
Chaucer("...she'll be getting her death... with crying and lamenting"38;
"and they walking as easy as you'd see a child walk who'd have a dozen
eggs hid in her bib"111; "Conchobar'll be in a blue stew this night
and herself abroad"276). As we have seen, the most frequent images are
borrowed from nature, but religious imagery also abounds throughout the
plays. "With the help of God" and "God help you" echo in the speeches
from the first page of In the Shadow of the Glen. But the play
containing most of the religious imagery is The Playboy, which in earlier
drafts contained even more vigorous and riotous language. The
flamboyancy of his imagery reaches a climax in the magnificent love
scene between Christy and Pegeen:

It's a little you'll think if my love's a poacher's, or an earl's
itself, when you'll feel my two hands stretched around you, and I
squeezing kisses on your puckered lips, till I'd feel a kind of pity
for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in His golden
chair (250-51);2

If the mitred bishops seen you that time, they'd be the like of the
holy prophets. I'm thinking, do be straining the bars of paradise to
lay eyes on the Lady Helen of Troy, and she abroad, pacing back and
forward, with a nosegay in her golden shawl(251).

But this combination of pagan sentiment with religious imagery is
apparent throughout the play:

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1 E.g., "belching ass" for "Kerry mule", "lies stinking in his
obscure grave"for "lies rotting." David H. Greene, "The 'Playboy' and
Irish Nationalism," The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,
April 1947, 201-03 comments, "It is hair-raising to think of how the
indignant audiences would have received the deleted phrase of one of the
early drafts which read, 'To hell with the Pope.'" (Lent in a letter to
Synge mid-August 1904, Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 166, objected to
the frequency of "Almighty God" in Well of the Saints.

there's none can see, The Lord God's jealous of yourself and me."
Amm't I after seeing the love-light of the star of knowledge shining from her brow, and hearing words would put you thinking on the holy Brigid speaking to the infant saints (234);

Aid me for to win her, and I'll be asking God to stretch a hand to you in the hour of death, and lead you short cuts through the Meadows of Ease, and up the floor of Heaven to the Footstool of the Virgin's Son (236).

One can only comment with the Widow Quin, "There's praying!" 1

The delight in a wealth of colourful imagery is sharply contrasted by the simplicity and dignity of Maurya's speech: "They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me." The earlier lyrics, Riders to the Sea and In the Shadow of the Glen, show a restraint and simplicity that is almost classical. In keeping with the emphasis on atmosphere rather than action, each sentence is weighted with meaning and a sense of hidden urgency: "It's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time, surely" (53); "and isn't it a grand thing when you hear a living man saying a good word of a dead man, and he mad dying?" (23-24)

As Synge's dramatic technique developed, the ease with which he handled his language improved. The language of The Tinker's Wedding, with its more colourful imagery, appears a little self-conscious after the austerity of the earlier plays. By the time of The Well of the Saints and The Playboy, however, the vigour and roughness become almost violent in the rush of colour and imagery and speech "as fully flavoured as a nut or apple." Language responds to sense and characterization. The torrent of vituperation in Well of the Saints accords with the quarrelsome natures of the two blind beggars ("and it's great times we'll have yet, maybe, and great talking before we die" 153). The irony of Martin's poetic pleading to Molly Byrne is increased by the earthiness

1 Many of the critics prefer to echo Old Mahon, "Leave troubling the Lord God." Even Mackenna balked at one word in Well of the Saints, Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 183, and the musical version of The Playboy, The Heart's A Wonder, drew letters of objection in 1958. Cf. Synge's comment on Huysmans' "curiously brutal slang," "Loti and Huysmans," 58: "the power of the language is a power gained in a workshop where the teachers are not saints."
and wildness of his language. The whole air of *The Playboy* is one of excitement, tension, surprise, whipped up to increasing heights by the amorous raptures of Christy, the angry quarrels of the women, the drunken comments of Michael James and his friends. Various drafts carry notes and suggestions for verbal revisions even after the play has gone into rehearsal or actually been published.¹

In the language of *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, as well as in choice of plot and characterization, there can be seen a conscious effort on Synge's part to change his style and material. The very nature of the subject demanded greater dignity and restraint than Synge had employed in *The Playboy* or *Well of the Saints*. The consistent use of metaphor and symbol (in the nature imagery) has already been observed. There is no suggestion of "flavouring" a speech without reference to content. George Moore pointed out that there is less peasant idiom in the third finished act than in the first two acts,² and it may be that Synge would have removed all traces of this idiom had he lived to finish the play. It has already been mentioned that he planned to leave the peasant dialect in his next work. However, as the play now stands, such characters as Owen and Lavarcham are genuine folk characters, and they retain the folk quality this myth should have. Yet at the same time, Deirdre is a queen, and in her speeches the restraint and dignity have refined all rougher elements to such an extent that she reproves Owen for his lack of civility. In the final act, which contains the most intense mood and heightened passion of any of Synge's plays, the eloquent simplicity of Deirdre's speeches lends the play both the dignity of tragedy and the homeliness of the universally human:

¹Cf. Greene, "The Playboy and Irish Nationalism,"op.cit.,201. Synge revised the third act of *Well of the Saints* after its first production in 1905 (see Flav.,1932), but this revision was mainly to include speeches for minor characters. The present writer has discovered a different set of verbal revisions concentrating more on phrasing and rhythm, annotated in Synge's hand in his own Abbey Theatre edition of the play, in the possession of Mrs. Stephens.

²Hail and Farewell:Vale,217.
...by a new-made grave there's no man will keep brooding on a
woman's lips, or on the man he hates (332);

Draw a little back with the squabbling of fools when I am broken
up with misery (343).

I have put away sorrow like a shoe that is worn out and muddy, for
it is I have had a life that will be envied by great companies. It
was not by a low birth I made kings uneasy, and they sitting in the
halls of Emain. It was not a low thing to be chosen by Conchubor,
who was wise, and Naisi had no match for bravery. It is not a small
thing to be rid of grey hairs, and the loosening of the teeth. (With
a sort of triumph.) It was the choice of lives we had in the
clear woods, and in the grave we're safe, surely... (344).1

The lyricism of his earlier plays is here synthesized with the dramatic
element of his more developed stage as a dramatist.2

Although we can trace this development in his language, it can be
seen that through all his plays Synge has retained the simplicity as
well as the joy of the Anglo-Irish idiom on which he based his work.
Even in the riot and colour of The Playboy the words are simple and
the combinations of these words produce the different lyrical effects.

In a letter to Max Meyerfield concerning a translation of The Well of
the Saints he wrote,

1 It is interesting to compare the various endings to the versions
of this legend of Deirdre and the Sons of Usna. Conchubor speaks the
lines of farewell in Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne, 140:
"A thousand deaths on the time I brought death on my sister's
children; now I am myself without Deirdre, and they themselves are
without life.

They were my sister's children, the three brothers I vexed with blows,
Naoise, and Ainele, and Ardan: they have died along with Deirdre."
AE also gives the farewell to Conchobar in his Deirdre, Imaginations and
Reveries, (Dublin: Maunsel, 1915), 255.
"I have two divided kingdoms, and one is in my own heart. Thus
do I pay homage to thee, O Queen, who will rule, being dead. (He bends
over the body of Deirdre and kisses her hand.)"
And in Synge's play Lavarcham speaks the last lines.

Essays and Introductions, 300: "all his people would change their life if
the rhythm changed."
...a great part of the dialogue...depends for its effect on the peculiar colour-quality of the dialect I have used. I imagine in the German "Volkslieder" one would get a language that would be pretty nearly what is needed.¹

And later in another letter,

I do not think you will find the general language hard to follow when you have done a few pages, as the same idioms are often repeated, and the purely local words are not very numerous.²

In striving for a lyrical cadence Synge has produced a smoothness and ease in the rhythm of his language which is of course not heard in the everyday speech of the peasant. But Synge is re-creating speech, not merely transcribing verbatim. His nephew records a discussion with Synge concerning realism in drama:

I said, "What is realism?" He replied that it was a way of conveying impressions by mentioning significant details instead of attempting to describe feelings. "For example," he said, "suppose you wanted to convey an impression of a very wet day in town, you might say - 'the drops were falling one by one from the point of the policeman's helmet' - that would be far more effective than any description of how wet the day seemed to you."³

Furthermore, in making this dialect the basis of his dialogue, Synge has all his people, no matter in what part of Ireland the play is supposedly situated, speaking the same dialect. His notebooks abound in short transcriptions of comments and phrases he felt worth remembering, and which frequently found their way into his plays.⁴ But here, too, the important thing is what the dramatist was able to do with these

¹26th May 1903, National Library of Ireland MS/78#5.
²10 July 1905, National Library of Ireland MS/78#7. Further letters of 12 and 21 August, 23 September 1905 comment on individual words and phrases; few of them are local dialect expressions.
³Stephens MS.1846; the conversation took place in January,1905.
⁴Quoted in Stephens MS.1443,1541,1787-88. In his letter to M.J. Nolan, 31 January 1909, Wilson collection, TCD, Synge wrote: "there is too much description and your characters are not alive enough. All these faults are inevitable in inexperienced work." (The italics are his). Synge's programme note to the first production of The Playboy, Henderson collection, National Library of Ireland 1720, is even more explicit about the necessity of realism in language.
gleanings. Like a true musician, he takes rough material, words and phrases that have their roots deep in the consciousness of the people, and transforms them into a vehicle which conveys not only his impressions of that reality, but his own attitudes towards life and art. If we compare Michael James's speech to Christy with the original speech of Old Mourteen to Synge, we can see how Synge has tightened the dialogue and compressed the essential spirit, yet at the same time preserved the cadence and charm of the original:

"Bedad, noble person, I'm thinking it's soon you'll be getting married. Listen to what I'm telling you: a man who is not married is no better than an old jackass. He goes into his sister's house, and into his brother's house; he eats a bit in this place and a bit in another place, but he has no home for himself; like an old jackass straying on the rocks." 1

What's a single man, I ask you, eating a bit in one house and drinking a sup in another, and he with no place of his own, like an old braying jackass strayed upon the rocks? (258-59)

Only with the flexibility of such a language as Anglo-Irish could Synge have learned his medium. By combining the element of exaltation he found in life with the flavour and cadence of a peasant speech which still reflects "a popular imagination that is fiery, and magnificent, and tender," Synge in his language as well as has proven that good theatre may also be good poetry.

All art is a collaboration; and there is little doubt that in the happy ages of literature, striking and beautiful phrases were as ready to the story-teller's or the play-wright's hand, as the rich cloaks and dresses of his time....In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by any one who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry,

Synge wrote in his Preface to The Playboy. Like Yeats, Synge was concerned with the art of the minstrel. As early as 1898 he commented in his notebooks,

There exists yet in lonely places the unlettered literature which was the real source of all the art of words. In the Gaelic-speaking districts of Ireland, for instance, recitation is of extraordinary merit. 2

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1. The Aran Islands, Works, 1910, III, 133.
2. Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 84.
And in an unpublished essay he argued that poetry should have a dual existence, in the voice of the poet and in the voice of the reader-performer:

In primitive times every poet recited his own poem with the music he conceived with the words in his moment of excitement. And his hearers who admired the work repeated it with the exact music of the poet. This is still done among the Aran islanders. An old man who could not read has drawn tears to my eyes by reciting verse in Gaelic I did not fully understand.1

The musician's ear must work in harmony with the poet's eye. Synge worked hard to achieve this musical rhythm in his speeches, re-working individual lines until they achieved the phrasing he required even after he had selected the individual words which provided the colour and tone he desired. In a letter to Max Meyerfield he explained some of the "cuts" in *Well of the Saints*:

Some of the cuts...I merely made...because I thought the speeches spoke more lightly without the words I cut out....Till one gets into the actual rehearsal it is I think better to do as little cutting as possible. Then if a speech drags on the stage it must of course be amended.2

He even went so far as to indicate the exact rhythm of his lines by means of internal punctuation, which is rhetorical rather than grammatical, and would, along with the odd syntax, assure proper delivery. If "breaks" are allowed only where his frequently oddly-placed commas occur, and the lines are read in the long sweeps applied to blank verse, the shape of the line and rhythm immediately become clear.3 Nor does this reading necessarily mean a deliberate slowing of delivery, for like all drama, Synge's plays would lose much of their dramatic effect if the natural speed of speech is checked. It will be noticed also that, as Synge wrote this speech, there is no indication of the slurring formerly applied to the speech of the comic Irish character, although an

3In an interview with the writer, 6 September 1957, Miss Siobhan McKenna, the Irish actress, verified this interpretation of Synge's punctuation, adding that the same rules applied to Shaw.
Anglo-Irish speaker would doubtless allow for the palatal of the "ing" ending. With these ideas in mind, then, the shape and sweep of the lines provide the natural cadence and music of the longer speeches:

...it's a grand thing to be waking up a day the like of this, when there's a warm sun in it, and a kind air, and you'll hear the cuckoos singing and crying out on the top of the hills (31).

It's well you know it's a lonesome thing to be passing small towns with the lights shining sideways when the night is down, or going in strange places with a dog noising before you and a dog noising behind, or drawn to the cities where you'd hear a voice kissing and talking deep love in every shadow of the ditch, and you passing on with an empty, hungry stomach falling from your heart (220-21).

I'm a long while in the woods with my own self, and I'm in little dread of death, and it earned with riches would make the sun red with envy, and he going up the heavens; and the moon pale and lonesome, and she wasting away (296).

Without Synge's sense of proportion as an artist, this language would not have been possible. His dialogue is never lyrical for the sake of lyricism alone; much as his characters appreciate "poetry-talk," he has managed to avoid "talking for talking's sake"; nor is there any sentimentality. Professor Ellis-Permor has pointed out that in Synge's ability to condense thought and passion, giving his imagination full rein only where it is consistent with plot and action, Synge is akin to the Jacobean. In Synge's belief in a popular imagination that

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1 Cf. Yeats's letter to Lady Gregory, 26 November 1909, Letters, 538 concerning a matinée performance of The Tinker's Wedding by the "Afternoon Theatre" organization, His Majesty's Theatre, London: "a most disgraceful performance, every poetical and literary quality sacrificed to continuous emphasis and restlessness.... the continual emphasis and change of note made the speeches inaudible, as they are in verse plays treated in the same way. This emphatic delivery and movement -- which is the essence of the English idea of romantic acting -- evidently fits nothing but plays written in short sentences without music or suggestion." Yeats had grasped the atmosphere behind the opening dialogue of the play as these players evidently had not, "which Synge meant to be quiet, with the heaviness of roads in it."

2 Ellis-Permor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, 2nd ed., 185-86.
is "fiery, and magnificent, and tender" and in the artist's ability to use that imagination to give "the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form," he himself recognizes his kinship with the Elizabethans. But Synge was above all a man of his time. By dealing with the reality as well as the joy, and by retaining the flavour of a language which is still fresh and living, the folk-imagination of his people, he has ensured his plays of a vital and universal appeal. His realization that the most valuable drama is that which sustains itself by the speech of the people is perhaps one of his greatest contributions to twentieth-century theatre.

"A Comprehensive and Natural Form"

"The effort of writing is to make the impossible seem inevitable," Synge noted in his diary. It was this inevitability he attempted to convey in the structure as well as the characterization and language of his plays. And again he drew heavily on his earlier studies of musical form. Just as the speeches of individual characters have a rhythm and cadence of their own, so has the structure of each act, perhaps most noticeably in his early one-act plays. He constantly revised his work, completely re-writing the entire act each time as well as revising paragraphs of action within the act, as he explained in a letter to John Quinn concerning The Playboy:

My final drafts -- I letter them as I go along -- were "G" for the first act, "I" for the second, and "K" for the third. I really wrote parts of the last act more than eleven times, as I often took out individual scenes and worked at them separately.

Those critics who speak of the limitations of Synge's language have surely misunderstood his theory of language. Language must express the mood and minds of the characters who speak it; change the character's nationality and environment and it is necessary to change the language as well so that once more it expresses the life of the people involved in the fable. For this reason Lady Gregory's Kiltartan Molière is most successful when she freely adapts structure and motive as well as language. Examples might also be drawn from Lorca, Faulkner, and D.H. Lawrence.

2 Probably 1900-1901, Stephens MS. 1237.
3 September 1907, Greene and Stephens, op.cit., 275.
Deirdre was rewritten over twenty times, and was still unfinished at his death.¹ Synge's advice to a young writer perhaps most clearly illustrates his contrapuntal method:

I thought one speech...excellent comedy growing out of the situation of the two characters -- but I am afraid as a whole the play is quite too slight for performance -- and too without shape.... Also one has to interlace one's characters -- a first act all A and B, with a second act all A and C is not satisfactory.²

Synge applied this same analytical care to his own writing, constantly striving for balance in characterization, action, and language, building up "currents" of tension through crescendos and contrasts, juxtaposing tragedy and comedy through exposition and poetry.³ As W.G. Fay remarked, "You cannot cut a line in any of his plays without damaging the whole structure."⁴

One of the first things Synge learned was the value of simplicity in structure and action. In both In the Shadow of the Glen and Riders to the Sea he deals with single themes in which action is cut down to a minimum and atmosphere and mood are intensified. In Riders to the Sea especially the conflict between Man and the power of Nature supersedes individual characterization and action. The mood alone is established, first by the continual reference to "the sea" and "the white boards" and by Maurya's constant mourning which grows in a crescendo to the wailing of the caoine. Second, there is no "padding" in the play; the details are carefully planned so that almost every speech and movement

¹Greene, "The Tinker's Wedding, A Revaluation,"825-26. There were twelve versions of Act III of Deirdre, Greene and Stephens,op.cit.,276. In a letter to Brodzky, 10 December 1907, Spencer Brodney collection, TCD, Synge commented, "There is no work that requires such slow care as writing a play."

²Letter to M.J.Nolan, 7 December 1906, L.M.Wilson collection, TCD.

³Cf. Notebooks,c.1901, Stephens MS.1415: "Contrast gives wonder of life. It is found in
(a) Misery of earth consciously set against Heaven, see pious writing. Happy other World, Hearn etc.
(b) Wonder of world set against the misery of age and death (see Villon)."

plays an important part in establishing the atmosphere of doom: Cathleen's simple comment, "It's a long time we'll be, and the two of us crying"; the old woman's pathetic complaint, "In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old." The homeliness of such details as the kelp for the fire, the pig with the black feet, Bartley's instructions to his sisters, serves to intensify other touches which become symbols of doom: the white boards, the forgotten bit of bread, and Michael's clothes. The silences are as eloquent: Cathleen at the spinning wheel, Maurya's aimless raking at the open fire. The rhythm of the entire play has the steady relentless beating of waves against a rock, gradually increasing in strength to the accompaniment of the low moan of the caoine. Against this eternal rhythm of nature the characters move in dream-like measures towards their inevitable destiny.

Again in his next play, In the Shadow of the Glen, Synge makes use of the same careful characteristics of the craftsman: simplicity of mood and plot made more powerful by localization; intensity carrying the emotional atmosphere across the footlights until each member of the audience feels it personally; the fastidious attention to details which outline each move and emotion so that they, too, take on personal significance. But here the monotone of fate is replaced by the contrast between nature's oppression and the farcical elements of the fabliau. The conversations Nora holds first with the tramp and later with Michael build up the atmosphere of loneliness; the conversations the old man holds with tramp and rival contribute to the comedy of the situation. As with all of his plays, the curtain rises on a tableau which emphasizes the essential mood which is later broken into by a contrapuntal theme. Here the peat fire casting a glow over the set, the glasses and bottle on the table standing out almost in silhouette, the covered body lying stiffly on the bed at the back, the restless movements of Nora, all
create an atmosphere of stillness and expectancy almost akin to that of Maeterlinck's early plays. (This same mood of "listening for the unknown" initiates the action in all of the other plays). Then, as the action progresses, the setting becomes less sinister. The Tramp's fear of the body, the "dead man's" thirst and the tramp's efforts to keep him covered, Michael's fear of the stick and of Dan build up to the ironic scene at the end, when the departure of Nora with the Tramp (again a conclusion common to most of the plays) leaves old Dan enjoying a quiet drink with the quiet and harmless Michael Dara. Here, too, Synge employs the device of contrast to emphasize the basic conflict felt throughout all his plays. The few possessions Nora bundles into her shawl when she leaves contrast sharply with the stage directions at the beginning of the play when she hears the Tramp's knock: She takes up a stocking with money from the table and puts it in her pocket. While she is indulging in reverie over the mists in the glen, Michael is counting the old man's money. The ending of the play follows naturally out of the action: Michael's interests dwindle away with the retreating money; Nora leaves with the Tramp only when her irate husband forces her to make the decision.

In both of these early plays, and especially in In the Shadow of the Glen, Synge employs the retrospective technique, by means of careful choice of detail. Nora's speeches are not only an exposition of her present mood but a recapitulation of her past life in the glen:

Maybe cold would be no sign of death with the like of him, for he was always cold, every day since I knew him...and every night, stranger(13).

--God spare Darcy; he'd always look in here and he passing up or passing down, and it's very lonesome I was after him a long while...and then I got happy again -- if it's ever happy we are, stranger -- for I got used to being lonesome(17).

Riders to the Sea evokes the same impression of the present reflecting the past:

It's little the like of him knows the sea (50).

...six fine men, though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming into the world -- and some of the them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now the lot of them...(50).
But the most striking evocation of the past occurs in the parallel action. The old mother has barely completed her account of how Patch's body was brought home when her last son's body is carried in to the accompaniment of this shadow of the past.

The Tinker's Wedding, Synge's only two-act play, might be considered an "experiment in expansion," for early manuscripts indicate that originally, the play was written in only one act and that Synge reworked his original plot six times, adding material and developing characterization. It was begun the summer of 1902, when Synge was working on Riders to the Sea and In the Shadow of the Glen; he continued rewriting it until December 1907, and it was published in its final form in January of the following year. An earlier title, Movements of May, aptly represents Synge's first idea in dramatizing the life of the tinkers he had met on the roads, for included within the framework of the tinkers' desire to marry are several tinker children and, in contrast, representatives of the conventional life to which the priest belongs: a village woman to whom the tinkers sell the can, and in an intermediary draft several village children on their way to the priest's confirmation class. The entire structure is much looser, the characterization thinner, the springtime of the year emphasized over the later call of the vagrant. Again, Synge's marginal instructions to himself ("put more current into duo," "cut out girls in white") indicate his careful eye for both balance of tension and character development. As he restricted his cast and humanized his vagabonds, the final scene of confusion gained momentum and power from his earliest weak ending where Michael hurls a stone at the retreating priest to the later towering malediction as the tinkers themselves scurry off. But despite the presentation of "a life, and view of life, that are rich and genial and humorous," the dramatist himself remained dissatisfied with this apprenticeship to the longer

2 Drafts of The Tinker's Wedding in the possession of Mrs. Stephens.
form. Although his material carried more potential for dramatic action than his plays, lyricism had not sufficiently blended with reality to create the "comprehensive and natural form" he desired. The single melodic line lacked sufficient strength to carry the weight of character and mood his theme implied.

The framework of *The Well of the Saints*, on the other hand, with its careful blending of contrapuntal themes, provided sufficient scope for greater fullness and richness of treatment and consequently falls naturally into the three-act form. Here, each act builds up to a climax, at the same time carrying with ease the thematic variations to be developed in the other acts. Act I picks up and elaborates the motif sounded throughout *The Tinker's Wedding*, the happy carefree life of the two blind beggars divorced from yet accepted by conventional society. The climax of the act, the quarrel between Mary and Martin, plunges from comedy to tragedy, and prepares us for the "second subject" which will in turn develop in strength through the next two acts, sounding stridently in the comic episode between Martin and Timmy the Smith, softening to the lyrical, yet still minor, duet between Martin and Molly Byrne. Act III picks up both melodies, hope reawakened in the rhapsodic hymn to nature between Martin and Mary, building to a climax in the crowd scene which provides a growling accompaniment to the frantic efforts of Martin and Mary to keep their new-found dream.¹

¹Among the papers in the possession of the executors is an incomplete analysis in Synge's handwriting of *The Well of the Saints*, which reads as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act I</th>
<th>1 Martin and Mary</th>
<th>Exposition of characters and psychic state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 plus Timmy</td>
<td>Comedical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>crescendo narrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 plus girls</td>
<td>current now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>current now</td>
<td>Martin excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 plus Saint</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 minus Saint</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 quarrel</td>
<td>tragic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Timmy and Martin</td>
<td>no current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>comic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Martin and Molly</td>
<td>love current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>postical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Martin and Mary</td>
<td>current of reawakened interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 plus crowd</td>
<td>current to make Martin be cured</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The weak point in the structure, as Synge recognized, is in subject rather than thematic development. In a letter to Meyerfield he confesses his difficulty:

I agree with you that the way I have treated their going blind again is open to criticism, but if I had taken the motive that their blindness was a punishment, I would have got out of the spirit of the play, or have fallen into needless complications so I passed lightly over the matter as it was not really essential to what is most important in the play.¹

It is significant that this is the only play in which Synge makes use of a deus ex machina to develop his theme. Motivation had not yet fused with characterization, but in his next plays he overcomes this difficulty as well. Again in Well of the Saints, however, we see his ability to foreshadow by subtly introducing a variation on a theme: the play-acting interlude with the Saint’s cloak and bell introduces the spiritual element of heavenly machinery still clogged by the coarse humour of the peasants (which will in turn echo throughout the Doub’s section of this theme); Mary and Martin’s ineffectual attempt to hide from that same heavenly machinery prepares us for the ironical blending of themes in the climax. And as has already been observed, the richness and texture of the undersong of nature’s moods are evident throughout the play, echoed in the speeches of the keen-hearing blind people. Years later Yeats recalled the extraordinary dramatic effect of the "stillness" of the first act.²

It is not surprising that George Moore found in The Well of the Saints an ideal libretto for a grand opera.³

¹21 August 1905, National Library if Ireland MS 778#8. In another letter to Dr. Meyerfield, 7 April 1906, Synge remarks that he is still "in some ways...not wholly satisfied with it." Louis Untermeyer in New York Times Saturday Review of Books, 14 April 1909, quotes from a letter from Synge in which he refers to The Tinker’s Wedding as "rather slight."

²"An Introduction for my Plays"(1937), Essays and Introductions, 527-28.

³Quoted by Lennox Robinson, I Sometimes Think, 48-49: "The blind man, basso; his wife, mezzo; Timmy the Smith, tenor; his girl, of course, soprano; the Friar [sic], baritone; and then the peasant chorus."
In carefully working out the sequence of events in the play and providing each act with its own rising action and climax, *The Well of the Saints* lost in freshness and spontaneity while at the same time gaining in thematic contrast and harmonic shading. *The Playboy of the Western World* indicates Synge's growing strength in handling of plot and structure as well as in character-drawing and sustained harmonies. In this next play Synge weaves an intricate, richly textured design from the unrelated incidents of his sources, at the same time retaining the clarity of line observable in his earlier plays. There is plenty of action, but it too shows greater control (perhaps because Synge here is creating his own fable instead of depending upon a familiar folk tale); there are no ragged edges; the movement of the play steadily progresses to the climax but allows for more intricate variations and amplification of his leit-motiv. Interest grows with each act, incident piles upon incident, but never obscuring the grand finale when Christy reaches his full stature as hero-playboy and is forever freed from the restricting worship of the Mayoites.

Besides having a much larger canvas to work on than for *The Well of the Saints*, Synge creates a much different atmosphere in *The Playboy*. The strange and distant country of *The Well of the Saints* with its

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1 Cf. Notes on musical form and composition taken by Synge in October 1892 and quoted in Stephens MS, 578-59:

"(i) Never attempt to get rid of the idea of harmony which will come into your head together with any melody you may conceive.
(ii) Never allow yourself to modulate from key to key on any instrument without an effort to produce some melody along with your harmonies.
(iii) Never commit to paper and retain as approved any melodic conception which fails to realize all above conditions.
(iv) Never rest satisfied with any composition, however good its harmony, form, counterpoint or instrumentation unless it is founded on good and regular melodies.
(v) ANALYSE."

These rules are followed by notes on an article describing "Beethoven's practice of putting identical ideas into different lights."
constantly surprising familiarity of detail is replaced by the bustling scene the curtain reveals for the opening of The Playboy. With little preliminary "orchestration," the opening theme is introduced in Pegeen's first words:

Six yards of stuff for to make a yellow gown. A pair of lace boots with lengthy heels on them and brassy eyes. A hat is suited for a wedding-day. A fine-tooth comb. To be sent with three barrels of porter in Jimmy Farrell's creel cart on the evening of the coming Fair to Mister Michael James Flaherty. With the best compliments of the season. Margaret Flaherty (177-78).

Then Shawn Keogh enters with news of "a kind of fellow above in the furzy ditch." Homeliness and familiarity of details, delivered with sharp, incisive thrusts, are shocked into unfamiliar clarity by the unexpected. Similarly, dialogue replaces stage directions in "setting the scene." Compare the opening stage directions for In the Shadow of the Glen with Shawn's first speech:

I stood a while outside wondering would I have a right to pass on or to walk in and see you, Pegeen Mike, and I could hear the cows breathing and sighing in the stillness of the air, and not a step moving any place from this gate to the bridge (178).

The same atmosphere of expectancy and stillness is attained, but more naturally through the speech of the characters; similarly, Shawn's appearance introduces by muted contrast the second subject, Pegeen's preference for the Playboy's "poet's talk" and "bravery of heart" over the material wealth her weakling fiance offers. Further, Synge has learned to carry his device of contrast and balance over from one act to the next. The opening of Act II parallels Pegeen's introductory scene, where a similar side of Christy, the peasant who counts security by possessions, is revealed:

Half a hundred beyond. Ten there. A score that's above. Eighty jugs. Six cups and a broken one. Two plates. A power of glasses. Bottles, a schoolmaster'd be hard set to count, and enough in them, I'm thinking, to drunken all the wealth and wisdom of the county Clare (208).
And again, the interruption of his monologue reflects not only the earlier contrast of the timid bridegroom, but foreshadows the entrance of Christy's Da, whose arrival smashes Pegeen's dream. Mahon's entrances in turn illustrate a development of another dramatic technique: tension is created by causing the action to be interrupted as soon as something important is about to be revealed. In *Riders to the Sea* it was Michael's clothes; in *The Playboy* the technique is applied to the question of old Mahon's identity. Similarly, Christy's flow of words gains further strength in its spiral movement through the occasional checks applied by his awestruck audience: "There's praying!" "There's talking!"

In reply to a criticism of *The Playboy* sent him by John Quinn, Synge commented,

> When he blames the "coarseness" however, I don't think he sees that the romantic note and a Rabelaisian note are working to a climax through a great part of the play and that the Rabelaisian note, the "gross note," if you will, must have its climax no matter who may be shocked.¹

We have already observed how through selection, intensification, and compression Synge was able to make the raw material of his language both more lyrical and more dramatic; plot and character pass through the same process to construct the architecturally sound *Playboy*. At one time Synge himself despaired, and in a letter to Molly Allgood wrote,

> Parts of it are the best work, I think, that I have ever done, but parts of it are not structurally strong or good. I have been all this time trying to get over weak situations by strong writing, but now I find it won't do, and I'm at my wit's end.²

But eventually he succeeded in working the two themes, Rabelaisian and romantic, through plot and character as well as language. Furthermore, he was able to do without the movement of recapitulation in each act which he had found necessary in *The Well of the Saints*. Here instead he sustains both leit-motifs while contrasting and amplifying them, working them contrapuntally through the earlier scenes in sympathy with

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¹ 15 September 1907, Greene and Stephens, *op.cit.*, 275.
² 30 October 1906, Greene and Stephens, *op.cit.*, 217.
the sharp shifts in action and mood as Christy alternately succeeds and fails in his efforts to wear the mask held out to him, sounding them together in the increasingly rapturous duets between the two lovers. Never are the themes obscured or blurred, however; both gain in strength and brilliance throughout the play until the final climax, where each reaches full development and range in keeping with the intensity of comedy and tragedy from which hero and heroine make their separate exits. Plot, character and theme here synthesize in an almost bewildering kaleidoscope of language and action.

Writing of The Playboy to Max Meyerfield, Synge remarked, "It is certainly a much stronger stage-play than the 'Well of the Saints' or any of my other work." As has already been observed, Synge re-wrote each act many times in his effort to achieve this clarity, with each revision developing and strengthening plot and theme as well as character and language. The first indication of the plot in his notebook was made in September 1905 during his visit to the Blasket Islands off the Dingle peninsula in County Kerry. It is entitled simply "Idea for play":

Island with population of wreckers, smugglers, poteen-makers etc. are startled by the arrival of a stranger and reform for dread of him. He is an escaped criminal and wants them to help him over to America, but he thinks that they are so virtuous he is afraid to confess his deeds for fear they should hand him over to the law that they are so apparently in awe of. At last all comes out and he is got off safely.

Little Queen daughter of ferryman of Dinish Island in play.2

Lady Gregory tells us that he had at first planned to stage the first act in the field on the "high, distant hills."3 The various drafts indicate change of title as well, from "Murder will Out," "The Fool of the Family," "Christy Mahon," to the final form. Although practically

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14 May 1907, National Library of Ireland MS.778#24. The italics are his.

2 Stephens MS.1971a; Greene and Stephens, op.cit.,190-191 quote all but the last line.

3 Our Irish Theatre,131-132.
every scene has been re-written,\(^1\) perhaps the most significant alteration
is in the ending; instead of the tragi-comedy of Pegeen's loss and
Christy's flourish, the play ends on a note of tragic farce, Christy
being driven out by his father and followed by the Widow Quinn, leaving
Pegeen and Shawn to make it up before the curtain falls.\(^2\)

In most of his plays Synge was able to adhere to the conventional
dramatic unities; the pace of the first two acts of *The Well of the
Saints* creates the illusion of ininterrupted action as well. *Deirdre
of the Sorrows*, however, presented several problems. First, the story
is well known among Irish people; as we have seen, Synge very wisely
sounded the note of foreboding firmly at the beginning. Second, it is
a narrative stretching over a number of years; both the early versions
of his play and his reports on progress indicate the difficulties Synge
had with the important second act which must sustain the first theme
while at the same time developing and elaborating the counter-theme.
As we have seen, he sketched but did not live to complete the full
development of the true subsidiary theme, the note of uncontrollable
passion sounded by Owen. However, the lyrical note expressed by the two
lovers, their dread of life and death, and the accompanying "nature"
motif are fully developed throughout the play. The theme of two young
people caught in the current of destiny is strengthened by the
introduction of little incidents which emphasize this human frailty:

\(^1\)In draft A Pegeen and Christy cry in each other's arms at the
thought of Christy being hanged; Shawn's sister acts as a sort of Ur-
Widow Quin; Christy and Shawn have a sham fight at Pegeen's instigation,
both afraid. In draft B Christy's Da states that he is ruined, his land
taken from him. Until draft E the Widow Quin is much more sympathetic
and disinterested. The drafts are in the possession of the executors.

\(^2\)From a fairly full scenario jotted on the back of an early draft
of Act I. Instructions in the margin indicate Synge's concern to keep
the contrast between the Rabelaisian and romantic notes throughout.
the eavesdropping scene in the second act which reveals the truth Naisi has tried to hide from Deirdre; the bitter quarrel in the shadow of death in the last act. Lavarcham and Conchubor each have their "signature-tunes" as well: the old nurse's peevishness and warmth; the lonely king's burden of sad desires and heavy responsibilities. And here also individual themes are made sharper by deft stage-play: the lovers who sought the ridge of the world find security at the last only in a narrow grave; the confidence of the king's offer of the glories of the material world is shattered by the great blaze of Emain; Conchubor brings gifts of jewels and rings, but Deirdre enters with a bag of nuts and a bundle of twigs; Naisi dies to the fulfilment of "a love that will last forever"; while his rival lives to mourn his dream.¹

Although the subject itself provides a larger canvas than any of his earlier plays, Synge manages to retain simplicity of plot and action; characters are comparatively few and language is compressed and intensified.² Stoicism, asceticism, and ecstasy are at last synthesized in the development of the dramatist. Further, this perfection of technique has enabled the dramatist himself to assimilate his own experiences and emotions so that they become a part of his technical knowledge and theories. A brief comparison of these later plays with Synge's first finished play gives some indication of the remarkable speed with which he mastered his medium. The main plot, the story of a young Irish writer who returns from Paris to his uncle's deathbed and there falls in love with his cousin, a nun in a nursing order, represents Synge's first consistent attempt to project his own emotions and experiences into the dramatic form. All of the themes developed in his later plays are here sounded with much strength but little harmony: his basic belief in the fulfilment of life; a passionate hatred of false,

¹ Contrasts here are in keeping with the over-all atmosphere of the play, as in The Tinker's Wedding the collisions between Mary Byrne and the priest in turn substantiate the rowdier atmosphere of the earlier play.

² Cf. Lady Gregory's Grania.
unnatural or outworn attitudes which pervert or restrict that fulfilment; his deep sympathy for the suffering and limitations of others; his sensitivity to nature. Further, the dialogue of the peasants (in contrast with the speech of the "Big House") represents his early experiments in language, while the thinly disguised self-pity betrays the emotional immaturity reflected in much of his poetry. And the awkwardly expressed conflict between the nun's advocacy of a spiritual love and the hero's desire for physical fulfilment ("The only truth we know is that we are a flood of magnificent life, the fruit of some frenzy of the earth.") represents Synge's first attempt to develop and blend the "romantic note" with the "Rabelaisian." (One of his early dialogues is a discussion of the relative merits of the religious book the nun is reading and the illustrated Rabelais belonging to the hero). The play is talk for the sake of the ideas the author felt compelled to express, but obviously the potential strength of neither form nor material had been explored or even grasped. Yet six years later the same author had written The Playboy and begun Deirdre of the Sorrows.

Again, an exploration of the many varying roles played by nature throughout his published work indicates the general development of this mastery of technique. In the early plays, Riders to the Sea and In the Shadow of the Glen, nature is the protagonist, directly influencing mood and action. In his later plays we see a less self-conscious use of nature, and instead a subtle blending with man's actions so that the outcome of the play is man's own doing. By the time of The Playboy,

1MSS. in the possession of the executors. Work is in progress on a complete definitive edition of Synge's plays, including publication of this play and various scenarios.

2Yeats was fond of describing a scenario on the '98 rebellion offered to the company by Synge, Autobiographies, 568. According to a letter from Frank Fay to Synge in the spring of 1904, this scenario was sketched at Fay's request for "a drama of '98 as much alive as In the Shadow of the Glen and Riders to the Sea showing what the peasantry had to endure. I believe there were whole districts in which there was not a woman unviolated." Letter in the possession of Mrs. Stephens.
nature is no longer a protagonist, but rather provides an undercurrent, brilliant in detail and necessary in mood. *Deirdre of the Sorrows* marks the perfection of this technique of assimilation. Nature here is neither the direct protagonist nor an ornament. Synge's own direct experiences with nature and the people about him have here become recollected in tranquillity, and out of this deeper understanding of himself in relation to his environment arises a corresponding maturity in the handling of theme and dialogue. Dramatic skill unites with the mature interpretive faculty; once again realism joins with lyricism. In presenting a view of life that is true and rich, Synge had learned to "give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form."

And that enquiring man John Synge comes next, That dying chose the living world for text And never could have rested in the tomb But that, long travelling, he had come Towards nightfall upon certain set apart In a most desolate stony place, Towards nightfall upon a race, Passionate and simple like his heart.  
(Yeats, "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory")

Yeats founded the theatre movement; Lady Gregory extended its life. Synge's position is more difficult to define. As an artist and a man he walked alone, speaking little of himself yet writing only of himself, observing with restrained objectivity out of his complete involvement. Strongly and proudly Irish, he yet remained apart from the other directors and from the entire national movement; an excellent producer, he frequently considered withdrawal from the Abbey he helped to direct. The same paradox can be seen in the reaction to his work: first to

1Cf. letter to Meyerfield, 12 September 1905, National Library of Ireland MS 776#10: "Synge is, of course, pronounced 'sing,' since they have been in Ireland for nearly three centuries, so that there is now a good deal of Celtic, or more exactly, Gaelic blood in the family."

2Cf. correspondence with Molly Allgood, Frank Fay, and Yeats, Greene and Stephens, *op. cit.*, 258-68.
achieve international fame, his plays caused bitter controversy and further hindered the directors' already difficult task of creating a theatre for Ireland. Although argument still flourishes over his intentions and status, it is now generally accepted that in choice of subject and language his source was national, even local. But Synge came to that material with his theories already formed, his themes already developed. He felt no compulsion to change his ideas so that they conformed to the aims of his co-directors or his audience. In reworking his material for the stage he was concerned with perfection of dramatic technique, characterization of peasant and tramp, shaping of a language that was musical and joyful yet had roots in reality. But all of these aims were in turn subordinate to his primary concern with art free of didacticism and artificially imposed limitations. It was this belief that led to the achievement of the lyrical and dramatic synthesis of The Playboy and Deirdre. And it was this belief that eventually led him to discard his earlier localized material when it became too limiting in its turn and to move towards the broader scope of the myth and less regional subjects. Synge therefore does not belong entirely within the narrow scope of a "people's theatre" any more than Yeats himself does. With his feet firmly established on Irish soil, he yet dealt with those aspects of life which are common to all; by striving sincerely to interpret the elemental passions and conflicts of life and the dream, he unconsciously moved from the particular to the universal. By practising his belief in art which enlarges as it records, enriches as it illustrates, more than any other playwright of his time he provides that lasting nourishment on which and for which our imaginations live.
CHAPTER 8 - Ursa Minor

It will take a generation, and perhaps generations, to restore the Theatre of Art....

(Beltaine, 1899)

We all did something, but none of us did what he set out to do. Yeats founded a realistic theatre.

(Preface to The Untilled Field, 1914)

The conflict between aestheticism and naturalism which drove the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre to Ireland is reflected in less extreme measures in the three plays Edward Martyn contributed to the movement; further, perhaps in his plays can most clearly be seen the first warning of the struggle within the Abbey itself, between the Theatre of Beauty dreamed of by the founders and the Theatre of Realism which eventually established the "Abbey tradition." In the plays of Yeats, Synge, and to a less extent of Lady Gregory, the Theatre of Art won the first round at the cost of losing both Martyn and Moore. Yet paradoxically Martyn's dream of an "intellectual theatre" taking as its models Wagner, Ibsen, Sudermann, and Hauptmann, had from the beginning a much better chance of success. It is ironical to reflect that if Martyn had built his theatre and "put the key in his pocket," the Abbey tradition as we see it today would doubtless be a great deal better.

As we have seen, Martyn was already interested in the theatre before 1897; like Yeats, Synge, and Moore, he had tried his hand at playwriting before becoming involved in a dramatic movement. The

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1"The Modern Drama in Germany," Daily Express, 11 February 1899.

2Quoted by Lady Gregory, Journals, 159.
Heather Field was written before 1894, Maeve before 1899; like them, too, he had already developed the aesthetic creed which he later applied to his plays. And, like his colleagues, he believed that "it is the dramatist makes the theatre, and not the theatre the dramatist."¹ Dramatists, "being men of genius, control the public taste instead of striving to gratify its caprices, like those who possess no talent."² But Martyn subordinated his aestheticism to didacticism. Art, and the drama in particular, he considered "a vehicle for enunciating high and philosophical truths," deriving its glory from "those old, yet ever new springs of emotion in human nature."³

From the beginning Martyn was more concerned than Yeats and Lady Gregory with the "drama of ideas" exemplified by Ibsen: "Every great drama, every work worthy to be thought Art, must be founded on some philosophical idea."⁴ Although nationalist in politics as we have seen, his ideal in art was avowedly cosmopolitan:

[...]

¹Preface to Henry B. O'Hanlon's The All-Alone (Dublin: Kiersey, 1922), vi.
²Morgante the Lesser, 273-74.
³"The Modern Drama in Germany," op. cit.; Morgante the Lesser, 264-65.
⁴Preface to The All-Alone, vii.
Like Moore, he felt that the actor was mainly responsible for the present state of the commercial theatre, for "where the actor predominates over the playwright, the drama is worthless, because it must be written with the false view of exhibiting the qualities of the former at expense of what originality, fertility, and logical dramatic sequence may struggle for expression in the latter." An actor concerned only with satisfying his personal vanity could never be interested in the drama of ideas, which is free from the "mechanical sterility" of convention. The first requisite for any national theatre was, therefore, to establish a school for the training of actors and actresses, "a most important branch of which should be devoted to teaching them to act plays in the Irish language." A second reason for the lamentable state of English drama was, he believed, the financial necessity of "pandering" to public taste and encouraging long runs, a belief shared by Moore. His solution was similar as well, "a state subsidy or a subsidy from private individuals, whereby a theatre might be made independent of public favour, and so might become a public instructor," as one finds in France and Germany.

These three aims -- "educating the multitude" to an appreciation of good modern drama, establishing a company "that will be more

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1Preface to The All-Alone, vi.
3Samhain, 1901,14.
4"The Modern Drama in Germany," Dublin Daily Express, 11 February 1899.
interested in Arts than in Philistinism and personal vanity,"^1 and founding a subsidised theatre which would be free to experiment — remained basic to Martyn's work in the theatre throughout his life. The first he was able to fulfil privately, financing the early productions of the Irish Literary Theatre, "the most significant action of my life,"^2 and later establishing The Irish Theatre.\(^3\)

The second aim resulted in a lifelong crusade for his beloved Ibsen, who remained the most profound effect on his own work. The third led to his break with the theatre he had done so much to found and his frequent struggles with amateur actors in Dublin. ("The greatest difficulty with which a reforming dramatist in Ireland has to contend is the kind of people whom he is forced to employ as actors."\(^4\))

Martyn's great respect for Ibsen as a craftsman is reflected in his own concept of the ideal play, which should be "a problem to be set out, so to speak, by living characters on a big blackboard called the stage while the audience, presumably an intelligent one, was expected to do a little sum."\(^5\) It must have well-contrasted characterization, "the true atmosphere of mystery and romance," and clear and "logical sequences depending for understanding and

\(^{1}\) Paragraphs for the Perverse, Gwynn, op.cit., 152-53.

\(^{2}\) Preface to Paragraphs for the Perverse, Gwynn, op.cit., 164.


\(^{4}\) Paragraphs for the Perverse, Gwynn, op.cit., 152.

\(^{5}\) Quoted by Henry B. O'Hanlon, Courtney, op.cit., 66.
enjoyment on intelligent attention to every speech." Preferably it should present "the supernatural interwoven with the everyday realism of life"; always it should have "a most refining and educational influence upon the artistic and moral character of the nation." Ideally, therefore, it should move beyond the narrow borders of peasant life to an Irish expression of the universal. It is in the light of these aims that we must examine his contribution to the Irish literary theatre.

The Heather Field was Martyn's first play and the new movement's first success. On the one hand, with its "mental drama arising from the clash of the poetic and matter-of-fact temperaments" of the protagonists, the play strongly echoes Ibsen's psychological drama ("This simple barren prose of your mind --! It is that that is driving me mad."). On the other, the conflict between Carden Tyrell's dream of the "departed joys" of his youth as reflected in the heather field and the reality of the troubled times of the present strikes the note to be sounded more powerfully in the works of Synge and later Irish dramatists. ("Can there possibly be a doubt as to which is the reality and which is the dream?" asks the hero in

1 Preface to The All-Alone, ix-x.
2 Samhain, 1901, 14.
3 Cf. Yeats, "Plays Produced by the Irish Literary Theatre...", Memorandum written for Horace Plunkett, 1904: "The Heather Field proved itself in performance an extremely powerful play." According to contemporary reviews, the audience saw it as an allegory of the state of Ireland.
4 Martyn in a letter 26 August 1910, Courtney, op. cit., 78.
horror. By following his dream through the heather field, Carden Tyrell recaptures the beauty of "the music of the morning." But Martyn's dreamer seeks a world far different from the call of Synge's vagrant; and the voice of the author can be more clearly heard in the generous but melancholy philosopher, Barry Ussher, who appreciates the music of the morning ("nature's ethereal phonograph") but recognizes the inevitable acceptance of "the pain of loss," a "true idealist... in a way so drilled and careful, that he will never let himself go." Martyn's comments on _The All-Alone_, by the dramatist discovered by his Irish Theatre over twenty years later, might have been written about the philosophical idea underlying _The Heather Field_, the sea replacing Carden Tyrell's dream of the reclaimed land:

_The All-Alone_ is a drama of the sea. The idea is the vague charm and longing which the sight of the ocean awakens in the human heart, and the fatality which results from over-mastering obsession by this or any other mental passion. In this lies material for the most awful tragedy, all the more awful because it is psychological in the truest sense; for it is only when a particular passion gets into the head, so as to become a sort of cult, that the sufferer is to be pitied as the most unfortunate of men. The more highly strung or imaginative he is, the greater is the difficulty of his deliverance; because the poetry and idealism with which he looks out on life are lighted up with the flame of this fatal beauty, and without it his prospect of the world appears to him in an uninteresting gloom. It is only those who conquer know, that there is no happiness in passion, that happiness was not made for this world, and that the nearest approach to it is the peace its conquest brings. So truly is the

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1. _The Heather Field_, 30.
2. _Ibid._, 92; _cf._ 52.
3. _Ibid._, 74; 16. _Cf._ the opposing view held by Sister Courtney, who considers Ussher "the most reprehensible personage in the play."
soul made for immortality.\textsuperscript{1}

Here speaks the young poet who burned his verses as penance for indulgence in the beauties of this world, the elderly ascetic who willed his body to science as final mortification of the flesh.

The *Heather Field* is Martyn's best play, constructed with the clear and logical framework he felt essential to a satisfactory work of art. The patterning and balance are almost extreme in their formalism; Tyrell's idealization and the inevitable failure of his work on the heather field is foreshadowed by his earlier idealization of marriage; his own "wild untamable nature" avenges itself as does nature through the heather field; his love of Hellenic beauty is transposed to the dream of the green fields of Ireland; his young son's joy of life reflects the qualities he appreciated in his brother Miles (who was the same age as Kit when Tyrell lost the ideal world of his youth by attaining his dream of marriage); the flowers Kit lovingly gathers for his father in the first act become the passport to madness in the final scene. Each act builds up to an emotional climax increasing in intensity to the final breakdown; the past is constantly reflected in the present; conversations between Tyrell, Ussher, and Miles are paralleled by conversations between Grace and the Shrules.\textsuperscript{2}

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\textsuperscript{1}Preface to *The All-Alone*, 1919 revised version for publication in *Paragraphs for the Perverse*, Gwynn, *op. cit.*, 168-69. The revisions make the comments even more applicable to Martyn's own work.

\textsuperscript{2}Lord Shrule might be patterned on Sir William Gregory.

developed and elaborated in his later work: the sharp portrait of Grace Tyrell prepares the way for the acrid etching of Catherine Devlin in *Grangecolman* (1912); the call of the unknown echoes throughout *An Enchanted Sea* (1902); the satirical sketch of the doctors is transformed into the bitter wranglings of the Aldermen in *The Tale of a Town* (1899); the farcical hairdressers of *Romulus and Remus*; and the weak intrigues of *The Place-Hunters*; the tentative note of danger sounded in Tyrell's romantic idealism is coarsened in the farcical caricature of George Augustus Moon of *The Dream Physician* (1914); and the sensitive evocation of the beauties of nature is deepened in the Celtic glamour of *Maeve*.

In his review of *The Heather Field and Maeve* in the *Daily Express*, AE commented on "the current of subtle spiritual reverie which is characteristic of the awakening genius of the Gael"; certainly in his second play Martyn is more strongly influenced by the "Celtic twilight" of his fellow nationalists than by Ibsen's

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2 *Romulus and Remus, or The Makers of Delights*: A symbolist extravaganza in one act, *Irish People*, Christmas Supplement, 21 December 1907. An unpublished letter 4 September 1910, Courtney, *op. cit.*, 119, indicates "the originals of Romulus, Remus and Daisy Houlihan as George Moore, Yeats and Lady Gregory, and Denis d'Oran as myself." Sister Courtney is doubtless correct in her identification of Mrs. Cornucopia Moynihan as Miss. Horniman. The humour is as heavy-footed as these labels suggest.

3 *The Place-Hunters*, a political comedy in one act, *The Leader*, 26 July 1902. The sketch simply transfers the intrigues of *The Tale of a Town* to the Four Courts in Dublin, and again in the character of Counsellor Hugh Daly, Martyn reserves the most sympathetic characterization and the wittiest comments for himself.

clear cold light of dawn. Again the scene is Ireland, the central figure an idealist who strives to unite the Hellenic beauty of form ("Form is my beauty and my love!") with the magic of the mythical Celt ("Such beautiful dead people.... Oh, I am dying because I am exiled from such beauty."). But whereas Carden Tyrell’s tragedy is the result of a disposition "too eerie, too ethereal, too untameable for good, steady, domestic cultivation" (like the heather field), Maeve’s dream of a love which would not be returned is as unsympathetic as her cold and distant nature ("Those feelings and impulses which are in our hearts and which govern our affections, with her are all in the head," comments her much more human and lovable sister.). Here Martyn has managed to combine the worst qualities of both extreme aestheticism and celticism in one characterization. His aim is reflected in his own analysis of Hauptmann’s Hannele, published in the Daily Express the same month that Maeve appeared in print:

With what marvellous art this beautiful dream-drama brings before us the dream of life and the life of dream. It is a masterwork of construction, and profoundly original withal, although the first idea may possibly have been suggested by Calderon’s "Life and the Dream". It is impossible to give an idea of the perfection of the scenes. Those of the peasants and paupers have a sort of Dutch charm like the genre pieces of Boers by Teniers and Ostade, while the dream visions, with their

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1 The second act of The Heather Field might also owe something to Strindberg’s The Father.
2 Maeve, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1917), 42.
3 Ibid., 3.
4 Ibid., 8.
soft beauty as of the poetic, ingenious designs of Bontet de Montvel, go with simple pathos to the heart.  

This is not to imply that Martyn felt his own work to be of the standard of Hannele, but in his dramatization of a girl pining to die for a lover who had no existence, set within a realistic framework of peasants in the west of Ireland, he too was attempting to portray a "dream-drama," "the wistful dream of beauty which haunts the heart of the modern Celt as it haunted the heart of the ancient Greek."  

( "Each man who comes to his ideal has come to Tir-nan-ogue."  

) The fault lies not so much in the idea as in the construction and characterization: the awkward blending of moments of vision with textual dissertations on Irish folklore and archeology; the crude and unconvincing attempt to symbolize English rapacity in the anxious character of Hugh Fitzwalter; the overloaded setting with its ruined abbeys, cairns, round towers, and distant mountains. But in his minor characters Martyn is more successful. The O'Heyne, Prince of Burren, strikes a more authentic note in his peevish reiteration of bad luck and resentment;  

Finola is the only sympathetic woman character in all of Martyn's work; and in the characterization of Peg Inerny, the sly old vagrant who reigns in the life of dreams as the beautiful Queen Maeve, there is a touch of

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2Cf. Letter to the Editor, United Irishman, 19 April 1902, 1, concerning the production of AE's Deirdre; also Gwynn, op. cit., 145. 

3Maeve, 1917, 42. 

4Cf. Eugene O'Neill's sea captain in Anna Christie.
genius. The play's reception was as mixed as its ingredients; Maeve's continual longing for "the day-ghost" and "the immortal beauty of form" brought unsympathetic titters from the audience and caused Yeats several years later to fear a similar reaction to Synge's verbal repetitions. But the enthusiastic applause to Peg Inerny's final triumphant speech led directly to the creation of Yeats's Kathleen-ni-Houlihan: "You think I am only an old woman; but I tell you that Eire can never be subdued."^1

The most successful scene in Maeve is the dream sequence in Act II, which although conceived by Martyn was "polished" for the stage by Arthur Symons. He was less successful in his next rather unwilling collaboration, when George Moore and Yeats revised The Tale of a Town as The Bending of the Bough. The story of this strange collaboration has been frequently told, first by Moore with

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2Cf.Yeats's memorandum for Horace Plunkett in the Patent Enquiry,1904, "Plays Produced by the Irish Literary Theatre...": "In addition to the primary meaning of the allegory there was a secondary meaning. The girl was Ireland wavering between her religious ideal, her spiritual dreams and the material civilization of England. The audience showed itself a very clever audience by very quickly understanding this. The remarkable thing in the play however was the character of Peg Inerny, the curious witch, who was beggar woman by day and a Queen of Fairy by night. She typified Ireland"; also Our Irish Theatre,27-28.

3Cf. Gwynn,op.cit., 121-25; Courtney,op.cit.,44. Martyn dedicated the first edition of The Heather Field and Maeve to George Moore, W.B.Yeats, and Arthur Symons.
elaborations and unkind shafts in *Hail and Farewell*, later by Yeats in his *Autobiographies*, more indirectly by Martyn himself in *Romulus and Remus*. Martyn's play as it stands, "a comedy of affairs in five acts," is an unwieldy indictment with symbolic overtones of small-town politics, reminiscent of but not slavishly copying Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. Powerful but clumsy in characterization, overtly nationalist in theme and intention, it was the movement's first attempt to portray contemporary town life on the stage and as such its sharply outlined criticism provided a sturdy example for such playwrights as Padraic Colum and Lennox Robinson. It was also the most original of Martyn's plays, exhibiting both the admirable qualities of *The Heather Field* and *Maeve* and the defects of all his work. The characters are well contrasted, the "philosophical idea" — again the conflict between compromise and the ideal -- probable, the situation appealing to a nationalist audience. But in his portrayal both of character and of situation Martyn exhibited the lack of "literary tact" which was already proving embarrassing to his colleagues. General acrimonious argument around the council table is paralleled by the petty family jealousies around the maiden aunts' tea table, the tangles of both restricting rather than contributing to theatrical interest; Millicent Fell, the young hero's fiancee, is an acid

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3 *Ave*, 215.
portrait of the qualities Martyn detested in the Oxford "blue- 
stocking," with insufficient sympathy to make her human; there 
is little distinction between family squabbles and party politics.
Furthermore, having little of the poetry of Maeve or Ibsen, the play 
moved further still towards the naturalism Yeats opposed. It is 
not surprising that the Directors felt that The Tale of a Town "did 
not ... come up to the required standard."^1

What is surprising is that they should think Moore's adaptation, 
The Bending of the Bough, did come up to that standard. For although 
Moore has deepened the characterization, tightened the construction, 
and emphasized the political at the expense of the personal element 
in the play, the result is not much of an improvement over the 
original version. There is in fact almost as much loss: the bluff 
outspoken Mrs. Costigan is transformed into the unsuccessful 
politician Macnee; the play on "union of hearts" is omitted, thereby 
losing much of the political overtones that phrase implied during 
the years immediately following the split in the Parnell party; the 
"blarney" of the original visiting Mayor is dispensed with, thus 
eliminating any interest this scene did have. The most interesting 
alteration occurs in the characterization of Jasper Dean, who in the 
second version paradoxically achieves more of the idealist spirit 
apparent in Martyn's earlier plays, torn as he is between the call to 
realism represented by his fiancee and the material advantages of her

^Lady Gregory to Padraic Colum, ?January 1906, Greene and 
Stephens, op.cit.,195. In his review, "Two Irish Plays," United 
Irishman, 9 November 1901,6, Frank Fay severely criticized the play.
position, and the prophetic oratory of Kirwan, who represents not only idealism in politics but "the spiritual destiny of the Celtic race."\(^1\) ("The difficulty in life is the choice, and all the wonder of life is in the choice.") Yeats also had a hand in the revisions, his main contribution being Jasper Dean's speech in the first act.\(^2\)

Although the theme of the play, universal in interest and national in significance, had value and in more capable hands has since proved eminently suitable for dramatization, the failure of both Martyn and Moore indicates their limitations as dramatists. On the other hand, the weakness of Lady Gregory and Yeats in accepting the play in either form indicates the first departure from their original aims and prepares us for the ultimate failure of their ideal theatre. For neither approved of Moore's version of the play, as Yeats implies in a letter reporting on the progress of the revision:

> It is foolish of Martyn to call the play "ugly," for ugly as it is from my point of view and yours, it is beauty itself beside what it was; and as for "commonness" in the writing, neither of them know what style is, but Moore can at least be coherent and sensible.\(^3\)

The play was of value, he felt, as "a splendid and intricate gospel of nationality and may be almost epoch-making in Ireland."\(^4\) This was the attitude Moore himself had towards his adopted child, believing that "it will cause a revolution."\(^5\)

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\(^1\) The Bending of the Bough (London: Fisher Unwin, 1900), 61.
\(^5\) \textit{Our Irish Theatre}, 27.
As a nationalist piece of propaganda, the play fared well, receiving the same applause Martyn's Peg Inerny aroused. But Maeve had been chosen for its passages of beauty, and the nationalist approval came as a surprise. The Bending of the Bough had only its sentiment to recommend it; as Frank Fay commented in his perceptive review of the Irish Literary Theatre experiment, its basic defects were theatrical, not literary ones: "writing for applause and a good curtain." In their anxiety to practise their dream, Yeats and Lady Gregory had for the first time invoked the double standard, accepting a play which fell short of the standard they demanded of their own works. In the perilous compromise between nationalism and art, the nation had won its first round.

The Tale of a Town was Martyn's last contribution to the dramatic movement he had helped initiate and sponsor. His next step was a further embarrassment to Yeats, and an indication of the course he was to follow in the pursuit of his ideals for the theatre. In reply to Yeat's request for an article on the Fays' production of AE's Deirdre, he wrote a letter extolling the play but damning the actors with faint praise:

1"The Irish Literary Theatre," United Irishman, 24 February 1900,5; Letter to the Editor (possibly from Mrs. George Coffey), All-Ireland Review, 3 March 1900,4.

2F.J.Fay, "The Irish Literary Theatre -- and After," United Irishman, 23 November 1901,3. Yet according to Holloway, 19 July 1907, National Library of Ireland MS 1805,447-48, Fay felt that Moore must have had a hand in The Heather Field as well.

3Yeats' letter to Lady Gregory, 10 April 1902, Letters,370.
The excellence of AE's play "Deirdre", I never for a moment doubted....I saw in the reading that the acts were scientifically right in construction; and the performance confirmed my opinion....The charm with which the great story of "Deirdre" is set forth was manifest to all, and the movement and many dramatic situations would have been more manifest under conditions of a more competent acting and stage management. I do not mean to say that the acting was bad. On the contrary, it had some good features in it, notably the all-important feature of being in the right key. It was, however, ineffective and quite wanting in that intensity which is necessary to give life to any strong dramatic situation.

The following year Yeats reports in a letter to John Quinn that Martyn has "taken up another amateur company and is getting them to play his plays. He took a big theatre for them last week and paid them. George Moore did the stage-management, and the company played The Heather Field and A Doll's House." With this gesture Martyn ended his association with the Irish Literary Theatre; for the rest of his life he gave generously of both time and money to establish his dream of "a society for producing native drama and continental masterpieces" which would deal with "the problems of people more complex and refined" than those of the Abbey Theatre. Finally with the foundation of The Irish Theatre in 1914 "for the production of non-peasant drama by Irishmen, of plays in the Irish Language, and of English translations from European master-works for the theatre," he found what he had been seeking. Perhaps more than

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1 Letter to the Editor, United Irishman, 19 April 1902, 1.
4 Preface to The All-Alone, v-vi.
either of his co-directors, Martyn remained faithful to his early ideals of the theatre. Looking back at the end of his life to that first experiment, he could still admit, "But the Abbey plan was intellectually sound, and it triumphed by creating a thinking audience for itself." That it was not his audience, he had learned long before Yeats made the same discovery. It is to Martyn's credit that he withdrew from the venture he had done so much to encourage with more grace than those who remained had shown towards him. His failure as a playwright did not alter either his ideals for the theatre or his faith in his dream. His statement of that faith, as expressed in 1902, illustrates not only his strength but his devotion to both Art and his Nation:

**Gratitude** — Of course we don't expect any gratitude! It is only weaklings hanker after gratitude. Nation-builders, in working out their will, think themselves lucky if they even escape assassination.  

Referring to their unfortunate collaboration over *The Bending of the Bough*, Yeats comments in his *Autobiographies*,

The finished work was Moore's in its construction and characterization, but most of the political epigrams and certain bitter sentences put into the mouth of Deane, a dramatization of Standish O'Grady, were mine. A rhetorical, undramatic second act about the Celtic Movement, which I had begun to outlive, was all Moore's; as convert he was embarrassing, unsubduable, preposterous.  

But embarrassing as he might be as a supporter and difficult as a collaborator, it is doubtful whether without Moore's encouragement

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2 *The Place-Hunters*, *The Leader*, 26 July 1902, 349.  
3 *Autobiographies*, 427.
Yeats could have succeeded in establishing the Irish Literary Theatre when he did. For Moore's idea of a theatre was in many ways similar to Martyn's and strengthened both: an endowed theatre which would be free from the dictates of that "filthy cur, feeding upon offal," the general public; a company untouched by the "mummer worship" current in the commercial theatre, thereby once more elevating playwright over actor; a policy cosmopolitan in design, recommending "great dramatic masterpieces of European renown, and plays dealing with our own national life, history, and legend" (which in Moore's temporary support of the Gaelic League included plays in Irish). Also, Moore arrived fresh from his battles for and with the Independent Theatre of London, with much of the "fine fleur" of France still about him as well; in the eyes of the relatively inexperienced Irish trio, he represented both the experience and knowledge they required. But from the beginning the partnership, as with Martyn, was an uneasy one, for Moore also believed that "the modern realistic drama... of the

3 "Is the Theatre a Place of Amusement?" Beltaines, 1900,9.
5 Cf. "Why I Don't Write Plays," Pall Mall Gazette, 7 September 1892, 3; Introduction to The Heather Field and Maeve, vii-viii.
present day — is the acting drama,¹ and took Ibsen's "perfect sense of
craftsmanship" as his model.² Hence we have from the very beginning the
paradox which was to be reflected within the Abbey Theatre policy
throughout the founders' lifetime, an attempt to create the Theatre
of Beauty but receiving its support from the Theatre of Realism.

Moore's concept of the ideal play was almost identical to
Martyn's — emphasis on plan and form,³ an effort to achieve the
"balance, design and sequence"⁴ he admired in Ibsen's "psychological
drama,"⁵ and concern for "the development of a moral idea."⁶ His
ambition in drama was in fact his concern in the novel, the problem
of "conveying an interesting and truthful reflection of life."⁷ Perhaps
this was also his main departure from Martyn's creed as well; for
Moore "the only end of life is life, and the only end of art is to

¹Letter to the Editor, Pall Mall Gazette, 29 February 1892, 2;
"Note on 'Ghosts,'" Impressions and Opinions, 164-65.
²Goodwin, Conversations with George Moore, 171; "A Preface to
³Goodwin, Conversations with George Moore, 62; Preface to The
Lake (London: Heinemann, 1921), ix.
⁴Introduction to The Heather Field and Maeve, xxii-xxiii.
Cf. Preface to The Coming of Gabrielle (London: privately printed,
1920), xvi.
⁵Ibid., ix-xi. Cf. "Our Dramatic Critics," Pall Mall Gazette,
9 and 10 September 1892.
⁶Note to The Strike at Arlingford (London: Walter Scott, 1893), 5.
⁷Ibid., 14.
help us to live," and the artist should go no further in his didacticism. 1 "The only two conditions that can be fairly imposed upon a playwright are — firstly, that his work should be a work of art; secondly, that it should interest." 2 Further, Moore had a more profound grasp of Ibsen's technical accomplishment, and like him turned to France for his first model, a debt he indicated in conversation with Michael Field:

We talked much of the construction of plays for the stage; he made me realize the leading fault of our work — its want of rhythmical progression — the haphazard development of plot which has contented us. The firm yet pliant structure of a work is one of the requirements of style. And preparation for events and entrances is the true foreshortened that gives dramatic art integrity and musical movement.

And so he brought with him to Ireland not only a superior knowledge of stagecraft but the emphasis on style and structure which would lead him first into collaboration with his fellow directors and eventually send him once more to the form of art he found more satisfactory, the novel.

Moore's interest in structure and situation was both his strength and his weakness as a playwright. Because of it the dramatic form intrigued him and gave him a clearer grasp of stagecraft

1 Letter June 1903, Letters from George Moore to Ed. Dujardin, 47. Cf. Moore's criticism of Granville Barker, quoted by Clark, "George Moore at Home in Paris" (1922), Intimate Portraits, 133-34: "He prattles about educating the public by means of the theatre. What the hell does he want to do that for?"

2 Interview with The Pall Mall Gazette, 21 February 1893, 2.

3 Works and Days from the Journal of Michael Field, ed. T. and D. C. Sturge Moore (London: John Murray, 1933), 198; Preface to The Coming of Gabrielle, x-xiii.
than either Yeats or Martyn at that time had. In spite of it, however, he was unable to make the next essential step in the construction of a play, the development of that situation through dialogue. "The situation was quite perfect, but when I wanted words they would not come," he confessed to Michael Field. Both Martyn and Yeats recognized his "power of inventing a dramatic climax" and consequently were willing to accept his help, as he in turn was willing to accept theirs for the sake of "the beauty of the creation." Neither, however, could overcome the difficulties of working with "that headlong intrepid man." And so for the first time, but not the last, theatre policy became further entangled with the problems of personality.

But although the part Moore played in the establishment of the Irish Literary Theatre has since been distorted by the accounts and

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1 Works and Days, 199. Cf. "Note on 'Ghosts,'" Impressions and Opinions, 163: "Plays read to me exactly as they act — only better." Also his revealing comment on Martyn's Maeve, "The Irish Literary Theatre," Samhain, 1901,13: "the idea of the play is clearer in the printed text than it was on the stage."


3 Cf. Moore's letter to Yeats, probably the spring of 1898, in the possession of the National Library of Ireland, referring to Yeats's help with the characterization of Ulick Dean in Evelyn Innes: "I am most grateful to you for your assistance, but I will suggest that you do not take any one into your confidence regarding this little collaboration. To do so would merely give occasion for some vain merriment and would prevent the beauty of the present creation from being seen. I am willing to take the credit for work which I have not done without assistance so that the few who are capable of seeing may see its beauty."

4 Yeats, "Notes and Opinions," Samhain, 1905,11.
counter-attacks of both Yeats and Moore, his influence as "man of the theatre" and collaborator cannot be ignored. If it had not been for Moore the first productions might never have reached the stage; he "gave excellent help in finding actors," and virtually took charge of rehearsals.\(^1\) He both defended and encouraged the enterprise with his customary energy and publicity;\(^2\) Yeats in turn admired his efficiency and dubbed him "the Aristophanes of Ireland."\(^3\) Most important of all, perhaps, he wrote a play with Yeats. For like Martyn, Moore had also breathed the rarified air of the Celtic Twilight, and in his Hall of Fame set beside Ibsen "the genius of W.B. Yeats, being a survival of that of the prophet and the seer of old Time."\(^4\) He greatly admired that "divine play," The Countess Cathleen, and gave liberally of both his praise and constructive criticism.\(^5\) But Moore could never resist involvement; soon the inevitable suggestion followed, a scenario "which might be of some use," and finally collaboration.

As we have seen, this was not the first time Moore had acted as collaborator. His first attempt at writing had in fact been two

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\(^1\) *Our Irish Theatre, 20: Autobiographies*, 413.


\(^3\) John Eglington, introduction to *Letters from George Moore to Ed. Dujardin*, 6; *Autobiographies*, 435-36.

\(^4\) Introduction to *The Heather Field* and *Maeve*, xx-xxiii.

plays "of which, I am glad to say, no trace remains."\(^1\) The Strike at Arlingford, the result of a wager and produced by the Independent Theatre in 1893, was written in collaboration with Arthur Kennedy,\(^2\) (William Archer compared the play favourably with Shaw's Widowers' Houses.\(^3\)). He had helped Martyn with The Heather Field, Maeve, and The Tale of a Town. He and his friend Alexis had made a French version of Gilbert's Sweethearts;\(^4\) he and Mrs. Pearl Craigie ("John Oliver Hobbes") wrote a one-act play in 1894.\(^5\) Later he was to write Peacock's Feathers in collaboration with Mrs. Craigie, a revision called Elizabeth Cooper in collaboration with Dujardin,\(^6\) and a further revision, The Coming of Gabrielle. A "very intelligent young man" contributed to the first dramatization of Esther Waters which was produced by the Stage Society on Bernard Shaw's

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\(^1\)Avowals, 258. In 1879 he published Martin Luther, written in collaboration with Bernard López.

\(^2\)Clark, Intimate Portraits, 91-92. The story of The Strike at Arlingford is told in "Why I Don't Write Plays," Pall Mall Gazette, 7 September 1892; Ave, 49-51. Moore explains his intentions in an interview with Pall Mall Gazette, 21 February 1893: "What I have tried to do is to depict a weak man in a position too strong for him — a kind of modern Hamlet, so to speak, whose mind and resolution are overborne by his circumstances." He was proud of his "Racenian [...] drama" (letter to Gosse, July 1893, Hone, George Moore, 183) and borrowed several of its incidents for several stories in Memoirs of my Dead Life. Later he was to say, "The audience doesn't want reasons, they want drama," Clark, Intimate Portraits, 98.

\(^3\)William Archer, The Theatrical "World" for 1893 (London:Walter Scott, 1894), 70-75.

\(^4\)Clark, Intimate Portraits, 151-52.

\(^5\)Journeys End and Lovers Meeting, produced by Forbes Robertson at Daly's.

\(^6\)Ibid., 91.
recommendation, and later revised with the help of Barrett Clark. He was constantly considering scenarios for operas (including one based on Deirdre, and one borrowed from Synge's *Well of the Saints*). He bombarded Yeats with criticisms and suggestions for scenarios, and finally in 1901 their *Diarmuid and Grania* reached the stage.

Their collaboration on this play has been described amusingly and fairly accurately by Moore in *Hail and Farewell*, more discreetly by Yeats in *Dramatis Personae*. The idea apparently first came from Moore and work had already begun when they turned their attention to *The Tale of a Town*. In a letter to his sister in 1899 Yeats describes the "compact" agreed upon:

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1. Moore quotes a postcard from Shaw in his preface to Esther Waters (London: Heinemann, 1913). Seven years later he wrote to Frank Harris, *Moore versus Harris* ed. Guido Bruno (Chicago: privately printed, 1925), 18: "Shaw is without any aesthetics whatever...his jokes are vulgar claptrap, the jokes of the clowns in the pantomime."


4. In 1899 AE wrote to Yeats, *Passages from the Letters of AE to W.B. Yeats*, 20: "I am very sorry you are changing *Shadowy Waters*. I swore at Moore when I heard it. I suppose he is the friend who has suggested alterations. I would like to strangle him."

5. Where *There is Nothing* originated in an idea told to Yeats by Dr. Sigerson on which Moore based a scenario and sent to Moore; cf. John Eglinton, *A Memoir of AE*, 107; Holloway also records the story in his diary, 21 November 1907, National Library of Ireland MS1805, 788. According to the correspondence between Moore and Yeats in the National Library of Ireland, MS8777, Moore suggested the plot of *Diarmuid and Grania* to Yeats, and may even have written the first outline scenario. Cf. Section Two, Chapter 5 of this thesis.
We have made the first draft and have got, as I think, a very powerful plot and arrangement of scenes. It will be a wonderful part for a great actress if she can be found. Moore is in boundless enthusiasm. The play will be in prose....Moore is now writing the play out fully. He will then give it to me and I will go over it all putting it into my own language so as to keep the same key throughout and making any other changes I think fit and send it back to Moore.

In theory, Yeats was willing to recognize Moore's superior knowledge of the stage, "a power of construction, a power of inventing a dramatic climax far beyond me"; Moore in turn was content to allow Yeats's authority on questions of style. Despite occasional outbursts of impractical enthusiasm (they once considered carrying the plot through three different languages before turning it into Anglo-Irish, according to Moore) and heated disagreements (at another time Arthur Symons was called in as mediator), the play was finally completed, and produced by F.R. Benson's company in October 1901, in the third year of the Irish Literary Theatre's experiment.

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1. The play was first offered to Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who offered "to pay a sum on account," but could not produce the play in Ireland. Letter from Moore to Yeats, before 1901, National Library of Ireland MS8777, envelope 1. Cf. Autobiographies, 441-42. Moore persuaded Sir Edward Elgar to compose special music.

2. 1 November 1899, Letters, 326.

3. Moore-Yeats correspondence, National Library of Ireland, MS8777. Cf. Susan Mitchell, George Moore (Dublin:Maunsel, 1916), 101-02: "Yeats had come to the collaboration determined to be substantial and material like Moore. Moore had resolved to rise to the heaven of the picturesque and beautiful to meet Yeats. They had passed each other on the journey."


The collaboration was more successful than the performance or the audience's reaction; the English company could not pronounce the Irish names; nationalists objected to Elgar's "English" music; critics denounced the "coarse English society play presented to us in fancy dress" as "a heartless piece of vandalism practised on a great Irish story." The nationalist campaign against the Irish Literary Theatre which had begun with *The Countess Cathleen* was gaining strength. Both Yeats and Moore replied to their critics, asserting the right to interpret the legend as they saw it, "the tragedy of a hero who has married a frail woman." The emphasis upon the "moral idea" and "the essence ... as an escapement from formal life" is reminiscent of Moore's earlier pronouncements on the drama, and much of the staging (the banquet-hall setting, Diarmuid's

1 Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 21.
2 Arthur Griffiths, "All Ireland," United Irishman, 14 and 21 September 1901: "There are Seven that Pull the Thread," a song from Act I of *Diarmuid and Grania*, with music by Elgar, was published by Novello in 1902 and reprinted in a Broadsheet in January, 1902, under the title "Spinning Song." The play, edited by William Becker and published in The Dublin Magazine, April–June, 1951, does not contain the song.
3 Standish O'Grady, "The Story of Diarmuid and Grania," All Ireland Review, 19 October 1901, 244, objected to this "writing and exhibiting an Irish drama founded upon an utterly untrue chapter of pretended Irish history, written in the decadence of heroic and romantic Irish literature." Later he objected to AE's *Deirdre* on the same grounds. Cf. also The Leader, 12 November 1901, 155–58; MacManus, White Light and Flame, 46–47. Fournier, editor of Celtia, November 1901, 170 did approve.
sheep-shearing, the unrealistic love-scenes appear to be his work also. But although the storm scene in the last act, one of the most powerful scenes in the play, may owe something to Moore's experiences at Bayreuth, it smacks even more strongly of Yeats's recent visits to Stratford-on-Avon. The defects of Diarmuid and Grania are obvious: the plot, as Yeats himself remarks, "is indeed but a succession of detached episodes"; the incidents and the language swing awkwardly from the lyrical and abstract to the prosaic and sensuous; the characterization of Grania, although more vivid than Diarmuid's, betrays the authors in two minds. The play is neither a failure nor a success, and Yeats's comments years later perhaps most clearly define the reason for both:

Lady Gregory thought such collaboration would injure my own art, and was perhaps right. Because his mind was argumentative, abstract, diagrammatic, mine sensuous, concrete, rhythmical, we argued about words. In later years, through much knowledge of the stage, through the exfoliation of my own style, I learnt that occasional prosaic words gave the impression of an active man speaking. ...Our worst quarrels, however, were when he tried to be poetical, to write in what he considered my style....we made peace at last, Moore accepting my judgment upon words, I his upon construction. To that he would sacrifice what he had thought the day before not only his best scene but "the best scene in any modern play," and without regret: all must receive its being from the central idea; nothing be in itself anything.

1Cf. Lady Gregory's Journals, 119.
2"At Stratford-on-Avon" (May 1901), Essays and Introductions, 96ff.
3Preface to Gods and Fighting Men, xiv.
4Yeats to Lady Gregory, 27 December 1900, Introduction to Diarmuid and Grania: "When one has to give up one's own standard as I have had to do in this play, one rather loses the power of judging at all."
He would have been a master of construction, but that his practice as a novelist made him long for descriptions and reminiscences.

The greater playwright, capable of learning more, gained most.

After the production, several attempts were made to improve upon the collaboration, and letters to Lady Gregory indicate Yeats's willingness to accept criticism of On Baile's Strand from both Martyn and Moore. But meanwhile new faces had appeared: the Fays, encouraged by AE, had replaced the English actors; Synge joined the movement; Lady Gregory having learned her trade with Diarmuid and Grania, had begun to write. The forces of folk drama and verse plays for the moment had the upper hand, and the rival stage tradition represented by Martyn and Moore was for the time being routed. The uneasy friendship between the two cousins continued in a new theatre venture, but Moore, who had "never pretended to have any great claims

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1 Autobiographies, 434–36. Cf. Moore's preface to The Coming of Gabrielle: "one must write in the idiom of one's own time, however indifferent the idiom is." Also Clark, Intimate Portraits, 104.

2 Letter to Lady Gregory, 3 April 1902, Letters, 368; to Frank Fay, 13 November 1904, 443. Also AE to Yeats, 1903, Passages from the Letters, 39–40. A few years before his death Yeats commented to Lennox Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 20: "I think it's better than I remembered it to be," an apt epitaph to an ill-fated play.

3 Letters to Lady Gregory, 13 January and 5 April 1902, Letters, 363 and 369.

4 Our Irish Theatre, 80: "I began by writing bits of dialogue, when wanted, Mr. Yeats used to dictate parts of Diarmuid and Grania to me, and I would suggest a sentence here and there."

5 Yeats to Frank Fay, 13 November 1904, Letters, 443.
on the theatre," returned to a happier means of expression. 1  "We all did something, but none did what he set out to do. Yeats founded a realistic theatre, Edward emptied two churches -- he and Palestrina between them -- and I wrote The Untilled Field." 2 With this, Moore's association with the new literary movement in Ireland ended.

It is ironical yet at the same time typical that Moore's change of allegiance from Yeats to AE should coincide with the latter's essay into the Irish Literary Theatre. But although AE's friendly advice might occasionally cause Yeats some difficulties, the support of his mystical friend was of more value than the earlier Martyn-Moore contribution. For AE's aesthetic doctrine, like his nationalism, was far removed from the realist tradition advocated by Martyn and Moore. Russell, like Yeats, strove for a spiritual note in Irish letters, and wrote of "the spirituality of the peasant, and the beauty and heroism of the past." 3 He differed from Yeats as well as from Martyn and Moore, however, in his belief in a national literature completely divorced from the cosmopolitan:

...we have arrived at a parting of ways. One path leads, and has already led many Irishmen, to obliterate all nationality from their work. The other path winds upward to a mountain-top

2 Preface to The Untilled Field (London: Heinemann, 1914), v.
of our own, which may be in the future the Mecca to which many worshippers will turn.

With this mystical nationalism in mind, he advised Irish writers to contemplate "the creation of heroic figures," and experimented himself with the folk-saga of the Fate of the Sons of Usna. He published his experiment in the New Ireland Review, thereby unwittingly ushering in the second wave of the Irish dramatic movement, for it caught the eye of a young drama critic with ideas about verse-speaking, Frank Fay. In a letter written many years later AE describes the sequence of events:

Deirdre was written at a time when I do not believe I had been in a theatre twice in my life and I knew absolutely nothing about stage technique or the construction of a play. It was written hastily in response to the request of two young actors,

1"Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Literature," Literary Ideals in Ireland, 87-88.
2On the suggestion of Seamas O'Cuisin, "Note to 'The Clansmen,'" United Irishman, 18 March 1905, 2-3. According to Eglinton, A Memoir of AE, 34, Russell and James Pryse had collaborated on a serial story in The Irish Theosophist, "The Enchantment of Cuchullin," with illustrations by AE. "Scene from 'The Flight of Deirdre'" the first act of Deirdre, appeared in the New Ireland Review on the 6,13 and 20 of July 1901; "Recall of the Sons of Usna" 26 October and 2 November 1901; and "Act III of 'Deirdre'" 8 and 15 February 1902. The entire play was published as a supplement to The Green Sheaf no. 7,1903, with two coloured illustrations by Cecil French and Pamela Colman Smith. The play was again published in Imaginations and Reveries (Dublin:Maunsel, 1915), 202-255. Two acts were produced in the open air, at Mr. George Coffey's house in Harcourt Street. Maud Gonne was impressed, according to Yeats in a letter to Lady Gregory, 20 January 1902, Letters, 365. Six photographs of this production are in the possession of Mr. Michael Walshe of Hodges and Figgis, Dublin.
3Cf. AE to Yeats, 19 April 1902, Some Passages from the Letters, 30; Our Irish Theatre, 30-31.
William and Frank Fay, who asked me to complete a scene I had written in one night without any idea of being staged at all. The second and third acts were written with the knowledge that the play would be spoken on a stage. It was intended to be acted behind a gauze curtain to give a remote and legendary character to all that took place on the stage, and was so staged on its first performance. This first and only attempt at playwriting was made with the high confidence of absolute ignorance of the stage.

The play itself has all of the defects the author cheerfully admits to. Paradoxically, the first act is perhaps more consistent than the later two, for here King Concobar speaks for AE and prophesies the new age his creator foresaw in Ireland:

_We must guard well the safety of the Red Branch. Druidess, you have seen with subtle eyes the shining life beyond this. But through the ancient traditions of Ulla, which the bards have kept and woven into song, I have seen the shining law enter men's minds, and subdue the lawless into love of justice. A great tradition is shaping a heroic race; and the gods who fought at Moytura are descending and dwelling in the hearts of the Red Branch. Deeds will be done in our time as mighty as those wrought by the giants who battled at the dawn; and through the memory of our days and deeds the gods will build themselves an eternal empire in the mind of the Gael._

In this act also the character of Lavarcam who is a Druidess with strong overtones of Moore-Yeats's Laban, is granted a moment of human insight in compensation for her weary hours of mystic vision:

_Thou art the light of the Ultonians, Naisi, but thou art not the star of knowledge._

The remainder of the play follows the ill-fated lovers and Naisi's brothers to Loch Etive in Alba, and back to the accompaniment of

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2 Deirdre, _Imaginations and Reveries_, 206-207.
3 Ibid., 215.
Deirdre's Druid wails to their inevitable doom. Concobar's Red Branch is torn by internal strife to which he himself contributes, Deirdre despite her gift of prophecy remains more the naïve child than the tragic queen, and Naisi after a rather weak struggle subsides with the other Lights of Valour. Yeats disliked the play, considering it "superficial and sentimental," but later learned to appreciate the absence of character which, he felt, "is like the absence of individual expression in wall decoration."^ Standish O'Grady again complained that vivid dramatization of the sagas would "degrade the ideals of Ireland and ... banish the soul from the land." AE replied with dignity, stating his own belief in the theatre:

The drama in its mystical beginning was the vehicle through which divine ideas, which are beyond the sphere even of heroic life and passion, were expressed; and if Mr. Yeats and myself fail of such greatness, it is not for that reason that the soul of Ireland will depart.... The danger of art is not in its subjects, but in the attitude of the artist's mind. The nobler influences of art arise, not because heroes are the theme, but because of noble treatment and the intuition which perceives the inflexible working out of great moral laws.

^Letters to Lady Gregory, 3 and 5 April 1902, Letters, 368; cf. letter 20 January, op.cit., 365. It is interesting to note that in a letter to St. John Ervine praising Mixed Marriage, which was produced at the Abbey in January 1911, AE should make a similar complaint of Yeats and Lady Gregory, who "treat people in drama as Whistler treats his sitters, turning them into arrangements and harmonies, and I was very tired of their world"; quoted by Eglinton, A Memoir of AE, 4.

^All Ireland Review, 12 April 1902, 84.

But later he suggested that perhaps O'Grady had been right, a decision in keeping with his belief that "the true and the Good," the idea rather than the form, should be the main concern of the artist. ("The final value of a work of art is not determined by its technical merits, but by the imagination and insight of its creator.")

Deirdre was a success in production, drawing even more applause than Maud Gonne's acting in Yeats's Kathleen-ni-Houlihan. For the first time Irish dramatists, writing on Irish subjects, had joined with Irish actors to delight an Irish audience. Many of the qualities of AE's play which impressed were those fulfilling Yeats's own demands: the treatment of an heroic subject in poetry, emphasis upon words over acting, of acting over scenery; an attempt at the Theatre of Beauty:

1 Preface to Some Irish Essays, Tower Press Booklets no. 1 (Dublin:Maunsel,1906), 7. Yet in a review of James Stephens's Deirdre in The Irish Statesman, 29 September 1923,84-85, he had once more changed his mind, coming that O'Grady, Yeats and Austin Clarke "wrote as if they knew the bardic world had no relation to history, but was a creation of the Gaelic imagination."

2 Letters to Yeats, 1900, Some Passages from the Letters of AE, 25,26-27.

3 "The Spiritual Influence of Art," Dublin Daily Express, 22 April 1899, 3. Cf. letter 4 July 1905 to Clifford Bax, quoted by Bax in "AE: The Strayed Angel," Some I Knew Well (London: Phoenix House,1951), 79: "Every thought or mood is the opening or closing of a door to the divine world... Art for art's sake is considering the door as a decoration and not for its uses in the house of life."

4 Autobiographies,450. Later productions of the play by the Theatre of Ireland were also greeted with enthusiasm, cf. Holloway's diary, 13 December 1907, National Library of Ireland MS 1805,851; "The Drama in Ireland," The Irish Review, May 1913, 142-43.
By the rhythmic beauty of his sentences; by the rise and fall of emotions which never break into discordant violence; by careful grouping of the actors, and the choice of a colour scheme, A.E. tries to create in the mind of the spectators the mood through which ideas of beauty flash like radiant figures in a dream. His play is not realistic; it scarcely even tells a story; it is rather like a strain of music carrying a sweet and subtle enchantment.

But AE was a poet, not a playwright; a nationalist, not a cosmopolitan; a socialist rather than an aristocrat in the kingdom of art. He contemplated further dramas, but never wrote them.

Like Moore, eventually he became an embarrassing ally and it was with relief mingled with little regret that the "gentle anarchist" finally withdrew with the nationalists and turned his energies elsewhere. He, too, had served his turn for the Theatre of Yeats's dreams, receiving as much as he gave. Yeats and AE remained close friends united by a common antagonism:

The trouble about literary movements in any country is this that there are only two or three writers of genius and they generally hate each other because they see different eternities,

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2Autobiographies, 449. Eglinton, A Memoir of AE, 54, says that there is a sketch for a comedy among his papers. Like his secretary, Susan Mitchell, author of Aids to the Immortality of Certain Persons in Ireland (Dublin: Maunsel, 1913), AE was an excellent satirist. The Henderson collection, National Library of Ireland, Ms 1720, 70-72, includes a parody of Yeats's Kathleen-ni-Houlihan and Synge's Playboy, "Britannia Rule-the-Wave: A Comedy (In One Act and in Prose)" published in Sinn Fein during the week of February 4 1907, a dialogue between "Chief Poet of Ireland," "Chief Actor of Ireland," and "Old Lady" dressed suspiciously like Britannia.

3Cf. Yeats's Preface to The Ten Principal Upanishads by W.B. Yeats and Shree Purohit Swami (London: Faber, 1937), 7.
AE wrote towards the end of his life, it is to the credit of both that each sought and remained true to his particular vision of that eternity.

Deirdre had not been the first dream-drama of the ancient days of Irish chivalry. Two years earlier, in 1900, The Last Feast of the Fianna, "a narrative undramatic play by Alice Milligan" had been produced. Miss Milligan, an Ulster Protestant and fervent Gaelic Leaguer, was perhaps the most scholarly contributor to the dramatic movement, bringing with her a solid knowledge of the Irish language and an equal determination to recapture "the breath of the Ossianic legends" in their natural medium. The play, actually only a brief sketch in dialogue form, was written in

2 Autobiographies, 429-430. Incidental music was especially composed by C. Milligan-Fox, Miss Milligan's sister. John O'Leary appeared as an ancient warrior. The Henderson collection, National Library of Ireland, MS1729, vol. I, 132-33, contains a copy of the text, probably printed in the Dublin Daily Express, February 20, 1900. The present writer is indebted to Miss Mary Pollard, librarian at Trinity College and Marsh's Library, Dublin, for help in tracing this play.
4 Note to first scene of The Last Feast of the Fianna: "written with a view to translation into the Irish language in the Ossianic stanza, which would have been the natural medium of Gaelic drama if that form had ever developed a step further than the dialogue recitales." Cf. Her letter to the Editor, Daily Express, 21 January 1899, 3; Yeats, "Plans and Methods," Beltaine, February 1900, 4.
unrhymed stanzas of four lines, and was produced as a series of tableaux. The setting is the home of Finn in old age, with a haggard and bitter-tongued Grania producing rancour among the Fianna and eventually forcing Oisin to follow Niamh to Tir-na-Öige. The plot had none of the poetic beauty of Yeats's *The Wanderings of Oisin* nor the dramatic qualities of *Diarmuid and Grania*, but the spirit was more in keeping with its pre-Christian source than perhaps any other work of the literary movement. It is not surprising that seven years later during *The Playboy* riots its author should advocate realism over romance, while at the same time deploring the Theatre's departure from the cause of nationalism.

The same year in which AE's *Deirdre* appeared brought another aspiring poet-dramatist into the Irish National Dramatic Company, James Cousins, who soon became more important as a principle of dissension than as a playwright. Cousins's one-act allegory, *The Sleep of the King*, was apparently written at the suggestion of

1 "The Irish Literary Theatre," *United Irishman*, 24 February 1900, 5.

2 Henderson collection, National Library of Ireland MS1720, 41. Alice Milligan was one of AE's "singing birds," and contributed to his anthology, *New Songs* (Dublin: O'Connell and Co., 1904).

3 Cousins wrote plays and poetry under the name of Seamas O'Cuisin, and acted under the name of H. Sproule.
Frank Fay, and produced by the company in October 1902. Of a later production Yeats was to write in his diary,

The play professed to tell of the heroic life of ancient Ireland, but was really full of sedentary refinement and the spirituality of cities. Every emotion was made as dainty-footed and dainty-fingered as might be, and a love and pathos where passion had faded into sentiment, emotions of pensive and harmless people, drove shadowy young men through the shadows of death and battle. I watched it with growing rage.

But as yet he could say nothing. The Racing-Lug, considered by Frank Fay the best one-act play he had seen in fifteen years, followed in the same week, despite Yeats's justifiable objections to its poor construction.

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1 The Sleep of the King was published in The United Irishman, 21 June 1902. A note indicated that "the play has been written for performance among trees in twilight" and a long postscript addressed to Frank Fay read in part: "When you first directed my thought towards the dramatic possibilities of the Story...I was somewhat deterred by its scanty detail and want of climax. But...I attained to the perception of something behind the story....that Spirit, which some call Wisdom, and others have named Beauty and Love, moving among the Trees of Life and Knowledge and calling away the soul of man in the hour when the king — who sways the sceptre of material things, of passions, of strivings — is lulled to sleep."

2 Discoveries (1907), Essays and Introductions, 263. Although Yeats does not name the play, The Sleep of the King is the only play at that time produced which fits the description. Yet Peter Kavanagh, The Story of the Abbey Theatre (NY: Devin-Adair, 1950), 35, records that Yeats "came over to O'Cuisin, clapped him on the back and said, 'Splendid, my boy, beautiful verse, beautifully spoken; just what is wanted.'" This may merely indicate Yeats's enthusiasm for a company which could speak verse at all.

3 The Racing-Lug was published in The United Irishman, 5 July 1902. Gerard Fay, The Abbey Theatre, 39, dates his father's letter to Yeats concerning the play as early May, 1901, but a letter from Yeats to Lady Gregory, 10 April 1902, Letters, 370, quoting Frank Fay's letter, indicates that this should be dated early April, 1902. Letter from Fay to Yeats, 25 July 1902, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, refers to Yeats's objections to the play.
Cousins as well as Fay had fallen under the spell of Ibsen, as is
more clearly apparent in his next play, Sold, "A Comedy of Real
Life in Two Acts." Again Yeats objected to the "rubbish and
vulgar rubbish," informing Lady Gregory that "Cousins is evidently
hopeless and the sooner I have him as an enemy the better." And
this time Yeats won. Another heroic play, The Sword of Dermot,
was produced at an "Original Night" by the National Literary Society
in 1903, and Cousins's association with the dramatic movement too
was ended. He became as fervent an opponent of the Abbey Theatre
as Yeats had been of him, and two months after Synge's death in 1909
delivered a public lecture attacking both the playwright and the
movement.

The struggle for control between Yeats and the Fays was to
continue for six more years, growing in strength along with the

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1Cf. Seamas O'Cuisin, "Note to 'The Clansmen,'" United Irishman,
18 March 1905, 2-3; In a review of An Enchanted Sea, "Two Irish Plays,"
United Irishman, 9 November 1901, 6 Fay admires Martyn's use of
Ibsen's methods. The Racing-Lug may also have been influenced by
Martyn's play.

2United Irishman, 27 December 1902, 5-7.

3Letter?26 September 1902, Letters, 379-80. Yeats continues,
"I think Fay will see from my letter that, although I do not
interfere with their freedom to produce what they like, too much
Cousins would make work in common out of the question." It is
interesting that the last performance at the old Queen's Theatre
(famous for its melodramas) on 18 March 1907, was Cousins's Sold;
the wheel has come full circle, and the Abbey Theatre company,
producing few plays that Yeats could approve of, has been playing
at the Queen's since the Abbey Theatre burned down in 1951.

4The Sword of Dermot was published in United Irishman, 2 May 1903,
2-3. In a letter to O'Grady, All-Ireland Review, 25 April 1903, 138-39,
Fein, 17 July 1909, for the substance of his lecture on Synge.
Abbey movement and eventually leading to the Fays' resignation in 1908. But meanwhile, although signs of the schism were already evident, the Yeats faction gained the support of a playwright who arrived in the same year as Synge, Padraic Colum. Ironically, once again help came from the realists. For although Colum's first dramatic experiments were based on Irish mythology and history, he soon directed his nationalism into the bitter folk realism which became the model for the "kitchen drama" that later flooded the Abbey stage. A young Irish Catholic and fervent Gaelic Leaguer, Colum in the three short plays performed by the Cumann na nGaedheal (the political group preceding Fine Gael) and published in The United Irishman\(^2\) struck the themes which he developed in all his plays and which were taken up by the "Cork realists" who followed him: the stern devotion of the older generation to the land; the pitiless revolt of the younger generation against the dictates of arranged marriages and their demand for the joys of life; the nationalist's fervent hatred of all things English and equal desire for all things American. His models were Ibsen and Maeterlinck,\(^3\) but his

\(^1\)Malone, The Irish Drama, 165. None of these plays was published.

\(^2\)The Poles, 10 May 1902; The Kingdom of the Young, 14 June 1902; The Saxon Shillin', 15 November 1902. He signed his name in Irish, Padraig MacCormac Colm.

\(^3\)Holloway complains in his diary 23 March 1907: "Joy and a few others have been the literary ruin of young Colm. They talked all originality out of him by their literary jargon and left him stranded with only high-sounding words to juggle with. To hear Colm make a speech is to hear him flounder about in a sea of echoes of other writers, imperfectly digested." Michael Joy was a journalist on the staff of United Irishman, and greatly disliked by Miss Horniman.
subject was Kathleen-ni-Houlihan in less gentle times. After his first production by the Irish National Theatre Society in 1903, AE and Yeats hailed an original genius¹ and Oliver Gogarty wrote in *The United Irishman*:

*Broken Soil* is a national drama in a fuller sense perhaps than any yet presented, not because its theme is Irish, but because the play is built and the catastrophe produced from circumstances arising out of the temperament, religion and tradition peculiar to the Irish people.

Colum in this first play, rewritten and produced sixteen years later as *The Fiddler's House*, was dealing with themes similar to Synge's -- the call of the roads which old Conn Hourican the fiddler finally must answer; the economic struggles which tie the younger generation to a life barren of any joy or freedom; the conflicts between old and young, materialist and artist. But *Broken Soil*, with its sympathetic portrayal of the old fiddler who can no longer obey the voice of common sense, was followed by a much more bitter "agrarian comedy," *The Land*, whose pertinence to the times makes it almost an "occasional" play:

"The Land" was written to celebrate the redemption of the soil of Ireland -- an event made possible by the Land Act of 1903. This event, as it represented the passing of Irish acres from an alien landlordism, was considered to be of national importance. "The Land" also dealt with a movement that ran counter to the rooting of the Celtic people in the soil -- emigration -- the emigration to America of the young and the


²Quoted by Fay and Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, 146–48. O'Grady in *All Ireland Review*, 12 December 1903, 425, commended the "sincerity and directness of the dialogue; also a certain artistic restraint which, while revealing sentiment, never allowed the characters to stray into the easy path of sentimentality."
fit. In "The Land" I tried to show that it was not altogether an economic necessity that was driving young men and women out of the Irish rural districts; the lack of life and the lack of freedom there had much to do with emigration. "The Land" touched upon a typical conflict, the conflict between the individual and that which, in Ireland, has much authority, the family group.

The Land was produced in 1905, the year Synge's Well of the Saints; Thomas Muskerry followed in 1910, the year of Deirdre of the Sorrows. The characters are again unpleasant, but the plot lacks the strength and restraint of his other plays. Again, however, Colum is concerned with the harsh rebellion of the children against the father, and once more his sympathy lies with the older generation. The character of Myles Gorman, the blind old piper, once more sings of the call of the roads and the poet's life of the vagrant. But by then Colum's connection with the National Theatre Society was broken, and four years later he too emigrated to America.

Colum entered the dramatic movement with Synge and left it the year after Synge's death. In many ways the two dramatists had much in common; both sang of the life of the roads and both, Synge indirectly, Colum overtly, condemned the narrowness of a poverty-stricken hard generation whose passion for the land overcame all gentler thoughts. Both, too, in their language elaborated on what they heard about them; however, Colum's "curious dialect" was a compound of Anglo-Irish idiom with journalist and text-book jargon, giving, as Yeats commented, "a

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1Author's Note to Three Plays, revised ed. (NY: Macmillan, 1925), vi. According to a letter from Yeats to Lady Gregory, 5 April 1905, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, both Yeats and Lady Gregory helped Colum with The Land. Lady Gregory also implies this in her letter to Colum early in 1906, Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 194-95.
very curious sense of reality though rather a horrid one. Colum's plays, unlike Synge's, lacked both character and humour. "The dramatist is concerned not primarily with the creation of character, but with the creation of situations," he claimed in his preface to Thomas Muskerry:

For character conceived as a psychological synthesis he has only a secondary concern. His main effort is always towards the creation of situations that will produce impression on an audience, for it is situation that makes the strongest appeal to our sympathies. Synge sang of himself and became universal; Colum wrote to the audience and remained national, almost provincial. This perhaps is the reason for Colum's popularity with the audience; although he depicted life in much harsher and greyer tones than his fellow dramatist, he portrayed types which could easily be recognized as one's neighbour, but did not call forth the sympathy which involved one's self; the playgoer listened to the author's message with the clear, detached mind he applied to the census reports. And so Colum's plays were hailed as "a triumph of realism" while Synge's were denounced as a desecration of the Irish character. Colum's sociological approach is further indicated in his early aims:

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1 Yeats to John Quinn, 15 February 1905, Letters, 448.

2 In a letter to Lady Gregory, 6 May 1910, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, Lennox Robinson remarks, "Kerrigan has made a wonderful thing out of Crofton Crilly — it is not Colum's Crilly but it is a very good thing and supplies some humour which the play needed."

3 (Dublin: Maunsell, 1910), 4-5. Earlier in the same preface he remarks, "Life, in terms of Catholic philosophy, is means to the individualization of the spirit. Socially one may have more sympathy with Thomas Muskerry than with Crofton Crilly or Felix Tourneur, but the dramatist is unable to conceive of one life being less significant than another." In an article written for The Spectator in 1932, "From Circus to Theatre," Spectator's Gallery, edd. Peter Fleming and Derek Verschoyle (London: Spectator, 1933), 124-27, Colum comes near to Yeats's theory of character: "It is the business of the writer for the theatre to take a type and enrich it. Characters in plays should be, as actors always are, animated masks. The audience must be able at once to identify the person on the stage."
Some years ago I thought of a grandiose task, the writing of the comedy of Irish life through all the social stages. I had thought of this work (perhaps after discovering Balzac) as a piece of social history.

But his plans for an "Irish Human Comedy" based on the merchant, the landowner, the political and the intellectual leader were limited to the three types portrayed in his plays: Murtagh Cosgar of The Land (the peasant), Conn Hourican of The Fiddler’s House (the artist) and Thomas Muskerry (the official). Like Martyn, Colum remained dominated by his subject, and thus never achieved the greatness as a dramatist which his early plays appeared to promise.

He did, however, remain an influence out of all proportion to his dramatic achievement, and the path opened by Colum was followed by three playwrights who might justifiably claim to have established the Abbey tradition of kitchen comedy and middle-class tragedy, the "Cork realists," Lennox Robinson, R.J. Bay, and T.C. Murray. Of these Robinson is best known, for he soon outstripped all of the other younger dramatists both in ability and achievement eventually becoming a producer and director as well. Robinson was converted to nationalism during the short space of a Saturday matinée performance by the Abbey players of Cathleen-ni-Houlihan and The Rising of the Moon in the Cork Opera House. He went home and wrote a play; it was accepted, and his long association with the theatre began. The Clancy Name, a one-act melodrama with no humour but strong characterization, was produced in 1908 and followed less than a year later by a three-act play, The Cross Roads, again containing much melodrama, but less characterization and more sociology.

1 Preface to Thomas Muskerry, 5.
2 Author’s Note to Three Plays, viii.
3 Yeats to Florence Farr, 6 October 1905, Letters, 464.
4 Twenty-three of his plays produced by the Abbey Theatre between 1909 and 1948, making his second only to Lady Gregory, who wrote thirty-five plays for production at the Abbey.
After Cross-Roads came another "logical" play, Harvest, again dwelling on the conflict not so much between generations as between the dream of the town and the life of the country, and again a social tragedy of manners. Uneasy at the grim sincerity of Robinson's early plays yet sensible to the terrible power they exhibited, Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory, "The young man told my sisters that it was Kathleen-na-Houlihan that changed his politics and also set him writing, so I should share the enthusiasm but I don't." The critics misunderstood the plays and praised their realism; Yeats feared and understood all too well the new attitude towards life and art they heralded.

Robinson's next play, Patriots, strongly reflecting the influence of Ibsen, confirmed his fears. In this grimly ironic tragedy of the returned Fenian, the romantic conception of nationalism had passed, and with it the Theatre of Beauty. "We young men, a generation later than Yeats," wrote Robinson, "no longer saw (Ireland) as a queen;"

...maybe we loved her more deeply, but just because we loved her so deeply her faults were clear to us. Perhaps we realists saw her faults too clearly, perhaps we saw her too often as a grasping, middle-aged hag. She was avaricious, she was mean, for family pride she would force a son into the Church against his will, she would commit arson, she would lie, she would cheat, she would murder and yet we would write all our terrible words about her out of our love.

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2 Yeats to Lady Gregory, 5 April 1909, Letters, 527.

3 Cf. Robinson, I Sometimes Think, 26. Patriots in one sense might be considered a reply to Conal O'Riordan's The Piper, a one-act play dealing with the Wexford rising which caused a protest on its production in 1908. In a programme note written for the production of The Piper in Manchester in 1909, Yeats wrote: "I saw the eternal, heroic aspirations of the Irish people embodied in the character of the piper;...Charles Stewart Parnell...that angry heroic man once again...face to face with Irish futility."

Political plays now were not calls to arms, but historical studies of a great man's failure. The Dreamers analyzed Robert Emmet's dream, just one year before that dream was tried once more in the 1916 rebellion.¹ The Lost Leader (1918), "nearly a great play but not quite," joined Lady Gregory's studies of the spirit of Parnell.² But in between, the grim irony explicit in Robinson's early plays at last joined the gentler spirit of comedy in Robinson's masterpiece, The Whiteheaded Boy (1916). Satirical in intention, comedy of small town manners in execution, the play belongs with the best of Lady Gregory's in the laugh-provoking "selection and rejection of incidents and characters" which Robinson believed to be "the beginning and end of all playmaking."³ The young men from Cork had at last vindicated Yeat's troubled faith.

In 1935 looking back at the realist theatre he had inadvertently founded, Yeats wrote,

Those who learned from Synge had often little knowledge of the country and always little interest in its dialect. Their plays are frequently attacks upon obvious abuses, the bribery at the appointment of a dispensary Doctor, the attempts of some local politician to remain friends with all parties. Indeed the young Ministers and party politicians of the Free State have had, I think, some of their education from our plays.

For as early as 1910 it appeared that Martyn and the spirit of Ibsen had conquered; the younger playwrights had learned courage and sincerity from Synge's battle with the mob, but they applied it to a

¹ Cf. Robinson's Preface to The Dreamers (Dublin: Maunsell, 1915): "Dreams are the only permanent things in life, the only heritage that can be hoarded or spent and yet handed down intact from generation to generation." Here Robinson appears to come closest to Lady Gregory's vision.

² Yeats to Lady Gregory, 16 December 1917, Letters, 635.

³ Preface to The Dreamers. Cf. I Sometimes Think, 39: "The perfect kind of play to my mind is tragedy written in terms of comedy, of which no more perfect example could be found in miniature than in Synge's In the Shadow of the Glen."
different school. The first of these new realists had been Frederick Ryan, whose play *The Laying of the Foundations* (1902), since lost, followed Martyn and Moore and the spirit of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* in its sober depiction of small town politics and the resulting conflict between materialism and ideals. Now within a year of Robinson's arrival R.J. Ray entered the field of bitter melodrama, his five plays, *The White Feather* (1909), *The Casting out of Martin Whelan* (1910), *The Gombeen Man* (1913), *The Strong Hand* (1917), and *The Moral Law* (1922), all powerful studies of the most brutal types of Irish humanity which suffered under the scourge of the "gombeen-man," vicious successor to the absentee landlord. Ray's plays were accepted and produced, but none received the benison of Abbey publication; Yeats and Lady Gregory had by now given in to the demands of the theatre, but they would not lower their literary standards. The split had widened.

T.C. Murray for a time did much to bridge the gap and merited both literary and theatrical consideration. Again we have unbeautiful Ireland, the tragedy of *Birthright* (1910), *Maurice Harte* (1912), *Spring*  

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1. *Autobiographies*, 570-571.
2. Malone, *The Irish Drama*, 222, considers *The Laying of the Foundations* the first of the laughter-making comedies in the manner of William Boyle's early farces. However, a lengthy review and summary of the action published in *The United Irishman*, 8 November 1902, p. 3, by "Seumas" (probably Arthur Griffiths), indicates that the play is far more serious in intention and considered a serious "thesis-play" by both the company and the audience.
3. The "gombeen-man" is a trader who supplies customers with the necessities for farming in return for their produce, thereby settling the prices to his own advantage and usually in this way controlling the entire community. During "hard times" gombeenism flourished further through appropriation of the land for debts. Cf. Malone, *The Irish Drama*, 273-74; O'Casey's *The Bishop's Bonfire*.
4. Among the unpublished correspondence in the possession of Mrs. Yeats is a letter from Ray giving a full scenario of *The Gombeen-Man*, with reference to Yeats's criticisms and suggestions.
5. Elected the most outstanding foreign play of 1911-1912 by the American critics.
(1918), and *The Briery Gap* (1917) melodramatic; the comedy of *Sovereign Love* (1913) ironic; the only exception being his "miracle play," *The Pipe in the Fields* (1927), which most clearly illustrates his belief that man can achieve happiness only through the blessing of the church. Murray's strength as a dramatist lies in the harsh truth of his vision and the intensity of his dialogue; perhaps more than any dramatist of the movement he approached the stark insight of Eugene O'Neill. St. John Ervine joined from the north, with *Mixed Marriage* (1911), *The Magnanimous Lover* (1912), *John Ferguson* (1915). Then Rutherford Mayne (Samuel John Waddell) appeared, also from Ulster, his *Red Turf* (1911) adding further strength to the now well-established "Abbey tradition." St. John Gogarty ("A.& O.") contributed a closely-reasoned study of tenement life in *Flight* (1917). And with four plays by Seumas O'Kelly, *The Shuiler's Child* (1910), *The Bribe* (1913), *The Parnellite* (1917), *Meadowsweet* (1919), the Irishman's view of Ibsen and the world around him reached its height. The Abbey Theatre had succeeded with half of its aims; but the bitterness of the clay and worms, now firmly engrained in the structure of the theatre, stretched far beyond Synge and Ibsen to the naturalism of Zola.

Nor was there much joy in the work of these new playwrights, and little of that heroic. While Lady Gregory was still delightedly discovering the antics of Cloon, William Boyle arrived at the Abbey. The *Building Fund* was produced in 1905, the year of *The Well of the Saints* and *The Land*, and it appeared for a short time that Boyle would be one of the most popular of the Abbey dramatists. But his first play remained his best, and although Yeats and Synge did their best to raise his work above the level of farce, they were defeated by both audience and playwright, who preferred the safe tricks of the "well-made play" and the stock characterizations popularized by Dion

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1 Gogarty contributed one other play, *Abbey, The Enchanted Trousers* (1919) under the pseudonym of "Gideon Ousley."

Boucicault. His next plays, *The Eloquent Dempsey* (1906) and *The Mineral Workers* (1906) were denounced by both Yeats and Synge as "hopelessly vulgar," but this time the Fays, supported strangely enough by AE, won. Once more compromise entered the theatre. It was with relief that the directors accepted the playwright's withdrawal on conscientious grounds over *The Playboy*, but public opinion was strong, and Boyle returned to the Abbey in 1909. The chasm between theory and practice grew irreparably deeper; Yeats's "heroic theatre" was in danger of becoming its own travesty.

The year of *The Playboy* brought another dramatist to the Abbey, however, who for a short time appeared to reconcile the new school with the first movement. George Fitzmaurice's first play, *The Country Dressmaker*, owed much to Synge both in spirit and structure, and was received with mixed feelings by the audience and players alike. Fitzmaurice came from Kerry, and his characters spoke with the richness formerly heard only from Synge. His realism was blended with the colourful fantasy of Synge's and Lady Gregory's world. Yet in all of his plays the dream is mingled with a reality harsher than that of his

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1 Boyle's most avid admirer aside from himself was Joseph Holloway, who includes in his Diary a detailed account of the playwright's plans and methods, quoting freely from letters and conversations. National Library of Ireland MS 1805 passim.


3 Holloway records his introduction to Fitzmaurice in his diary, 11 October 1907, National Library of Ireland MS 1805, 647-48; "I... found him a nice, unassuming fellow, with I am sorry to say a hankering after Synge and his methods of presenting the Irish character on the boards. We had a long argument over the matter but he was of the same opinion at the end, I fear. He thinks hardly of the Irish peasant but agreed that the stage was a place for selection and everything one saw or heard should not be crudely noted down and served up for towns-folks consumption. Much of the peasants ways would seem hard and coarse and misunderstood by audience in the Abbey for instance. " Cf. Yeats to Quinn, 4 October 1907, Letters, 496; "He thinks himself a follower of Synge, which he is not."
forerunners; the romance tends to disappear, leaving only the bitter ashes of a cold world. Julia Shea, the little country dressmaker, her capacity for romance increasing with her consumption of cheap novelettes, creates her own dream in the long-awaited return of an Irish-American, Pats Connor. But Pats is not worthy of the dream, and neither is Julia. Like Martin and Mary Doul, she must face disillusionment, forbidden by her stern young creator the escape to a greater dream. The play swings from bitter comedy to harsher tragedy as the not-so-young and less happy couple face a marriage which offers little beauty in the knowledge that one must learn to "make the best of it."

The Pie-Dish, produced six months later, was received with some bewilderment by both actors and audience. Here in the space of one act Fitzmaurice sketches the tragedy of an artist:

Twenty years at my pie-dish, twenty years! and thirty years before that thinking of it, but I neglecting to give under making it all that time with diversions coming between me and it. But it's fifty years the pie-dish is in my brain, and isn't it great work if I don't get time to finish it in the heel? and isn't it great work if I don't get time to finish it in the heel?1

But the would-be Faust receives help from neither God nor the Devil, and dies as his almost-completed work of art crashes to the floor.2 The priest, voice of the narrow reality old Leum rejects in favour of his dream, is left to pronounce his damnation in terms of the values of the harsh peasant world:

What folly and vanity there do be in this short world! But what was in this at all? (Takes up pieces of pie-dish.) What was in this at all?3

With his next one-act play, The Magic Glasses(1913), Fitzmaurice grants his aspiring artist a glimpse of the dream only to dull it with suspicion and faint shame. Jaymony confides sadly,

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1The Pie-Dish, Five Plays (Dublin: Maunsell, 1914), 153.
2Cf. Moore, The Untilled Field.
3The Pie-Dish, 155.
Times I know it's a fool I am, surely, but the fancy's got stuck in me for them Magic Glasses, and the sport I had with them up in that top loft:

For the coloured glasses take him away from this life where success is measured by material possession to the beauty and timeless love of Tir-na-nOge, the ancient battles of heroes, and the glories of the great world: "Wisha, 'tis better than being in the slush -- same old thing every day -- this an ugly spot, and the people ignorant, grumpy, and savage." But those bound by this world are too timid to accept the outsider, and superstition leads to violence and death for the harmless dreamer.

The harsh greyness of the peasant world itself loosed from reality provides the only framework for his next fantasy, The Dandy Dolls, published in 1914 but never produced. Here as in The Pie-Dish the dream too is unbeautiful, the artist unsympathetic. Pagan wars with Christian, the eerie world of hags and witches struggles against the cloth of the Church, the magic draughts of the Grey Man weigh against the holy water of the Priest -- and the greater reality of the terrible supernatural wins. The dream has become a nightmare. One more play appeared, rooted once again in the peasant world of County Kerry. In his four-act tragedy The Moonlighter, Fitzmaurice turned his attention from the weird fantasy of his one-act plays to a dream held by the world about him, and found it wanting. Here, too, values are reversed, and the sincerity of the old Fenian Peter Guerin outweighs all the romantic, fervent eloquence of the younger patriots, who celebrate their nationalism in capers by moonlight but lack the courage to uphold the vision against the mean values of the peasant community. "Leave me alone, I'm saying," cries Eugene Guerin as he stands by the corpses of his father and friend. "New thoughts have come to me, and

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I am what the Lord God made me." In the bitter world of Fitzmaurice, self-knowledge brings no relief; there can be no joy for dreamer or dream.

The harshness of Fitzmaurice's tragedy is reflected in his comedy, his characters, and their language. Laughter is rough in a peasant world blackly etched in strong passions and words. The powerful personalities of Luke Quilter, the matchmaker from the mountains in *The Country Dressmaker*, Malachi Cantillon, the sentimental gombeen man of *The Moonlighter*, Eugene, the crippled "scholard" of *The Pie-Dish*, Mr. Quille, the miracle-worker of *The Magic Glasses*, are crudely drawn, in keeping with the stark tragi-comic situation through which they stride. Set against them are the peasants whose lives are narrowed by fear of priest, neighbour, and the supernatural. Neither group can enter the world of the dreamer, and even the dream is suspect.1 All speak a language strongly regional, gratingly poetic:

> My heart is bubbling. We are in the heel of our days, and it must be the Lord in His mercy is thinking of relenting towards us and lifting from us the heavy hand that kept our noses to the ground and broke the melt in us so long. Flaming years have passed over our heads, and we have brought our scars out of the raging battling times, but there is a quietness all around, and now at last, maybe, there is opening before us a little while of joy© 'Tisn't we should be confident, Malachi, still, there is throbbing in my bosom the warmest hope we'll all rise contented at to-morrow's dawn, calm and rational for ourselves, without the pains of villainous torments darting through our eyeballs, and we blinking out at the sky of heaven and the fields so green.2

The action, like the language, presses solidly and swiftly forward, the strange choric repetition of key phrases reflecting the relentless, certain, realistically fantastic fate of the characters.

"We hadn't the genius of Synge, his genius of combining poetry of

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1 In this portrayal of separate worlds, each man forbidden communication with his fellow, and the mingling of naturalist method with a fearful fantasy, Fitzmaurice has much in common with such recent playwrights as Harold Pinter.

2 *The Moonlighter, Five Plays*, 114.
speech with humdrum facts, and, of course we hadn't the poetry of Yeats, Lennox Robinson has written of that first Abbey school. Yet in the strange, original genius of George Fitzmaurice they struck and ignored a vein of rich fantasy which might have yielded greater treasure. From a distance of almost fifty years it is as difficult to assign praise or blame as it is to prophesy with certainty what might have been. That Fitzmaurice's originality was recognized is obvious. Yeats wrote of The Country Dressmaker: "A harsh, strong, ugly comedy. It really gives a much worse view of the people than The Playboy. Even I rather dislike it, though I admire its sincerity." But it is equally clear that he was given neither the opportunity of William Boyle nor the encouragement of Padraic Colum. However, his fate appears to have been the result of ill-timing rather than any personal antagonism or deliberate oversight. The Country Dressmaker was produced in October, 1907, when the company was going through one of the most difficult periods of its first decade: The Playboy riots had occurred in January; Ben Iden Payne, the English manager brought over by Miss. Horniman, had arrived in February and after a rather unpleasant six months had returned to England; in June Synge's play had been taken to Oxford and London; the Fays were to resign in December. The Pie-Dish appeared in March of the following year as a curtain-raiser to The Golden Helmet, and partly because of its unheroic subject, partly because of the contrast with Yeats's heroic farce, the audience greeted it as a comedy. The Magic Glasses again struck troubled times, during a period devoted to productions of Hauptmann, Strindberg, and Tagore by the "second company" while the main company toured the United States. But by then Fitzmaurice had lost faith as well. Overshadowed by Synge's greatness and the battle of The Playboy from the beginning, he had never succeeded in breaking through the barrier

1 Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 84.
2 Letter to John Quinn, 4 October 1907, Letters, 495.
3 Malone, The Irish Drama, 171.
of misunderstanding to the sympathetic involvement required by the strange new form of his bitter fantasy-realism. Without realizing it, Yeats had lost a valuable ally in his losing battle against the "Abbey traditionalists"; the dream at last became a divided image. How this in turn affected the theatre as a whole, will be explored in the next section.
PART THREE

THEATRE, PLAYERS, AND PUBLIC
CHAPTER 9 - RESPONSIBILITIES

Is there a bridle for this Proteus
That turns and changes like his draughty seas?
Or is there none, most popular of men,
But when they mock us, that we mock again?

(Yeats, "At the Abbey Theatre," 1912)

We should keep before our minds the final object which is to create in this country a National Theatre something after the continental pattern.

(Yeats, Memorandum, December 1906)

The Irish Literary Theatre (1899-1901) might be considered both in aim and execution the curtain-raiser to the Irish Dramatic Movement proper. Frankly advertised by its founders as a short-term experiment modelled on a well-established pattern, its purpose to "warm up" the audience for greater things to come, this first theatrical enterprise was, as we have seen, as much the result of the opportune convergence of personal ambitions as of national feeling. Furthermore, an examination of the aims and methods of this first group indicates that the "People's Theatre" deplored by Yeats in 1919 was an inevitable outcome of the conflicting forces invoked by the first directorate in 1899. For from the beginning Yeats, Martyn, and Lady Gregory sought an uneasy "union of hearts"; their three-year experiment was to be not only national in design but cosmopolitan in theory, not only educational in aim but aesthetic in practice.

As we have seen, Yeats's plan for a literary theatre began much earlier than 1899 or even than 1896 when he first met Lady Gregory. In March 1888 Yeats made his first visit to the Southwark Irish
Literary Club. In 1891 he helped found the Irish Literary Society of London, and in the same year met Edward Martyn through Arthur Symons. The following year he travelled to Dublin to found the National Literary Society, but returned to London to discuss with Florence Farr a "small theatre in the suburbs." In April 1894, The Land of Heart's Desire was performed at the Avenue Theatre in London, under Miss Farr's management and with Miss Horniman's funds; several months later he met George Moore. His early letters to Katharine Tynan indicate his desire to have his plays produced, a desire perhaps strengthened by Todhunter's work in the Bedford Park playhouse. In 1896 he met both Lady Gregory and Synge and visited the Aran Islands. He was still suggesting projects for the National Literary Society and writing plays. Then in January 1897, he wrote to Fiona Macleod from Paris:

Our Irish Literary and Political literary organizations are pretty complete (I am trying to start a Young Ireland Society, among the Irish here in Paris at the moment) and I think it would be very possible to get up Celtic plays through these Societies. They would be far more effective than lectures and might do more than anything else we can do to make the Irish, Scotch and other Celts recognise their solidarity. My own plays are too elaborate, I think, for a start, and have also the disadvantage that I cannot urge my own work in committee. If we have one or two short direct prose plays,

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2 Autobiographies, 403ff; 199ff.
3 The National Literary Society of Ireland. Rules, Proceedings, etc. (Dublin, 1897); W.P. Ryan, The Irish Literary Movement (London: pub. by the author, 1894), 126.
5 Cf. above, Part One, Chapter 4, p. 190ff.
of (say) a mythological and folklore kind, by you and by some writer (I may be able to move O'Grady, I have already spoken to him about it urgently) I feel sure we could get the Irish Literary Society to make a start.

He was already distinguishing between plays by others for the sake of the nation, and plays by himself for the sake of art. "The people, after generations of politics, read nothing but the newspapers, but they would listen (to what interminable speeches had they listened) and they would listen to plays." 2 Until now, Yeats had managed to keep his nationalism and his literary work separate, the two converging only in his vague desire to be considered an Irish rather than an English writer. But during the summer of 1897 he visited Lady Gregory at Coole, and for the first time a union of interests seemed possible. That winter work began, and Yeats wrote from London of a meeting arranged with Barry O'Brien, the President of the Irish Literary Society, to discuss "the Celtic Theatre." 3

Edward Martyn, as we have seen, had already written two plays which had been rejected by London managers, and was deeply engrossed in his admiration of Ibsen and interest in the Irish language. 4 He too sought a union of aims. During the summer of 1898 their request for subscriptions amounting to three hundred pounds was circulated, 5

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1 Letters, 279.
2 The Irish National Theatre, 1934, 6.
4 Cf. Moore, Ave, 1-2.
5 Cf. Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 2-3, for list of guarantors.
and with the help of W.E.H. Lecky the law was altered to allow the granting of "an occasional license for the performance of any stage play or other dramatic entertainment in any theatre, room, or building where the profits arising therefrom are to be applied for charitable purpose or in aid of the funds of any society instituted for the purpose of science, literature, or the fine arts exclusively."^ Lady Gregory acted as provisional Honorary Secretary, and in January 1899 the Irish Literary Theatre was founded under the auspices of the National Literary Society, with Miss Florence Farr as General Manager and Edward Martyn as Treasurer.\(^2\) Martyn promptly offered to finance the first year's venture.\(^3\) The movement was gaining strength.

As soon as the Irish Literary Theatre was assured of a nationalist backing, it started to dissociate itself from any political aim, and the long struggle with the public began. On the one hand support was required to achieve the avowed aim of establishing "a kind of racial festival" with the Theatre at the core;\(^4\) on the other, the founders claimed their right to ignore all propaganda "but that of good art."\(^5\)

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1. Our Irish Theatre, 19. Cf. Martyn's letter to the Town Clerk for permission to give performances in the Antient Concert Rooms, referring to this clause, Gwynn, Edward Martyn and the Irish Revival, 126–27. Also Yeats's reference to the law in his address on the Irish Literary Theatre at the National Literary Society "At Home," reported by the Dublin Daily Express, 10 January 1899.

2. Extract from the Minutes of the National Literary Society, 16 January 1899, Henderson collection, National Library of Ireland MS1729, 7 and 20.


5. Samhain, 1903, 5.
For their model they looked to the continental municipal theatres and especially to the encouraging example offered by Norway; for their material they turned to "the imagination and speech of the country, all that poetical tradition descended from the Middle Ages." Their work must be for "the countryman and the artisan," yet they appealed to "the imaginative minority and not to the majority which is content with the theatre of commerce." But they believed that both minority and majority (once educated), their "moral nature" aroused by political sacrifices and their imagination by "a political preoccupation" with their own destiny, were ready to be moved by the "profound thoughts" a popular literary theatre could provide. "It is only at the awakening — as in ancient Greece, or in Elizabethan England, or in contemporary Scandinavia — that great numbers of men understand that a right understanding of life and of destiny is more important than amusement."

Because they believed Ireland to be on the verge of awakening, men like Yeats, Martyn, and Moore had things to say to their countrymen, "which it is our pleasure and our duty to say," and Lady Gregory was equally...

1"The Irish Literary Theatre," Daily Express, 14 January 1899, 3; "The Irish Dramatic Movement," Works, 1908, IV, 226; Beltaine, 1899, 6; Samhain, 1908, 7: "All literature...is derived from models....it is the presence of a personal element alone that can give it nationality in a fine sense."

2"The Bounty of Sweden," Autobiographies, 570.

3Samhain 1902, 9; The Arrow, no.1, 1906.

4"The Irish Literary Theatre," Literature, 6 May 1899, 474.

5"The Irish Literary Theatre,1900," Beltaine, 1900, 22–24, reprinted from The Dome, January 1900; Beltaine, 1899, 6.

6Beltaine, 1900, 22–23.
determined that they should have the opportunity.¹

"National life and national feeling — these had always been
the basis of admirable literature," Yeats declared at an early
lecture.² However, equal emphasis was placed on their desire to
create a literary theatre as well as a national one, as the theatre
programme for the first performance makes clear:

By the word "literary" is meant production which, however much
it may fall short of its aim, will at least be inspired by
artistic ideas, uninfluenced by the purpose which under present
conditions governs the production of plays on the regular stage
— that of achieving immediate commercial success. The Irish
Literary Theatre will appeal rather to the intellect and spirit
than to the senses. It will eventually, it is hoped, furnish
a vehicle for the literary expression of the national thought
and ideals of Ireland such as has not hitherto been in
existence. In this object it hopes for the support of Irish
people of all sections who desire to aid in serving the higher
intellectual and artistic interests of the country.

In order to further their aesthetic aims, they insisted that "in
all or almost all cases the plays must be published before they
are acted, and no play will be published which could not hope to
succeed as a book." ³

In these first three years of experiment, therefore, the
principles were established and the dual aim acknowledged; the

¹ Beltaine, 1900, 22.
² Lecture on the Irish Literary Theatre, Daily Express, 8 May
1899, 6. Cf. report of same lecture by Irish Daily Independent, 8 May
1899: "What they now aimed at was the making of an ark where the
few who remained faithful to intellectual ideals might take refuge
until the time of debasement ceased."
³ Courtney, Edward Martyn and the Irish Theatre, 71. Many
critics objected to the terminology, especially United Irishman,
whose editor, William Rooney, doubted "the possibilities of
revolutionising taste by appealing to the intellect," 29 April
1899, 1.
⁴ Beltaine, 1899, 7.
theatre would be national, but first it must be art. In 1900 Yeats had felt sufficiently encouraged to write,

We have brought the "literary drama" to Ireland, and it has become a reality. ...In Ireland, we had among our audience almost everybody who is making opinion in Ireland, who is a part of his time, and numbers went out of the playhouse thinking a little differently of that Ireland which their work is shaping: some went away angry, some delighted, but all had seen that upon the stage at which they could not look altogether unmoved....On the whole, therefore, I have a good hope that our three years of experiment, which is all we proposed to ourselves at the outset, will make literary drama permanent in Ireland during our time, and give the Irish nation a new method of expression.

But already in 1901, the final year of the Irish Literary Theatre, the emphasis was more national than literary. Diarmuid and Grania, an uneasy attempt at modernizing folk drama, proved beyond the capacities of the English company; and Douglas Hyde's Casadh an Teagáin, the first Gaelic play produced in a theatre, was acted by amateurs, members of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League, under the direction of W.G. Fay. Present in the audience were Frank Fay and John Millington Synge. So far as the venture had been "an experimental movement to test whether Irish plays could be acted by professional actors," the results were negative.2 Actors as well as audience would have to be trained. And so the experiment ended, sufficiently successful as far as audience and playwrights were concerned; not so promising when it came to theatrical conditions. The Directors retired, intending to return to their "proper work," which, Yeats strongly affirmed, "did not include theatrical management."3 Martyn and Moore turned their attention elsewhere; Yeats and Lady Gregory sat back and waited.

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1Beltaine,1900,4-5.
3"Windlestraws," Samhain,1901,3.
But the experiment had been more successful than the Directors at first realized, for the next move came from within, and this time the impetus was almost entirely national. In 1899 Willie and Frank Fay, the brothers who had for some time been prominent entertainers in the clubrooms and "Coffee Palaces" of Dublin, had organized a small group of amateur actors called the Ormonde Dramatic Society. Both had watched with interest the efforts of the Irish Literary Theatre, Frank reviewing the productions for United Irishman and frequently writing long articles on the necessity of Irish actors for Irish plays. They had recently been asked by Maud Gonne's Inghinidhe na hÉireann, the Daughters of Erin, to produce some tableaux of Irish historical subjects. In August 1901 in the Antient Concert Rooms, which two years earlier had sheltered the Irish Literary Theatre, they presented Alice Milligan's Deliverance of Red Hugh to an appreciative audience which included Yeats, Lady Gregory, and AE. All were impressed; Yeats complimented Frank Fay on "the grave acting" of his company, and encouraged by their success the company reassembled as W.G. Fay's Irish National Dramatic Society. The challenge of the Irish Literary Society had been accepted.

In the meantime Samhain appeared, indicating that the Irish Literary Theatre had completed its experiment but was looking about for a successor. The Fays were not to wear the mantle yet, for the Directors made it clear that two paths lay open, one representing the cosmopolitan ideal advocated by Martyn and Moore, the other reflecting the narrower aims of the more fervent nationalists. Both groups recognized the necessity of training actors, raising funds, and touring.

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2 Fay, The Abbey Theatre, 34. Cf. Dudley Digges, "A Theatre was Made," The Irish Digest, October 1939, 11-14; Padraic Colum, The Road Round Ireland (NY:Macmillan,1930), 315. However, he criticized Miss Milligan's play for being in two scenes, Samhain, 1901, 4.
Ireland. However, one advocated working from without in, suggesting help from leading actors (preferably Irish, probably English) and local endowment; the other insisted that endowment would eventually lead to compromise and English actors to English plays. Yeats himself publicly indicated a desire to withdraw from active participation, at the same time shrewdly refraining from commitment to either viewpoint:

I do not know what Lady Gregory or Mr. Moore think of these projects. I am not going to say what I think. I have spent much of my time and more of my thought these last ten years on Irish organisation, and now that the Irish Literary Theatre has completed the plan I had in my head ten years ago, and that others may have had in their heads for all I know, I want to get back to primary ideas. I want to put old stories into verse, and if I put them into dramatic verse it will matter less to me henceforward who plays them than what they play, and how they play it.

And in a letter to Lady Gregory, he remarked privately but less astutely,

How Moore lives in the present! If the National Theatre is ever started, what he is and what I am will be weighed and very little what we have said or done. A phrase more or less matters little. When he has got more experience of public life he will know how little these things matter — yet I suppose we would both be more popular if I could keep from saying what I think and he from saying what he does not think. You may tell him that the wisest of men does not know what is expedient, but that we can all get a very good idea as to what is our own particular truth.

Lady Gregory was also biding her time, and replied to Yeats,

If all breaks up, we must try and settle something with Fay, possibly a week of the little plays he has been doing through the spring. I have a sketch in my head that might do for Hyde to work on. I will see if it is too slight when I have noted it down, and if not, will send it to you.

219 November 1901, Letters, 359.
3Our Irish Theatre, 30. The play was probably Twenty-Five.
At this point the Fays themselves stepped in. The second act of AE's *Deirdre* appeared in the *New Ireland Review* in November, and Frank Fay asked for a third act with permission to produce all three. AE suggested they approach Yeats, who gave them *Kathleen-ni-Houlihan*. Maud Gonne agreed to act in the title role, and the company included Maire Quinn, Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh [Walker], Dudley Digges, P.J. Kelly, Padraic Colum, James Cousins, Fred Ryan, all fervent nationalists who would later contribute to the Abbey Theatre. The plays were a success, with Edward Martyn's the only dissenting voice. The Fays and the nationalist group from which they drew their support were growing stronger. Again Yeats was approached, this time for a little comedy "about a man who made soup out of a stone."¹ The remainder of the programme came from the company and their supporters: James Cousins supplied *The Sleep of the King* and *The Racing Lug*, Fred Ryan *The Laying of the Foundations*, Father P.T. McGinley their second play in Irish, *Eilís agus an bhean deirce* (Ellis and the Beggar Man). Once more the little amateur company changed its name, officially amalgamating with the earlier more ambitious scheme represented by Yeats and Lady Gregory, for Martyn and Moore had long since withdrawn. Yeats became President of the Irish National Theatre Society, with Maud Gonne, AE and Douglas Hyde as Vice-Presidents, and W.G. Fay

¹Frank Fay, to Yeats, quoted in Fay, *The Abbey Theatre*, 41.
as Stage Manager.\(^1\) Before he had an opportunity of leaving it, Yeats was once more involved in "Theatre business, management of men."\(^2\)

He wrote *On Baile's Strand*, *The Hour-Glass*, and *The King's Threshold*  \(^3\) with the Fays in mind, and gave them *The Shadowy Waters*. More important for the future of the theatre, he introduced J.M. Synge.

Although from the beginning of the second movement Yeats was considered one of the leaders, the balance of power for several years was an uneasy one, Yeats, Lady Gregory and eventually Synge on the side of the Fays, AE and the nationalists in effective opposition.

Most of the actors, drawn from the various nationalist groups in Dublin, looked upon membership in the theatre as a part of their political activities. They had at first wanted AE as President because he was more sympathetic to their feelings; but AE retired in favour of Yeats.\(^4\) Yeats took an active part in determining policy.

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\(^1\) Unless otherwise stated, the information for this section is drawn from papers in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, the Henderson and Holloway collections in the National Library of Ireland, Malone's *The Irish Theatre*, and Gerard Fay's *The Abbey Theatre*, which draws upon his father's unpublished papers. However, the conclusions drawn are the present writer's own. Professor Ellis-Fermor, *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, Appendices 1 and 2, dates the foundation of the Irish National Theatre Society as April 1902. However, correspondence between the Secretary, Fred Ryan, W.G. Fay, and Yeats, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, indicates that although an informal organization took place in 1902, no rules were drawn up until February 1903.


\(^3\) Cf. Letters to Lady Gregory, 5 April 1902 and 13 June 1902, *Letters*, 369 and 375; Note to *The King's Threshold* and *On Baile's Strand*. Being Volume Three of *Plays for an Irish Theatre* (London: Bullen, 1904), vii. Here Yeats refers to "Mr. Fay's 'Irish National Theatre.'"

\(^4\) Fay, *The Abbey Theatre*, 44-45; Letters from Fred Ryan to Yeats, 10 August 1902, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
and publicizing the movement's aims and theories not only in Ireland but in England. However, AE's voice carried as much weight. Each member of the society had an equal vote, and as the actors outnumbered the playwrights and producers, much "lobbying" was necessary if Yeats and the Fays were to get their way. With the acceptance of In the Shadow of the Glen, shortly after their successful first visit to London, feelings ran high, and the first open split occurred; Maud Gonne, Dudley Digges, and Maire Quinn, whose disapproval of The Land of Heart's Desire as an insult to their religion had prevented its production, now resigned at the further "insult to Irish womanhood" implied by In the Shadow of the Glen. Yeats was relieved, and in a letter to Frank Fay indicated that this defection of the strongest national element would make it easier "to keep a pure artistic ideal." Differences between the two leaders finally came to a head during the winter of 1903-04, while Yeats was lecturing in America and AE was left in charge. There was further rebellion in the ranks, this time the actors objecting to "the way in which plays were accepted or rejected without their consent," AE reported to Yeats.

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1Yeats gave frequent lectures on "The Reform of the Theatre" as well as on the "New Art" of chanting. Cf. Letter to Florence Farr, 14 May 1903, Letters, 401; letter from Ryan to Yeats, 16 February 1903, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats; Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 32-33.

2Fay, The Abbey Theatre, 51 and 60; Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 36. On the other hand, Colum explains Maud Gonne's resignation as arising from the Fays' refusal to produce The Saxon Shillin', cf. Robinson, op. cit., 37-38.


4Probably December 1903, Some Passages from the Letters of AE, 42-43.
But the solution AE offered, "some definite rules on a democratic principle," further limited the powers of President and Vice-Presidents, and left the majority of actors in control. Controversy had also arisen over the question of touring. The Society was invited to take part in the International Exposition at St. Louis, Missouri; AE objected on principle, but a few more actors left to join Dudley Digges, taking with them permission to produce Deirdre. AE replied in full to a violent objection from Yeats, at the same time clearly stating his own ambitions for the Irish National Theatre Society:

With regard to the question of a vice-president giving away the rights of one of its plays I have already written to you today, and I, for one, will protest against the company having any right to control my action in regard to my disposal of my work outside Ireland or England. You say that the only chance of the company making money is by an American tour. If that is so, then I think

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1 Among the papers in the possession of Mrs. Yeats there is an unsigned, undated page containing two amendments, III and IV, which appear to belong to this time and are the rules referred to in the letters from AE to Yeats. Amendment IV reads, "In all cases a copy of the play proposed for production shall be submitted to the President and Vice Presidents, or to such of them as may be unable to be present at the reading, together with the Stage Manager's comment as to any alterations that seem to him desirable for theatrical reasons. This Rule, however, must not be considered as limiting the right of the Stage Manager to suggest to the Author such slight changes as may seem desirable during the rehearsal of the play. The opinion of the President and Vice Presidents (should they desire to express any opinion) shall be read to the Company before the final vote which decides upon the acceptance or rejection of the Play. The President and Vice Presidents can vote by proxy. Every Member of the Society shall have one vote, and at the request of any Member the voting shall be taken by ballot. A three quarters majority of the votes shall be required before any play is accepted. The author shall not be allowed to be present when the decision is taken." The Members of the Society were the President, the Vice Presidents and the Actors. In his diary 15 February 1907, National Library of Ireland MS 1805, Holloway maliciously quotes a story told him by D.J. O'Donoghue, "that Yeats sent in a play anonymously to the Irish National Theatre Society before it was turned into a limited company and it was not accepted."

2 According to a letter from Yeats to Lady Gregory, 4 May 1903, Letters, 400, the request was by Lady Aberdeen after the company's successful London visit. Yeats remarks that "Fay is very anxious for it, as he thinks it would start them with prestige and experience." Cf. AE's letters to Yeats, Some Passages from the Letters of AE, 1904, 44-46. Yeats kept closely in touch with the theatre while he was away, cf. Letters, 419, 420, 423, 424-25. Also letter quoted by Fay, The Abbey Theatre, 69.
the Company had better dissolve at once for I would lose all interest if it were only to live for America by America. I have no interest in its work outside Ireland and if it is hopeless to expect success by working in Ireland with occasional tours in England then it is in my opinion useless to continue taking any interest in it. With this I think the company would agree. They have refused, rightly I think, to go to the States because it would injure their work here. I am sorry Digges and his people went also because I would like to have seen two or three Irish companies in Ireland. I have quite as much interest in the Company as you have, and in my own way have worked quite as much as you have to preserve it here, settling to the best of my ability the rows which threatened its existence, but if they were to assume the right to control my disposal of what I write outside these Islands I would withdraw from them at once. You and the Company will only be known by what you do over here by personal work here, and I think the company realise this well enough.

A few days later he resigned, again explaining in full his position to Yeats:

...I feel that as your views and mine about the spirit in which the Society should work are so different, and as the future success of the Society must be to a great extent bound up with your future work, whereas I in all probability will never write again in the dramatic form, it would be unfitting that I should retain an official position in the Society with which your name is associated and which depends almost altogether on your work for its success.

In the struggle between nation and art, Yeats had once more won.

But new complications were to enter on the heels of AE which, though increasing Yeats's power in the movement, were to cause further

1 Letter early 1904, Some Passages from the Letters of AE, 46-48. Although Lady Gregory's name does not enter the controversy, she was apparently involved throughout with Yeats's plans. Cf. Yeats to Russell, April 1904, Letters, 433-34.

2 Letter 1904, Some Passages..., 49-50. Cf. Yeats to Katharine Tynan, September 1906, Letters, 477: "When we started on the theatre he [Russell] actually tried to persuade Lady Gregory and myself to keep it a small theatre, that various interesting souls might be given the opportunity of dramatic expression for the soul's health."
crises and to force Yeats once more to decide between nationalism and art. Writing in his Autobiographies many years later, Yeats remarks, "Two events brought us victory: a friend gave us a theatre, and we found a strange man of genius, John Synge." Miss Horniman and Synge arrived in the same year, 1903, and made their debuts at the same performance, Synge with In the Shadow of the Glen, Miss Horniman with the costume designs for The King's Threshold. "A painter, learned in astrology," she had known Yeats for at least ten years both as a fellow theosophist and as a generous backer of his artistic enterprises. In an article written twelve years after her withdrawal from the scheme she helped finance, she recounts her own version of the origin of the Abbey Theatre:

1 Autobiographies, 566-67.
2 In a letter 9 October 1903, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, she writes, "Do you realise that you have now given me the right to call myself 'artist'? How I thank you!" The costumes were apparently not too successful, according to Yeats's letter to Frank Fay, 20 January 1904, Letters, 425-26. And a letter from Miss Horniman to Yeats, 16 July 1906, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, states, "As soon as I found that you and I did not agree about 'decorative treatment'...I never interfered with the 'mise en scene' again."
3 Cf. Introductory poem by Masefield, Some Memories of W.B. Yeats, 3-4.
4 As already stated, she had financed Florence Farr's management of the Avenue Theatre when The Land of Heart's Desire was first produced in 1894. Her letters to Yeats frequently refer to their work in astrology and theosophy. She was apparently known to AE in the late '80's also, for in a letter to Mrs. Coates about 1886, he writes, "You talk about leaving Armagh....do you think of trying Miss Horniman?" Some Passages from the Early Letters of AE, Dublin Magazine, April-June 1940, 16-17.
I sat alone here in my flat making the costumes for the Irish Players to wear in "The King's Threshold." I was thinking about the hard conditions in which they were working, and the idea struck me that if and when enough money were to turn up, I would spend it on hiring or building a little hall where they could rehearse and perform in fair comfort. I wrote at once to W.B.Yeats, who was then in Ireland. He was not very enthusiastic on the subject. Time went on, and being in Dublin I searched to see if there were any possible places there. Some money came to me quite unexpectedly -- enough for me to hire the hall of a derelict Mechanics' Institute in Marlborough Street. There was no space for a vestibule, but the deserted Morgue of the City of Dublin was adjoining, so I hired that from the Corporation. The building eventually was called the Abbey Theatre.¹

Since 1901 Frank Fay had been advocating that the Irish Literary Theatre build a hall of their own,² but help finally came not from Ireland, but from England, not for nationalist reasons but for cosmopolitan ideals, and not to the society itself but to W.B. Yeats.³ In her formal letter offering the use of the theatre to the Irish National Theatre Society, Miss Horniman stressed the Samhain principles advertised by Yeats;⁴ in her personal letters

²"The Irish Literary Theatre," United Irishman, 4 May 1901, 6; letter to Yeats, 25 July 1902, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, suggesting Martyn as a possible benefactor.
³From the amount of correspondence between Miss Horniman, Yeats, Lady Gregory, Synge, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, of which Willie Fay knew very little, it is apparent that Miss Horniman at no time felt she was endowing an Irish scheme, but rather an artistic scheme which happened to be set in Ireland and at the same time making use of Irish actors. Cf. Fay and Carswell, The Fays of the Abbey Theatre, and Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, which both support the opposing view. Gerard Fay, The Abbey Theatre, makes use of some of this correspondence, but tends to support his uncle's viewpoint.
⁴Samhain, 1904, contains Miss Horniman's formal offer and the company's letter of acceptance, as well as an elaboration of Yeats's principles.
to the Directors she made even more clear her own high ambitions and intense dislikes: "The theatre is a means for carrying out a certain theatrical scheme and as long as you continue in the same path, the theatre is at the disposal of you and your friends under whatever title you may choose to use," she wrote to Yeats on the formation of the Limited Society in January 1906. During the same week she wrote to Synge: "The Theatre was given for the carrying out of Mr. Yeats's artistic dramatic schemes and for no other reason. These patriots are all jealous of Art, they want to keep the standard down so as to shine themselves." Yet she also stressed that her main interest was art, not Yeats: "I wanted to make the nucleus of an Art theatre, not for your work in particular, but a theatre where such work would be done and other good work too of all kinds." The Dublin theatre was to be "the nucleus--the factory--the school--for an international theatre." As an admirer of Wagner, she appreciated the opportunities such a theatre could offer but stopped short of Wagner's theories of the "folk." The fact that the Abbey Theatre happened to be situated in Ireland was purely incidental ("extrinsic to my scheme itself"); Irish plays and players would be accepted if they conformed to her demands for art. Neither nation nor individual could be considered apart from this ideal.¹

In December 1904 the Abbey Theatre opened with Yeats's On Baile's Strand and Lady Gregory's Spreading the News. The company

¹Letters from Miss Horniman to Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory, and from Miss Darragh to Yeats, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
now included Sara Allgood, and Willie Fay was on full salary as Stage Manager and general overseer. The Patent had been granted in Lady Gregory’s name, as Miss Horniman was not resident in Ireland. The venture first suggested by the Irish Literary Theatre and taken up by the Fays had gained considerably both in artistic and practical strength, and was now "the first endowed theatre in any English speaking country."¹ The following year it became apparent that the group could not continue under the present democratic and rather chaotic conditions. Plans were made to make the society a professional theatre, and Miss Horniman offered a subsidy of £800. Again AE stepped in to help with the constitution, but this time he sided with Yeats and the Fays; and now Synge was also an important voice. After much consultation between the dramatists and producers, the Articles of Association were passed, making the Irish National Society a limited company carrying on the objects of the Society of 1903, but managed by a Board of Directors who were empowered to "appoint and remove stage manager, business manager and all other employees, fix their salaries and arrange their duties." Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge were appointed Directors. Shareholders included the Fay brothers, Sara Allgood, Udolphus Wright and Vera Esposito.² Yeats


²Rules of the National Theatre Society Limited, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. Also in the possession of Mrs. Yeats are the letters between Yeats and Lady Gregory discussing the proposed Articles and their plans for carrying the scheme through. Cf. Yeats to Florence Farr, 6 October 1905, Letters, 463.
had again won, but without yet realizing it, the Fays had lost power, and the theatre was more than ever a literary theatre created for dramatists. Still more actors left the society, again for political reasons. The remaining nationalists, led by Maire Nic Shuibhlaigh, felt that the Society was moving too far from the aims of a national theatre; after much discussion they seceded and formed their own group, taking Padraic Colum with them. Frank Fay was granted an additional ten shillings a week to train the remaining actors in verse speaking. Maire O'Neill (Sara Allgood's sister) joined the company. The Theatre continued.

Now that the demands of the extreme nationalists could no longer hamper them, the Directors were free to develop the theatre along their own lines. But here again trouble started, for each Director was finding his own path, discovering his individual method, and demanding special response from the company. All remained constant in their emphasis upon a literary theatre, but it soon became clear

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1Among the Yeats papers are letters from W.G.Fay to Yeats clearly stating his own position in the company, and insisting upon a formal business arrangement: "Without my brother and myself there would never have existed any acting society to produce these plays and if these people that we have made dont think we are competent we are both ready to leave them to do as they like when they can elect and vote and play round till further notice." Gerard Fay, The Abbey Theatre, 100-101 quotes excerpts from this letter. In January 1906, Lady Gregory drafted a long statement to the seceding players concerning use of the theatre, division of funds, and the preservation of Miss Horniman's rights in the Patent, again emphasizing that "the theatre was given to carry out Mr. Yeats' dramatic projects. No one not acting in association with him, least of all anyone who is in revolt against those projects, has any moral right to expect the theatre free." Colum withdrew his plays, but gave back The Land in August 1907, according to Holloway's diary for that year, 418.
that more than one interpretation was involved. Yeats's dream was still of a poetic drama concentrating on romantic and historical plays, a dream shared and encouraged by Miss Horniman. Synge and Lady Gregory on the other hand, although both might experiment with historical drama, required a different treatment for their peasant plays. As we have seen, other playwrights had appeared, writing mainly of the towns and requiring an interpretation more in the naturalist tradition. The movement which Yeats had visualized as "a return to the people" was itself becoming restricted, and although his sympathies extended to the plays produced by his fellow directors, he saw the apex of poetry receding in the distance. However Samhain of 1906 still sounded optimistic:

Our work has developed more quickly upon one side, and more slowly upon another, than I had foreseen. We have done little, though we have done something, to find music that would not obscure the meaning and the rhythm of words, and we have done nothing for the story-tellers, but now that our country comedies, with their abundant and vivid speech, are well played and well spoken, we may try out the whole adventure.¹

He comforted himself by assuring others that "the building up of a theatre like ours is the work of years," and spoke of the even more distant future:

We are now fairly satisfied with the representation of peasant life, and we can afford to give the greater part of our attention to other expressions of our art and of our life. Our romantic work and poetical work once reasonably good, we can, if but the dramatist arrive, take up the life of our drawingrooms, and see if there is something characteristic there, something which our nationality may enable us to express better than others, and so create plays of that life and means to play them as beautiful

¹Samhain, 1906,3; cf. Samhain, 1908.
as a play of Hauptmann's or of Ibsen's upon the German or Scandinavian type. I am not myself interested in this kind of work, and do not believe it to be as important as contemporary critics think it is, but a theatre, such as we project, should give a reasonably complete expression to the imaginative interests of its country. In any case, it was easier, and therefore wiser, to begin where our art is most unlike that of others, with the representation of country life.¹

Miss Horniman was not as sanguine; it was difficult to stand by and see one's money devoted to a scheme which seemed to depart in every way from the original project. Moreover, she was not being given either the courtesy or acknowledgement that was her due; suggestions made by her in good faith were shrugged off by the hot-tempered, overworked Willie Fay; Synge, always immersed in his art and private emotions, tried to ignore her frequent and on the whole justifiable tirades. However, she still had faith in Yeats and Lady Gregory, and in their dream. During the summer of 1906, with her usual generosity and solid sense, she resigned any rights she might have had in the theatre policy and announced "Home Rule" at the Abbey, but she still handled the purse strings, and was determined to try once more to salvage "that part of the cargo which is of real importance," Yeats's plays.² The plan she suggested coincided with Yeats's dissatisfaction with the direction the theatre appeared to be heading: the engagement of a Managing Director ("who should be fairly young, of good manners, and such a temper as will make the position possible for him") who would take over the stage management and

²Miss Horniman to Yeats, November 1905 to January 1906, letters in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
production of all but peasant plays, thereby building up the side of the repertoire which at the moment was being neglected. All of the officers had been troubled for some time by the amount of time demanded by the business side of the theatre, and in an effort to ease the load had appointed W.A. Henderson, secretary of the National Literary Society, as business secretary in August 1906. Clearly, however, this was not enough; in December Yeats addressed a lengthy memorandum to his fellow directors, elaborating the problem and suggesting a solution. The popularity of the theatre at the moment depended, he felt, on Lady Gregory and William Boyle, who would eventually tire the audience or create a school of bad imitators. On the other hand, no second verse writer had appeared, and his own work would not draw large audiences for a considerable time. Actors, audience, and future dramatists would therefore have to be trained, and this would require enlarging the capacities of the present company, increasing the number and types of plays available for performance, and if necessary bringing in both players and teachers. "We should keep before our minds," he warned, "the final object which is to create in this country a National Theatre something after the continental pattern.

...To be artistically noble it will have to be the acknowledged centre for some kind of art which no other theatre in the world has in the same perfection....Such a Theatre must however if it is to do the educational work of a National Theatre be prepared
to perform even though others can perform them better representative plays of all great schools.

The ideal solution would be, he suggested, the addition of more capital in order to engage actors "whose imaginations will express themselves in other forms of work with the same ease and abundance with which W.Fay's imagination expresses itself in comedy"; to employ a teacher who could develop this necessary aspect of the theatre; to become a true repertory theatre, playing continuously; and to engage a Managing Director to correlate all these activities.

This was an ideal, and at the moment highly improbable. But a smaller scheme which could gradually develop these conditions was possible: Willie Fay must be freed from the business and non-artistic side of the theatre in order that his talent for comedy might have the opportunity of improving; a verse teacher should be brought over once a year; Yeats, as the only writer of verse drama, should have the right to bring in players when necessary for the proper production of his own work; and foreign masterpieces should be produced.\(^1\)

His fellow directors' reactions were not surprising, but unexpectedly violent. Synge's reply ran to three typed pages: the unique value of their theatre was, he believed, the fact that the movement was entirely creative, producing "a new dramatic literature

\(^1\) Memorandum in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. He was still reserving the right to bring in actors for his verse dramas in 1915, memorandum in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, spring of 1915.
in which the interest is in the novelty and power of the new work rather than the quality of the execution”; to turn this now into an executive movement "in which the interest lies in the fine and careful interpretation of works that are already received as classics" would be disastrous for the movement and for Ireland. Rather than copying the continental repertory movement, they should do their best to avoid it for the next ten years; "national dramas have never been created by such a theatre." Continuous playing should be avoided as well, and the company kept small so that it could remain occupied by the small store of native plays at present available. As for the suggestion of bringing in a business manager or "foreign" actor,

I object to giving Miss Horniman any control over the company whatever. If she is given power it ceases to be an Irish movement worked by Irish people to carry out their ideas, so that if any such arrangement becomes necessary I shall withdraw -- my plays of course might remain if they were wanted. I object to Miss Horniman's control not because she is English, but because I have no confidence in her ideals.1

Yeats would clearly get no encouragement from that quarter.

Meanwhile Miss Horniman renewed her offer to hire a new man to replace the "incapable" Willie Fay, describing the theatre as nothing but "an Irish toy."

Lady Gregory was not in favour of the proposals either; she did not want the Fays "shoved out either by force or gentler means," and saw this final secession an inevitable result. She wrote to Synge, "I think as Yeats and Fay represent the

1Comments on Yeats's memorandum in the possession of Mrs. Stephens. A slightly different version of the same reply, in a letter to Lady Gregory, is in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.

2Letter to Yeats, 13 January 1906, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
extreme right and left, we who are the moderate centre are best out of it, leaving the rearrangement to them." But she also enclosed two proposals, one "more logical and spirited," the other "easier," adding, "We can take Miss Horniman's letter seriously or not, as suits us best." The spirited second proposal doubtless reflected Lady Gregory's own feelings:

We cannot with self respect, and looking at the list of plays produced and the notices of them, accept Miss Horniman's statement that we are "in the public eye an Irish toy." We cannot accept her statement that our stage manager having had "his chance to carry out what he could" has "proved his absolute incapacity." To accept the new man would be to accept these statements. We claim six months in which to work in our own way. We claim the right of taking our work to London and elsewhere before the end of that time, "the public eye" may judge what we can do while still working by ourselves. At the end of six months, should Miss Horniman renew her offer, we should hold a meeting of authors and actors and make our decision. But the "easier" proposal was finally offered for Yeats's consideration. Synge and Lady Gregory would accept the new man subject to certain conditions: that W.G.Fay's wages be raised by a hundred pounds a year and that he be given a written contract defining his duties as producer of dialect plays; that the authors be free to withdraw their plays at the end of six months; that Synge's suggestions concerning the necessity for a national theatre be agreed upon; and that the new man be "a thorough theatrical business man, if possible an Irishman."
The new man was Ben Iden Payne, who arrived in May 1907, produced Lady Gregory's translation of Maeterlinck's *L'Interieur* and Wilfred Scawen Blunt's *Fand*, and left in October. Yeats and Miss Horniman had lost by winning. But as usual many of Miss Horniman's points, although exaggerated, were accurate. "At this moment Fay in the form of Mr. Synge points one way, and I and your interest point in the other," she had written to Yeats on one occasion; on another, "I feel as if whatever we do will be frittered away unless Fay comes to the conclusion that the Directors must direct." Here she struck the root of the problem. Synge, like Lady Gregory and Yeats, believed in a literary theatre first, a national theatre second; concerning their first London visit in 1903 he had written to Frank Fay,

> Archer seems to criticise -- at least our prose plays -- as dramas first and literature afterwards. The whole interest of our movement is that our little plays try to be literature first -- i.e., to be personal, sincere and beautiful -- and drama afterwards.... strong and good dramas only will bring us people who are interested in the drama, and they are, after all, the people we must have.\(^3\)

But plays must be performed, and in the Fays both Synge and Lady Gregory had discovered actors who in their art employed the same

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1. 31 December 1906, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. Miss Horniman's attitude to Synge varied, depending upon his attitude towards her controversy with Fay. In 1905 she wrote to him, "I look upon you as one of the assets of the company," but at the same time his work remained a threat to Yeats's. Stephens MS.2003.
method of heightened realism found in the plays. The Fays belonged
to the theatre each desired; but to them the Fays were actors first,
producers second.\(^1\) The Fays in turn believed in a national theatre,
in an artistic rather than a political sense; they had founded the
Ormonde Dramatic Society and then sought Irish plays suitable for
their Irish actors. "The Abbey Theatre was first and foremost a
theatrical not a literary movement," Willie Fay insisted. "What
brought us together was enthusiasm for the art of acting."\(^2\) And as
such, in accordance with general theatrical tradition, the Stage
Manager should reign supreme. This basic conflict was inevitable
and had shown itself as early as the struggle over Cousins' plays in
1902.\(^3\) It finally reached a climax in the year of The Playboy, when
Fay objected to the Directors' direct interference with actors and
insisted on the right to choose the plays.\(^4\) If the Directors were

\(^1\) Cf. Yeats's letter to Synge, December 1907, Greene and Stephens,
\textit{op. cit.}, 281-82: "I too think compromise is out of the question or
drifting on - but I won't act without Lady Gregory as the loss of Fay
affects her work chiefly." Also 1906 Memorandum.


\(^3\) See above, Part Two, chapter 8, p.502-504.

\(^4\) The struggle between the Fays and the company had been going
on for some time. Willie was not getting on with the actors, who
threatened to resign, \textit{cf. Greene and Stephens, \textit{op. cit.}}, 281-282;
letter signed by Sara Allgood, Arthur Sinclair, J.M.Kerrigan, and
Maire O'Neill, to the \textit{Dublin Daily Express}, 22 May 1908,6,contradicting
the statements Fay was making in America; also Yeats's letter to the
Editor, \textit{Daily Express}, 22 May 1908,6. Holloway in his diary for 23
November 1907, National Library of Ireland MS 1805,791-792, however,
reports a conversation with the Fays and Ernest Vaughan, one of the
actors: "They are all quite sick of the Yeats- Gregory management.
Willie Fay thinks them both off their heads....Yeats had better return
to his lyrics again. He had never done anything to equal \textit{The Land of
Heart's Desire} or \textit{Countess Kathleen}. He and Lady Gregory were played
out as dramatists. He made sure that Fitzmaurice's new play would be
on in January. He was sick of the whole thing."
to grant his request, they would be renouncing the *Samhain* principles on which their entire work, peasant and poetry, was based; by refusing, they rejected not only the Fays but their last opportunity to join the traditional theatre.

One more schism was to come however, it too inevitable, and again involving two opposing but equally valid views of art. Miss Horniman had finally had enough; the repertory theatre she and Yeats had planned had not materialized, and she saw the poet whose art she admired spending his energies on "business of men." In July 1908 she indicated that she would not be prepared to renew her subsidy at the expiration of the patent in 1910. By this time she had established her repertory theatre in Manchester (which in turn became the model for the Old Vic), and invited Yeats to join her:

I hope that when you have quite got rid of the remains of my old interference that you personally will see that I did my best to carry out the original scheme and that you will accept the fact that there is no place for you in it. Mr. Boyle would be much more useful, suitable and profitable in every way; if not Mr. Boyle, then some other man of like capacity. The very commonnesses in his work which you tried to get rid of are what are wanted, what are required in the natural development of a real theatre in Dublin for Dublin people. You and I tried to make it an Art theatre and we had not the living material to do it with. Your genius and my money together were helpless. We must both keep our promises uprightly, but we must not waste our gifts, we have no right to do so.¹

Yeats was obviously not happy with the Abbey, as his memorandum of two years earlier had indicated. At first he felt that the Fays would

¹Letter in Mrs. Yeats's possession, quoted by Fay, The Abbey Theatre, 123. Miss Horniman's theatre opened in Manchester in July 1907.
win, and wrote to Synge in August 1907:

You know of old that I don't believe that Fay is a very competent man to run a theatre, that in fact I think him particularly unfitted for it, but Miss Horniman has definitely announced that she will do nothing more for us at the end of two years. In all probability Fay may survive us, and at the end of that time may carry on some sort of touring company with our good will and what he wants of our plays. I wanted somebody in control over Fay, but now that plan has failed....The theatre is now a desperate enterprise and we must take desperate measures.1

If we think back to the two projects suggested in Samhain, 1901, it appears that the first course had been tried and found wanting, that the second was inevitable. Yeats's dream of a theatre modelled upon the continental repertory theatres had failed to materialize and the theatre evolving was one which had little room for his work. In Samhain, 1904, he had threatened the nationalists that literature "has an unlucky craving for reality" and would seek it where it might be found.2 The following year he had rapped the same knuckles, claiming that "so long as I have any control over the National Theatre Society it will be carried on in this spirit, call it art for art's sake if you will."3 Now was an opportunity to retire honourably for the same reasons he had first joined; the Abbey had not become the nationally centred cosmopolitan theatre he had dreamed of; perhaps that dream was impossible in Ireland. But Yeats refused:

I have thought carefully over your proposal of yesterday and have decided that it is impossible so far as I am concerned. I

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1Yeats to Synge, 14 August 1907, quoted by Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 273.
2Samhain, 1904, 55.
3Samhain, 1905, 13.
am not young enough to change my nationality -- it would really amount to that. Though I wish for a universal audience in playwriting there is always an immediate audience also. If I were to try to find this immediate audience in England I would fail through lack of understanding on my part perhaps through lack of sympathy. I understand my own race and in all my work, lyric or dramatic I have thought of it. If the theatre fails I may or may not write plays, -- there is always lyric poetry to return to -- but I shall write for my own people -- whether in love or hate of them matters little -- probably I shall not know which it is. Nor can I make any permanent allocation of my plays while the Irish theatre may at any moment need my help. At any moment I may have to appeal to friends for funds with a whole mass of plays for a bait.¹

However, the only new play by Yeats produced at the Abbey between 1908 and 1919 was The Golden Helmet (and its revision, The Green Helmet); when The Player Queen was finally produced in December, it had already received its première by the Stage Society in London. The Abbey instead became a business, and Yeats was determined to make it succeed. "I have often failed as a poet but not as a businessman," he wrote to Olivia Shakespear towards the end of his life.² The Abbey in its later form owes its life as much to that determination shared by Yeats and Lady Gregory, long after it ceased to be the personal venture they had planned, as to the playwrights who carried it off on another path. Samhain of 1908 announced new plans; before the patent expired they hoped "to have made the theatre either self-supporting or nearly so, and to be able to hand it over to some

¹Rough draft in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. Wade, Letters, 500, dates this as early 1908. It is likely that the offer was actually made in the autumn of 1907 while Yeats was in London. Cf. his letter to the Editor of the New York Gael, December 1899, Letters, 328: "I have always written as an Irish writer and with Ireland in my mind."

management that will work it as a business, while keeping its artistic aim."¹ In his diary for 1909 Yeats commented, "If at all possible I will now keep at the Theatre till I have seen produced a mass of fine work."² A small pamphlet marked *Paragraphs from Samhain: 1909*, "Private and Confidential," and signed by the two remaining Directors, had the same familiar ring: the problem of acquiring more money; and the desire to add more translations, enlarging the experience of the players in order to keep the theatre "intellectual and courageous."³ It is significant that in 1910, during a course of lectures attempting to raise the necessary capital, Yeats pleaded not for his own drama, but for the younger "Cork realists" who would be "driven into exile like Ibsen" if the Abbey found it necessary to close.⁴ As we shall see, for his own work he already had other plans.

Lady Gregory and Yeats continued to act in accordance with the Beltaine and Samhain principles, desiring to broaden the repertoire to include "masterpieces from every school...even though the public be slow to like that old stern art."⁵ They approached both Ricketts


² *Autobiographies*, 483-84.

³ In the possession of Mrs. Yeats. It has eight pages and is dated November 1909 from the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. The cover has Elinor Monsell's design of girl and wolf hound. This is not listed in Wade's *Bibliography*. A letter to Miss Horniman, 27 July 1909, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, reaffirms his belief that the theatre must continue. A statement in 1915 covers the same points.

⁴ Hone, W.B. *Yeats*, 251.

and Craig with requests to join their forces in Dublin, but although both, as we shall see, gave willingly of their advice and talents, both also preferred to remain free. In 1911, finding that the Abbey players had all too clearly become a company of "folk actors," they founded a school of acting under the leadership of Nugent Monck, whose first productions were medieval mysteries.\(^1\) In 1937, two years before Yeats's death, the Peacock, an experimental theatre, was opened under the direction of Miss Ria Mooney, present stage director of the Abbey Theatre. Lady Gregory had translated Molière, Sudermann and Maeterlinck; Yeats translated Sophocles.\(^2\) But the Abbey itself remained essentially a "people's" theatre; Yeats continued to experiment on his own, and even Lady Gregory moved away from "the Abbey method."

"All true arts, as distinguished from their commercial and mechanical imitations, are a festival where it is the fiddler who calls the tune," Yeats wrote in *Samhain*, 1906.\(^3\) The Directors of the

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\(^1\) Hone, *op.cit.*, 255; letter to J.B.Yeats, 5 March 1912, *Letters*, 567. Among the papers in the possession of Mrs. Yeats is a memorandum concerning arrangements for the school while the regular company is on tour, apparently written in 1911.

\(^2\) During the first years of the Abbey many productions of foreign masterpieces were contemplated but not realized: John Eglinton was translating Oedipus for Payne, Robert Gregory *Antigone*, Greene and Stephens, *op.cit.*, 213; Yeats had promised *Phèdre* to Miss Darragh in 1906; Mary Colum in *Life and the Dream* (NY: Doubleday, 1947), 372, records that Yeats had asked her to translate Claudel's plays for the Abbey. In 1913 translations of *Hannele* by Hauptmann and *There are Crimes and Crimes* and *The Stronger* by Strindberg were produced.

\(^3\) p.3.
Abbey went one step further and elevated the composer at the expense of the performer. As we have seen, the Directors were soon forced to distinguish between their requirements for their own plays and the business of training dramatists to keep the theatre going. This basic distinction between their duty as artists and their duty as educators would be more clearly marked as time went on and result in one of their most publicized crises, the rejection of O'Casey. But this distinction is apparent in all of their instructions to aspiring dramatists. In 1899 Yeats had written concerning the Irish Literary Theatre,

Our plays will all be about Irish subjects; and, if we can find enough writers, and I have little doubt we will find them, who will write with some depth and simplicity about legends associated with the rivers and mountains of Ireland, or about Irish historic personages and events, or about modern Irish life, an increasing number of persons will desire to hear a message that will so often illustrate the circumstance of their lives.1

Later they distributed a printed form which advised playwrights on the difference between Abbey plays and those suitable for the commercial theatre:

A play to be suitable for performance at the Abbey should contain some criticism of life, founded on the experience or personal observation of the writer, or some vision of life, of Irish life by preference, important from its beauty or from some excellence of style; and this intellectual quality is not more necessary to tragedy than to the gayest comedy.2

1"The Irish Literary Theatre," Literature, 6 May 1899, 474.

2"Advice to Playwrights who are sending Plays to the Abbey, Dublin," Our Irish Theatre, 100-102, Cf. Samhain, 1904, 11: "A play which seems to its writer to promise an ordinary London or New York success is very unlikely to please us, or succeed with our audience if it did."
Careful attention should be paid to dialogue, which must be true to the author without falling into "the base idioms of the newspaper."  

All plays were given careful reading individually by each director before a decision was made, and if the author showed promise he received a letter with full comments even though the play might be rejected. Dramatists were encouraged to write out their own personal emotions rather than conforming to type, as Yeats states in a letter to Miss Winifred Letts, whose play The Eyes of the Blind had a brief unhappy production in 1907:

If you would found your work as much as possible on real life you would find it at once easier to write and more powerful in structure. I mean if you would take the class of people you know most of and invent stories not to amuse or startle but to express the truths of their life. Probably you allow yourself to read authors who keep on the surface. If one writes one can hardly ever afford to read anything but old and simple books, or if modern books only the greatest... Those fantastic plots, a product of the contemporary stage, make sincerity almost impossible. A good play must have truth of atmosphere as in poetic writing -- a truth of fact or truth of idea (as with Shaw who overflows with theoretical energy) and truth of fact is generally the best to aim for at the start with most writers for the stage.... Take any life you know and express its reality as your own eyes have seen that reality. To know what one has seen is the greater part of the labour of literature.

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1 Samhain, 1902, 9.
2 Among the papers in the possession of Mrs. Yeats are detailed criticisms of plays which apparently never reached the Abbey stage. Holloway reports a discussion with W. G. Fay in March 1907, MS 1805, 166: "No play that was any good that had been sent in had been refused. Good plays were uncommonly hard to get." On the occasion of the rumour that the Fays had left because of the Directors' injustice in their choice of plays, Yeats wrote to the Editor of the Daily Express, 15 January 1908, 8, challenging him to appoint three persons chosen from the literary men of Dublin, to read the plays rejected by the Abbey during the preceding twelve months.
3 Reprinted by Winifred Letts, "The Fays of the Abbey Theatre," The Fortnightly, June 1948, 420-423. Parts of two letters are quoted in the article, which is not included in Wade's Bibliography. The letter was apparently written shortly after April, 1907, Cf. also Samhain, 1904, 21 and Samhain, 1908, 7.
But too frequently the dramatists did not appear, and those who did exhibited an increasing penchant for modern Irish life at the expense of the legendary and historical material the Directors also recommended. Too few could "stand above their subject and play with it,...their writing...a victory as well as a creation."¹ As time went on fewer still showed any strong personal feeling;² in later years Yeats sadly reflected that "the old idealistic tradition" seemed to have disappeared "from great spaces of the public mind."³ But that single conviction of its founders, "Not what you want but what we want," remained; despite controversy, the theatre remained free while the Directors retained control:

The moment any dramatist has some dramatic sense and applies it to our Irish theme he is played. We may help him with his technique or to clear his mind of the second-hand or the second-rate in their cruder forms, but beyond that we can do nothing. He must find himself and mould his dramatic form to his nature after his own fashion, and that is why we have produced some of the best plays of modern times, and a far greater number of the worst.

In his open letter to Lady Gregory in 1919, although he expressed his disappointment in the type of theatre produced by their labours,

¹Letter to Florence Farr, 6 October 1905, Letters, 464.
²In On the Boiler, 32, Yeats recalls accepting a play he disliked because "the author had won the right to decide upon the merits of his own work." However, in production the play "displayed a series of base actions without anything to show that its author disapproved or expected us to do so."
⁴Ibid., 13-14. Cf. Synge's comments on Yeats's memorandum, 1906: "a creation of a new dramatic literature in which the interest is the novelty and power of the new work rather than the quality of the execution," Stephens MS.
Yeats could proudly claim that the Abbey dramatist had at least benefited from "our own rejection of all gross propaganda and gross imitation of the comic column in the newspapers."\(^1\) The Theatre of Art had perhaps failed, but the Irish Theatre they created was in this sense at least a credit to their nation. "One should try and take the whole question before 'the long-remembering harpers' and their eternal audience," Lady Gregory had written many years earlier.\(^2\) While they remained to call the tune, they sought the best music they could find. But the harmonies had altered.

**Actors and Producers**

But actors lacking music  
Do most excite my spleen,  
They say it is more human  
To shuffle, grunt and groan,  
Not knowing what unearthly stuff  
Rounds a mighty scene...\(^3\)

During a meeting of the Irish Literary Society in London in 1897, Bernard Shaw claimed, "and as to saying there are good Irish actors, there are not, and there won't be until the conditions in Ireland are favourable for the production of drama."\(^4\) If the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre were to make the creation of drama possible in Ireland, they would also have to find actors to perform in it. Their first three years of experiment had proved

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\(^1\) Plays and Controversies, 204.  
\(^2\) Hugh Lane's Life and Achievement, 52.  
\(^3\) Yeats, "The Old Stone Cross" (1938), Collected Poems, 365-66.  
\(^4\) Malone, The Irish Drama, 39.
that the plan was possible, but also clearly indicated that Irish drama required Irish actors. Here they were fortunate, for the Fays with their small band of amateurs were already gathered, waiting for the dramatists and the theatre. But as we have seen, the dramatists quickly assumed control; "enthusiasm for the art of acting" might have brought the two groups together, as Willie Fay claimed, but actors remained subordinate to the material acted. Here again we find a division of theory and practice, players, scenery, and theatrical effects reflecting the same basic trends apparent in subject and form. On the one hand Yeats, with his poetic drama and dream of a Theatre of Beauty, advocated a form and production which would conform to the drama as ritual and would become as aristocratic as the poet who created it; on the other, the heightened realism of Synge's and Lady Gregory's plays, the naturalism of the later realists, required a technique based on close observation of the world about them and an effort to bridge the gulf between players and audience. Both schools required much art and careful training, but the one was more readily accessible and hence more quickly attained. Both at their best demanded a substitution of speech and music for painted scenery,\(^1\) of gesture and intonation for the false realism of the commercial stage.

Yeats arrived in Dublin with many definite ideas and a certain amount of experience in practical theatre. In production as well

\(^1\)Introduction to "The Cat and the Moon," Wheels and Butterflies, 135.
as in poetry, the artist "chooses the style according to the subject," the method in accordance with the aim:

All imaginative art remains at a distance and this distance once chosen must be firmly held against a pushing world. Verse, ritual, music and dance in association with action require that gesture, costume, facial expression, stage arrangement must help in keeping the door.

Yeats's ideal actor was in fact part-puppet, part-magician, a most fitting vehicle for the poet-jester's image. His main function must be to act as minstrel, with music in his voice and "a learned understanding" of the sound of words. But speaking verse which was in itself deliberately conceived "to give direct expression to reverie, to the speech of the soul with itself" required a different convention from the speech of prose, of everyday conversation. For the actor must not only "preserve as far as possible the intonation and speed of ordinary passionate speech," but at the same time elevate that speech to song. And so, as with

1"Certain Noble Plays of Japan" (1916), *Essays and Introductions*, 221.
2Ibid., 224.
3"Literature and the Living Voice" (1905), *Plays and Controversies*, 177.
4J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910), *Essays and Introductions*, 333.
5"The Play, the Player, and the Scene," *Samhain*, 1904, 28-29.
6Cf. "The Theatre" (1899), *Essays and Introductions*, 168-69: "verse spoken without a musical emphasis seems but an artificial and cumbersome way of saying what might be said naturally and simply in prose." Also Yeats's footnote to Moore's article on "The Irish Literary Theatre," *Samhain*, 1901, 12: "I do not want dramatic blank verse to be chanted, as people understand that word, but I do not want actors to speak as prose what I have taken much trouble to write as verse."
his choice of material and treatment of subject-matter and image, Yeats sought a model from an earlier time. "You must always go back to folk art if you want to get any real art at all; then you must bring your folk art into sympathy with the thought of the age," he claimed. The particular folk art he had in mind was of course Irish, and inevitably the art of the reciter or minstrel, the blind poet Raftery brought up to date: "The acting of the poetical drama should be as much oratory as acting, and oratory is a lost art upon the stage." Furthermore, the actor should understand "how to so discriminate cadence from cadence, and to so cherish the musical lineaments of verse or prose that he delights the ear with a continually varied music." This did not necessarily imply a "monotonous chant," but rather a conforming to the rhythm of the line rather than to the rhythm of ordinary speech; for a poem, and even more so a poetic drama, is "an elaboration of the rhythms of common speech and their association with profound feeling." It is precisely this rhythm that separates good writing from bad, that is the glimmer, the fragrance, the spirit of all intense

1 Interview with Yeats and Florence Farr in the Illustrated Standard, from a newspaper clipping in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
4 Samhain, 1903, 9.
5 "Modern Poetry: A Broadcast" (1936), Essays and Introductions, 508.
literature." It is this rhythm the actor must capture in his speech.

The proper speaking of verse, then, demands first of all an actor who can appreciate poetic drama, "some mind in control in which romance and tragedy is a natural means of expression." It requires "passion and expression" in both voice and gesture as well as "great clearness of elocution, a fine feeling for both line and passage as units of sound, with a sufficient sense of accent," "force and simplicity." In an unpublished letter concerning Miss Farr's production of The Shadowy Waters, Yeats criticized the speech-habits of the actor playing Forgael:

He has all the usual faults in an aggravated degree. He rushes up and down the scale merely because he thinks he must have variety, or because he cannot control his voice.

And admitting the failure of Diarmuid and Grania, he said, "There was always something incongruous between Irish words and an

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1 "Speaking to the Psaltery" (1902), Essays and Introductions, 18. Cf. Beltaine no. 1 (May 1899), 7-8; Shaw's preface to Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: Their Correspondence, ed. Christopher St. John (London: Reinhardt, 1952), xix-xx.

2 Yeats Memorandum, 1906, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. Lennox Robinson, "The Man and the Dramatist," Scattering Branches, 63, quotes Yeats: "I am not musical, I have the poet's exact time sense, only the vaguest sense of pitch, yet I get the greatest pleasure from certain combinations of singing, acting, speaking, drum, gong, flute, string provided that some or all of the words keep their natural passionate rhythm." Robinson continues, 63-64, "He once told me that he composed all his poetry to either of two airs and he hummed them to me. I could make nothing out of them, not even a rhythm."

3 Dictated letter to Lady Gregory, 29 June 1905, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. Cf. letter to Quinn, 29 June 1905, Letters, 451-52. The actor was Robert Farquharson (Robert de la Condamine).
English accent."¹

It is possible, barely so, but still possible, that some day we may write musical notes as did the Greeks, it seems, for a whole play, and make our actors speak upon them — not sing, but speak,

Yeats wrote in *Samhain* in 1905.² As we have seen, for many years he experimented with Florence Farr and Arnold Dolmetsch on a system of notation for lyric poems and songs for his plays.³ But the experiments at fixing pitch were unsuccessful except with the Fay brothers and the Allgood sisters, who were already excellent speakers of verse.⁴

"All art is a collaboration," Synge wrote in his preface to *The Playboy*. In his efforts to produce poetic drama Yeats was especially fortunate in his collaboration with the Fay brothers, whom he met in 1901, and whose acting in Alice Milligan's *Red Hugh* sent him away with his "head on fire" and a desire to hear Greek

¹Quoted by Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh and Kenny, *The Splendid Years*, 4-5. Cf. Frank Fay's criticism of the unbeautiful speech, "The Irish Literary Theatre," United Irishman, 2 November 1901,2; also under the same heading, 4 May 1901,6; 26 October 1901,2.


³See above, Part One, Chapter 4, p. 62. Gerhard Fay, *The Abbey Theatre*, 70-71, quotes a fragment of an undated letter by Miss Horniman indicating her disapproval of the efforts in Dublin to achieve these "quarter tones" advocated by Yeats.

⁴In an unpublished letter in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, written about March 1904, Ricketts objects to the attempts at "intoning" in *The King's Threshold* (Frank Fay played Seanchan). Miss Ria Mooney, in an interview with the present writer, recalls being exhorted by Yeats to "try to think like the wind," when auditioning for the part of the fairy child in *The Land of Heart's Desire*. 
tragedy spoken with a Dublin accent. By 1901 the two brothers had organized their "comedy combination" and had had at least ten years' experience in amateur dramatic societies. Willie was an electrician by trade, but had for some time travelled with a touring company. Frank was a clerk in a Dublin firm, but spent all of his spare time teaching elocution and studying theatrical history. Most of their acting experience had been in traditional farce, but both had developed a technique which was to become the foundation of the Abbey acting tradition. Neither had had much formal training and neither was naturally equipped for the heavy responsibilities that devolved on them in the years to come.

1Autobiographies, 449.
2Dudley Digges, Frank's most famous pupil, recalls that he received elocution lessons for about 2/6 a month, "A Theatre was Made," Irish Digest, October 1939,13. The brothers used to coach acting to a political organization, "The Celtic," until they were dismissed for producing "stage Irish" characters in the Coffee Houses, Alan Cole, Stagecraft in the Modern Dublin Theatre, Ph.D. Thesis for Trinity College, Dublin, 1952, 13-22.
3Drama criticisms of the period report productions of such farces as "The Irish Tutor," "My Wife's Dentist," and full length plays such as Boucicault's The Colleen Bawn.
4Fay, The Abbey Theatre, 16, quotes a letter from Lennox Robinson in 1949: "Don't think...that the Fays were outstanding actors. ...I saw W.G. afterwards with Beerbohm Tree in 'The O'Flynn' and many years later met him on the films in 'General John Regan.' But in those thirty years he never established himself as a really great actor. The Fays came in when there was an outcry that Irish plays should be done by Irish players and they and their company ...were able to fill the bill and Ireland was very proud of them. But eventually they couldn't hold their own with Arthur Sinclair, Fred O'Donovan, F.J. McCormick, Barry Fitzgerald and many others." During an interview with the present writer Miss Ria Mooney recalls seeing Frank in later years, and gives the same opinion.
both believed in the dream of the Irish Literary Theatre and were
driven by a sincere desire to achieve that dream, no matter what
the cost.¹ Willie, his natural talent as a comedian showing to
greatest advantage in Lady Gregory's plays, tended to take the
lead, but as far as Yeats was concerned, the most valuable asset
to the company in its early years was Frank.

For Frank's passion was the proper speaking of verse,² and
he had watched Yeats's experiments with Florence Farr and The
Irish Literary Theatre with interest.³ From the beginning his
occasional dramatic reviews in the United Irishman harped upon one
theme, the necessity of Irish actors for Irish plays.

In the last century we gave Quin, Macklin, Barry, and Peg
Woffington, Mossop and Sheridan (father and son) to the English
stage. What has become of our histrionic ability? Is it that
we lack the perseverance necessary?

he asked in his first review of the movement.⁴ Citing the examples

¹In a letter to Synge, 14 September 1905, in the possession
of Mrs. Stephens, Frank comments, "We have an audience to get,
which I believe can be got, but it will take a lot of hard and
excellent work, and while much of the work of the Society is
excellent in intention, that won't suffice. The Irish distaste
for thoroughness and love of laziness will have to be got over too."

²Cf. Winifred Letts, "The Fays at the Abbey Theatre," The
Fortnightly, June 1948, 420-423; Greene and Stephens, op.cit., 273.
³"Samhain," United Irishman, 26 October 1901, 2. In his
article, "The Irish Literary Theatre," op.cit., 2 November 1901, 2,
he defends the organization against James Joyce's assertion in
"The Day of the Rabblement" that the Irish Literary Theatre had
"surrendered to the popular will."

⁴"Irish Drama at the Theatre Royal," United Irishman, 8 July
1899, 1; "Dublin Theatres," op.cit., 3 March 1900, 3. Neither of
these articles are cited by Gerard Fay, The Abbey Theatre, although
his father's first articles appear in July 1899.
of Antoine, Lugné-Poë, and William Poel, he commented in a later article,

It is manifestly the duty of those who will benefit by the Irish Literary Theatre plays to train up a company of Irish actors to do the work they want. ...What is the use of using the title "Irish" Literary Theatre if we have to get English actors because we are too lazy to train up Irish ones.

Furthermore, could not the committee "build a hall of their own with a stage about the size of the stage of the Queen's Theatre?" ¹

By 1901 he was urging Yeats to employ amateur Irish actors who "could give a meaning which escapes experienced English professionals." ² "We shall find our actors among Cumann na nGaedheal and among the Inghinide na hEireann or others who, possessing the histrionic temperament, are not afraid to use it in the service of Ireland. We have sufficient plays both in Irish and English with which to make a start." ³ At first he advocated a return to plays in Irish as the only possible foundation for a national theatre, and suggested Douglas Hyde as director.⁴ Above all, the theatre must remain out of commercial hands:

Personally, I see the way clear before me to a National Theatre, I do not think we need financial bounders or aristocratic patrons. The people who support the Gaelic movement will support a Gaelic Theatre. We would have a very, very small beginning, but many great things have started from less

² "The Irish Literary Theatre," op.cit., 26 October 1901, 2.
promising surroundings than an Irish National Theatre such as I conceive would have to encounter.

However, a year later when his dream appeared to be materializing, he had altered his concept of the Irish National Theatre as "the nursery of an Irish dramatic literature....through the medium of the Irish language," and was cautiously warning Yeats that "all talk about a National Theatre is premature." ² "After ten years' work, we may have something to say."³

Like Yeats, Frank was mainly concerned with poetic drama. "I cannot take any interest in acting peasants first because I dislike dialect and secondly because I don't know the life or ways of the peasant," he wrote to Yeats in 1903.⁴ Like Yeats also, he disliked the popular acting seen on the English stage and emphasized the importance of voice over gesture,⁵ and a preservation of "the varied inflexion of life" rather than a forced unnatural modulation of the voice.⁶ For his models he went, as the founders of the Literary Theatre had gone, to France:

² Letter 16 September 1902, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
³ Letter to Yeats 25 July 1902, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
⁴ 21 January 1903, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
⁵ "Shakespeare at the Gaiety," United Irishman, 22 February 1902,5; Nic Shiubhlaigh and Kenny, The Splendid Years, 8-9.
⁶ "Mrs. Patrick Campbell," United Irishman, 13 July 1901,6. Cf. entry in Holloway's diary, 26 October 1907, National Library of Ireland MS.1805,701: "Then he [Frank Fay] let out at the unnatural method of stage speaking of present day English actors, and mentioned Lewis Ball as the perfection of natural stage speaking though he was considered of the old school of acting."
The finest acting in Europe is to be found on the French stage, the tradition of which comes from the great poet-dramatist Racine and the great actor-dramatist Molière. The modern English actor has broken with the tradition which his stage once possessed, and has taken to playing himself instead of interpreting character.

We in Ireland, who are beginning to have a Drama of our own, must make our own actors, and we shall do this by ascertaining from those who know the principles of acting and following them. We think our actors will resemble those of France rather than the modern untrained English actor.

Dublin during the end of the century was enjoying all the privileges of a "second capital." Home productions ranged from pantomime through plays by Boucicault and the "stage Irish" at the Queen's ("The Home of Irish Drama") to "society melodramas." The D'Oyly Carte Company and the Carl Rosa's Opera Company appeared. Touring companies led by George Edwards, Frank Carson, Marie Lloyd, Forbes-Robertson, Kate Vaughan, Beerbohm Tree, and John Hare presented plays from Shakespeare to Pinero. Sarah Bernhardt had visited Dublin in 1881 and 1887, and returned again in 1902, 1904, 1905, 1908, and 1912; Coquelin arrived in 1899; Rejane in 1901. Frank Fay's personal idol was Coquelin, who, he claimed, "was the only actor who had the courage to cast off the 'genteel'"

1"Irish Acting," United Irishman, 15 November 1902, 6. This article is unsigned but so closely echoes phrasing and ideas in his letters to Yeats and other U.I. articles at the time that it might be definitely considered Frank Fay's. As it compliments the acting of the Irish National Dramatic Company, Fay likely left it unsigned out of modesty.

2Nic Shiubhlaigh and Kenny, The Splendid Years, 6-7; Holloway's Diary for the year 1898; Fay, "Shakespeare at the Gaiety," United Irishman, 22 February 1902, 5.

conventions which burdened the work of the English players." But he had also seen and admired William Poel in the Elizabethan Stage Society's production of The Merchant of Venice. It was with considerable authority, therefore, that he spoke of his own principles of speech and acting; and Yeats listened. When he published The King's Threshold, it was dedicated to Frank Fay for "his beautiful speaking in the character of Seanchan." And when formally inviting Fay to become a teacher of verse-speaking and voice-production at the Abbey, Yeats wrote, "I always look upon you as the most beautiful verse speaker I know — at least you and Mrs. Emery compete together in my mind for that — and I know nobody but you who can teach verse speaking." It was not until the theatre itself seemed to be moving towards the hard, brilliant drama of Synge, that Fay's "fine feeling for both line and passage... and infallible sense of accent" were deemed insufficient. But by

1 Nic Shiubhlaigh and Kenny, op.cit., 8-9. Fay wrote Yeats long letters on the subject of verse speaking and the art of annotation. He sent Yeats articles and books by Coquelin and other French actors. Letters in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.

2 Speaight, William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival, 139-40, quotes from an undated letter by Frank Fay, commenting on Poel's use of an upward tone of the voice similar to foreign and Irish actors.

3 In "The Play, the Player, and the Scene," Samhain, 1904, 29, Yeats refers to Fay's speech, "so masculine and so musical."


5 Yeats's memorandum, 1906. Holloway records the incident in his diary, 24 January 1907. AE, on the other hand, criticized Frank Fay's "sonorous microbe," claiming that he thought of sound rather than sense. Some Passages from the Letters of AE, 1903, 41-42.
then Yeats's style, too, had changed, moving him gradually away from the theatre he and the Fays had established.

But Yeats's were not the only plays demanding careful treatment of dialogue. Synge's dialect required special training as well, and both Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh and W.G. Fay record the difficulties the actors experienced with the strange rhythms of his speech:

At first I found Synge's lines almost impossible to learn and deliver. Like the wandering ballad-singer I had to "humour" them into a strange tune, changing the metre several times each minute. It was neither verse nor prose. The speeches had a musical lilt, absolutely different to anything I had heard before. Every passage brought some new difficulty and we would all stumble through the speeches until the tempo in which they were written was finally discovered. I found I had to break the sentences — which were uncommonly long — into sections, chanting them, slowly at first, then quickly as I became more familiar with the words.

Nor would Synge make any concessions to the actors any more than he did to the audience, and Willie Fay recalls futile arguments endeavouring to persuade him to cut or tone down his language. 2

Once he had composed his play, he refused to alter it; as with Ibsen's compact and highly interwoven designs, the complex structure of his plays prohibited any facile alterations. Even

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2 Fay and Carswell, op.cit., 168-69 and 211-213. In a letter to Meyerfield enclosing cuts for Well of the Saints, Synge objects to one cut insisted on by the stage manager, 19 November 1905, National Library of Ireland, MS.778#14.
more than Yeats, who absorbed the theory of the image-maker in his
concept of the image, Synge wrote to please himself.

Though I wrote "Riders" and "The Shadow" for Fay's company, I
had been out of Ireland so much that I had never met any of
the company or seen them act, at that time,
he explained in a letter to Leon Brodzky. ¹

At times the difficulties of verse-speaking limited the
theatre's powers; in 1906 Yeats was sufficiently dissatisfied with
the company that in defiance of Abbey tradition he brought in an
actress for his own plays. But although Florence Darragh (Letitia
Marion Dallas) acted beautifully in the title role of Deirdre,
the contrast between her method and that of the other members of
the cast was in itself indicative of the original technique the
Fays had developed:

...it was like putting a Rolls Royce to run in a race with a
lot of hill ponies up the mountains of Mourne. The ponies
could outpace the Rolls all the way; though they were less of
a mechanical marvel they had natural advantages. ²

Miss Darragh retired, leaving the field to the golden voice of Sara
Allgood and the silver tones of Maire O'Neill, both pupils of
Frank Fay. ³ But "good speech of some kind...whatever the play"
remained their "principal pre-occupation." ⁴

¹12 December 1907, Brodney collection, Trinity College, Dublin.
The Arrow, no.2, 24 November 1906, 1.
³Cf. Sara Allgood's autobiographical sketch, The Weekly
Freeman, 17 March 1909; Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 189-90.
One other guest actress made a brief appearance, in 1919 when Lady
Gregory acted in Kathleen-ni-Houlihan, Journals, 56-57.
⁴The Arrow, 1 June 1907, 2.
In his history of the Fays of the Abbey Theatre, Willie Fay describes their aims in production and technique:

...to enforce the most rigid economy of gesture and movement, to make the speaking quite abstract, and at the same time to keep a music in it by having all the voices harmonized.¹

Here, too, the Fays and Yeats agreed. For in order to achieve a consistent impression with the formal diction and expression he demanded of the poet-minstrel, Yeats found it necessary to formalize gesture and movement also. Once again he was in agreement with Craig's concept of the actors as an "über-marionette," the Jester's puppet. Style and ritual create pose and gesture, hence greater control on the part of the poet. Movement must be simplified "that it may accompany speech without being its rival,"² gravity of bearing will in turn increase the effect of "stillness" the younger Yeats had admired in Maeterlinck's efforts to enlarge the distance between poetic drama and reality. For this reason Yeats was much impressed by the "wonderful simplicity and novelty" of the Fays' acting when he first saw them in AE's *Deirdre*:

Their method is better than their performance, but their method is the first right one I have seen. In *Deirdre* a dim dreamlike play, they acted without "business" of any kind. They simply stood still in decorative attitudes and spoke.

¹Fay and Carswell, *op. cit.*, 133-34.
²Samhain, 1903,10.
Here was the "stillness" his art demanded. But a studied simplicity requires perhaps more effort than much stage "business." Frequently the younger actors, like the younger playwrights, captured only the outward characteristics of this inner control; the seemingly haphazard naturalness could lead to slovenliness.

And so again Yeats, as we have seen, considered bringing in professional actors to train the company; and again the stubborn values of the early technique triumphed. Payne too departed, leaving the Fays in charge once more.

Eventually the Fays also left and in time others after them, but the Theatre continued on the same principles the directors and first company had shared. Actors could at times restrict

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1 In order to "see" his people as actors, Yeats at one time considered going on the stage, letter to Lady Gregory, 22 March 1902, Letters, 367. This may have been suggested to him by one of Fay's articles, "Mr. Yeats and the Stage," United Irishman, 4 May 1901,6: "Mr. Yeats can, undoubtedly, be an immense power for good in our Theatre (why should he not act, at any rate in his own plays? Jean Richepin did so in Paris)."

2 Cf. Autobiographies, 557: "Almost the first thing a new actor at the Abbey has to learn is to walk as if he wore those heavy boots, and this gives awkwardness and slowness to his movements." A comparison between the London critics' reactions to the first tours in 1903 and 1904 with their comments in 1909 indicates that once the glamour of this new style of acting had worn off, the faults were more readily apparent even though the "method" still remained the right one. Cf. Arthur Symons to Frank Fay, Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 57-58; Samhain, 1903,35-36; Beerbohm, "Some Irish Plays and Players," Saturday Review, 9 April 1904, and "Irish Players," op. cit., 12 June 1909. On their first trip the Fays were anxious to present the "showier" pieces like Deirdre rather than the plays which used more traditional acting, like The Laying of the Foundations, letters, January 1903, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
productions, but the theatre remained chiefly a playwright's theatre, the method reflecting the author. Traditional "business" was continued for years, and Lennox Robinson reports that many years after the first actors had departed, the "meticulous, stereotyped productions" remained. In part this traditional style was due to the strong influence the Fays themselves had; it was due even more to the active participation of the producer-playwrights. For even though the Directors found it necessary to hire stage managers, they closely supervised the productions of their own plays, and were ready in times of crisis to take over the duties of general manager. When the Fays left, Synge became active in the business of the theatre; Lady Gregory produced her

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1Two notable rejections because of the restricted equipment of the company were John Bull's Other Island, refused in 1904 because the company had no actors capable of playing Patsy Farrell and Keegan, cf. Fay and Carswell, The Fays of the Abbey Theatre, 206-207; Holloway's diary, 30 November 1907, National Library MS. 1805, 816-817, and Joyce's Exiles refused by Yeats in 1917 because "it is too far from the folk drama; and just at present we do not even play the folk drama very well." Letter quoted in Ellman, James Joyce, 414. Cf. also The Arrow, 1 June 1907,2; Appendix IV, Works, 1908,II,256-57; Our Irish Theatre, 97; Fay and Carswell, op.cit., 193.

2Cf. Micheal MacLiammoir, All for Hecuba (London:Methuen, 1946), 349-50: "The real achievement of the Abbey was the invention of a new tradition in writing, not in acting, for what in acting did it invent that was not already being practised elsewhere by seekers after reality?"

3Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 51. This was especially true for their productions of Molière, where they had in the first place followed the traditional "business" of the Comédie-Française, The Arrow, 20 October 1906,4.

4Yeats to John Quinn, 27 April 1908, Letters, 510; Greene and Stephens, op.cit., 283; he became involved from the time of Payne's arrival in the autumn of 1906, according to letters and memoranda in the possession of Mrs. Stephens.
first play, Shaw's *The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet*, in 1909;¹ and when the players made their first American tour in 1911, she followed them to train a new Pegeen for *The Playboy*.² Although Yeats by this time had moved away from the Abbey Theatre, he also kept a keen eye on productions and acting techniques.³

One quality did alter, but again it might be considered incipient in the first years of the theatre, and can be attributed to the "double standard" evident in the Abbey plays. The characteristics of ensemble playing which the Fays had insisted upon and which arose in part out of the peculiar democratic conditions before the Theatre became strictly "professional," gradually disappeared as time went on. Sara Allgood received "star billing" while the company was on tour; later Arthur Sinclair's mobile features resulted in still more individual playing to the audience. In part this change was a result of the plays. Willie Fay had been guilty of "gagging" in *Pot of Broth* in 1902;⁴ later playwrights, adapting themselves to the traditional

¹*Our Irish Theatre*, 140ff.
²Ibid., 169.
⁴Letter from Frank Fay to Yeats, 16 September 1902, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. Miss Horniman complains several times of Fay's "vulgar gagging," and Martyn in his letter to the Editor, *United Irishman*, 19 April 1902, 1, and Moore ("Paul Rutledge") in *Dana*, September 1904, 150-152, both compare Fay's stage management unfavourably with Antoine's. On a post card to Yeats in November 1915 concerning the production of *O'Flaherty*, V.C. Shaw writes, "It is Kerrigan's tragedy that there is so little romance in the repertory; he is always character-acting, which is a mechanical business; and Sinclair gets all the fat."
Abbey play, depended even more upon the experienced player to fill in "business." On the one hand Lady Gregory's comedies demanded a realistic method of acting which would highlight the fantasies of Cloon. On the other, plays such as *The Hour Glass* required "a special kind of acting, which it would take time to develop." Yet both schools demanded the same careful attention to rhythm and internal movement. Because of this "rejection of all needless movement," the plays of Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory rival Shaw's in detailed stage directions; but later playwrights tended to give the actors much more freedom in interpretation. The method suited the play; the responsibility remained the dramatist's.

**Costume and Setting**

"I have been the advocate of the poetry as against the actor, but I am the advocate of the actor as against the scenery," Yeats wrote in his exposition of the *Samhain* principles. Plays and acting had both, by going back to "first principles," resulted in new variations on old themes. Now in production the Abbey again discovered itself following unfamiliar paths. In order to heighten the rôle of his choric-commentators, Yeats early experimented with the use of masks, thereby more fully developing

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1 Frank Fay to Yeats, 16 September 1902, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
3 Cf. Fay and Carswell, *op. cit.*, 138ff, concerning Synge's powers of "visualization."
4 *Samhain*, 1904, 31.
his early theories of the puppet-image. By putting his players into masks, he established further control over them, eliminated any possibility of facial expression detracting from the words, and restricted the character-portrayals to the essentially narrow reflection of the images they were to represent. Here once again he found support for his theories in the work of Gordon Craig. In a letter to Lady Gregory he enthusiastically describes the masks Craig had designed for the Fool and the Angel of The Hour Glass:

I am very much excited by the thought of putting the fool into a mask and rather amused at the idea of an angel in a golden domino. I should have to write some words into the play. "They fear to meet the eyes of men being too pure for mortal gaze" or the like... If the masks work right I would put the fool and the blind man in Baile's Strand into masks. It would give a wildness and extravagance that would be fine.

Still thinking of his theatre, he adds, "I should also like the Abbey to be the first modern theatre to use the mask."1

The use of the mask even further ensured the dramatization of qualities and images rather than "characters" in the theatrical sense. Furthermore, its static nature gave to the player the quality Yeats was attempting to achieve in his verse:

A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player, or for that face repainted to suit his own vulgar fancy, the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice. A mask never seems but a dirty face, and no

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1 21 October 1910, Letters, 554. Cf. letter to John Quinn, 2 April 1916, Letters, 610: "The Hawk's Well in which masks are being used for the first time in serious drama in the modern world." See frontispiece.
matter how close you go is yet a work of art.

By dehumanizing the player, it increased the dignity and power of the words. Then, too, a mask in itself is dramatic, not only because it represents the principle of opposition in Yeats's own theories, but because it also symbolizes eternal rather than temporal qualities. Once again he found himself moving towards ritual. "Perhaps in the end one could write plays for certain masks." After Yeats publicly disavowed the Abbey as an Art Theatre, he continued the principles he had first expounded there; and he continued his experiments. Craig's early masks tended towards the grotesque; so, too, did the first masks created by Edmund Dulac for the Noh plays *At the Hawk's Well* and *The Dreaming of the Bones.*

For his next Noh play, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, he pursued those experiments by having the same character change masks — thereby changing personality — on stage. And finally, after being assured

1. "Certain Noble Plays of Japan" (1910), *Essays and Introductions*, 226. For the first performance of *At the Hawk's Well*, in Lady Cunard's drawing room, actors who were not masked were made up to look as if they were. Letter to Lady Gregory, 28 April 1916, *Letters*, 611.


4. Dulac's designs for *At the Hawk's Well* are reproduced in *Plays and Controversies*. Yeats felt that the mask of Cuchulain would serve for Dervorgila in *The Dreaming of the Bones*, preface to *Four Plays for Dancers*, vi. Later masks designed by Mr. Hildo Krop of Amsterdam inspired Yeats to re-write *The Only Jealousy of Emer* as *Fighting the Waves.*
that they would be dramatically effective, he extended his range by including beautiful masks as well.¹

The early theories which led to Yeats's experiments with masks are again reflected in the early work of Frank Fay, who wrote to Synge after the 1904 London visit,

Max talks about our "blank" faces. Others however...say that I and others have "wonderful" eyes. Miss Horniman says that I have expression but not always. I aim at what Symons says about Coquelin and Duse at not giving facial expression from moment to moment but as summarizing.

Evidently for Fay as well as for Yeats, the secret of style, "which is but high breeding in words and in argument,"² involved the actor as well.

A mask is in one sense simply the head of a puppet; once again Yeats is drawing upon his concept of the player-marionette whose actions are restricted by the theory and technique of the playwright.³ Yeats's early principles of staging continued this same development towards a ritualized form of art, and once again, as well, we see in the early work of the Abbey a concerted effort to carry out those aims. The actors, Yeats felt, should form a tableau against a "symbolic and decorative setting" which would in no way detract the attention from the speakers. "One should design a scene which would be an accompaniment not a reflection of the text,"⁴ making "pictures with robes that contrasted with great masses of colour in the back-cloth and such severe or decorative forms

¹Letter to Olivia Shakespear, 27 May 1921, Letters, 669.
²Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 162.
⁴In a letter to Allan Wade, 10 July 1921, Letters, 671, Yeats professed great interest in the puppet scenes in Bartholomew Fair.
⁵Letter to Fiona Macleod, January 1897, Letters, 280.
of hills and trees and houses as would not overwhelm, as our
naturalistic scenery does, the idealistic art of the poet."¹ "The
great thing in literature, above all in drama, is rhythm and
movement. The picture belongs to another art."² Realism of setting
and costume should be limited as much as possible, colour, form and
light taking its place. A wood, for example,

should be little more than a pattern made with painted boughs.
It should not try to make one believe that the actors are in
a real wood, for the imagination will do that far better, but
it should decorate the stage. It should be a mass of deep
colour, in harmony with the colours in the costumes of the
players.

Sometimes perhaps a shadowy background would be sufficient, but
here he parted with George Moore's temporary enthusiasm for no
scenery at all; "one needs enough of scenery to make it unnecessary
to look at the programme to find out whether the persons on the
stage have met indoors or out of doors, in a cottage or in a
palace."³ Scenery should be there, but must remain "little more
than a suggestion — a pattern with recurring boughs and leaves of
gold for a wood, a great green curtain with a red stencil upon it
to carry the eye upward for a palace, and so on."⁴ As one critic
observed, "in a word, Mr. Yeats would have in his proposed theatre
more nature and less realism."⁵

¹"At Stratford-on-Avon" (1901), Essays and Introductions, 100.
Preface to The Countess Cathleen, Works, 1908, III, 211-213.
³"The Acting at St. Teresa's Hall," United Irishman, 26 April
1902, 31.
⁴Letter to the Editor, The Daily Chronicle, 27 January 1899,
Letters, 308-09. Cf. lecture to the National Literary Society,
6 May 1899, on "Dramatic Ideals and the Irish Literary Theatre,"
reported by Dublin Daily Express, 8 May 1899, 6.
Dear Synge,

your letter. Just came yesterday. I don't seem to have a Jockey costume.

The one I have is:

1. Football jersey

2. Tweed trousers (always with a long tail)

3. Tweed cap, with a long peak

4. Wellington boots

5. Not long boots, as in the plays. Seldom seen except at the races.

A sketch of the costume:
Perhaps because of his own early interest in painting, Yeats tended to emphasize and depend upon colour schemes in his plays. Nearly all of his plays contain explicit directions as to the colours used both in costume and background. A letter to T. Sturge Moore in 1903 states his principles:

1. A background which does not insist on itself and which is so homogeneous in colour that it is always a good background to an actor wherever he stand...
2. Two predominant colours in remote fanciful plays. One colour predominant in actors, one in backcloth. This principle for the present at any rate until we have got our people to understand simplicity.1

The Hour Glass was staged with a monotonous green background, the chief actor wearing a purple garment;2 the fool was dressed in red-brown, the colour repeated in the furniture.3 On Baile's Strand was mounted with amber-coloured hangings and handpainted medallions on the wall, a great golden spiral playing across the front, blending the more colourful costumes of the kings into the paler background.4 Occasionally Yeats deliberately aimed at startling effects with the use of a pronounced colour scheme, as in The Green Helmet: "I have noticed

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1 Correspondence, 5-6. Cf. Samhain, 1904, 24-33.
2 Lecture on "The Reform of the Theatre," 1903, quoted by Robinson in Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 32. Charles Ricketts, Self-Portrait, 64, quotes Florence Farr's comments on her role as Aleel in The Countess Cathleen: "You see, Yeats had insisted on my wearing mauve -- such a trying colour -- a mauve tunic just below the knees, you know, and over that a great common purple cloak."
that the more obviously decorative is the scene and costuming of any play, the more it is lifted out of time and place, and the nearer to faeryland do we carry it."\(^1\) But for the most part he insisted upon the "strange grey dreamlike effect"\(^2\) he sought in the setting for The Shadowy Waters and describes in detail in the printed text:

The deck of an ancient ship. At the right of the stage is the mast, with a large square sail hiding a great deal of the sky and sea on that side. The tiller is at the left of the stage; it is a long oar coming through an opening in the bulwark. The deck rises in a series of steps behind the tiller, and the stern of the ship curves overhead. All the woodwork is of dark green; and the sail is dark green, with a blue pattern upon it, having a little copper colour here and there. The sky and sea are dark blue. All the persons of the play are dressed in various tints of green and blue, the men with helmets and swords of copper, the woman with copper ornaments upon her dress.\(^3\)

The effect is one of Pre-Raphaelite, dream-like beauty, with Morris and Burne-Jones colouring, the scenery "thought out not as one thinks out a landscape, but as if it were the background of a portrait."\(^4\) Gordon Craig's screens, made for the Abbey in 1910, gave Yeats additional opportunities to experiment with non-realistic decoration.

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\(^1\) Appendix III, Works, 1908, IV, 243.
\(^2\) Letter to Lady Gregory, 21 December 1899, Letters, 331.
\(^3\) Poems: 1899-1905.
\(^4\) C. E. Montague, Manchester Guardian, 18 February 1909, quotes Samhain, 1903, 10. Yeats zealously guarded the colour schemes to his plays, once refusing a play to Florence Farr because she would not agree to his suggestions. Letter to Lady Gregory, May 1905, in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
Costumes, in Yeats's mind, were simply a part of the scenery, and he dreamed of a theatre where there too the costumes could become part of the imagery:

"Let them have one suit of clothes for a king, another for a queen, another for a fighting man, another for a messenger, and so on, and if these clothes are loose enough to fit different people, they can perform any romantic play that comes, without new cost. The audience would soon get used to this way of symbolizing as it were, the different ranks and classes of men."1

Fortunately, perhaps, for the Abbey players, his own company did not have to resort to this device.

Lighting, however, was of great importance, and here he was again influenced by Gordon Craig, whose early experiments with lighting in Dido and Aeneas had impressed him,2 and whose later invention of a model stage gave Yeats opportunity to experiment with lighting himself. "He has banished a whole world that wearied me and was undignified and given me forms and lights upon which I can play as upon some stringed instrument."3 Yeats was especially impressed by lighting effects, especially the "free and delicate use of light and shadow."4 "No breadth of treatment gives monotony when there is movement and change of lighting."5 But the Abbey Theatre had limited lighting equipment only, and Yeats eventually was forced to give up his dreams of diffuse and reflected lighting.6

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1 'Samhain, 1904, 4.'
2 Letter to the Editor, Saturday Review, 5 March 1902, Letters, 366.
3 Preface to Plays for an Irish Theatre, 1913, xiii.
4 Ibid., xii.
5 Note to The Green Helmet, Plays for An Irish Theatre, op. cit., 219.
From the beginning, Yeats was restricted in his theories of staging by the theatre he worked in. Economy was essential, but his demand for simplicity was aided, rather than deterred by this factor. However, he found the restrictions of the stage and theatre more difficult to overcome. He was fortunate in having designers such as his brother Jack Yeats, W.G. Fay, and Robert Gregory, as well as Charles Ricketts and Gordon Craig, but even then the ideas when executed were not always successful. The stage was small, and the effects required frequently demanded more scope than the Abbey Theatre could produce. The small realistic peasant setting, at which W.G. Fay excelled, was much more within their grasp and young dramatists preferred to write in a style they could more readily attain. This in turn resulted in a proficiency for the actors and producers in

2Ricketts dressed *The King's Threshold*, *On Baile's Strand*, and *Well of the Saints* for the Abbey, as well as offering occasional advice for productions. Jack Yeats also did some designs for *The King's Threshold*, and some work on *The Well of the Saints*. Pixie Smith designed a production of *The Well of the Saints*. Robert Gregory designed among others, *Kincora*, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, *On Baile's Strand* and part of *The Shadowy Waters*. AE had designed and dressed his *Deirdre* and Miss Horniman had dressed the first production of *The King's Threshold*. See illustration, p. 579, for Jack Yeats's sketches of jockey costumes for *The Playboy*. In 1935 Hugh Hunt became producer, and Tanya Moiseiwitsch designed scenery and costumes. Seaghan Barlow, general "handy man" at the Abbey, designed most of the traditional settings for the "kitchen dramas," and contributed many of the mechanical devices Lady Gregory's later "wonder plays" required.
3Abbey stage dimensions were 15 ft. in depth, 21 ft. width of proscenium, 14 ft. height of proscenium. Auditorium was 42 ft. wide and 51 ft. deep, with a seating capacity of 562.
4According to Cole, *Stagecraft in the Modern Dublin Theatre*, Appendix III, between 1904 and 1911 when the Craig screens were introduced, of 63 sets, 49 were representational.
style directly opposing Yeats's desires. Thus in production as well as playwriting, the "double standard" continued. Too often, as with choice of plays for the Abbey, he found it necessary to compromise on matters of production, creating instead of the poetic theatre of his aims, a popular theatre within the grasp of his company. "The necessities of the builders have torn from us, all unwilling as we were, the apron....We would have preferred to be able to return occasionally to the old stage of statue-making, of gesture," Yeats wrote of the first compromise in the Abbey Theatre.¹ The necessities of the players and producers led to further compromise which eventually forced him to turn reluctantly away from the theatre he had founded to other experiments, and finally out of the regular theatre altogether.²

Because the play was "more a ritual than a human story" when preparing The Shadowy Waters for production, Yeats had felt justified in employing the trick of the harp (substituted by a psaltery in actual production because of mechanical difficulties), a stage device he would ordinarily reject as part of the commercial theatre:


²Cf. Note to The Countess Cathleen (1912) Poems (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1927), 315-16: "Now at last I have made a complete revision to make it suitable for performance at the Abbey Theatre....I have left the old end, however, in the version printed in the body of this book, because the change for dramatic purposes has been made for no better reason than that audience -- even at the Abbey Theatre -- are almost ignorant of Irish mythology -- or because a shallow stage made the elaborate vision of armed angels upon a mountain-side impossible."
There is no reason for objecting to a mechanical effect when it represents some material thing, becomes a symbol, a player, as it were. One permits it in obedience to the same impulse that has made religious men decorate with jewels and embroidery the robes of priests and heriophants, even until the robe, stiffened and weighted, seems more important than the man who carries it. He has become a symbol, and his robe has become a symbol of something incapable of direct expression, something that is superhuman. If the harp cannot suggest some power that no actor could represent by sheer acting, for the more acting the more human life, the enchanting of so many people by it will seem impossible.¹

"The more acting the more human life;" The Shadowy Waters marked his first deliberate move away from the theatre of actors into the theatre of symbols and images. And he had already realized the impossibility of producing his kind of art on the Abbey stage. Looking back over his life's work, Yeats wrote in 1937, "When I follow back my stream to its source I find two dominant desires: I wanted to get rid of irrelevant movement -- the stage must become still that words might keep all their vividness -- and I wanted vivid words."² The latter quality, for which he was responsible only to himself, he did achieve; the former, for which he was dependent on others, led him first to the creation of a theatre, and then away from the theatre he had himself founded.

¹Note to The Shadowy Waters (1906), Poems:1899-1905.
Audience Participation

"They do be putting quare plays on in Dublin nowadays!...very quare plays. They do be putting on plays where a boy from the country kills his da!"
"That seems wrong."
"Yes. And they make us out to be nothing but cutthroats, and murderers, and dijinerates."
"What on earth do they mean by doing that?"
"They calls it -- ART."

(From an overheard conversation.\(^1\))

Although Yeats and Lady Gregory jealously reserved the privilege to "call the tune," they wrote their plays for a theatre and demanded the test of audience participation. "A man may write a book of lyrics if he have but a friend or two that will care for them, but he cannot write a good play if there are not audiences to listen to it," Yeats wrote concerning his dream for an Irish national theatre.\(^2\) Yet "compromise is as impossible in literature as in matters of faith."\(^3\) Their problem was difficult and twofold: audiences were required but like the actors would be allowed no voice in choice of material or presentation; moreover, the theatre envisioned was not the kind which would appeal to the type of audience desired. This meant that besides the preparation necessary for the dramatists they hoped to find and encourage, further preparation was required for the audience. It must be wooed and educated; invited to become "almost a part of the play,"\(^4\) yet trained to become a demanding critic: "We shall do nothing till

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\(^2\) *Works*, 1908, IV, 120-21.
we have created a criticism which will insist upon the dramatic poet's right to educate his audience as a musical composer does his."¹

At no time did the founders of the theatre wish to compete with the "commercial theatre." At all times Yeats made clear his own desire to write "for ourselves and our friends, and for a few simple people who understand from sheer simplicity what we understand from scholarship and thought."² His ideal audience was "that limited public which gives understanding, and not...that unlimited public which gives wealth."³ It must be cultured, with sufficient leisure to roam beyond the narrow restrictions of everyday life;⁴ preferably it should be Irish, with sufficient knowledge of "those ancient, heroic tales which are chief among Ireland's treasures."⁵ Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge remained as aristocratic towards their audience as they were towards their art; their ideal audience, like their ideal dramatist and subject, came not from that amorphous "middle class" of the intellect, but from the leaders of men and the simple folk of the country. When drama of the towns and for the towns did arrive at the Abbey, it followed the other stream towards a "People's Theatre."

¹4 October 1907, Their Correspondence,13.
²"The Theatre" (May 1899), Essays and Introductions, 166.
³Beltaine, number 1, 1899,7.
⁴Samhain, 1904, 11-12. Cf. Old Man's Prologue to The Death of Cuchulain: "I wanted an audience of fifty or a hundred....On the present occasion they must know the old epics and Mr.Yeats's plays about them."
Although Yeats desired an audience which would approve of and understand his nationalist aestheticism, his work appealed to a limited group only. 1 Looking back many years later he remarked to Lady Gregory, "I have never made a play in sympathy with my audience except Kathleen ni Houlihan, and that was you and a dream." 2 Rarely did he stir the audience to violent praise or blame; the early controversy over The Countess Cathleen was deliberately fostered by a political enemy; 3 although for years the actors refused to perform in The Land of Heart's Desire, on its production in 1911 there was no outcry from the public. 4 Lady Gregory, concerned more with the pit than the stalls, was more successful in attaining rapport with her audience; her plays were greeted with pleasure and are still frequently performed by amateur companies all over the world. Occasional murmurs of complaint were heard over individual plays by other dramatists. Diarmuid and Grania and AE's Deirdre had roused some objections, as we

224 May 1926, Lady Gregory's Journal, 264.
5There was some slight suspicion, however, that any nationalist play should show a policeman in a favourable light as Lady Gregory did in The Rising of the Moon, Samhain, 1904, 13-14. And Twenty-Five had first been rejected because "it might encourage emigration," Autobiographies, 565.
have seen; Norreys Connell's (Conal O'Riordan) The Piper disturbed the nationalists in 1908; ¹ Shaw's The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet harried the Castle in 1909.² But the public reserved its brightest fireworks in the early years for the plays of Synge. In the Shadow of the Glen was denounced by those who had earlier attacked The Countess Cathleen;³

The Tinker's Wedding has never been performed in Ireland because considered "too dangerous;"⁴ The Well of the Saints almost emptied the theatre;⁵ The Playboy of the Western World caused a week's rioting in Dublin and a court case in the United States.⁶

The controversy over The Playboy illustrates most clearly both the attitude of the public to its would-be educators and a fundamental

¹Yeats's programme notes to The Piper, Henderson collection, National Library of Ireland, MS.1732.
²Cf. Our Irish Theatre, 140-166; Robinson, I Sometimes Think, 34-36; Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 59-65; Shaw's Preface to the play. Robinson reports in I Sometimes Think, 36-37, that the Amalgamated Society of Tailors made a formal protest against Androcles and the Lion, produced in 1919. John Bull's Other Island was refused by the directors because of the limitations of their players; among the papers in the possession of Mrs. Yeats is correspondence concerning a projected production of O'Flaherty, V.C., which was finally withdrawn.
³Cf. Greene and Stephens, op. cit., 143-155; correspondence and editorials in The United Irishman, 7 January to 4 February 1905.
⁴Letters from Yeats to Synge and to Lady Gregory in September 1905 indicate that they were contemplating publishing The Tinker's Wedding in Samhain. "You have such a bad reputation now it can hardly do any harm." But they finally decided it would be "too dangerous at present." Letters in the possession of Mrs. Yeats and Mrs. Stephens.
⁵Cf. Letter to Quinn, 15 February 1905, Letters, 447-48; Holloway's diary, 10 November 1905, National Library of Ireland MS. 1805. The Abbey lost sixty pounds over it, papers in the possession of Mrs. Yeats.
⁶Our Irish Theatre, 169ff; Autobiographies, 569-70; Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, 52-55.
truth about the theatre movement as a whole. In 1905 Yeats wrote to John Quinn,

We will have a hard fight in Ireland before we get the right for every man to see the world in his own way admitted. Synge is invaluable to us because he has that kind of intense narrow personality which necessarily raises the whole issue....It will be a fight like that over the first realistic plays of Ibsen.¹

His comments were prophetic, for the battles raged over The Playboy evoked the same hysterical denial and exaggerated claims from both camps. The causes were many, but could be considered under the general categories of art, religion, and politics. In the first place Synge, like Ibsen, wrote out of himself and his vision of the world; the heightened symbolic realism achieved by both caught the audience off guard; emotions became involved and the audience was roused to self-identification. Clumsy satires on their countrymen, written with broad humour and accepted "types," could be accepted, for both audience and author remained superior to the characters on stage. This was not so with Synge's Nora or Pegeen; they expressed the universal desires of mankind, and in doing so commented on the general faults of the nation. "They object to Synge," commented Yeats, "because he is profound, distinguished, individual. They hate the presence of a mind that is superior to their own, and so invent and even believe the cry of immorality and slander."² What they objected to even more was

¹15 February 1905, Letters, 447-448.
²Letter to T. Sturje Moore, 4 October 1907, Their Correspondence, 13.
Synge's refusal to allow his audience or himself to dissociate themselves from his art. While at the same time hysterically denying the truth of his image, they denounced him for eavesdropping through cracks in the floor. Synge recognized the contradictions in their attitude, and further realized that he was being categorized by the contemporary popular reaction to naturalism. Hence his violent objections to the Ibsenite drama, his desire not to be linked with the "decadent drama" of France, and his refusal to explain his plays to the public. He wished to remain an individual writer, writing out of his own material. "I don't care a rap" was his immediate reaction to criticism, while at the same time he insisted that he wrote for that audience only.

Synge concerned himself only with his desire to create his work; Lady Gregory and Yeats on the other hand were more involved in the principle behind the riots. "We gave what we thought good until it became popular," Lady Gregory had commented. In their determination to create a national drama which would fulfil their aesthetic aims, they tended almost to encourage the rioting over The Playboy. In his speech to the audience, Yeats insisted,

We have put this play before you to be heard and to be judged, as every play should be heard and judged. Every man has a right to hear it and condemn it if he pleases, but no man has a right to

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1Synge's Preface to The Playboy has been misunderstood by critics ever since. An unpublished reminiscence by E.M. Stephens describes the summer of 1902 which Synge spent at Castle Kevin, in Wicklow, when Synge's bedroom was directly over the kitchen; the serving-girls had exceptionally piercing voices.
interfere with another man hearing a play and judging for himself. The country that condescends either to bully or to permit itself to be bullied soon ceases to have any fine qualities, and I promise you that if there is any small section in this theatre that wish to deny the right of others to hear what they themselves don't want to hear we will play on, and our patience shall last longer than their patience.¹

Both recognized Synge's genius and the right he had to be heard; yet Lady Gregory personally disliked the play,² and Yeats's ideal of drama differed greatly from Synge's. But The Playboy had become a principle; it was the answer to the political and religious partisans who had plagued them for almost ten years.³ It was "the true Ireland fighting the false,"⁴ the artist arrogantly asserting his right, Seanchan rebelling against the king. Here in Synge's masterpiece was the culmination at last of all the Samhain principles, the fusion of aesthetic and national ideals:

We must name and number the passions and motives of men....There is no laughter too bitter, no irony too harsh for utterance, no passion too terrible to be set before the minds of men.⁵

In her speech at the Abbey's twenty-first birthday in 1925, Lady Gregory said, "In the Theatre we have the three A's, interdependent,

¹Greene and Stephens, op.cit., 243.
²Lady Gregory to Hugh Lane, 1913, Hugh Lane's Life and Achievement,132-33.
³Cf. Sean O'Faolain, "Ireland after Yeats," Books Abroad, Autumn, 1952,332: "the difficulties of writing in a country where the policeman and the priest are in a perpetual glow of satisfaction."
⁴Yeats to Lady Gregory on Shaw's interview with the New York Sun, Our Irish Theatre,211.
⁵Samhain, 1908,12.
inseparable -- Author, Actor, Audience. We are necessary to one another.¹ But the author must remain supreme. Less than a year later the artist once again asserted his right to be heard, and again Yeats scolded his unruly children for rebelling. Storming on to the stage on the first night of *The Plough and the Stars*, he shouted,

You have disgraced yourselves again. Is this to be an ever-recurring celebration of the arrival of Irish genius? Once more you have rocked the cradle of genius. The news of what is happening here will go from country to country. You have once more rocked the cradle of reputation. The fame of O'Casey is born tonight.²

The tone of his words and the subdued reaction of the audience indicate most clearly of all the peculiar and personal relationship between the Abbey Theatre and its nation.

¹Lady Gregory's Journals, 93.
²Fay, The Abbey Theatre, 5.
CHAPTER 10 - FINALE: THE DIVIDED IMAGE

A movement will often in its first fire of enthusiasm create more works of genius than whole easygoing centuries that come after it. (Samhain, 1904)

"In dreams begins responsibility."
(Quotation from an Old Play, Responsibilities, 1914)

Two basic conflicts are inherent in the Directors' dream of an Irish Literary Theatre; one they solved by insisting upon the eternal rights of the poet, the other led each on separate paths away from the theatre they had founded. The first might be considered the inevitable struggle between the call of the nation and the call to art; the second is more complex, involving an interpretation of the form and function of drama as a literary vehicle. Neither is inseparable from nor clearly definable without the other; both contribute to that multi-figured, kaleidoscopic entanglement of emotions, ideas, and reactions through which the artist creates his art. The theatre which this dream produced causes further speculation: "We have been the first to create a true 'People's Theatre,'" Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory in 1919; "Yet we did not set out to create this sort of theatre, and its success has been to me a discouragement and a defeat." Why did the dream fail, yet, paradoxically, why did the theatre succeed? And in creating a theatre they did not desire, what, if any, responsibility did they betray?

As we have seen, from the beginning the founders were equally concerned with creating a national theatre and keeping that theatre free of all partisanship. They succeeded in both aims, but with success came the loss of many of their best actors and an inevitable restriction in the type of drama the theatre tended to produce. Practically every exodus of actors and playwrights during the first years was due to the founders' determination not to yield to pressure from any quarter. Maud Gonne, Dudley Digges, and the extreme nationalists left because of The Shadow of the Glen; AE resigned in protest over Yeats's intention of treating nationalism through cosmopolitanism; Maire Nic Shiubhleagh
withdrew when the theatre became "professional"; Padraic Colum, William Boyle and Alice Milligan resigned in protest over The Playboy. On the other hand, the Directors' determination to remain free led to Miss Horniman's withdrawal, while their emphasis upon Irish subject matter and Irish character tended to restrict both actors and playwrights. As Edward Martyn had foreseen, the Abbey company became proficient actors of peasant and folk drama, but were unable to act anything else. (John Bull's Other Island was refused because they had no Broadbent, Joyce's Exiles because their actors could not play it). Dramatists who wished to write for the Abbey followed the safe pattern of copying their elders, but, seen through the eyes of others, subject and theme lacked the original penetrating insight characteristic of Synge and Lady Gregory, Lennox Robinson and Padraic Colum at their best. "The town would only think town thoughts," Yeats explained in "The Bounty of Sweden":

We were to find ourselves in a quarrel with public opinion that compelled us against our own will and the will of our players to become always more realistic, substituting dialect for verse, common speech for dialect.¹

Yet in their insistence upon an Irish theatre, perhaps the Directors as well as the town were to blame for the failure of their dream. They succeeded in ridding the stage of the Irish buffoon who had ruled there; but they unwittingly fostered a series of "Abbey types" who appeared and re-appeared around the same kitchen table.²

However, although as Directors striving to keep a national theatre open the founders allowed a policy to develop which restricted that theatre, as playwrights they did not allow the Abbey to restrict their art. They may have written with the Abbey in mind, but not for the

¹ Autobiographies, 562.

² Miss Ria Mooney, in conversation with the present writer, remarked that for years one could recognize a play directed by Robinson by the inevitable kitchen table encircled by chairs, placed in the centre of the stage.
Abbey only. Because of the nature of their tragi-comic vision, Lady Gregory and Synge had a closer tie than Yeats with both their players and their audience (even though in the case of Synge this resulted in riots); their plays were rooted in the realistic tradition, but their tragi-comedy transcended reality and forced open the door to fantasy and the dream. Where the unblended bitter comedy-tragedy of the Cork realists hardened into a formula and eventually lost much of its spirit altogether, it remained fresh and flexible in the hands of the older playwrights. Lady Gregory confessed that the desire to experiment led her further and further away from the realism which was invading the Abbey stage and eventually to the classical form of the morality; Synge admitted that he had not known the company when he wrote his first two plays, and stubbornly refused to alter the musical-poetic form he had laboriously evolved in each play. Both naturally gained from seeing their plays through rehearsal, but both had already envisioned character, situation, and atmosphere in full before the plays reached the players. There was little "trying for size" with their own plays, as they later tended to encourage in the majority of the plays which followed them.

Synge's aim being with the definition, externalization and expression of a personal experience within the protective limits of a literary form, he was less emotionally involved than his fellow-directors with the management of the theatre itself. From the beginning he was able to keep completely separate his functions as artist and director; although

3 As we have seen, they re-wrote many of the plays submitted to them, and from the comments preserved in the Yeats theatre papers it is evident that they made a great many leading suggestions to applying playwrights.
he was concerned with the theatre as a national project and firmly upheld the Samhain principles of production, he was insistent upon his right to remain apart from the frequent squabbles within the theatre, and at one time seriously contemplated resigning his directorship. Even Lady Gregory, who helped create a theatre and then wrote plays for it, tended to keep separate in her mind and attitude the plays she was working on and the practical affairs of the Abbey. But in the work and theory of Yeats we find the clearest evidence of this duality.

For even while devoting most of his time and energy to the realization of an Irish theatre, Yeats had never completely turned his back on the possibilities of a poetic theatre outside Ireland. To him poetry and drama, dealing with the soul of man, could not possibly be limited by nationalist aims any more than treatment of subject could be restricted by partisanship. The organization of his projected theatre continued to take up much of his interest during his lifetime, but remained in one sense a business project he had created for his country; as we have seen, although he wrote several plays with the Fays in mind, for the realization of his art he felt free to look elsewhere as well.

It will be remembered that his first production had been in England, when Florence Farr with Miss Horniman's backing produced The Land of Heart's Desire as a curtain-raiser first to Todhunter, then to Shaw. His first plans of an Irish theatre had been strongly tied to his newly-awakened nationalist instincts, but the dream had not seemed possible until the happy coincidence of Lady Gregory's energy

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1 Cf. his letter to Lady Gregory concerning Payne's first production, Our Irish Theatre, 93-94.
2 Cf. letters between Synge and Molly, Yeats and Synge, Synge and Fays, Greene and Stephens, op.cit., 256-68. In letters to Synge in the possession of Mrs. Yeats, Yeats shows concern over Synge's aloof attitude in a time of crisis. Synge makes the point in a letter to Miss Horniman in the possession of Mrs. Stephens that he does not consider stage-management part of his duties as director.
3 Cf. her Journals.
with the efforts of W.G. Fay's small amateur company. While eager to contribute his own plays as well as his management to an institution which would also satisfy his desires to do something for his country, Yeats continued to remain in close touch with the dramatic experiments in London. Indeed, it was largely through his contacts with English theatre that an Irish theatre was financed; throughout their struggles to keep the Abbey alive, it was to their English sympathisers that he and Lady Gregory turned. Miss Horniman financed the original building; lectures in London kept it open.¹

Yeats had arrived at his early aesthetic and dramatic ideas through contact with the literary movements of London and Paris. With the exception of Synge and Lady Gregory, his circle of literary acquaintances continued to remain English. For help in producing his own plays he frequently turned towards Gordon Craig, Charles Ricketts, and T. Sturge Moore, and at the same time that he was creating a literary movement in Dublin, he remained a leader in the movements of London. He helped found the Rhymers' Club in the '90's, encouraged Todhunter's work in poetic drama, experimented in verse-speaking with Florence Farr and Arnold Dolmetsch, contributed to the enterprises of the Independent Stage Society,² acted on the managing committee of the short-lived "Masquers Society," was a member of the Honorary Committee of Philip Carr's Mermaid Repertory Theatre,³ and contributed to the innumerable

¹Cf. Hone, W.B. Yeats, 386 et passim.
²The Stage Society gave the only production of Where There is Nothing (directed by Harley Granville Barker) on June 26, 27, and 28, 1904, and the first production of The Player Queen (the part of Nona being played by Edith Evans) on May 25 and 27, 1919. The Abbey Company in turn gave two performances of Shaw's The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet for the Stage Society on December 5 and 6, 1909.
literary magazines of the period.\(^1\) Countless other schemes with Ricketts, Sturge Moore, and Craig for "London seasons" were contemplated but never materialized.\(^2\) Eventually his experiments in dramatic form led him away from the public theatre altogether, and back into the London drawing-room.

"It takes a lifetime to master dramatic form," Yeats had written to his father in 1918. What he could not have foreseen was that when he finally did "discover" the form he had been seeking all his life, he should arrive back at a position not far from where he started. His first attempt to dramatize "the soul of man," The Shadowy Waters, he had rejected as being too remote and impersonal in its theme, where

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...\text{one should lose the persons in the general picture. I had a different feeling about [the] stage when I wrote it -- I would not now do anything so remote, so impersonal. It is legitimate art however though a kind that may I should think by this time prove itself the worst sort possible for our theatre. The whole picture as it were moves together -- sky and sea and claud are as it were actors. It is almost religious; it is more a ritual than a human story. It is deliberately without human characters.}\(^3\)
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But now, after experiments which led him to the foundation of a theatre and a company rapidly gaining world fame for their folk art, he turned back once again to a remote and impersonal drama which could do without scenery or setting or even a stage, and came very close to eliminating the actor as well. For although he was willing to accept the art of his fellow-dramatists, an art which involved "a study of the common people" and a preservation of the national characteristics they represented, he himself turned to the art which required sufficient


2 Including Craig's plan to produce The Countess Cathleen, Yeats to Lady Gregory 6 January 1903, Letters, 394; the Craig-Darragh theatre scheme for which Yeats was to act as literary adviser, cf. above, Part One, chapter 4, p.207; a projected Aldwych season with Charles Ricketts, Edmund Dulac, and Thomas Beecham, Letters to Lady Gregory, 28 March 1916, Letters, 611; and various undefined projects with Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Florence Farr.

distance from everyday life to transcend those same characteristics,\(^1\) plays which required a convention as strict in its way as the deliberately dehumanized Greek chorus, or at the other extreme, the rigidly defined stage-management of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta.

Gradually Yeats found himself simplifying to the extent of limiting his actors, forcing them into more specialized roles. Gesture gave way to the stately dance just as conversation had given way to the dignified chorus and facial expression to the gravity of the mask. "I promise a dance. I wanted a dance because where there are no words there is less to spoil." Ironically, artificiality in turn gave way to artificiality: "I had thought to have had those heads carved, but no, if the dancer can dance properly no wood-carving can look as well as a parallelogram of painted wood."\(^2\) Reality twice removed once more led him to pure abstraction of the image. And again he was fortunate in finding performers who could interpret his art: Ninette de Valois, an Irish dancer who had studied with Diaghilev and returned to Ireland to found the Abbey school of dancing, and Michio Ito, a young Japanese dancer who had come to England to study European dancing and returned to his native traditions of the Noh.\(^3\)

Years earlier Yeats had been astonished at Lady Gregory's experiments with casts of only two or three characters\(^4\); now he in turn continued the experiment, restricting himself to musician and dancer. Dissatisfied with The King of the Great Clock Tower ("there

\(^1\)The Arrow, 20 October 1906, 2.

\(^2\)Prologue to The Death of Cuchulain, see Appendix D.

\(^3\)The Exhibition Catalogue to the University of Manchester exhibition, "W.B.Yeats: Images of a Poet," held in the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, 3 May to 3 June 1961, contains many valuable photographs of Michio Ito in costume.

\(^4\)"They must have a great deal to talk about," he commented at Lady Gregory's plans to write her three-act play Gronia, with only three characters. "Notes," Irish Folk-History Plays First Series, 195-96.
are three characters...and that is a character too many”), he re-wrote it as *A Full Moon in March*, "reduced to the essentials" of Dancer-Queen and Singer-Stroller. He had criticized Wilde's *Salome*, but now found himself creating a dance play which echoed Wilde's technique as much as his efforts towards an artificial style echoed Wilde's theory. And in 1929 he re-wrote *The Only Jealousy of Emer* as another dance play, *Fighting the Waves*.

"What matter if people prefer another art, I have had my fill," Yeats wrote of his experiments in choric dance. Yet for the "distinguished, indirect, and symbolic ... aristocratic form" he finally developed he once again sought historical justification, and found it in Ezra Pound's recent work on the Noh plays. Here at last, he felt, was the form he had been seeking, a drama "which may delight the best minds of my time" and once more return heroic ecstasy to the stage.

But the very qualities of stylization and ritual that he appreciated in the Noh he had been seeking in the dramatic form from the beginning, and it is significant that he first contemplated translating Sophocles during the early years of the Abbey Theatre. For the poetry he finally developed, passion frozen in form, the endistancement of the personal, has perhaps even stronger resemblances to the classical theatre of Greece. In seeking the simplicity and ritual of poetry which divines its heroic ecstasy as much from the philosophy of passion as from the passion itself, Yeats might just as well have turned for his "poetic rationalization" to the tragedy of Sophocles. "A table of values, heroic joy always, intellectual curiosity and so on -- and a public theme"; the spirit was at last captured in the perfected form.

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2 Ibid., vi.
4 "Certain Noble Plays of Japan" (April 1916), *Essays and Introductions*, 221.
6 Introduction (1937), *Essays and Introductions*, viii.
In writing these little plays I knew that I was creating something which could only fully succeed in a civilization very unlike ours. I think they should be written for some country where all classes share in a half-mythological, half-philosophical folk-belief which the writer and his small audience lift into a new subtlety. All my life I have longed for such a country, and always found it quite impossible to write without having as much belief in its real existence as a child has in that of the wooden birds, beasts, and persons of his toy Noah's ark. I have now found all the mythology and philosophy I need.

Yeats wrote of his dance plays. Thus in leaving the public theatre, in spirit he also left his nation, while still retaining Ireland as the subject for his art. The image of an Irish literary theatre was at last divided, and in this final separation can perhaps be found the key to one of the greatest enigmas of the Abbey's early years, the rejection of Sean O'Casey. It seems at first glance a paradox that Yeats and Lady Gregory should reject O'Casey's play The Silver Tassie, while at the same time allowing plays of a much inferior calibre to be produced on the Abbey stage. But if we consider the history of their management, the paradox simplifies; through the years, out of necessity in keeping the theatre open and fulfilling their function as an educational institution, the Abbey had had to accept plays of a style and subject matter which the directors would not tolerate in their own work. For the sake of the theatre they had early learned to compromise; but in their own art they would tolerate no lowering of standard. The Abbey Theatre had produced The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the 'Paycock', The Plough and the Stars. Not since the discovery of Synge had the theatre revived to such genius. But then came The Silver Tassie, which, rightly or wrongly, the directors did not feel was worthy of O'Casey's standard. The young dramatist whose fame they felt responsible for, as they had felt responsible for Synge's twenty years earlier, was given the advice they would have given each other. And so once more the

1 "Note on 'The Only Jealousy of Emer,'" Plays and Controversies, 434.
2 Cf. The Irish Statesman, 9 June 1928, 268-272; Lady Gregory's Journal, 104-111.
Abbey lost a playwright.

The Irish dramatic movement remains important "because of the principles it is rooted in whatever be its fruits," Yeats commented prophetically in 1908.¹ The dream of a national theatre maintained by Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge, has been fulfilled; for despite the occasional depletion of company and playwrights, the Abbey still lives. At this moment a new theatre is being built; new plays are in rehearsal; bookings are heavy. It is perhaps significant that all three director-playwrights dealt in their work with the absorbing conflict between the dream and the reality. For the reality of the theatre they founded, though at its best an admirable example of a limited tradition in playwriting and acting, is not the theatre of which they dreamed. Yet that unfulfilled dream of a poet's theatre remains un tarnished and necessary, an inspiration to countless "little theatre" movements in Europe and America, and a lasting promise of the fulfilment of the dramatist. Lady Gregory's words of the Abbey players apply with even greater truth to the founders of the theatre: "They have won much praise for themselves and have raised the dignity of Ireland."² By striving to create a theatre of art for their nation, they transcended nationalism, and became truly universal.

¹ "The Irish Dramatic Movement," Works, 1908, IV, 80.
² Our Irish Theatre, 37.
APPENDIX A

Cuchulain, the Girl, and the Fool

The Girl
I rage at my own image in the glass
That's so unlike myself that when you praise it
It is as though you praised another, or even
Mocked me with praise of my mere opposite;
And when I wake towards morn I dread myself.
For the heart cries that what deception wins
Cruelty must keep; therefore be warned and go
If you have seen that image and not the woman.

The Hero
I have raged at my own strength because you have
loved it.

The Girl
If you are no more strength than I am beauty
I had better find a convent and turn nun;
A nun at least has all men's reverence
And needs no cruelty.

The Hero
I have heard one say
That men have reverence for their holiness
And not themselves.

The Girl
Say on and say
That only God has loved us for ourselves,
But what care I that long for a man's love?

The Fool by the Roadside
When all works that have
From cradle run to grave
From grave to cradle run instead;
When thoughts that a fool
Has wound upon a spool
Are but loose thread, are but loose thread;

When cradle and spool are past
And I mere shade at last
Coagulate of stuff
Transparent like the wind,
I think that I may find
A faithful love, a faithful love.
APPENDIX B

The King's Threshold: A Prologue

An Old Man with a red dressing-gown, red slippers and red nightcap, holding a brass candlestick with a guttering candle in it, comes on from side of stage and goes in front of the dull green curtain.

Old Man. I've got to speak the prologue. (He shuffles on a few steps.) My nephew, who is one of the play actors, came to me, and I in my bed, and my prayers said, and the candle put out, and he told me there were so many characters in this new play, that all the company were in it, whether they had been long or short at the business, and that there wasn't one left to speak the prologue. Wait a bit, there's a draught here. (He pulls the curtain closer together.) That's better. And that's why I'm here, and maybe I'm a fool for my pains.

And my nephew said, there are a good many plays to be played for you, some tonight and some on other nights through the winter, and most of them are simple enough, and tell out their story to the end. But as to the big play you are to see tonight, my nephew taught me to say what the poet had taught him to say about it. (Puts down candlestick and puts right finger on left thumb.) First, he who told the story of Seanchan on King Guaire's threshold long ago in the old books told it wrongly, for he was a friend of the king, or maybe afraid of the king, and so he put the king in the right. But he that tells the story now, being a poet, has put the poet in the right.

And then (touche other finger) I am to say: Some think it would be a finer tale if Seanchan had died at the end of it, and the king had the guilt at his door, for that might have served the poet's cause better in the end. But that is not true, for if he that is in the story but a shadow and an image of poetry had not risen up from the death that threatened him, the ending would not have been true and joyful enough to be put into the voices of players and proclaimed in the mouths of trumpets, and poetry would have been badly served. (He takes up the candlestick again.)

And as to what happened (sic) Seanchan after, my nephew told me he didn't know, and the poet didn't know, and it's likely there's nobody that knows. But my nephew thinks he never sat down at the king's table again, after the way he had been treated, but that he went to some quiet green place.
in the hills with Fedelm, his sweetheart, where the poor people made much of him because he was wise, and where he made songs and poems, and it's likely enough he made some of the old songs and the old poems the poor people on the hillsides are saying and singing to-day.

[A trumpet blast.]

Well, it's time for me to be going. That trumpet means that the curtain is going to rise, and after a while the stage there will be filled up with great ladies and great gentlemen, and poets, and a king with a crown on him, and all of them as high up in themselves with the pride of their youth and their strength and their fine clothes as if there was no such thing in the world as cold in the shoulders, and speckled shins, and the pains in the bones and the stiffness in the joints that make an old man that has the whole load of the world on him ready for his bed.

[He begins to shuffle away, and then stops.]

And it would be better for me, that nephew of mine to be thinking less of his play-acting, and to have remembered to boil down the knap-weed with a bit of three-penny sugar, for me to be wetting my throat with now and again through the night, and drinking a sup to ease the pains in my bones.

[He goes out at side of stage.]

"Written for the first production of "The King's Threshold" in Dublin, but not used, as, owing to the smallness of the company, nobody could be spared to speak it. The King's Threshold And On Baile's Strand Being Volume Three of Plays for an Irish Theatre (London: A.H. Bullen, 1904), 5-9."
APPENDIX C

The Black Jester's Prologue

No. I won't listen any more. Go away. What is that you are saying? [Goes R.I.E. and speaks as if talking to somebody.] No. I'll have my own way. I told you from the first I was going to. Yes I'm quite ready to take the consequences. [Goes C.] He's always interfering. As if one could make any kind of an enchantment worth looking at, if one had always to be thinking of him. [At C, facing audience.] The Stage Manager says I've got to juggle for you. That I'm to cause a vision to come before your eyes, but he doesn't want to let me please myself. He says it must be simple, easy to understand, all about real human beings but I am going to please myself this time [going halfway to side.] It's no use shaking your hand at me there. I am going to do just as I like. What is the use of getting the Black Jester out of the waste places if he is not to do what he likes. [Returns to C.] These are my friends that I have here hung round my neck. Some of them I picked up on the wayside, some of them I made with a jack knife. I am going to make you dream about them and about me. I am going to wave my fingers and you will begin to dream. These two are Aengus and Edaine. They are spirits and whenever I am in love it is not I that am in love but Aengus who is always looking for Edaine through somebody's eyes. You will find all about them in the old Irish books. She was the wife of Midher another spirit in the hill but he grew jealous of her and he put her out of doors, and Aengus hid her in a tower of glass. That is why I carry the two of them in a glass bottle. [Holds bottle in front of him] O Aengus! O Edaine! be kind to me when I am in love and to everybody in this audience when they are in love and make us all believe that it is not you but us ourselves that love. These others -- the black dog, the red dog and the white dog -- I am always afraid of them. Sometimes the black dog gets on my back, though I have not been juggling but I will not talk about him for he was very wicked. I do not know the red dog from myself whenever I am angry or excited or running about. And it is only when I escape from him and the black dog, that the pale dog leads me when I would go to everything impossible and lasting. He sees before him the impossible things. They look to him like a deer that he can never overtake. I made him out of willow wood one day after I had been reading about him in an old Irish book. He is always running to the place where these poor flowers that I have round my head can never die because they are made out of precious stones. They too are myself but that is a great mystery. The dogs and the little
king and queen in the bottle and the flowers, they are all
going to be in the dream that you are going to dream presently,
but they will be great and terrible and my birds will be there
too. [takes out birds] These sea birds that I shall be like
when I get out of the body and this jewsharp that I play on
when my birds and my beasts won't talk to me and I too shall
be there, there in the dream and all that I did long ago or
that I would like to do. I would like to lead everybody
out of the world, away to the waste places where there is
nothing but my beasts. Not only as I am going to lead you
now for a moment but for ever and always away, away, away.
When you are dead, you will become birds but I would like to
carry you away while you live.
APPENDIX D

Prologue to The Death of Cuchulain (1939)

Scene.-- A bare stage of any period. A very old man looking like something out of mythology.

Old Man. I have been asked to produce a play called The Death of Cuchulain. It is the last of a series of plays which has for theme his life and death. I have been selected because I am out of fashion and out of date like the antiquated romantic stuff the thing is made of. I am so old that I have forgotten the name of my father and mother, unless indeed I am, as I affirm, the son of Talma, and he was so old that his friends and acquaintances still read Virgil and Homer. When they told me that I could have my own way, I wrote certain guiding principles on a bit of newspaper. I wanted an audience of fifty or a hundred, and if there are more, I beg them not to shuffle their feet or talk when the actors are speaking. I am sure that as I am producing a play for people I like, it is not probable, in this vile age, that they will be more in number than those who listened to the first performance of Milton's Comus. On the present occasion they must know the old epics and Mr. Yeats' plays about them; such people, however poor, have libraries of their own. If there are more than a hundred I won't be able to escape people who are educating themselves out of the Book Societies and the like, sciolists all, pickpockets and opinionated bitches. Why pickpockets? I will explain that, I will make it all quite clear.

(Drum and pipe behind the scene, then silence

That's from the musicians; I asked them to do that if I was getting excited. If you were as old you would find it easy to get excited. Before the night ends you will meet the music. There is a singer, a piper, and a drummer. I have picked them up here and there about the streets, and I will teach them, if I live, the music of the beggar-man, Homer's music. I promise a dance. I wanted a dance because where there are no words there is less to spoil. Emer must dance, there must be severed heads -- I am old, I belong to mythology -- severed heads for her to dance before. I had thought to have had those heads carved, but no, if the dancer can dance properly no wood-carving can look as well as a parallelogram of painted wood. But I was at my wit's end to find a good dancer; I could have got such a dancer once, but
she has gone; the tragi-comedian dancer, the tragic dancer, upon the same neck love and loathing, life and death. I spit three times. I spit upon the dancers painted by Degas. I spit upon their short bodices, their stiff stays, their toes whereon they spin like peg-tops, above all upon that chambermaid face. They might have looked timeless, Rameses the Great, but not the chambermaid, that old maid history.

I spit! I spit! I spit!

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This list includes primary sources, secondary sources which contain primary material unavailable elsewhere, and those general writings found most helpful as background material. Items which have been consulted once only have been fully described in the footnote references and are not again listed. All extant works of the major figures have been consulted; Section A therefore acts as a preliminary bibliography to this thesis as well as an indication of the most complete printed bibliographies of the major figures concerned. Section C includes only those items not listed in the bibliographical material of Section A and the editions used for reference in the thesis.

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