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THE DEVELOPMENT OF
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS



WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

From a drawing by Mr Sean O'Sullivan, R.H.A., in the Collection of Mr John Burke

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

by

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With a Preface by

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V. K. N. M.

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PREFACE

MR. NARAYANA MENON came to Edinburgh, some short time before I demitted office there, with the intention of working for the degree of Ph.D. or D.Litt. The subject on which he arranged to work was the changes in the poetic diction of the present century. Beginning with Yeats and Francis Thompson, we were to trace the movement away from a traditionally poetic diction to a language which is that of everyday use. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley, Yeats says he is helping "Purohit Swami to translate the Upanishads. It is amusing to see his delighted astonishment when he discovers that he can call a goddess 'this handsome girl' instead of a 'maiden of surpassing loveliness'. I say to him 'think like a wise man but express yourself like the common people', and the result is that he will make the first great translation of the Upanishads." One need no longer call a moustache the 'knightly growth that fringed his upper lip'. A necessary preliminary to the study was a careful examination of the changes in Yeats's own diction shown not alone by a study of the differences between his early and later poems, but also in the many changes that the text of his poetry, like Tennyson's, underwent in successive editions.

It was the preparation for this work that led Mr. Menon after I had retired, and was indeed in America, to offer as a first thesis for the doctorate a study of the poetry of Yeats, its form and content. This was accepted, and the essay which follows, combined with a close analysis of the changes that the text of the poems had undergone, which is not printed here, was the result.

No reader will expect from Mr. Menon a final judgement on Yeats, nor have I any intention of attempting such. It will be long before we can pass a final judgement on a poet who combined so many interests and was so indifferent to others—a poet interested in the occult but indifferent to modern science; a poet mystically inclined for whom the Christian religion had as little significance as modern science; a patriot whose aristocratic leanings have left him out of sympathy with the direction in which his country has moved; a faithful disciple of the doctrine of art for art, whose poetry, from its earliest phase to its very different latest phase, is pervaded by a metaphysic which has its roots in his own reactions to life and experience, is a criticism of life. These things must be left to time

and study to evaluate. I propose to say a few words concerning my own recollections of Mr. Yeats's vivid and interesting personality and conversation.

I made his acquaintance early in the year 1906 when he came to Aberdeen to lecture to our students, and stayed with my wife and myself. The memory of his arrival calls back to my mind Hazlitt's account of his first meeting with Coleridge. He entered the house talking and continued to talk delightfully throughout his stay. I had not left the bedroom, to which I conducted him to change, before he had told me of his interest in Nietzsche as a counteractive to the spread of democratic vulgarity ; of Sinn Fein (We Ourselves) and all he hoped from it for Ireland ; and then, or later in the evening, of his discovery of Synge in Paris and of the friends of the Cheshire Cheese days of whom he remained throughout his life so devotedly loyal and admiring a champion :

You kept the Muses sterner laws
And unrepenting faced your ends,
And therefore earned the right—and yet
Johnson and Dowson most I praise—
To troop with them the world's forgot,
And copy their proud steady gaze.

He did not share the weaknesses of his friends, and was indeed perhaps the most temperate poet since Milton, indifferent to what he ate or drank. I met him once in the theatre at the first performance of *Fanny's First Play*. We went at his invitation into the bar together and discovered that neither of us wanted anything stronger than lemonade. But to return to that first visit. At his request he was left an hour alone in my study while he put together a few notes for his lecture in the evening. It was a beautiful lecture and he was a picturesque figure delivering it, not shut up behind a desk reading from a paper, but in evening suit and elegant pumps moving freely about the stage. The subject was "Spoken Poetry", his text "All old literature was spoken or read out". The age of print was making literature a dusty affair. He told us of Irish peasants and tramps and the Abbey Theatre, and kept a large audience of Scottish students entranced. He came again later to address the Philosophical Society in the city, an older, soberer audience ; and he himself was suffering from a violent cold in the head. But it proved to be an interesting occasion. The night of his lecture was the night of the first performance in Dublin of Synge's *Playboy of*

the Western World about which he had talked to us the whole evening. When we got home a telegram had arrived to say all was going well, and we persuaded him to stay in bed next day to throw off his cold, at least not to travel. But about 4 A.M. I was rung up, and going to the door found another telegram which I took up to his bed. This was to say that the performance had been ended by the breaking-out of a riot. There had been some mention, apparently, of a girl's "shift". He left next morning for Dublin by the shortest route, and for several nights faced and fought the rioters. He says that in his youth he was physically timid. He never showed any lack of courage in defending his own opinions or his friends.

On the occasion of one of these visits I had a friend to dinner, a distinguished artist in stained glass. In the evening Yeats got on to his theme of the occult, mediums and trances, and held forth with such conviction and eloquence that when I took my friend down to see him out he told me that he felt as if his hair had been rising on his head while he listened. In London once when I was staying with an old student, George Herbert Mair, and his delightful Irish wife who had been a member of the Abbey Theatre company, Yeats called when Mair was out, and talked in the same way about recent experiences of the occult kind. When he finished and left, the lady exclaimed in a charmingly natural manner, "Oh, I am sure the good Lord did not mean us to go into such things!"

During the war he came to Edinburgh to lecture and stayed with my wife, I being myself in London working in the Ministry of Labour. I saw him at his club the night before he left and had some talk with him as to the lecture. The result was a little circumstance characteristic of his entire sincerity. In talking of ballads, a favourite subject, I had said that I used to point out to my class that what Coleridge did to the ballad was not unlike to what happened to a wild flower when it was taken into a garden and cultivated. It acquired fresh qualities without losing its essential character. He made use of the comparison in the lecture and stopped to say: "Now, if you hear Professor Grierson say that you must not think he got it from me, for it was I who got it from him". And this gives me occasion to say one other thing. To me the whole business of the occult and mediums was so suspect that I was inclined to think that perhaps the interest and belief he expressed was somewhat of a pose, that there was even a little charlatanism in the stress he laid on it knowing that the subject was a favourite one with fashionable circles, the idle rich, as is, or was, astrology.

But Yeats was as sincere in that as in his views on any other subject on which he dilated. He was one of the most sincere men I have ever known. On this last visit he talked as frankly and fascinatingly to my daughters as he had to any older people.

It was on the same occasion of his visit to Edinburgh that another characteristic little incident occurred. The friend of whom I have spoken, a friend of Aberdeen days but who had also settled in Edinburgh, took my place at a luncheon to meet Yeats. When he and the poet were left alone after the ladies went out, he said to Yeats how difficult he found it to go on with his work amid all the anxieties of war. "Oh," said Yeats, "the artist should keep himself above all that. His art should be his exclusive preoccupation." That mood did not outlive the Dublin rebellion and all that followed in Ireland. How deeply he felt the drift everywhere towards violence is evident in many later poems :

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
Rides upon sleep : a drunken soldiery
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;
The night can sweat with terror as before
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
And planned to bring the world under a rule,
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

Nor, although for a time he became a "green-robed senator", did he think the direction taken by his emancipated country was that of which he had dreamed. He often said to me in the early days of our occasional contacts that once the fight with England was over it would be followed by the fight for intellectual freedom against the domination of the priesthood. When I met him in New York in 1932 I said to him, "The clergy seem to have won a pretty complete victory"; and he acknowledged somewhat sadly that it was so. Ireland is the most puritan country in Europe, literature censored on moral grounds, in so much that for a fuller freedom her young authors are fain to fly to Paris or New York. What Yeats thought of such ordering is clear from some of his epigrams : *On hearing that the Students of our New University have joined the Agitation against Immoral Literature* :

Where, where but here have Pride and Truth,
That long to give themselves for wage,
To shake their wicked sides at youth
Restraining reckless middle-age?

On their publication he was good enough to send me some of his autobiographical and critical volumes. Accordingly I sent him, on its appearance in 1912, my edition of the poems of John Donne. I sent it two years later to the then poet laureate whose acquaintance I had made in the interim. The letters I received were characteristically different. Robert Bridges frankly declared that he disliked Donne for various reasons, but that he had found my work a welcome distraction from the anxieties of the dreadful days when we were being driven back on Paris by an apparently victorious enemy. To Yeats Donne had always been a source of interest, but he was good enough to write : " I have been using it constantly and find that I can at last understand Donne. Your notes tell me exactly what I want to know. Poems that I could not understand or could but vaguely understand are now clear, and I notice that the more precise and learned the thought the greater the beauty, the passion. The intricacy and subtlety of his imagination are the length and depth of the furrow made by his passion. His pedantry and the obscenity, the rock and loam of his Eden but make us the more certain that one who is but a man like us has seen God." That is characteristic at once of Yeats's generosity and of the modesty which went along with a fine pride that would not let him yield a jot to any attack upon his ideals or his friends.

✓ Yeats was a great, a quintessential poet. His dramas reveal that perhaps even more clearly than the poems. Much has been said and done in the revival of poetic drama. But it seems sometimes to be thought that a poetic drama is simply a drama written in verse. It is much more than that. In the poetic drama everything, action, characters and form, are differently envisaged from the same in realistic tragedy of bourgeois everyday life. Yeats did not wish to write tragedies such as Sean O'Casey has done so well, no more than Shakespeare could have cared to write a tragedy like *Arden of Feversham*, tragedies which leave you crushed and stricken dumb by a sense of the cruelty and ugliness of human nature and life. Like the Greek dramatists, at least till Euripides, and like Shakespeare with his tragedies of kings and queens and great captains, Yeats turned to the Irish myths. He is less interested in the characters than in the great passions of which they are the mouth-piece. Of tragedies like the *Agamemnon* or *Lear* or *Deirdre* we remember less the horror of the events than the beauty of the whole,—incident, character and language.

Yeats was certainly, whatever we may think of some of his

aberrations as they seem to my more prosaic mind, the greatest poet that I have known in the flesh. Alone of the poets who began to sing in the nineties he lived out his proud life to the end without concession to any demands or censure of his public or his country ; and like the greatest artists, poets, musicians, his work shows a continuous development, its different periods, as in Shakespeare of the early comedies, the histories, the tragedies, the romances, or Milton of the early poems, the *Paradise Lost*, and the last two works of his old age, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson*, or Tennyson of the poems up to *In Memoriam*, then the too perfect but not deeply inspired *Idylls of the King*, and finally the troubled passionate poems of his last years. But these changes in Yeats are the main theme of Mr. Menon's study. The drift of his thought towards authoritarianism he deplores. I cannot believe that the aristocratic bent of Yeats's mind would ever have accepted with equanimity the rule of such vulgar, brutal tyrants as Hitler and his crew. What he dreamed of is clear from his admiration of Swift's *A Discourse*, the need in every country for some proper adjustment of rulers, advisers and people which even if we become socialists every well-ruled country must have. Communism, anarchism are dreams, ideal limits in directions a country may move.

In Indian students Yeats had always a deep interest. He told me he respected in Mr. Menon his knowledge not only of English literature but of the poetry of his own country. His early interest too in the possibilities of combining music and recitation made him interested in one who is both hereditarily and actually a musician, as in Scotland a Macrimmon may be, and one whom I know is, hereditarily and actually a piper. Mr. Menon's instrument is the *veena*. He comes of an ancient family of musicians.

H. J. C. GRIERSON

INTRODUCTION

“ We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.”—*Per Amica Silentia Lunae*.

IN *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* Yeats wrote—“ A poet when he is growing old will ask himself if he cannot keep his mask and his vision without new bitterness, new disappointment ”. Yeats’s own later days are the most complete answer to it. His later work represents the consummation of a long and fruitful poetic career and is a reminder to us of how a poet can and should develop.

It is perhaps too early to assess his achievement finally. Not that I think it is impossible to judge a contemporary writer satisfactorily. I think contemporaneity is one of the most useful factors in studying and understanding a writer. Yeats’s uncanny awareness of the unsatisfactoriness of the European social organisation, of the nature of some of our struggles, and his analysis of the contemporary European scene can be grasped best by our generation. The validity of some of his assumptions for the future seems to me dubious. I think a measure of the greatness of a writer is how significant his interpretation of the present is for future generations. Some of Yeats’s conclusions, the inevitability of authoritarianism, for instance, I find difficult to accept. Freedom to Yeats implied the recognition of necessity, but not economic necessity. It certainly did not mean the creation of opportunities. These things, I believe, are very important in any broad assessment of history.

Time will have to decide if Yeats was a great prophet. But as to his greatness as a poet even we today have little doubt. In personal intercourse he was open, generous and very communicative. There was little arrogance and little posing. This is not the impression one would gather from a superficial acquaintance with him, or even from his writings, where he is reticent about personal emotions and somewhat overbearing in his criticism. If he dressed and behaved a little too consciously like a poet, it was because he thought of a poet’s work as a vocation and took it seriously. And throughout his life he was true to his vocation in a way few poets have been. Three factors are important in this make-up and the general trend of his development—the Irish background (perhaps I should say the

Irish-Protestant background), the obsession with his own family circles, and the influence of his father. These three things are closely related and merge into one another. Other factors, like the aestheticism of Pater, the influence of the Symbolists, books, the friends of his youth, Irish politics, Ezra Pound, the discovery of *Speculum*, his wife's mediumship, are more or less conscious influences which he has carefully utilised. But the first three are fundamental and persist right through his work. If he quarrelled and disagreed with his father, the very quarrels and disagreements acquired a somewhat lasting importance.

The eighteen-eighties, when Yeats started to write, was a strange period in the history of Irish Literature and Poetry. The antipathy to the English had permeated into every recess of the national consciousness. On the one hand, poets attempted to create a poetry of hatred with traditional English phrases and idioms. On the other, they tried to go back to Gaelic. With neither of these schools did Yeats have much sympathy. Patriotism by itself was not enough; nor was aggressive nationalism. And Yeats's lack of scholarship and his English education made him unequal to the task of tackling Gaelic. Patriotism had to be seasoned with romanticism and had to be conceived in the old high-heroic way before he could be excited. O'Leary, for instance, belonged to that romantic conception of nationalism and patriotism. Thus Yeats's Ireland was not quite the same as that of the contributors to *The Nation*, though he might have accepted Mangan. Nor did he commend Davis without reserve. The Ireland Yeats wanted to labour for was the heroic legendary Ireland of Cuchulain and Conchubar and Deirdre, of which O'Leary and perhaps Grattan seemed to him modern counterparts. Into this pattern some of his ancestors fitted very well. There was one who was "a King's County soldier, one of Marlborough's generals. . . . Other ancestors or great-uncles bore a part in Irish history; one saved the life of Sarsfield at the battle of Sedgemoor; another, taken prisoner by King James's army, owed his to Sarsfield's gratitude; another, a century later, roused the gentlemen of Meath against some local Jacquère, and was shot dead upon a county road, and yet another 'chased the United Irishmen for a fortnight, fell into their hands and was hanged'. The notorious Major Sirr, who arrested Lord Edward Fitzgerald and gave him the bullet wound he died of in the jail, was godfather to several of my great-great-grandfather's children; while to make a balance, my great-grandfather had been Robert Emmet's friend

and was suspected and imprisoned though but for a few hours. One great-uncle fell at New Orleans in 1813, while another, who became Governor of Penang, led the forlorn hope at the taking of Rangoon. . . . I am delighted with all that joins my life to those who had power in Ireland or with those anywhere that were good servants and poor bargainers. . . ." This ancestral hero-worship and pride in the old family tradition were given a further point by his own extreme timidity as a youth and his comparative poverty. Yeats envied courage and personal daring in others. The fearless adventurous grandfather with a great scar on the hand from a whaling-hook became undifferentiated from the violent, passionate heroes of Irish legendry. And, of course, it is the impoverished gentry that diligently cultivates the aristocratic bias. Yeats loved to quote O'Leary: "No gentleman can be a Socialist, he might be an anarchist".

"Three types of men", he wrote in *Poetry and Tradition*, "have made all beautiful things. Aristocracies have made beautiful manners, because their place in the world puts them above the fear of life, and the countrymen have made beautiful stories and beliefs, because they have nothing to lose and so do not fear, and the artists have made all the rest, because Providence has filled them with recklessness." He would have stressed the first and third types. The second represents the interests of a short period when he took great delight in folklore. The aristocratic bias is seen even in his early poetry in the cold, proud women, his portrayal of love as a grand, distant passion, in the subject matter, so frequently Kings, Heroes and their contentions.

The father's influence he did outgrow, though it set him on a path on which he would otherwise have not found himself. The pre-Raphaelite household under John B. Yeats's dictatorship might have completely warped his individuality. Indeed it is a miracle of individuality and strength that he could withstand such a powerful pull. One thing must be said of John B. Yeats. He instilled into his son a complete indifference to 'getting on' in this world. In his early struggles this was a great determining factor. His "fanatic heart" did the rest. Poetry became his *raison d'être*; and he applied himself to his art with a diligence and wholeheartedness few poets have been capable of. At times, naturally, he was uncertain and his vision cribbed. But always he kept growing, gaining in strength, often forcing, by a miracle of fortitude, triumph out of defeat.

On the occasion of Yeats's seventieth birthday T. S. Eliot wrote in a commentary in *The Criterion* : " I can think of no poet, not even among the greatest, who has shown a longer period of development than Yeats. . . . Development to his extent is not merely genius, it is character ; and it sets a standard which his juniors should seek to emulate without hoping to equal."

EARLY DAYS AND WORK

I

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS was born at Sandymount near Dublin on June 13, 1865. John B. Yeats, his father, was a man of strong opinions and an artist of considerable merit who gave up a fairly lucrative practice at the Irish Bar to devote himself to painting. His mother was a Pollexfen, frail and beautiful, who fostered in him that deep and passionate yearning for Sligo which was such a formative influence in his early days. The Yeatses were courteous and gentle, 'respectable' as the Sligo barber said; the Pollexfens fearless and somewhat adventurous. "We have ideas and no passions, but by marriage with a Pollexfen we have given a tongue to the sea-cliffs," said a Yeats once, and it was the only eulogy which really turned Yeats's head.

A shy, wide-eyed boy, he grew up in lovely Sligo with its hills and rivers and inland lakes and the sea. Yet his childhood was not one of happiness. "I remember little of childhood but its pain; I have grown happier with every year of life as though conquering something in myself, for certainly my miseries were not made by others, but were a part of my own mind", he wrote later. The stable-boy was his principal companion and his book of *Orange Rhymes* which they read together in the hayloft or among the piles of nets on the quay gave him for the first time the pleasures of rhyme. His mother read little. But she and the fisherman's wife would tell each other stories "that Homer might have told, pleased with any moment of sudden intensity and laughing together over any point of satire". *Village Ghosts* in *Celtic Twilight* is the record of such an afternoon. And he was eight or nine years old when his father, sitting with him on a tongue of land covered with coarse grass between Sligo and Rosses Point, read out to him *The Lays of Ancient Rome*. It was the first poetry to move him after the stable-boy's *Orange Rhymes*. Later came Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Grimm and Hans Andersen. But none of them could satisfy his prodigious fancy or give him the knights and dragons and beautiful ladies that he longed for.

Soon afterwards the Yeats family shifted to London and went to live in a house close to Burne-Jones's. Yeats hated London and

longed for Sligo, if only for a sod of earth from some field that he knew or something of Sligo to hold in his hand. And at the school at Hammersmith with its Gothic building of yellow bricks, unable to attend to anything less interesting than his thoughts, and persecuted by the boys for being Irish, he would think of Sligo with tears.

His father influenced his reading a great deal and even as a boy he read Balzac, Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, Byron, the pre-Raphaelites, and a little later, Darwin and Wallace, Huxley and Haeckel. John Yeats was somewhat of a sceptical philosopher, an English liberal in thought and a pre-Raphaelite in literature. He disliked the 'Victorian poetry of ideas' and insisted that poetry must be an idealisation of speech. He never read anything aloud for its content, and all his discussions were of style.

Back in Dublin in 1880, Yeats went to the Harcourt Street High School where he read Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* to his class-mates and was indifferent to examinations. Later he went to the Art Schools in Kildare Street where he made the friendship of John Hughes and Oliver Sheppard, the Irish sculptors, and A. E. the poet. A. E. had already begun to have his visions. The school did not lay any emphasis on scholarship or the history of Art and had no settled standards. The masters liked smooth surfaces and neat outlines and nothing else. And Yeats merely studied Art for want of anything better to do.

But Dublin had its compensations. Professor Dowden was a friend of the family and his prosperous house, where good taste prevailed and Poetry was rightly valued, was a pleasant refuge. Dowden was a sympathetic critic, but never extravagant in praise. At first, Dowden's good-humoured irony and scholarship made him appear a sage. But he was chilled to know that Dowden wrote his book on Shelley, whom Yeats worshipped, merely to keep a promise to the Shelley family; and when, later, he was urged to read George Eliot there was almost a quarrel. "I . . . was in no mind to like her. She seemed to have a distrust or a distaste for all in life that gives one a springing foot." Soon, to provoke Dowden became a delight. Others came to the Dowdens—Katharine Tynan, Dr. Hyde, John F. Taylor, friend of the Fenian O'Leary, all friends of later life. Dublin was becoming tolerable.

He 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. My lines but seldom scanned, for I could not understand

the prosody in the books, although there were many lines that taken by themselves had music. I spoke them slowly as I wrote and only discovered when I read them to somebody else that there was no common music, no prosody." The "play after play" were the slight dramatic sketches, *The Island of Statues*, *The Seeker*, *Mosada*, *Time and the Witch Vivien*, all of which appeared in the *Dublin University Review*. None of these are in the Collected Works. The *Dublin University Review* was then under the editorship of T. W. Rolleston and C. H. Oldham, both men of great ability and critical acumen. Rolleston, an upright handsome man and a fine Greek scholar, and Oldham were constantly on the look-out for new literary talent. The *Dublin University Review* in their hands really became the organ of the Young Ireland Movement and rose to an importance almost as great as that of *The Nation*. *The Nation* under Duffy was a first-rate political weapon, but its literary contributors (in spite of the fact that Clarence Mangan was one) simply wrote political propaganda in facile and mechanical rhymes. The Young Ireland Movement, on the other hand, was a conscious attempt to found a school of Irish Literature in the English language. John Mitchel, perhaps the ablest member of the group, wrote the testament of Young Ireland in his *Jail Journal*. Rolleston played a great part in the early stages of the movement, and the *Dublin University Review* towards the end of the nineteenth century became a great deal more than a mere University journal.

Yeats's own contributions were far from being of revolutionary importance. But Oldham took a great interest in Yeats and often asked him to read his poetry at his rooms where friends gathered. Whatever Yeats's achievement at that time, there seems to have been little doubt in literary circles that he was the coming man. These dramatic sketches are short inconsequential works. They are the work of an indolent young man, somewhat lost in this world of everyday life. *The Island of Statues* is the earliest of them, an Arcadian pastoral with enchanted islands, mysterious flowers and timid shepherds. "I had read Shelley and Spenser and tried to mix their styles together in a pastoral play." The pastoral setting, the Arcadian shepherds, Naschina's disguise in the quest after her lover, are all in the Spenserian manner. Spenser's *Island of Venus* and Diana's nymphs changing into stone obviously suggested the play to him. On the other hand, the Voices and their prophecies and the general atmosphere of doom about the Island are echoes of *Prometheus Unbound* which was his sacred book at that time. I

don't think the play is meant to be seriously treated as an allegory. Technically, it is uncertain. The rhythm is not always smooth and the great many end-stopped lines produce an effect of cramp. Today the whole poem appears very adolescent and perhaps a bit silly. But I doubt if it gave the same impression in 1885. Poetic conventions change quickly. Pastoral settings and Arcadian shepherds sound absurd today, but fifty years ago they simply gave the serious poet the character of a romantic in a broad and accepted sense. The woodland valley, shepherds with their flutes, old knights, the ruined temple in the forest, bearded witches, all appear again in *The Seeker*, another early attempt. The Spanish Inquisition is the theme of *Mosada*, a more ambitious work. It first appeared in the *Dublin University Review*, but was published soon after in book form. It was a limited edition by Sealy Bryres and Walker and has been long out of print. *Mosada*, a beautiful Moorish lady of the village of Azubia, is condemned to the stake for her religion by the officers of the Inquisition. Ebremar, the chief monk, bright-eyed and hollow-cheeked from fasting, decrees that the Moorish girl must die. "I will burn heresy from this mad earth," he says with passionate devotion. In the meanwhile, *Mosada*, alone in the dungeon of the Inquisition, sucks poison from a ring in anticipation of death and is dreaming of her lover, Gomez. Ebremar enters to prepare the heretic for her death and is shocked to recognise her as his old love. His passion for her is roused again, and in desperation he entreats her to escape with him to some distant country where "none shall know that I was Ebremar whose thoughts were fixed on God and heaven and holiness". But it is too late. The deadly poison has done its work and *Mosada* comes to her end. The story is a little fantastic and the plot somewhat incoherent. A thoroughly comic song by a Spanish monk is one of the few really comic touches in the early Yeats.

The *Dublin University Review* continued to bring out little poems, fragments and odds and ends. There was a short poem entitled *Love and Death*. Another, *In a Drawing-Room*, and a third, *Life*, were mixed together and rehashed later as *Quatrains and Aphorisms*. A political poem called *The Two Titans* has never been reprinted. These make up his juvenilia and represent the shy and arrested expression of his gentle and youthful fancies. There are many slovenly lines, awkward and uncouth constructions and other flaws of execution. But they form a distinct achievement full of promise.

II

The Yeats family returned to London in 1887 to set up house in Bedford Park. And soon Yeats is hard at work at the British Museum on an edition of Irish fairy and folk tales. There is no doubt that these fairy tales and legends were very real to him. He is continually harping on horses which shiver with terror and dogs that howl at things which we cannot see. People who live primitive lives are conscious of many things which we cannot fathom, he says, and adds: "As life becomes more orderly, more deliberate, the supernatural world sinks farther away". In this, he was not alone considering the amount of literature which has appeared in the nineteenth century on Irish folklore and fairies. The sincerity and seriousness with which he wrote such notes as—"It has been held by many that somewhere out of the void there is a perpetual dribble of souls; and these souls pass through many shapes before they incarnate as men—hence the nature spirits. They are invisible—except at rare moments and time; they inhabit the interior elements, while we live upon the outer and the gross"—are a bit alarming. And he quotes Paracelsus and Elephas Levi, which shows that the craze for occultism had already started. Edward Walsh, William Allingham and Sir Samuel Ferguson roused his interest very much. The anthology has many poems of theirs. Ferguson writes poems on fairy wells and fairy thorns, Walsh on fairy nurses and Allingham on fairy shoemakers. Walsh, the son of a sergeant in the Cork Militia, had a passion for the Irish language and collected an enormous number of tales, legends and songs of the people. A school teacher by profession, he was continually getting into trouble with the authorities for his political ideas. He was dismissed from one job for writing *What is Repeal, Papa?* and from another for managing to get a clandestine interview with John Mitchel. He had a great gift for translation, and it is by his transcriptions of ballads that he will be remembered best. Allingham, a customs official and friend of Leigh Hunt, was the poet of Donegal. He had many friends in England among poets and men of letters and was a very subtle artist. Ferguson, a far greater poet than both, had a more fertile imagination and wrote about the heroic cycles of Irish myth and at that time stirred Yeats's interest most. It is with a touch of bitterness and impatience that he says—"The English reader will most likely never have heard his name, for Anglo-Irish critics who have found English audiences, being more Anglo than Irish, have

been content to follow English opinion instead of leading it in all matters concerning Ireland ”.

The Wanderings of Oisín and other Poems appeared in 1889. The principal work is a long narrative poem in three parts which owes a great deal to Ferguson's *Aideen's Grave*, Oisín's lament over Aideen, the wife of his son Oscar. It even echoes Ferguson's poem frequently. Compare Yeats's

We thought on Oscar's pencilled urn
And those on Gavra lying low

to Ferguson's

The great green rath's ten-acred tomb
Lies heavy on his urn

and

A cup of bodkin-pencilled clay
Holds Oscar.

The familiar old theme in Ferguson's hands acquires an epic grandeur and strength. Yeats, in creating the vagueness of a dream, emasculated his theme. I think it was a deliberate attempt to get out of the classical European tract. “Modern Poetry grows weary of using over and over again the personages and stories and metaphors that have come to us through Greece and Rome, or from Wales and Brittany through the middle ages. . . . The Irish legends in popular tradition and in old Gaelic literature are more numerous and as beautiful, and alone among great European legends have the beauty and wonder of altogether new things.” He even succeeds in creating a strange unEuropean cadence here and there :

Ran

Deep sunken on the blade's length, “Mananan !”
Sea-god, that once, to give his slaves content,
Sprang dripping, and, with captive demons sent
From the whole seven seas, those towers set
Rooted in foam and clouds. . . .

And look at the similes, the metaphors : ‘Old like the wandering moon’, ‘Like coloured Asian birds at evening in the rainless lands’. The shell of Niamh's dress ‘wavered like the summer streams as her soft bosom rose and fell’ ; and her days pass ‘like a wayward tune’. Her sheep have wool ‘whiter than sea-froth flows’. Her companions laughed ‘like murmurs of the sea’, their brows ‘white as fragrant milk’. The song birds ‘stood round

the shore like drops of frozen rain-bow light'. Oisín falls into 'a long iron sleep, as a fish in the water goes dumb as a stone'. His horse 'fled away like a summer fly'. And yet with all this un-English Celtic remoteness the poem as a whole is just a dilution of the old English romantics. "With all that overcharged colour inherited from the Romantic Movement . . . I deliberately sought out an impression as of cold light and tumbling clouds." He confesses that it is full of the Italian colour of Shelley. And it is also significant that Morris thought it was his kind of poetry. Morris infused into his sagas a kind of medieval feeling which also resulted in the almost complete emasculation of his themes. What Yeats did to the Oisín story is clear when you compare his poem with, say, Ferguson's. There are echoes of Tennyson in many places. The landscape, the pageantry and the not infrequent bathos recall Keats's *Endymion*. If you search for derivations, one finds many, even in the details. I don't think the likeness between the Fortress on the Isle of Many Fears and the Temple of the Spirit in *The Revolt of Islam* is accidental. Neither can I help feeling that

And the fixed stars had dawned and shone and set,
Since God, Time and Death and Sleep

is in imitation of Blake. Yeats's Irishism at this stage is confined to his interest in fantasy, vague Celticism, fairies and spirits. Even his use and understanding of Gaelic mythology is uncertain.

We also see here the earliest phase of a conflict between aesthetic and moral interests. He hadn't yet come under the full force of the aestheticism of Pater, though he had virtually accepted the Blakean idea that imagination is a *thing*, or a region in which real things exist. Blake's contention that you cannot have liberty without moral virtue implied a restraint of conduct. Paganism is natural to proud and happy people, Yeats liked to think. Undelighted labour has made the business of men a desecration. This gay pessimism is, of course, very different from the medieval Christian pessimism of *The Seeker* and *The Island of Statues*.

Coming to the shorter poems in the 1889 volume, one is again struck by the fact that someone so deeply rooted in Sligo as Yeats should produce poems so English in style. They consist of short dramatic sketches, meditative and fanciful lyrics, ballads, songs and quatrains. Almost all of them had appeared in some periodical or other—the *Dublin University Review*, the *Irish Monthly*, the *Irish Fireside*, the *Leisure Hour*. But it is not a complete collection up to date.

There are at least half a dozen poems published in reviews and periodicals which are absent here. He had already started to select and discard. I think one or two of the discarded poems like *Remembrance* which begins :

Remembering thee, I search out these faint flowers
 Of rhyme; remembering thee, this crescent night,
 While o'er the buds, and o'er the grass-blades, bright
 And clinging with the dew of odorous showers,
 With purple sandals sweep the grave-eyed hours—
 Remembering thee, I muse, while fades in flight
 The honey-hearted leisure of the light,
 And hanging o'er the hush of willow bowers . . .

are as good as any in the book. Of course, even about half the poems in the 1889 volume are absent in the later Collected Works. The longer poems are dramatic sketches. The partiality for this form was due to his father's influence, which was still great. His father exalted dramatic poetry above everything else and would hear of nothing but drama. Personal utterance was only egoism. Yeats argued that personal utterance could be as fine an escape from rhetoric and abstraction as drama itself. And so the struggle went on, and in those early days the father always had his way. And Yeats struggled hard with a difficult medium and achieved little outside mere romantic convention. Later on he himself came round to the belief that lyric poetry is often blurred and vague whereas dramatic poetry is clear in outline and can achieve more manful energy. *Time and the Witch Vivien*, a bold little sketch, has marble-flagged, pillared rooms, magical instruments and a fountain. It is a mixture of Malory and *The Mabinogion*, Spenser and Tennyson. *Jealousy* has an Indian setting.

The Indian poems are very naïve. His search for some philosophic idea, some tradition of belief older than the European Church, took him wherever his fancy led. Eastern philosophy and religion had a vague and distant lure. He was attempting to create a new religion, one of "poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression". "I wished for a world where I could discover this tradition perpetually, and not in pictures and poems only, but in tiles round the chimney-piece and in the hangings that kept out the draught. I had even created a dogma: 'Because those imaginary people are created out of the deepest instinct of man, to be his measure and his norm, whatever I can imagine those mouths speaking may be the

nearest I can go to truth'." Yeats imagined he found in the young Brahmin that he and A. E. invited to Dublin one of those imaginary people. He was a charming young man with delicate hands and beautiful gestures. The seriousness with which they treated him and his words is somewhat pathetic. "Alcibiades fled from Socrates lest he might do nothing but listen to him all his life long and I am certain that we, seeking as youth will for some unknown deed and thought, all dreamed that but to listen to this man . . . and to think as he did was the one thing worth doing and thinking." The little Brahmin with the Christ-like face poured out wisdom in riddles. His make-up was complete. He carried *Marius, the Epicurean* in his pocket and had even theories of Art. Art for Art's sake is the only really sinless doctrine, he maintained. All action and all words that lead to action were vulgar and trivial! This was, of course, completely acceptable to Yeats. Indeed the measure of the greatness of any doctrine, religion or dogma was how far it fitted in with his own particular scheme of life, how far to *him* it was acceptable. T. S. Eliot has pointed out that the influence of Hindu thought on Europe as in Schopenhauer, von Hartmann and Deussen has largely been through romantic misunderstanding. The same is true of Yeats, though he did not, of course, apply himself to the study of Eastern thought and philosophy with half the seriousness of any of these. The Hindu in the sculptured caverns of Elephanta discovers a profound answer to the riddle of the world, he says in the Introduction to the works of Blake. One would think by that that he understood the deep significance of Hindu art, the concept of *Samādhi*, of Art as a means of edification. But, no. In the next breath he says that the gipsy finds an equally efficacious answer in the markings of the sea-shell that he carries to bring him good fortune.

Except for the titles and the names, the Indian poems are, again, just romantic convention. *Jealousy* (in later editions *Anashuya and Vijaya*) was actually suggested to Yeats by a man at Rosses Point who was carrying two salmon. "One man with two souls," I said, and added, "O no, two people with one soul." *Kanva on Himself* is based on the Brahmin's bedtime prayer: "I have lived many lives. I have been a slave to a prince. Many a beloved has sat upon my knees and I have sat upon the knees of many a beloved. Everything that has been shall be again." Beautiful words, says Yeats, which he spoiled by turning into clumsy verse. The longing for the other world of *The Wanderings of Oisín* appears again now and then:

Come away, O human child !
 To the woods and waters wild
 With a fairy, hand in hand,
 For the world's more full of weeping than you can
 understand.

This is more than just a superficial love for the land of the fairies. It is part of an imagination which is seeking out an escape from the world of everyday realities. Even the 'Irish' poems in this group like *Ephemera* and *The Fairy Pedant* show this vagueness and inaction. *The Fairy Pedant* is no more Irish than *Kanva on Himself* is Indian. It shows the metallic tunefulness of Swinburne :

Afar from our lawn and our levée,
 O sister of sorrowful gaze !
 Where the roses in scarlet are heavy
 And dream of the end of their days,
 You move in another dominion
 And hang o'er the historied stone :
 Unpruned is your beautiful pinion
 Who wander and whisper alone.

The only political poem, *The Two Titans*, is rather pointless, a watery *Prometheus Unbound*. The only patriotic poem, *How Ferenczi Renyi kept Silent*, is set in Hungary. It is very emphatically patriotic and melodramatic and is very much in the manner of Davis. *Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet* is the reconstruction of an old Irish song. This and the ballad *King Goll* are the only poems which have an Irish quality. They are slightly later in date than most of the others. They indicate the direction of his development and form a prelude to the more Irish imagery and contents of his next volume.

III

Yeats has said that from the moment he began *The Wanderings of Oisín* his subject matter became Irish. A good many of the poems in *The Countess Cathleen* volume are founded on Irish tradition and have a distinctive Irish character, though there are quite a few like *The White Birds*, *The Two Trees* and *The Man who dreamed of Fairyland* which again deal with the old theme of a nostalgia for the world of phantasy and dream. His attachment to Ireland at this period was mainly sentimental. His real friends and interests were in England. Henley was there, so was William Morris, perhaps the two greatest influences at that time. At William Morris's house at

Hammersmith he was a frequent visitor. He met there Walter Crane, Emery Walker, Bernard Shaw, Hyndman the Socialist and the anarchist Prince Kropotkin, all members of Morris's Socialist circle. Morris stirred his interest very much. "If some angels offered the choice, I would choose to live his life, poetry and all, rather than my own or any other man's." Yet Morris's influence worked in a different way from Henley's. Morris did not "project like Henley . . . an image of himself, because having all his imagination set upon making and doing, he had little self-knowledge". On the other hand, Henley was his acknowledged teacher. "I, like many others, began under him my education." Morris's poetry moved him intensely. He admired *The Man who never Laughed Again* to the point of exasperating his father. Henley's writings he disliked "mainly because he wrote *vers libre*, which I associated with Tyndal and Huxley, and Bastien-Lepage's clownish peasant staring with vacant eyes at her great boots". The strong impressionism of *Hospital Sketches* and *London Voluntaries* did not appeal to him. He was a great actor with a bad part, Yeats used to say, like a great actor of passion who could display some quality of the soul personified again and again. "Henley, half inarticulate—'I am very costive,' he would say—beset with personal quarrels, built up an image of power and magnanimity till it became, at moments, when seen as it were by lightning, his true self." Henley was the leader of a little group which included Charles Whibley, Kenneth Grahame, Barry Pain, the novelist, and R. A. M. Stevenson. Kipling was there sometimes and Stepniak, the revolutionary. Henley was something of an autocrat, but he encouraged talent, denounced things and persons "that did not move us to reverence" and was "quite plainly not on the side of our parents". He frequently revised and even rewrote Yeats's contributions to the *Scots Observer* (afterwards the *National Observer*), of which he was the editor. "At first, indeed, I was ashamed of being rewritten and thought that others were not, and only began investigation when the editorial characteristics—epigrams, archaisms and all—appeared in the article upon Paris fashions and in that upon opium by an Egyptian pasha."

In spite of all this excitement, he writes to Katharine Tynan : "Any breath from Ireland in this hateful London where you cannot go five paces without seeing some wretched object broken either by wealth or poverty is good". And again in another letter : "I do not think I shall ever find London very tolerable. It can give me

nothing." That is pure sentimentality. He gives fuller vent to it in *John Sherman* and *Dhoya*, the two prose stories which he wrote at his father's instigation. John Sherman is very much like Yeats himself and there is little doubt that Ballah is Sligo. Gangonach's apology, "I am an old little Irish spirit, and I sit in the hedges and watch the world go by. . . . If my voice at while grows distant and dreary when I talk of the world's affairs, remember that I have seen all from my hole in the hedge. I hear continually the songs of my own people . . . and am content", is only one side of a restless existence. Contentment was the last thing he had. Intellectually he was discontented with everything—his father's Liberalism, Morris's Socialism, Henley's Conservatism. Henley's patriotic imperialism must have been as unpleasant to him as his violent and picturesque denunciations during conversation. But his iconoclasm and unconventional ways were stimulating. He was a frank and genial friend, the champion of Rodin, and made the promotion of Art and Literature his chief purpose in life. Morris's Socialism was almost diametrically opposed to the sentiments of Henley's *National Observer*. But it was tempered by a yearning towards an inaccessible artistic ideal. His house, furniture and decorations had a faint medieval atmosphere. The simplicity of feeling, the directness, even the severity of the ballads—*Father Gilligan*, *Lament of the Old Pensioner*, *Meditations of an Old Fisherman*, *The Fiddler of Dooney*—show the strict and passionate self-judgement which is Henley's. On the other hand, the wistfulness and melancholy of the poems based on the Irish cycle are Morris's.

Ireland has really become the main theme, though its treatment is determined by English standards of judgement. There is only one fairy poem. The Indian has disappeared. The Arcadian myths have given place to Diarmuid, Fergus and Cuchulain. But Fergus's world isn't yet one of Irish mythology.

Who will go drive with Fergus now,
 And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,
 And dance upon the level shore?
 Young man, lift up thy russet brow,
 And lift thy tender eyelids, maid,
 And brood on hopes and years no more.
 And no more turn aside and brood
 Upon love's bitter mystery.

This is Fergus in a semi-Arcadian setting and very artificial. The vague mystical worship of Intellectual Beauty caught from Spenser

and Shelley has been given the Irish symbol of the Rose. And he uses it with a difference in that he imagines it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar.

The short poems in this volume were later collected under the name *The Rose*, and they begin and end with the pursuit and finding of Beauty. The opening poem *To the Rose upon the Rood of Time* beginning

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days !
 Come near me while I sing the ancient ways :
 Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide ;
 The Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,
 Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold ;
 And thine own sadness, whereof stars, grown old
 In dancing silver-sandalled on the sea,
 Sing in their high and lonely melody.
 Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,
 I find under the boughs of love and hate,
 In all poor foolish things that live a day,
 Eternal beauty wandering on her way,

has a rhyme, as Yeats himself confesses, that echoes Morris. That feeble prayer to the red-rose-bordered hem develops into a bold and fearless cry in the last poem :

Know that I would accounted be
 True brother of that company
 Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
 Ballad and story, rann and song ;
 Nor be I any less of them,
 Because the red rose bordered hem
 Of her whose history began
 Before God made the angelic clan,
 Trails all about the written page,
 For in the world's first blossoming age
 The light fall of her flying feet
 Made Ireland's heart begin to beat,
 And still the starry candles flare
 To help her light foot here and there,
 And still the thoughts of Ireland brood
 Upon her holy quietude.

Nor may I less be counted one
 With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
 Because to him who ponders well
 My rhymes more than their rhyming tell

Of the dim wisdoms old and deep,
 That God gives unto man in sleep.
 For round about my table go
 The magical powers to and fro. . . .

This is the very personal statement of an overwhelming ambition. And between these two we find both the Intellectual Beauty of the Red Rose and Ireland treated in different forms and guises. Fergus is set to a Druid tune in a Druid land. The Rose is treated as the Rose of the World, the Rose of Peace and the Rose of Battle. In all these the Rose is spiritual love, supreme beauty, a symbol of the Sun, the Flower of Life, and of course, Ireland. In the notes to *The Wind among the Reeds* he says : " One finds the Rose in the Irish poets sometimes as a religious symbol, as in the phrase ' the Rose of Friday ' , meaning the Rose of austerity, in a Gaelic poem in Dr. Hyde's *Religious Poems of Connacht* ; and, I think, as a symbol of woman's beauty in the Gaelic song *Roseen Dubh* ; and a symbol of Ireland in Mangan's adaptation of *Roseen Dubh*, *My Dark Rosaleen*, and in Mr. Aubrey de Vere's *The Little Black Rose*. I do not know any evidence to prove whether this symbol came to Ireland with medieval Christianity, or whether it has come down from Celtic times. I have read somewhere that a stone engraved with a Celtic god, who holds what looks like a rose in one hand, has been found somewhere in England. . . . If the Rose was really a symbol of Ireland among the Gaelic poets, and if *Roseen Dubh* is really a political poem, as some think, one may feel pretty certain that the ancient Celts associated the Rose with Eire or Fotla, or Bamba—goddesses who gave their names to Ireland—or with some principal god or goddess, for such symbols are not suddenly adopted or invented, but come out of mythology."

Often the old inclination to write of strange things in a ' tongue men do not know ' is visible. But though the earlier wistfulness and sentimental attachment to places like Sligo are seen here and there as in *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, most of the ballads are full of natural sentiment and have humour. The effective use of the broken stave in *The Death of Cuchulain* to relieve the monotony of the rhymed couplets shows that he pays careful attention to technique.

The principal work, *The Countess Cathleen*, is an attempt to answer a moral question : May a soul sacrifice itself for a good end ? In answering the question, Yeats manages to give the traditions, customs and beliefs of Christian Ireland a dramatic form. Up till now he dealt with the pre-Christian cycle of events. The contending

moods and moral motives of the Christian cycle, he thought, were best suited to dramatic form. It is also an attempt "to unite a more ample method of feeling not less national, Celtic and distinctive". *The Countess Cathleen* is an excellent piece of propaganda, but it irritated both patriots and the clergy. "I was accused of blasphemy because I made a woman sell her soul and yet escaped damnation, and a lack of patriotism because I made Irishmen and women, who it seems never did such a thing, sell theirs." A cardinal who protested most vehemently against the play avowed that he had not read it; and a politician, besides persuading a number of Catholic students to sign a protest, actually called upon the audience to use obstructionist methods.

The whole play is directed to the main question mark, and by a careful avoidance of complexities of motives he achieves both directness and severity. Even the conflict in Cathleen's mind is left to the imagination of the audience. The Celtic tapestries remain. There are pookas and slowths, sheogues and tevishes, and a love-lorn bard. But when necessary he succeeds in giving his lines a stark reality, as for instance the words of the peasants when describing the famine :

Mary : You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang
Nailed like dead vermins to the doors of God.

And in another place :

Sheumas : I passed by Margaret Nolan's ; for nine days
Her mouth was green from dock and nettles.

I have been writing of the play as it was first written and published. It was planned and partly written when Yeats was little more than a boy "in the first fervour of my generation's distaste for Victorian rhetoric". In the later versions the play has been revised and almost completely re-written. Alcel, the poet, has taken the place of Kevin, the bard, and the old songs have disappeared. The love scenes between Alcel and the Countess were added on only after the first production in Dublin, which was as late as 1899. He knew nothing of the theatre when he first wrote the play, he says, and the revisions were intended for more effective stage production. The Abbey did not perform it till 1911, and a new ending was sketched with an eye on the Abbey stage where it was difficult to stage a mountainside full of armed angels. On the other hand, the stage platform was quite easily adaptable to the flight of steps for the

appearance of the angels. This new ending is shorter and easier to follow than even the first revised form and is meant for audiences whose knowledge of Irish mythology is limited. Thus almost the whole of the Irish mythology is cut out from Aleel's speech. In the acting version it is :

Aleel : They're rising up—they're rising through the earth,
 Fat Asmodel and giddy Belial,
 And all the fiends. Now they leap in the air.
 But why does Hell's gate creak so? Round and round,
 Hither and hither, to and fro they're running.

Compare this to the older version :

Aleel : The brazen door stands wide, and Balor comes
 Borne in his heavy car, and demons have lifted
 The age-weary eye-lids from the eyes that of old
 Turned Gods to stone ; Barach, the traitor, comes
 And the lascivious race, Cailitin,
 That cast a Druid weakness and decay
 Over Sualtim's and Old Dectora's child ;
 And that great king Hell first took hold upon
 When he killed Naoise and broke Deirdre's heart ;
 And all their heads are twisted to one side,
 For when they lived they warred on beauty and peace
 With obstinate, crafty, sidelong bitterness.

There is no doubt that the play gains in effectiveness considerably from these revisions. Dissatisfied with the colour and exuberances of his early work, he devoted considerable time to re-writing his early poems and plays. It was a search for simplicity and naturalism in style and an attempt to use the common syntax. But of this I shall say something later.

SPECULATIONS

THE Wind among the Reeds, Yeats's next book of poems, did not appear till 1899, though several editions of the earlier works came out in varying stages of revision after 1892. The new volume shows everywhere the speculations of his youth. It is the product of a period of incursions into legendry, magic, astrology, occultism, theosophy, symbolism, crystal-gazing, and it is necessary to examine some of these preoccupations to understand *The Wind among the Reeds*.

I. LEGENDRY, MAGIC, ASTROLOGY

During this period, Yeats produced two volumes of prose—*The Celtic Twilight* (1893) and *The Secret Rose* (1897). *The Celtic Twilight* is an attempt to create in the form of vivid sketches the background of Irish beliefs, superstitions and customs. The sketches comprise scraps of autobiography, the conversation of peasants and farmers, stories of old country-women, gossip, folklore, dramatised incidents. The Irish people had a legend for every little village, every strange stone and little coppice. The old ballad-writers used all this material simply to express popular sentiment accurately and sympathetically. Yeats went further in his treatment of the material. "The things a man has heard and seen are the threads of life, and if he pull them carefully from the confused distaff of memory, any who will can weave them into whatever garments of belief please them best", he writes in the Introduction. He has given us a taste of what patterns that garment can take in *The Hosting of the Sidhe* and in the blind psychic bards and fair fierce women of his later works.

The Secret Rose is a much more important work and has something of the inwardness of a poet's beliefs. It is a study in Irish mythology and its symbolic meanings. Some of the legends and tales are of Yeats's own creation, and are an attempt to create a personal and individual mythology, a mythology he makes use of later to express both personal feelings and modern sentiments. "Ireland has preserved with some excellent things a gift of vision which has died out among the more hurried and more successful nations", he writes to A. E. in the dedicatory letter. The book is a tribute to that gift and an elaboration of that vision.

It has no particular plan. He does not build up any argument and he rationalises nothing. And yet *The Secret Rose* is the key to *The Wind among the Reeds*. "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 ", he says in the notes to *The Wind among the Reeds*. " I have used them as principles of the mind." In *The Secret Rose* these imaginary personages come to life and we see the symbols as living forces. In *The Tables of the Law* and *The Adoration of the Magi* we meet more of these solitary heroes living turbulent lives. The Temple of the Alchemical Rose is there, where spirits of beautiful Grecian and Egyptian women long dead come to dance at night.

At the British Museum reading-room Yeats had met MacGregor Mathers, author of *The Kabbala Unveiled* and the brother-in-law of Henri Bergson, the philosopher. Soon he was initiated into 'The Hermetic Students' in a Charlotte Street studio and had mastered Mathers' symbolic system. Impressed by the elaborate ritual of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Door, he thought Alchemy was " the gradual distillation of the contents of the soul, until they are ready to put off the mortal and put on the immortal ". As in the case of Lully, Flamel and Paracelsus, alchemy soon became a dangerous preoccupation. Sometimes he looked as if he was the victim of his own credulity. Mathers and his friend, the white-haired Oxfordshire clergyman, spoke of alchemical laboratories in weird cells and the elixir of life. At his house at Forest Hill a small romantic group including Florence Farr assembled. Mathers was demonstrating to his initiates, one by one, strange and unbelievable phenomena, and, " presently, my turn came. He gave me a cardboard symbol and I closed my eyes. Sight came slowly, there was not that sudden miracle as if the darkness had been cut with a knife, for that miracle is mostly a woman's privilege, but there arose before me mental images that I could not control : a desert and black Titan raising himself up by his two hands from the middle of a heap of ancient ruins. Mathers explained that I had seen a being of the order of Salamanders because he had shown me their symbol, but it was not necessary even to show the symbol, it would have been sufficient that he imagined it." This was not mere imagination, because we find him soon asking himself, " What fixed

law would our experiments leave to our imagination?" He also tries to establish a close affinity between the work of artists and the labour of the alchemists. Both attempt, he says, to condense out of "the flying vapour of the world an image of human perfection for its own and not for art's sake". This immaterial vapour is not unrelated to the 'tinctures' which we meet later in *A Vision*.

MacGregor Mathers introduced Yeats to astrology too. George Moore in *Ave* describes Yeats's specially designed cards for the casting of horoscopes, and says that he had triangles drawn on plain sheets of cardboard into which to look while thinking of some primary colour. With astrology came theosophy and the Society of Psychical Research. Colonel Olcott, the President of the Society, confirmed to him the existence of ghosts and the reality of goblins and phantoms. Madame Blavatsky, an extraordinary woman with a frighteningly fertile imagination, psychic intuition and compelling personality, the other star of the movement, attracted him very much. Soon he was a frequent visitor at her house in Holland Park. Henley warned him she was a fake, yet a genius perhaps. But, no. "If wisdom existed anywhere in the world, it must be in some lonely mind admitting no duty to us, communing with God only, conceding nothing from fear or favour." He began to attend seances. His curiosity was insatiable and he would lend himself to any experiment with the utmost readiness. He even conducted some fantastic experiments himself: "Some book or magazine . . . had quoted from an essay upon magic by some seventeenth-century writer. If you burnt a flower to ashes and put the ashes under the receiver of an air-pump and stood the receiver in the moonlight for so many nights, the ghost of the flower would appear hovering over its ashes. I got together a committee which performed this experiment without results." There was another experiment to rid the mind of abstraction which did not work either. His curiosity needed proof to be satisfied and he insisted that each experiment should be a scientific inquiry. But criticism and argument were unwelcome in the society and in his disillusionment he wondered whether it was just a dread of heresy or lack of essential purpose.

II. SYMBOLISM ; THE RHYMERS

Yeats and Ernest Rhys were the moving forces behind the founding of the Rhymers' Club. The club met at an old eating-house in the Strand called the Cheshire Cheese. The principal

members were Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Victor Plarr, Ernest Radford, John Davidson, Richard le Gallienne, T. W. Rolleston, Edwin Ellis and Arthur Symons. Less frequent visitors to the Cheshire Cheese were John Todhunter, Oscar Wilde, Herbert Horne and Francis Thompson. Iconoclasm was their fetish and they revelled in spirited contradiction. They dressed in the conventional poetic fashion, and created a little Bohemia of their own, and read their poems to one another. But in spite of the beer they drank, and the music-halls and harlots they wrote about, the meetings were dull and decorous, and politeness made their criticism of little value.

It was at the Rhymers' Club that Yeats first met Arthur Symons. Lionel Johnson was the acknowledged critic of the group, but his place in Yeats's friendship was soon taken by Arthur Symons. He was translating Mallarmé and Verlaine. "I think", Yeats wrote, "that [the translations] from Mallarmé may have given elaborate form to my verses of those years, to the latter poems of *The Wind among the Reeds*, to *The Shadowy Waters*, while Villiers de l'Isle Adam had shaped whatever in my *Rosa Alchemica* Pater had not shaped." Symons dedicated his *Symbolist Movement in Literature* (published 1899) to Yeats. In the dedicatory epistle he said: "You, more than anyone else, will sympathise with what I say in it, being yourself the chief representative of that movement in our country. . . . Your own Irish literary movement is one of its expressions; your own poetry and A. E.'s poetry belong to it in the most intimate sense. . . ." Yeats's own theories of symbolism were derived almost wholly from those of Symons. "How often have you and I discussed all these questions," wrote Symons, "rarely arguing about them, for we rarely had an essential difference of opinion, but bringing them more and more clearly into light, turning our instincts into logic, digging until we reached the basis of our convictions. And all the while we were working as well as thinking out a philosophy of art. . . ." This philosophy of art can be summarised more or less in Yeats's own words: "Science through much ridicule and some persecution has won its right to explore whatever passes before its corporeal eye, and merely because it passes: to set as it were upon an equality the beetle and the whale though Ben Jonson could find no justification for the entomologist in the *New Inn*, but that he had been crossed in love. Literature now demands the same right of exploration of all that passes before the mind's eye, and merely because it passes." This is merely substituting, as he himself confesses, a spiritual objectivity for a physical one. It also implied a rejection of the work

of the Victorians who filled their work with "impurities, curiosities about politics, about science, about history, about religion". Rossetti and the pre-Raphaelites would have subscribed to it, laying as it does great emphasis on the treatment of the sensations. The pre-Raphaelites were governed, to a great extent, by the same impulses as the symbolists, though their influence on English poetry was nothing compared to the influence of Mallarmé or Rimbaud on European literature. Pre-Raphaelitism was, by 1885, a spent force (though poems in the pre-Raphaelite manner did not cease to appear), but symbolism is even today shaping the work of poets all over the world.

Symbolism, as a conscious movement, originated in France. It was a reaction against form, the precision and exactitude of the realists, Flaubert, the Goncourts, Zola, Leconte de Lisle, de Heredia. It was not so much the passion for detail and photographic reproduction of the naturalists that brought about the reaction; it was their uncompromising delineation of functions and features of life which are by convention suppressed. Zola, the greatest exponent of the doctrine of naturalism, brought literature very close to life and its realities. So did Flaubert in the monumental *L'Éducation Sentimentale*. The symbolists condemned this as mere 'exteriority'. They had, as André Gide has pointed out, a complete lack of curiosity about life. Almost all of them were pessimists, renunciants, resignationists. "As for living, our servants will do that for us," said Villiers de l'Isle Adam, a favourite quotation of Yeats. Poetry was to be a refuge, an escape from life. Yeats responded to these sentiments fully. He was interested in the creation of the Flower Aspect, of men who dreamed about Fairylands and Happy Townlands. His Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne were as far removed from life as de l'Isle Adam's Axel. "The doctrine of mysticism with which all this Symbolical Literature has so much to do, of which it is all so much the expression, presents us . . . with a theory of life which makes us familiar with mystery, and which seems to harmonise those instincts which make for religion, passion and art, freeing us at once of a great bondage", wrote Arthur Symonds.

The new doctrine necessitated a new technique of expression, a new style. "With this return to imagination . . . this understanding that the laws of art, which are the hidden laws of the world, can alone bind the imagination, would come a change of style, and we would cast out of serious poetry those energetic rhythms, as of a man running, which are the invention of the will with its eyes

always on something to be done or undone ; and we would seek out those wavering, meditative, organic rhythms, which are the embodiment of the imagination that neither desires nor hates, because it has done with time ", wrote Yeats, and later on : " You cannot give a body to something that moves beyond the senses, unless your words are as subtle as complex, as full of mysterious life, as the body of a flower or of a woman ". Form was to be elaborated, not for its own sake, but to separate it from its servility to rhetoric. " All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their pre-ordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions ; and when sound and colour and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become as it were one sound, one colour, one form and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion." All this marked a revolt against the materialistic tradition. Literature was to be a sacred ritual with the dignity and solemnity of religion. It suited the temperaments of writers who felt isolated from life by the sharpening contradictions of a life becoming more complex because of the machine. Life was distasteful. The only hope lay in the emancipation of the imagination.

Most of the early symbolists suffered from maladjusted sensibilities and consequently lived rather abnormal lives. Gérard de Nerval, perhaps the first conscious symbolist, was an erratic genius who lived constantly on the verge of insanity. Villiers de l'Isle Adam's hatred of life took the form of a medieval antipathy to modern science and thought, and an arrogance which only impoverished aristocrats are capable of. Arthur Rimbaud, a sensitive, precocious genius, violently intemperate, was thoroughly disillusioned with life before he was twenty, and left literature and Europe. Paul Verlaine between his absinthe and his bad women was constantly at the mercy of the law and almost throughout his life abjectly poor and miserable. Only Mallarmé, who had the quiet and leisure of a professor's life, led a life of moral stability, and his work centred round his search for a new aesthetic. It was only natural that most of them found direct communication difficult.

Rimbaud in the sensational letter to Démeny, written at seventeen, said : " The poet makes himself a *visionary* through a prolonged and reasoned *derangement* of all the senses. All forms of love, of suffering, of madness, he seeks himself ; he consumes all poisons in

himself to retain only their quintessences. An indescribable torture in which he has need of all faith, all superhuman force, in which he comes, among all, the great patient, the great criminal, the great accursed—the supreme Savant ! For he arrives at the unknown. Because he has cultivated his soul, already rich more than anyone else ! He arrives at the unknown ; and even if, driven insane, he should end by losing his grip on his visions, he has seen them ! Let him perish, in his plunging, by unheard-of unnamable things : other horrible workers will come ; they will begin at those horizons where their predecessors sank ! . . .” And in *A Season in Hell* : “I habituated myself to simple hallucination. I would see a mosque instead of a factory, a school of drummers composed of angels, coaches on the roads of the sky, a drawing-room at the bottom of a lake ; monsters, mysteries ; the announcement of a musical comedy would cause horrors to rise before me.

“Then I explained my magical sophistries by the hallucination of words !

“I ended up by finding sacred the disorder of my mind. . . .”

If this appears an exaggeration of the symbolist doctrine, it is only the exaggeration of a vital truth. Rimbaud, when all is said and done, stands head and shoulders above everyone else as the doctrinaire of the group. He epitomises in his strange and bewildering life the whole movement, and represents the quintessence of the new cult. And yet it was to Mallarmé and de l'Isle Adam that Yeats turned. This would point to two things. The first is that Yeats was looking in the new movement merely for a system which could provide him with creative integrity. “. . . There was something in myself compelling me to attempt creation of an art as separate from everything heterogeneous and casual, from all character and circumstance, as some Herodiade of our theatre, dancing seemingly alone in her narrow moving luminous circle.” To Rimbaud and Verlaine the new cult became their *raison d'être*. They gave up everything, family, respectability, to *be*, in every sense of the word, the outlaws of society. Writing of Verlaine, Rimbaud said in *Vagabonds* : “I had, indeed in all sincerity of spirit, undertaken to restore him to his primitive condition of child of the Sun—and we wandered, fed with the wine of thieves' dens and the hard-tack of the road, I eager to find the place and formula”. Yeats would have found this impossible. He stayed outside the movement, watching it from outside and making use of its methods. He was searching in it for a new aesthetic.

In this, and this is the second thing, he was influenced most, not by the most potent forces at work, but by personalities to whom he felt most attracted. Mallarmé he admired and respected. But de l'Isle Adam became to him the symbol of a new spiritual renovation in literature, and *Axel*, a sacred book. An aristocrat, and very catholic in his tastes, he attracted Yeats. "Is not all charm inherited, whether of the intellect, of the manners, of the character, or of literature?" In his later life this bias towards the well-born and the rich became something of a snobbish obsession with Yeats.

If Yeats's poetry at this time appears a little different from that of the French symbolists or even of their English counterparts, the Rhymers, it is because his symbolism was tempered by two things—his belief in magic and his Irishism. "I believe", he wrote in his essay on Magic,

(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 memory 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."

And then, "I often think I would put this belief in magic from me if I could, for I have come to see or to imagine, in men and women, in houses, in handicrafts, in nearly all sights and sounds, a certain evil, a certain ugliness, that comes from the slow perishing through the centuries of a quality of mind that made this belief and its evidences common over the world".

And then again, a little later: "All men, certainly all imaginative men, must be for ever casting forth enchantments, glammers, illusions; and all men, especially tranquil men who have no powerful egotistic life, must be continually passing under their power. Our most elaborate thoughts, elaborate purposes, precise emotions, are often, as I think, not really ours, but have on a sudden come up, as it were, out of hell or down out of heaven".

In his use of symbols, these theories of magic play an important part. "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 . . . is fire burning by itself." In Aedh this magical symbolism is combined with an Irish symbolism because Aedh is

Irish for fire. He did try to make a distinction between the symbols of the poet and those of the magician, though not very successfully. "I cannot now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic or half-consciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist. At first I tried to distinguish between symbols and symbols, between what I called inherent symbols and arbitrary symbols, but the distinction has come to mean little or nothing. Whether their power has arisen out of themselves, or whether it has an arbitrary origin, matters little, for they act, as I believe, because the great memory associates them with certain events and moods and persons. Whatever the passions of man have gathered about, becomes a symbol in the great memory, and in the hands of him that has the secret, it is a worker of wonders, a caller-up of angels or of devils."

Irish mythology with its Sidhe, Shadowy horses and Danaan children provided Yeats with a source of symbols more systematised and with a comparatively understandable meaning. Not that even Irish audiences were particularly clear about the specific significance of these vague symbols. But in using the less abstract symbolism of Irish mythology and legends, Yeats achieved a certain precision even in his vagueness which the French symbolists with their use of isolated symbols could not. Not only that. Yeats, as Edmund Wilson has pointed out, in transplanting his symbolism to Ireland gave it a strange and national quality. And he put it to a use very much his own, as we will notice in *The Wind among the Reeds*.

THE WIND AMONG THE REEDS

YEATS'S early poetry dealt with phantasy, the dream-world, Irish country-side, peasant beliefs and traditions. Into these he now brings his new loves, magic and symbolism, and the result is a work with a haunting cadence and an intangible evanescent charm. The tapestries of his early work—'pearl-pale hand', 'dream-awakened eyes', 'dew-dropping sky', 'cloud-pale eyelids', 'dew-cold lilies'—are there. But the more intimate use of Irish legendry, mythology and symbolism give these poems a new pattern and the earlier dream-reality a new significance.

The 'Wind' is used here as a symbol of vague desires and hopes, and in most of the poems, particularly the love poems, Yeats is attempting to clothe his personal feelings and emotions in an elaborate garb of mythological symbolism. "Elaborate modern psychology sounds egotistical, I thought, when it speaks in the first person, but not those simple emotions which resemble the more, the more powerful they are, everybody's emotion, and I was soon to write many poems where an always personal emotion was woven into a general pattern of myth and symbol." This pattern of myth and symbol has been carefully built up into a system in which particular moods of the consciousness are personified and given Irish names—Aedh, Hanrahan, Robartes. Love, pain, suffering, and the ecstasy of a hope fulfilled or about to be fulfilled are all expressed in terms of these. 'Michael Robartes remembers forgotten Beauty.' 'Aedh thinks of those who have spoken evil of his Beloved', 'gives his Beloved certain rhymes', and 'tells of the Perfect Beauty'. 'Hanrahan speaks to the lovers of his songs in coming days.' 'Mongan thinks of his past greatness', 'laments the change that has come upon him and his Beloved and longs for the end of the world'. All these deal with an absolute Beauty seen and felt in an impersonal vision, and yet we feel that the poignancy and the ecstasy everywhere have a personal significance :

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,

I would spread the cloths under your feet :
 But I, being poor, have only my dreams ;
 I have spread my dreams under your feet ;
 Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

Or again,

You need but lift a pearl-pale hand,
 And bind up your long hair and sigh ;
 And all men's hearts must burn and beat.

This can be traced almost everywhere and often it develops into a conflict, a restlessness :

All things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and old,
 The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumbering
 cart,
 The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry mould,
 Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of
 my heart.

Maud Gonne is clearly the reference here. Tall and strikingly beautiful, she dominated Dublin life in the nineties. Her dynamic personality, boundless energy and complete independence made a lasting impression on Yeats : " She seemed a classical impersonation of the Spring, the Virgilian commendation ' She walks like a goddess ' made for her alone. Her complexion was luminous, like that of apple blossom through which the light falls. . . ." Much of it has been expressed in symbols and attributed to others, but whether he was writing about Cathleen ni Houlihan or some sybil from an old legend, it was Maud Gonne's shape that they all took :

I thought of your beauty, and this arrow,
 Made out of a wild thought, is in my marrow.
 There's no man may look upon her, no man,
 As when newly grown to be a woman,
 Tall and noble but with face and bosom
 Delicate in colour as apple blossom.
 This beauty's kinder, yet for a reason
 I could weep that the old is out of season.

Yeats brought this vision of her to everything that he touched, the stage, the players, and made everybody susceptible to her arresting beauty.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears :
 That you were beautiful, and that I strove
 To love you in the old highway of love ;

This should rank with the greatest love poetry of our age. Expressed in symbols and personified, it becomes a poignant penetrating cry :

When my arms wrap you round I press
My heart upon the loveliness
That has long faded from the world.

Here Michael Robartes is remembering forgotten Beauty. There are long elaborate notes at the end of the volume which explain the precise significance of all these strange personages—Hanrahan, Aedh, Mongan, Aengus, parts of which I have already quoted. Also on the nature of the Secret Inviolable Rose, the Sidhe, the Sedge. The notes are not always important or relevant, but they are certainly interesting enough to be looked into. Here is part of *The Rose* notes : “ I have made the Seven Lights, the constellation of the Bear, lament for the theft of the Rose, and I have made the Dragon, the constellation Draco, the guardian of the Rose, because these constellations move about the pole of the heavens, the ancient Tree of Life in many countries, and are often associated with the Tree of Life in mythology. It is this Tree of Life that I have put into the *Song of Mongan* under its common Irish form of a hazel ; and because it had sometimes the stars for fruit, I have hung upon it ‘ the Crooked Plough ’ and the ‘ Pilot ’ star, as the Gaelic-speaking Irishmen sometimes call the Bear and the North Star. I have made it an axle-tree in *Aedh hears the cry of the Sedge*, for this was another ancient way of representing it.”

Such notes make lively reading. Yeats’s prose, even when he is trying to rationalise his wildest projects and ideas, always does. But it is a clumsy expedient and makes one conscious of the arbitrariness of his symbols. This is particularly so with his astrological and magical symbols, which he has to explain at great length. Thus in the notes to *Michael Robartes bids his Beloved be at Peace* he describes first the neoplatonist symbolism of the sea and then goes on to say : “ I follow much Irish and other mythology, and the magical tradition, in associating the North with night and sleep, and the East, the place of sunrise, with hope, and the South, the place of the sun when at its height, with passion and desire, and the West, the place of sunset, with fading and dreaming things ”. Again, the hound in

Do you not hear me calling, white deer with no horns ?
I have been changed to a hound with one red ear,

is supposed to be related to “ the Hounds of Annwryn or of Hades,

who are white, and have red ears” ; also to the hounds that “ Irish country people believe will awake and seize the souls of the dead if you lament them too loudly or too soon ; and to the hound the son of Setanta, killed . . . on a visit to the Celtic Hades. . . . I got my hound and deer out of a last century Gaelic poem about Oisín’s journey to the country of the young. After the hunting of the hornless deer, that leads him to the sea-shore, and while he is riding over the sea with Niamh, he sees amid the waters . . . a young man following a girl who has a golden apple, and afterwards a hound with one red ear following a deer with no horns. 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 desires that are as these. . . . The man in my poem who has a hazel wand may have been Aengus, Master of Love ; and I have made the boar without bristles come out of the West, because the place of sunset was in Ireland, as in other countries, a place of symbolic darkness and death.”

Some of the notes are delightfully vague and explain very little, for instance, the notes to *The Cap and Bells* : “ I dreamed this story exactly as I have written it, and dreamed another long dream after it, trying to make out its meaning, and whether I was to write it in prose or verse. [Did he make up his mind to have another dream in the hope it would elucidate the first ?] The first dream was more a vision than a dream, for it was beautiful and coherent, and gave me the sense of illumination and exaltation that one gets from visions, while the second dream was confused and meaningless. The poem has always meant a great deal to me, though, as is the way with symbolic poems, it has not always meant quite the same thing. Blake would have said, ‘ The authors are in eternity ’, and I am quite sure they can only be questioned in dreams.” It is a straightforward poem without much trumped-up artificial symbolising, but with all the crystal clearness of the diction, it is difficult to understand what it is all about. When one uses rather recondite symbolism and takes great pains to explain in elaborate notes that he is doubtful of the meaning himself, he is creating obscurity almost wantonly. This is the sort of thing that makes some people suspicious even of his use of the names Aedh, Hanrahan, Michael Robartes. If these had a specific significance in 1899, why are they dropped later ? I don’t find that difficult to justify. The symbolic names were intended to give pattern to the poems and were meant to help *him* rather than the reader in giving expression to his complex sensibility.

It is a legitimate and quite justifiable method. T. S. Eliot has often used a similar method of putting in names of people to give precision to his thoughts.

Yeats's insistence on the supernatural and his frequent allusion to the attractiveness of a world of phantasies and dreams have brought upon him a good deal of condemnation from serious critics. I. A. Richards accuses him of repudiating not merely current civilisation but life itself in favour of a world of symbolic phantasmagoria of which he is desperately uncertain. Eliot goes further. In his typical pontifical manner he accuses Yeats of choosing the *wrong* supernatural world. Wrong because it is devoid of spiritual significance. But I think it is a mistake to take these violent repudiations too seriously. His rejection of Tyndall and Huxley and modern science was serious. Even long after he had discarded the bibelots of his youth he could not completely accept modern science. He wrote in *On the Boiler* (1938): "Instead of hierarchical society, where all men are different, came democracy; instead of a science which had rediscovered Anima Mundi, its experiments and observations confirming the speculations of Henry More, came materialism: all that whiggish world Swift stared on till he became a raging man. The ancient foundations had scarcely dispersed when Swift's young acquaintance Berkeley destroyed the new, for all that would listen created modern philosophy and established for ever the subjectivity of space. No educated man today accepts the objective matter and space of popular science, and yet deductions made by those who believe in both dominate the world, make possible the stimulation and condonation of revolutionary massacre and the multiplication of murderous weapons by substituting for the old humanity with its unique irreplaceable individuals something that can be chopped and measured like a piece of cheese; compel denial of the immortality of the soul by hiding from the mass of the people that the grave-diggers have no place to bury us but in the human mind." This is a rejection of science, economics and perhaps even progress. But with all its facile generalising and misleading emphasis, is not a rejection of *life*. The negative attitude to life in *The Wind among the Reeds* and some of the poems immediately before and after it should be taken seriously. But that does not imply the complete acceptance of the validity of the dream-world of his creations. "There was no dominant opinion I could accept. Then finding out that I (having no clear case—my opponents' case had been clarifying itself for centuries) had become both boor and bore, I

invented a patter, allowing myself an easy man's sincerity, and for honesty's sake a little malice, and now it seems that I can talk nothing else." That is again from *On the Boiler* and describes his frame of mind fairly accurately. And it is significant that in between all these supernatural ideas of good and evil he is capable of producing straightforward, simple and realistic poems like *The Song of the Old Mother*. If his technique of using 'dissociated phases of consciousness' is unsatisfying, that is because he was trying to express something which is on the farthest edge of our consciousness. He went about it, as L. A. G. Strong has pointed out, like a magician, and if he has been uncertain and unintelligible, he has at least awakened in us huge shadows of his wonder.

TRANSITION

THE Wind among the Reeds and the poetic play *The Shadowy Waters* mark the culmination of Yeats's early style. The slight *Land of Heart's Desire*, an earlier play, takes its place beside *The Countess Cathleen*, etc. *The Shadowy Waters* is much nearer the manner of *The Wind among the Reeds*. Here the dream-world is illuminated with magic and symbolic images :

. . . Sometimes there is a torch inside my head
That makes all clear, but when the light is gone
I have but images, analogies,
The mystic bread, the sacramental wine,
The red rose where the two shafts of the cross,
Body and soul, waking and sleep, death, life,
Whatever meaning ancient allegorists
Have settled on, are mixed into one joy.
. . . But when the torch is lit
All that is impossible is certain,
I plunge in the abyss.

Forgael is musician, lover and magician. While Cathleen is a legendary figure with her feet on the ground, Dectora is completely of the dream-world. The allegory of *The Countess Cathleen* (the woods and marshes with their poisonous vapours stand for evil and sin, and Cathleen's beauty and unselfishness for grace and faith) gives way to the symbolism of the mystic bread, the sacramental wine, the red rose and the lit torch. *The Wind among the Reeds* was published in 1899, the first version of *The Shadowy Waters* in 1900. With the turn of the century, we notice a remarkable change in his work. *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, the next play, is an effective propaganda piece and in prose. *In the Seven Woods*, the next volume of poems, has only two poems which harp on unreal worlds. In *Under the Moon* there is even a rejection of these :

I have no happiness in dreaming of Brycelinde,
Nor Avalon the grass-green hollow, nor Joyous Isle,

Nor Ulad, when Naoise had thrown a sail upon the wind ;
Nor lands that seem too dim to be burdens on the heart :

To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dismay,
Even in an old story, is a burden not to be borne.

The old vague hankering after an impersonal love gives place to a direct statement which has not the least shoddiness or ambiguity :

Sweetheart, do not love too long :
I loved long and long,
And grew to be out of fashion
Like an old song.

Or again,

Never give all the heart, for love
Will hardly seem worth thinking of
To passionate women if it seem
Certain, and they never dream
That it fades out from kiss to kiss.

This is clearly a departure from the visionary mood. The impatience, the indignation of :

Better go down upon your marrow-bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather ;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world.

is very much in the later Yeatsian manner. *Adam's Curse*, written in 1902 (it first appeared in the *Monthly Review* of December 1902), seems very much nearer to us than anything in *The Wind among the Reeds* published only three years before it. *The Green Helmet* has poems with such different titles as *A Friend's Illness*, *At Galway Races*, *On hearing that the Students of our New University have joined the Agitation against Immoral Literature*, *A Drinking Song*, *Upon a House shaken by the Land Agitation*. This shows a direct interest in life and is astonishing considering that only a few years had passed after his well-known controversy with John Eglinton in the course of which he had quite emphatically stated : " I believe that the renewal of belief, which is the great movement of our time, will more and more liberate the arts from ' their age ' and from life, and leave them more and more free to lose themselves in beauty, and to busy themselves, like all the great poetry of the past, and like all the religions of all times with ' old faiths, myths, dreams ', the accumulated beauty of the age.

I believe that all men will more and more reject the opinion that Poetry is a 'criticism of life', and be more and more convinced that it is a revelation of a hidden life, and that they may even come to think 'painting, poetry and music' 'the only means of conversing with eternity left to man on earth'." Eglinton, on the whole, tackled Yeats effectively and, I think, successfully. The controversy started with an article by Eglinton on *What should be the Subjects of a National Drama?* in the *Dublin Daily Express* and became the main issue of the Saturday numbers of the paper for some time. Eglinton pointed out, at a time when such statements would have appeared heretical to the precious circle of the nineties, that poets should not look away from themselves and their age; that they should feel the facts of life and not seek an escape from them in art. Yeats retaliated with the passage I have just quoted and referred to the work of his own ideal, Count Villiers de l'Isle Adam. He accused Eglinton of petulance and said that his criticism was doubly mischievous in a country like Ireland which had no settled opinions on the subject of literature. This roused Eglinton. What, he asked, do the symbolists (who speak so much of the exaltation of the senses) mean when they say that poetic passion is not in nature and that Art is to be liberated from life? Villiers de l'Isle Adam, he said, cherished a particular hatred of the sun and daylight. Verlaine hated to hear the laugh of a healthy man. Life, he went on to say, is what we make of it and cannot be changed by twisting it into an abnormality. The controversy developed along these lines until A. E. and Professor William Larminie intervened. Yeats was very angry and very arrogant in his next article, and, I think, regretted it afterwards. The important thing is that this controversy had a good effect on Yeats. For by 1906 we find that he has revised his opinions considerably. "There are moments when I cannot believe in the reality of imaginations that are not inset with the minute life of long familiar things and symbols and places", he says in *Discoveries*. In the essay *Personality and the Intellectual Essences* in the same volume he says: "I have always come to this certainty: what moves natural men in the arts is what moves them in life . . . intonations that show them in a book or a play, the strength, the essential moment of a man who would be exciting in the market or at the dispensary door". He clarifies his position further in the essay *The Tree of Life*: "Without knowing it, I had come to care for nothing but impersonal beauty. I had set out on life with the thought of putting my very self into poetry, and had understood

this as a representation of my own visions and an attempt to cut away the non-essential, but as I imagined the visions outside myself my imagination became full of decorative landscape and of still life. I thought of myself as something unmoving and silent living in the middle of my own mind and body, a grain of sand in Bloomsbury or in Connacht that Satan's watch fiends cannot find. Then one day I understood quite suddenly, as the way is, that I was seeking something unchanging and unmixed and always outside myself, a Stone or an Elixir that was always out of reach, and that I myself was the fleeting thing that held out its hand. The more I tried to make my art deliberately beautiful, the more did I follow the opposite of myself, for deliberate beauty is like a woman always desiring man's desire. Presently I found that I entered into myself and pictured myself and not some essence when I was not seeking beauty at all, but merely to lighten the mind of some burden of love or bitterness thrown upon it by the events of life. . . ." And so on to : " We should ascend out of common interests, the thoughts of the newspapers, of the market-place, of men of science, but only so far as we can carry the normal, passionate, reasoning self, the personality as a whole ". Once he had come to these conclusions, his poetry acquires an altogether new character. Many other things helped this coming-down to earth—dissatisfaction with Ireland, the bitterness of frustrated love, the contact with Synge. Synge's love of ' all that has edge, all that is salt in the mouth, all that is rough to the hand ' was contagious. And the treatment that the press and the nationalists gave Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* made his blood boil. Irish nationalism seemed to care merely for immediate successes and an immediate utility. The Irish Nationalists, he wrote in *Synge and the Ireland of his Time*, " are preoccupied with the nation's future, with heroes, poets, soldiers, painters, armies, fleets, but only as these things are understood by a child in a National school, while a secret feeling that what is so unreal needs continual defence makes them bitter. . . . They no longer love, for only life is loved, and at last, a generation is like an hysterical woman who will make unmeasured accusations and believe impossible things, because of some logical deduction from a solitary thought which has turned a portion of her mind to stone." This vein of disillusionment runs almost right through *The Green Helmet*, etc. Dissatisfaction with the Abbey audience, disappointment at the disappearance of large houses, the disillusionment due to unrequited love. Unrequited love causes resignation—" Why

should I blame her that she filled my days with misery ? '—which soon leads up to reconciliation. But with the other things his impatience becomes a raillery :

. . . My curse on plays
That have to be set up in fifty ways,
On the day's war with every knave and dolt,
Theatre business, management of men.

Notice how far removed all this is from the Celtic Twilight and Eternal Beauty. The imagination must be rescued from abstraction, and in order to bring it closer to reality he presses everything into his poetry—the theatre, patriotism, controversies. The lines :

Things said or done long ago,
Or things I did not do or say
But thought that I might say or do,
Weigh me down, and not a day
But something is recalled,
My conscience or my vanity appalled,

show genuine regret. His speculations merely brought him disillusionment and defeat. But he finds and makes his mask in disappointment :

Through all the lying days of my youth
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun ;
Now I may wither into the truth.

The struggle at times becomes a sardonic cry :

The fascination of what's difficult
Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent
Spontaneous joy and natural content
Out of my heart.

For a moment poetry even ceases to be his first interest :

All things can tempt me from this craft of verse :
One time it was a woman's face, or worse—
The seeming needs of my fool-driven land.

The seeming needs of his fool-driven land were many. The Lane controversy took up a lot of his time and energy. These controversies often took him to strange companies. It is astonishing to see Yeats, the lover and admirer of aristocracy, contributing an article to the revolutionary labour paper *The Irish Worker* in which he attacks some of the methods used against the strikers during the big strike

of 1913-14. Where Yeats was concerned, personal issues were always involved in such controversies. James Larkin, the leader of the strikers, was a supporter of the Lane Gallery proposal. Matters of public interest are becoming responsibilities. Sir Hugh Lane should be defended, extolled ; and out of all this arid controversy we get some more poems in which he deals with the ' knaves and dolts ' arrogantly and severely. Cardinals, M.P.s and self-seeking politicians brought him out of the Ivory Tower. To deal with them he needed a brutal weapon. Synge had drawn his attention to it. " Before verse can be human again, it must learn to be brutal."

RESPONSIBILITIES

THE Green Helmet, etc. shows a tremendous advance in precision of imagery and syntax on his earlier work. Look at *The Mask* :

‘ Put off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes.’

‘ O no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise,
And yet not cold.’

‘ I would but find what’s there to find,
Love or deceit.’

‘ It was the mask engaged your mind,
And after set your heart to beat,
Not what’s behind.’

‘ But lest you are my enemy,
I must enquire.’

‘ O no, my dear, let all that be ;
What matter, so there is but fire
In you, in me ? ’

This is just the barest statement of a theme without any ornament or elaboration. It is the complete absence of any kind of superfluity that makes the poem so extraordinarily effective. It could be set side by side with a considerably later poem, *For Anne Gregory*, which employs the same method and has the same economy, directness and precision. This manner and style are developed in *Responsibilities*. Nearer contemporary life, his poetry acquires the idiom of direct speech.

A cursing rogue with a merry face,
A bundle of rags upon a crutch,
Stumbled upon that windy place

has the run of everyday speech. This also illustrates a technique which he has developed in his later poems (*The Second Coming* and *A Prayer for my Daughter* are good examples)—the technique of adapting the movement of the verse to the nature of his theme. We see it also in the very effective refrain of *September 1913* :

Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone,
It’s with O’Leary in the grave.

John O'Leary, the Fenian, writer of patriotic verses, stood for romantic Ireland. He was an extremely handsome old man and spoke like a character from some heroic Elizabethan play. He and his associates who 'weighed so lightly what they gave' would risk their lives in an insurrection which had no real chance of success. The new nationalism and the new literature both seemed singularly devoid of romantic content :

These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye.

As for literature and the theatre,

Is there a bridle for this Proteus
That turns and changes like his draughty seas ?

That unity of image which he sought in national literature seemed hopelessly far away. Ireland, 'ruined by abstractions', did not seem capable of producing the great tragic poetry he hoped for. *September 1913* expresses this tragic and desperate helplessness :

Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide ;
For this that all that blood was shed,
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave ?
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

The Cold Heaven is the work of a lonely man : " I began to feel myself not only solitary, but helpless." This solitariness and bitter helplessness develop into a terrible thought in *The Witch* :

Toil and grow rich,
What's that but to lie
With a foul witch
And after, drained dry,
To be brought
To the chamber where
Lies one long sought
With despair ?

whose stark nakedness makes one shudder. It is like a challenge to a generation which had praised him with the emphasis on the wrong things ; a challenge which he repeats with a flourish in *A Coat* :

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat ;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked.

Whether this is a dig against cheap imitators or not, it is a proclamation to the world that he is capable of forcing a triumph out of defeat. Almost all the poems in *Responsibilities* and *The Green Helmet* seem to me full of a strength which comes out of complete confidence in oneself, a confidence which borders on arrogance. The enterprise of walking naked needs a lot of courage. Yet to most contemporaries this new strength and beauty seemed like a drain on the poetic impulse. C. L. Wrenn, in an article in the *Durham University Journal* (1920), dismissed *Responsibilities* as a collection of topical verses, the work of a tired man fighting for lost causes and ideals. The bitterness, he says, betrays the poet into actual ugliness in expression. I think he must have had *The Witch* in mind. With all its terrifying suggestions one cannot say it is an 'ugly' poem. Most of the poems, he goes on to say, show the weariness which comes from impotent desire. These poems show anger, rage, impatience, but little weariness. In short, Wrenn says : " Admirers of Yeats will certainly not wish for any detailed criticism of *Responsibilities and Other Poems*. They will rather pass it by on the other side with bewildered regret. For beyond question, this is the volume on which the poet is least to be congratulated. Its poetry is in depressing contrast to the bulk of its pages, and it is a disagreeable reminder that human littleness must beset even the poet consecrated to his art." Forrest Reid in his study of Yeats published in 1915 said that *The Green Helmet* shows a marked falling off both in inspiration and expression, and that it is of all Yeats's works the one that could most easily be spared. He criticised it for lack of spontaneity (which is perhaps justifiable) and lyrical impulse. I wonder what he thought of *Words*, *No Second Troy*, *Reconciliation*, *The Mask*. Others said when the Shakespeare Head press brought out a collected edition of his work that Yeats had said all that he had to say and would spend the rest of his life revising old work, directing the Abbey and perhaps lecturing in America.

The best answer to all these was, of course, the appearance of *The Wild Swans at Coole* in 1917. Here, after the storming and the raging of *Responsibilities*, he enters a period of calm, perhaps I should say, comparative calm. 'In dreams begins responsibility', he had said at the beginning of *Responsibilities*, quoting from an 'old play'; and immediately afterwards,

'How am I fallen from myself, for a long time now
I have not seen the Prince of Chang in my dreams',

quoting Khoung-Fou-Tseu. With the recognition of the close proximity of literature to life he is conscious of his responsibilities to Ireland. Art is a part of life and cannot be liberated from it. For its preservation and improvement one must work hard to create the necessary conditions. For that dreams are not enough. It will be necessary to fight and argue, often against tremendous odds, not infrequently against the one-track minds of the clergy and the politicians. "Neither religion nor politics can of itself create minds with enough receptivity to become wise, or just and generous enough to make a nation. Other cities have been as stupid . . . but Dublin is the capital of a nation, and an ancient race has nowhere else to look for an education. . . . In Ireland I am constantly reminded of the futility of all discipline that is not of the whole being. Religious Ireland . . . thinks of divine things as a round of duties separated from life and not as an element that may be discovered in all circumstance and emotion, while political Ireland sees the good citizen but as a man who holds to certain opinions and not as a man of goodwill. Against all this we have but a few educated men and the remnants of an old traditional culture among the poor." Parnell should be defended; Synge vindicated; Sir Hugh Lane's offer extolled. In all these controversies, in spite of his strong personal bias, he showed great respect for other people's ideas and opinions. (How unlike the Eglinton controversy!) Parnell's politics and Synge's plays were controversial topics. That he realised and admitted. But it was the lies and malicious accusations which were part and parcel of the arguments of small minds that enraged him. As for Hugh Lane, he and his supporters were described as self-seekers, self-advertisers, log-rolling cranks and faddists by an ignorant crowd of municipal councillors and journalists. There were no greater humbugs in the whole world than art critics, picture-dealers and poets, said some. Sir Hugh Lane was trying to raise a monument at the city's expense, said others. The fumbling

wits and old foul mouths 'had set the pack upon him'. They had

. . . Insult heaped upon him for his pains,
And for his open-handedness, disgrace.

But never mind. .

What cared Duke Ercole, that bid
His mummers to the market-place,
What th' onion-sellers thought or did
So that his Plautus set the pace
For the Italian comedies?
And Guidobaldo, when he made
That grammar school of courtesies
Where wit and beauty learned their trade
Upon Urbino's windy hill,
Had sent no runners to and fro
That he might learn the shepherds' will.
And when they drove out Cosimo,
Indifferent how the rancour ran,
He gave the hours they had set free
To Michelozzo's latest plan
For the San Marco Library,
Whence turbulent Italy should draw
Delight in Art whose end is peace,
In logic and in natural law
By sucking at the dugs of Greece.

In this and the other poems in defence of Hugh Lane his poetry does become a brutal weapon. He needed it. He was fighting a storm. After it had blown over comes tranquillity :

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky ;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine-and-fifty swans.

Here he has caught the serenity of the swans, 'mysterious, beautiful', and achieved too an individual rhythm with a finished beauty. This rhythm seems to me almost new to English poetry. And a different one, very much Yeats's own, is that of

There is a queen in China, or maybe it's in Spain,
And birthdays and holidays such praises can be heard
Of her unblemished lineaments, a whiteness with no stain,
That she might be that sprightly girl trodden by a bird.

And though there are ' lines written in dejection ' here and there,

The holy centaurs of the hills are vanished ;
 I have nothing but the embittered sun ;
 Banished heroic mother moon and vanished,
 And now that I have come to fifty years
 I might endure the timid sun,

and in a flippant, half-ironical vein :

I think it better that in times like these
 A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth
 We have no gift to set a statesman right ;
 He has had enough of meddling who can please
 A young girl in the indolence of her youth,
 Or an old man upon a winter's night,

which show traces of the old bitterness, he is certain that ' men improve with the years '. And when he does grumble occasionally :

' What have I earned for all that work,' I said,
 ' For all that I have done at my own charge ?
 The daily spite of this unmannerly town,
 Where who has served the most is most defamed,
 The reputation of his lifetime lost
 Between the night and the morning . . .

there is no bitterness in it. *The People* shows a tremendous gain in stability of mind and a complete absence of arrogance which borders on humility : ' I sink my head abashed '. His anger now becomes controlled passion and, what is more, he can keep his head. *Ego Dominus Tuus* shows sustained dignity and dispassionate self-analysis. Its subject matter is the poet's conflict with himself. " How could I have mistaken for myself an heroic condition that from early boyhood has made me superstitious ? " Searching his own mind, he calls to his own opposite.

Ille : By the help of an image
 I call to my own opposite, summon all
 That I have handled least, least looked upon.

Hic : And I would find myself and not an image.

" If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one from others." This active discipline implies the acceptance of a mask. The nature of this mask, of the conflict between self and anti-self, of the distinction between the art which is the result of one's combat with oneself and

that which is the result of one's combat with circumstance, are all elaborated in *A Vision* which I shall discuss in the next chapter.

Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921) has three remarkable poems—*Easter, 1916*, *The Second Coming* and *A Prayer for my Daughter*. *Easter, 1916* is in the nature of a palinode. “ ‘ Romantic Ireland's dead and gone ’ sounds old-fashioned now. It seemed true in 1913, but I did not foresee 1916. The late Dublin rebellion, whatever one can say of its wisdom, will long be remembered for its heroism. ‘ They weighed so lightly what they gave ’ ; and gave too, in some cases, without hope of success.” The rebellion startled Ireland and brought home to people like Yeats the spirit and tremendous force of the Irish movement. O'Leary, Fitzgerald, Emmet and Tone of *September 1913* were a colourful and romantic crowd : ‘ They have gone about the world like wind ’. James Connolly, Padraic Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and others of the sixteen shot were, on the other hand, rather a mixed lot. One, a woman, spent her days ‘ in ignorant good-will ’. Another man kept a school. A third, a sensitive soul, might have become famous some day. Still another was just ‘ a drunken, vainglorious lout ’.

Yet I number him in the song ;
He, too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy ;
He, too, has been changed in his turn,
Transformed utterly :
A terrible beauty is born.

Yes. Out of those sixteen dead men a terrible beauty is born. Yet, ‘ Was it needless death after all ? ’ The question haunts him and the horror of that violence keeps recurring to his mind again and again. We see it in *Meditations in Time of Civil War*, in *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*, in *Blood and the Moon*.

In *The Second Coming* Ireland has given place to Europe and the world at large. Blood and violence still haunt him, but his expression is not circumscribed by patriotism or national interests, though the Easter rising must have been, to some extent, at the back of his mind :

Things fall apart ; the centre cannot hold ;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned ;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

This is a very significant statement considering what Fascism has brought to Europe since. As always, the expression is equal to the loftiness of the thought. Phrases like 'the blood-dimmed tide' and 'the ceremony of innocence' give it the character of a great prophetic utterance. He continues :

Surely some revelation is at hand ;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 The Second Coming ! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
 Troubles my sight : somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
 The darkness drops again ; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born ?

The imagery and diction of this are very striking indeed. (The 'instructors'?) One suddenly notices too that what appeared a great contemporary awareness in the first half of the poem has settled into a symbolic pattern which has little reality or meaning for those not acquainted with the Great Wheel and the Year of the ancients. If we have here a faint hint of the coming of Fascism, it is not based on an analysis or understanding of social, economical and political forces at work in Europe, but on a somewhat irrational determinist cycle of history which ordained a 'Second Coming'. The approaching era is to be hierarchical, masculine, harsh, surgical, he says in *A Vision*, which was written soon after Mussolini had come to power in Italy and fired the imagination of Ezra Pound, who had a remarkable hold on Yeats.

After all this excitement, *A Prayer for my Daughter* seems a lovely benediction full of gentle assurance and quiet determination. It is a prayer with hardly any 'religion' and little moral significance : 'May she be granted beauty and yet not beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught'. Let her be learned in courtesy and let her be un-opinionated. Opinions, particularly where women are concerned, are accursed. "Women, because the main event of their lives has been a giving themselves and giving birth, give all to an opinion as if it were some terrible stone doll." And he remembers Maud Gonne's obstinacy and oneness of purpose :

Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
 Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,
 Because of her opinionated mind
 Barter her horn and every good
 By quiet natures understood
 For an old bellows full of angry wind ?

Custom and ceremony are the touchstones of the poem—'the ceremony of innocence' :

. . . All hatred driven hence,
 The soul recovers radical innocence.

All hatred, particularly intellectual hatred. 'Innocence is the highest achievement of the human intellect' is a favourite quotation of Yeats. This, the belief in 'good breeding' and the faith in aristocracy, are qualities he lays great importance on :

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
 Where all's accustomed, ceremonious ;
 For arrogance and hatred are the wares
 Peddled in the thoroughfares.
 How but in custom and in ceremony
 Are innocence and beauty born ?
 Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
 And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

The weakness as well as the beauty of this benediction lie in the selection of and emphasis on certain qualities—qualities which he would like to stress very much even in his own general make-up. They point to no unifying or enduring moral subject. The ennobling of the surface qualities of the aristocratic faith would suggest, in a final analysis, even a lack of wide humanity. Could he not find a subject of deep moral significance in the social life of his time ? The complete disregard for religion in the later *Coole and Ballylee* and the pessimism of some of the poems in *The Tower* would suggest not. Dissatisfied with religion as well as science, morality as well as rationalism, he tried to create a system of thought to his own satisfaction. In *A Vision* this system, which serves also as a dictionary to the symbols of his poetry, is explained at great length. Spengler interpreted history so as to fit in with a similar scheme. Giovanni Gentile, Gabriel D'Annunzio, and to some extent Stefan George, saw similar systems inherent in Fascist philosophy and supported it. It is worth examining if this system means a departure from the natural development of Yeats's genius.

A VISION

IN 1925 T. Werner Laurie Ltd. published Yeats's *A Vision*—an explanation of life founded upon the writings of Giraldus and upon certain doctrines attributed to Kusta ben Luka. It was privately printed for subscribers only and priced at three guineas, and contained a portrait of Giraldus, a picture of 'The Great Wheel' and a unicorn, all from the *Speculum Angelorum et Homenorum* by Giraldus and supposed to be printed at Cracow in 1594. I have been unable to trace any reference to this mysterious book outside Yeats. The portrait of Giraldus looks like a genuine sixteenth-century woodcut, but the picture of the Great Wheel looks a little suspicious. The book is dedicated to Vestigia, a lady of great beauty, learning and 'mysterious gifts'. He says in the dedication: "Truth cannot be discovered but may be revealed. If a man does not lose faith and were to go through certain preparations, revelation will find him at the fitting moment." There is an introduction written by Owen Aherne which tells us Michael Robartes' story of the discovery of the *Speculum*, his adventures in Arabia in quest of wisdom, his discovery of the mysterious dances of the Judwalis, and of Kusta ben Luka, Christian philosopher at the court of Harun Al-Raschid. Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne would appear to be real persons here. Yeats did have, it seems, a friend named Michael Robartes who lived part of his life in Mesopotamia and dabbled in the arts of the nomads of Arabia. But some of his later confessions would point to the fact that Vestigia and the dance of the Judwalis were creations of his imagination. In the later (1937) edition of *A Vision* Vestigia gives way to Ezra Pound, and Owen Aherne's introduction is dropped, though parts of it appear in the chapter 'Stories of Michael Robartes and his Friends'. "When I wrote the first edition of this book I thought the geometrical symbolism so difficult, I understood it so little, that I put it off to a later section; and as I had at that time, for a reason I have explained, to use a romantic setting, I described the Great Wheel as danced on the desert sands by mysterious dancers who left traces of their feet to puzzle the Caliph of Bagdad and his learned men. I tried to interest my readers in an unexplained rule of thumb that somehow explained the world." The later edition, which is considerably

revised and enlarged, has nothing of the flippancy of the unexplained rule of thumb. On the contrary, the whole argument is elevated in it to the magniloquence of a divine revelation. Even Rapallo, where part of the rewriting was done, becomes, as it were, a sacred shrine. "Descartes went on pilgrimage to some shrine of the Virgin when he made his first philosophical discovery, and the mountain road from Rapallo to Zoagli seems like something in my own mind, something that I have discovered." And in the dedication to Ezra Pound he says : "I send you the introduction of a book which will, when finished, proclaim a new divinity".

This divinity is a strange philosophical system which is also a compendium of knowledge, life, death, the Universe and everything else. The main part of the work deals with an analogy which Yeats has built up with great ingenuity between a cyclic progression of the human soul in twenty-eight incarnations and the twenty-eight phases of the moon during the lunar month. "The bright part of the moon's disk, to adopt the symbolism of a certain poem, is subjective mind, and the dark, objective mind, and we have eight and twenty Phases for our classification of mankind, and of the movement of its thought. At the first Phase—the night where there is no moonlight—all is objective, while when, upon the fifteenth night, the moon comes to the full, there is only subjective mind. The mid-renaissance could but approximate to the full moon 'For there's no human life at the full or the dark', but we may attribute to the next three nights of the moon the men of Shakespeare, of Titian, of Strozzi and of Van Dyck, and watch them grow more reasonable, more orderly, less turbulent, as the nights pass ; and it is well to find before the fourth—the nineteenth moon counting from the start—a sudden change, as when a cloud becomes rain, or water freezes, for the great transitions are sudden ; popular, typical men have grown more ugly and more argumentative ; the face that Van Dyck called a fatal face has faded before Cromwell's warty opinionated head. Henceforth no mind made like 'a perfectly proportioned human body' shall sway the public, for great men must live in a portion of themselves, become professional and abstract ; but seeing that the moon's third quarter is scarce passed ; that abstraction has attained but not passed its climax ; that a half, as I affirm it, of the twenty-second night still lingers, they may subdue and conquer, cherish even some Utopian dream, spread abstraction ever further till thought is but a film, and there is no dark depth any more, surface only. But men who belong by nature

to the nights near to the full are still-born, a tragic minority.” This is the theme of *The Phases of the Moon*. Yeats does not maintain that the stars control human destiny. They are merely “pointers which enable(d) us to calculate the condition of the universe at any particular moment and therefore its effect on the individual life”. Individual lives are credited with four ‘Faculties’—*Will* and *Mask*, *Creative Mind* and *Body of Fate*. “It will be enough . . . to describe *Will* and *Mask* as the will and its object, or the Is and the Ought (or that which should be), *Creative Mind* and *Body of Fate* as thought and its object, or the Knower and the Known, and to say that the first two are lunar or *antithetical* or natural, the second two solar or *primary* or reasonable.” There are elaborate rules to discover the ‘faculties’ each man is endowed with. The classification has thus method. And his remarks are often very illuminating whatever the authenticity of his dialectic. Napoleon and Shakespeare both belong to Phase 20; and Yeats writes of them: “Napoleon sees himself as Alexander moving to the conquest of the East, *Mask* and Image must take an historical and not a mythological or dream form, a form found but not created; he is crowned in the dress of a Roman Emperor. Shakespeare, the other supreme figure of the phase, was—if we may judge by the few biographical facts, and by such adjectives as ‘sweet’ and ‘gentle’ applied to him by his contemporaries—a man whose actual personality seemed faint and passionless. Unlike Ben Jonson he fought no duels; he kept out of quarrels in a quarrelsome age; not even complaining when somebody pirated his sonnets; he dominated no Mermaid Tavern, but—through *Mask* and Image, reflected in a multiplying mirror—he created the most passionate art that exists. He was the greatest of modern poets, partly because entirely true to phase, creating always from *Mask* and *Creative Mind*, never from situation alone, never from *Body of Fate* alone; and if we knew all we would find that success came to him, as to others of this phase, as something hostile and unforeseen; something that sought to impose an intuition of Fate as from without and therefore as a form of superstition. Both Shakespeare and Balzac used the False *Mask* imaginatively, explored it to impose the True, and what Thomas Luke Harris, the half-charlatan American visionary, said of Shakespeare might be said of both: ‘Often the hair of his head stood up and all life became the echoing chambers of the tomb’.” At this phase, we are told, *Will* is ‘The Concrete Man’; the *True Mask*, ‘Fatalism’; the *False Mask*, ‘Superstition’; the *True Creative Mind*, ‘Dramatisation

of *Mask* ; the *False Creative Mind*, 'Self-desecration' ; and the *Body of Fate*, 'Enforced success of action'.

Let us examine the twenty-second phase. The *Will* for this phase is 'Balance between ambition and contemplation' ; the *True Mask*, 'Self-immolation' ; the *False Mask*, 'Self-assurance' ; the *True Creative Mind*, 'Amalgamation' ; the *False Creative Mind*, 'Despair' ; the *Body of Fate*, 'The "breaking of strength"'. Flaubert, Dostoieffsky and Swedenborg are among the men who belong to this phase. "Flaubert is the supreme literary genius of the phase, and his *Temptation of St. Anthony* and his *Bouvard and Pécuchet* are the sacred books of the phase, one describing its effect upon a mind where all is concrete and sensuous, the other upon the more logical, matter-of-fact, curious, modern mind. In both, the mind exhausts all knowledge within its reach and sinks exhausted to a conscious futility. But the matter is not more of the phase than is the method. One never doubts for a moment that Flaubert was of the phase ; all must be impersonal ; he must neither like nor dislike character or event ; he is 'the mirror dawdling down a road' of Stendhal, with a clear brightness that is not Stendhal's ; and when we make his mind our own, we seem to have renounced our own ambition under the influence of some strange, far-reaching, impartial gaze.

"We feel too that this man who systematised by but linking one emotional association to another has become strangely hard, cold and invulnerable, that this mirror is not brittle but of unbreakable steel. 'Systematised' is the only word that comes to mind, but it implies too much deliberation, for association has ranged itself by association as little bits of paper and little chips of wood cling to one another upon the water in a bowl. In Dostoieffsky the 'amalgamation' is less intellectual, less orderly ; he, one feels, has reached the point of balance through life, not through the deliberate process of his art ; his Whole will, not merely his intellectual will, has been shaken. His characters, in whom is reflected this broken will, are aware, unlike those of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, those of the *Temptation* even, of some ungraspable Whole to which they have given the name of God. For a moment that fragment, that relation, which is our very being, is broken ; they are at Udan Adan 'wailing upon the edge of nonentity, wailing for Jerusalem, with weak voices almost inarticulate' ; yet full submission has not come.

"Swedenborg passes through his balance after fifty, a mind

incredibly dry and arid, hard, tangible and cold, like the minerals he assayed for the Swedish government, studies a new branch of science: the economics, the natural history of Heaven; notes that there nothing but emotion, nothing but the ruling love exists. The desire to dominate has so completely vanished, 'amalgamation' has pushed its way so far into the subconscious, into that which is dark, that we call it a vision. Had he been out of phase, had he attempted to arrange his life according to the personal *Mask*, he would have been pedantic and arrogant, a Bouvard, or a Pécuchet, passing from absurdity to absurdity, hopeless and insatiable."

This revelation with its clarity, power and precision, often achieved in a few phrases or sentences, is certainly a testimony to the eloquence of his prose. But the complete absence of any real or tangible standards by which to judge the validity of this elaborate method of classification makes one sceptical as to its value as serious criticism. Criticism, of whatever type it be, has little or no value if its standards and methods cannot be linked up with reality. For instance, on what plane is he trying to be clear? If he has a method, what is its dialectic? Of what relevance is pure speculation in establishing a critique of values?

Almost all Yeats's theses—his division of the transcendental man, the nature of Daimons, the doctrines of reincarnation, the nature of after-lives, the cyclic nature of civilisation—are put forward as *a priori* arguments. Even his treatment of history is based on quite unwarranted assertions: "One must bear in mind that the Christian Era, like the two thousand years, let us say, that went before it, is an entire wheel, and each half of it an entire wheel, that each half when it comes to its 28th Phase reaches the 15th Phase or the 1st Phase of the entire era. It follows therefore that the 15th Phase of each millennium, to keep the symbolic measure of time, is Phase 8 or Phase 22 of the entire era. . . ." And with all its parade of scholasticism and innumerable allusions to historians and philosophers, the history of civilisation he sketches is far too generalised to have any real value. But we cannot afford to neglect it as it is the basis of a good deal of his later poetry. The conceptions of 'mask', 'will', 'gyres', 'body of fate' contained in *A Vision* form an excellent dictionary to his work, particularly his later work. Thus, whatever its value in itself, it serves a practical purpose for us. Yeats does admit in the dedication of the first edition that he had a practical object in creating this elaborate framework: "Some were looking for spiritual happiness or for some form of unknown

power, but I had a practical object. 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. The Greeks certainly had such a system, and Dante—though Boccaccio thought him a bitter partisan and therefore a modern abstract man—and I think no man since. Then when I had ceased all active search, yet had not ceased from desire, the documents upon which this book is founded were put into my hands, and I had what I needed, though it may be too late. What I have found indeed is nothing new, for I will show presently that Swedenborg and Blake and many before them knew that all things had their gyres ; but Swedenborg and Blake preferred to explain them figuratively and so I am the first to substitute for Biblical and mythological figures historical movements and actual men and women."

In the Introduction to the 1937 edition we are told that the revelation came through his wife, who is a medium. Details of how and when these revelations came about, the exact circumstances, the nature of the signals, the strange phenomena which accompanied it, the sudden flashes of light, the strange whistling, the sweet smells are all described with a disarming frankness. And yet, the first edition contains no reference to all these breath-taking happenings. There we are told that the whole thing was discovered in the mysterious *Speculum* and augmented by Kusta ben Luka. The subtitle is conclusive on the point—'an explanation of life founded upon the writings of Giraldus and upon certain doctrines attributed to Kusta ben Luka'. A good deal of what was put forth with a great flourish as the Great Truth in 1926 becomes merely a romantic setting in 1937. Not only that. His anxiety to establish the authenticity and the sanctity of the revelations occasionally gives him away. For instance, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, written a little before he got married, anticipates the instructors in some places, and so he says : "Sometimes when my mind strays back to those first days I remember that Browning's Paracelsus did not obtain the secret until he had written his spiritual history at the bidding of his Byzantine teacher, that before initiation Wilhelm Meister read his own history written by another, and I compare my *Per Amica* to those histories". He is also anxious to point out that the instructors drew their first symbolical map of European history with the principal years of crisis a few *days before* Spengler's *Decline of the West* was published in German. Spengler gives the same years of

crisis and his conclusions are in general the same as Yeats, a similarity as Yeats himself points out, too great to be accidental. *A Vision*, too, he is anxious to point out, was written a little *before* the English translation of Spengler appeared, and here even the metaphors and symbols are often the same.

Whatever the genesis of the system—and I have no doubt that if one tries to piece out all the evidence there is a good deal of contradiction in it—there is no doubt that it has been at the back of his intellectual life almost from the beginning. His poetry is full of it. Without it his later poetry becomes almost completely unintelligible. Even in his early days he thought of legends and myths in cycles. Speaking about an early period of his development when he was full of mystical philosophy, he says : “ I look back to it as a time when we were full of a phantasy that has been handed down for generations, and is now an interpretation, now an enlargement, of the folklore of the villages. That phantasy did not explain the world to our intellects which were after all very modern, but it recalled certain forgotten methods of meditation and chiefly how so to suspend the will that the mind became automatic, a possible vehicle for spiritual things.” The conflict between the emotional and the aesthetic on the one hand, and the rational and the moral on the other, so visible in his early poetry, would suggest the antithetical and primary tinctures. *The Celtic Twilight* has an essay entitled *The Friends of the People of Faery* which describes a movement similar to that of the gyres explained at the beginning of the section on the Great Wheel. Passages in his early poetry like

. . . Cloud-pale eyelids, dream-dimmed eyes,
The poets labouring all their days
To build a perfect beauty in rhyme,

suggest Phases 14 and 16 of the moon. *The Land of Heart's Desire* would fit in with Phase 15. A very early poem called *The Moods* anticipates, to some extent, the antithesis between man and daimon and such things as the distinction between terrestrial condition and the condition of fire. In a later note he says : “ When all sequence comes to an end, time comes to an end, and the soul puts on the rhythmic or spiritual body or luminous body and contemplates all the events of its memory and every possible impulse in an eternal possession of itself in one single moment. That condition is alone animate, all the rest is phantasy, and from thence come all the passions, and some have held, the very heat of the body.

Time drops in decay,
 Like a candle burnt out,
 And the mountains and woods
 Have their day, have their day ;
 What one in the rout
 Of the fire-born moods
 Has fallen away ? ”

The Hour-Glass has a passage in which Teigue the fool speaks of the ‘ antithesis of the seasons ’ :

Fourth Pupil. Come, Teigue, what is the old book’s meaning when it says that there are sheep that drop their lambs in November ?

Fool. To be sure—everybody knows, everybody in the world knows, when it is spring with us, the trees are withering there, when it is summer with us, the snow is falling there, and have I not myself heard the lambs that are there all bleating on a cold November day—to be sure, does not everybody with an intellect know that ? And maybe when it is night with us, it is day with them, for many a time I have seen the roads lighted before me.

Whether this is just an echo of the talk of a superstitious countryman who has heard the lambs of Faery bleating in November or of some story of supernatural flowers blossoming in winter, or is really based on the theory of opposing cones which represent the twelve months, it is difficult to say. But it is interesting to note that the fool here is wiser than the wise man because perhaps of his intuitive knowledge. In the twenty-eighth phase of the moon, the Fool is described thus : “ At his worst his hands and feet and eyes, his will and feelings obey obscure subconscious fantasies, while at his best he would know all wisdom if he could know anything ”. It is impossible to understand Cruachan of *The Hour before Dawn* if one does not realise this.

Yeats’s middle plays are full of the new philosophy. The description of the nature and history of woman’s beauty in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* is very close to Phases 14 and 16 :

A woman’s beauty is like a white
 Frail bird, like a white sea-bird alone
 At daybreak after stormy night
 Between two furrows upon the ploughed land :
 A sudden storm, and it was thrown
 Between dark furrows upon the ploughed land.
 How many centuries spent
 The sedentary soul
 In toils of measurement
 Beyond eagle or mole,

Beyond hearing or seeing,
 Or Archimedes' guess,
 To raise into being
 That loveliness ?

Cuchulain's mysterious awakening and the full meaning of the rôles played by the Sidhe, Emer and Eithne Inguba can be understood only if we realise that the spirits at Phase 15 need help and those at Phase 1 give it. "The second give it because they are the instrument of communication between men and all orders of spirits, where the communication shows an automatic element, and they are also said to give the 'Kiss of Life' while the first give what is called the 'Kiss of Death'. The spirits at 15 need help that, before entering upon their embodied state, they may rid themselves of all traces of the *primary Tincture*, and this they gain by imposing upon a man or woman's mind an *antithetical* image which requires *primary* expression. It is this expression, which may be an action or a work of art, which sets them free, and the image imposed is an ideal form, an image of themselves, a type of emotion which expresses them, and this they can do but upon one man or woman's mind, their coming life depending upon their choice of that mind. They suffer from the terror of solitude, and can only free themselves from terror by becoming entirely *antithetical* and so self-sufficing, and till that moment comes each must, if a woman, give some one man her love, and though he cannot, unless out of phase and obsessed to the creation of succuba, know that his muse exists, he returns this love through the intermediary of an idol. This idol he creates out of an image imposed upon his imagination by the Spirit. This Spirit is said to give the 'Kiss of Death' because though she that gives it may persecute other idols, being jealous, the idol has not come out of the man's desire. Its expression is a harmonisation which frees the Spirit from terror and the man from desire, and that which is born from the man, and from an all but completed solitude, is called an *antithetical Arcon*. Such *Arcons* deal with form, not wisdom." It is of this kiss that Emer speaks when she says :

I know her sort.
 They find our men asleep, weary with war,
 Lap them in cloudy hair or kiss their lips ;
 Our men awake in ignorance of it all
 But when we take them in our arms at night
 We cannot break their solitude.

In *The Dreaming of the Bones* the popular superstition that the

dead dream back is given a subtle meaning. He bases the play on a distinction he creates between the dreaming of the Shade (Body of Fate) and the dreaming of the Spiritual Being (Spirit and Celestial Being). A poem called *Shepherd and Goatherd* deals with a similar theme and has a song which describes the development during and after life of 'solar' and 'lunar' natures :

He grows younger every second
 That were all his birthdays reckoned
 Much too solemn seemed ;
 Because of what he had dreamed,
 Or the ambitions that he served,
 Much too solemn and reserved.
 Jaunting, journeying
 To his own dayspring,
 He unpacks the loaded pern
 Of all 'twas pain or joy to learn,
 Of all that he had made.
 The outrageous war shall fade ;
 At some old winding whitethorn root
 He'll practise on the shepherd's flute,
 Or on the close-cropped grass
 Court his shepherd lass,
 Or put his heart into some game
 Till daytime, playtime seem the same ;
 Knowledge he shall unwind
 Through victories of the mind,
 Till, clambering at the cradle-side,
 He dreams himself his mother's pride,
 All knowledge lost in trance
 Of sweeter ignorance.

This would appear somewhat obscure if one does not share Yeats's belief that "all solar natures . . . during life move towards a more objective form of experience, the lunar towards a more subjective. After death a lunar man, reversing the intellectual order, grows always closer to objective experience, which in the spiritual world is wisdom, while a solar man mounts gradually to the most extreme subjective experience possible to him. In the spiritual world subjectivity is innocence, and innocence, in life an accident of nature, is now the highest achievement of the intellect."

In *Calvary* subjectivity and objectivity are symbolised by different kinds of birds. Yeats thought of certain birds like the heron, hawk, eagle and swan as the symbols of subjectivity. "I have used my bird symbolism in [the] songs to increase the objective loneliness

of Christ [Phase 15] by contrasting it with a loneliness, opposite in kind, that, unlike His, can be, whether joyous or sorrowful, sufficient to itself. I have surrounded Him with the images of those He cannot save, not only with the birds, who have served neither God nor Caesar, and await for none or for a different saviour, but with Lazarus and Judas and the Roman soldiers for whom He has died in vain. 'Christ', writes Michael Robartes, 'only pitied those whose suffering is rooted in death, in poverty, or in sickness, or in sin, in some shape of the common lot, and He came especially to the poor who are most subject to exterior vicissitude.' I have therefore represented in Lazarus and Judas types of that intellectual despair that lay beyond His sympathy, while in the Roman soldiers I suggest a form of objectivity that lay beyond His help."

The Cat and the Moon (the play as well as the poem of the same name) deals with the phases of the moon and of man's eternal search for his opposite. In the poem the cat is disturbed by the moon and "in the changing pupils of its eyes seems to repeat the movement of the moon's changes". The cat represents the normal man and the moon the opposite he is looking for. *The Player Queen* is the farcical treatment of a theme where almost every character is involved in the effort to find the Antithetical Self.

I have been pointing out all this arid symbolism, quoting all the time from Yeats himself, to show that the philosophy of *A Vision* has been at the back of his work a good deal more than one would suspect. Whole poems deal with it alone—*Ego Dominus Tuus*, *Phases of the Moon*, *The Double Vision of Michael Robartes*, *The Fool by the Roadside*, *All Souls' Night*, *The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid*, *The Second Coming*, *Leda and the Swan*. Others like *The Dolls* or *The Magi* point to it. Still others like *Under the Round Tower* or *Towards Break of Day* are based on it. The golden king and the silver lady in the former (who are also the Sun and Moon) symbolise the continual oscillation which represents the horizontal movement of the historical cones (refer section III of 'Dove and the Swan'). *Towards Break of Day* is based on the theory of *complementary dreams*. Two people 'who have established a supersensual link' can receive in their mind's eye complementary images, however far apart they are, if they both meditate upon the same theme. If one continues with this search for new meanings there will be no end to it, particularly in his later poetry where the new divinity not only creates the willing suspension of disbelief, but takes toll of human civilisation with a challenge and a flourish that are alarming.

I think that Yeats's aversion to 'progress', assumed in his youth as a pose perhaps, caused a certain warping of his mind. This was one of the things which led him to strange company and stranger interests. It also made him to a great extent a victim of his own credulity. "I have come to believe so many strange things because of experience, that I see little reason to doubt the truth of many things that are beyond my experience", he wrote in the essay on Magic. *He* sees little reason. But what of others? How can his experiences be related to the rest of human experience if those experiences cannot be felt or shared by others? This is an important question, because on the authenticity of *A Vision* depends the authenticity of some of Yeats's proclamations which arise from it. These proclamations are relevant to contemporary social and political problems. They announce a new age and a new civilisation, an "aristocratic civilisation in its completed form, every detail of life hierarchical, every great man's door crowded at dawn by petitioners, great wealth everywhere in few men's hands, all dependent upon a few, up to the Emperor himself who is a God dependent upon a greater God, and everywhere in Court, in the family, an inequality made law". A movement similar to that of Yeats's own Great Wheel is fundamental in the philosophy of Giovanni Gentile, and is "the half-conscious foundation of the political thought of modern Italy. Individuals and classes complete their personality and then sink back to enrich the mass. Government must, it is held, because all good things have been created by class war, recognise that class war though it may be regulated must never end. It is the old saying of Heraclitus, 'War is God of all, and Father of all, some it has made Gods and some men, some bond and some free', and the converse of Marxian Socialism." Gentile is a follower of Vico, the apostle of Fascist Italy and the greatest protagonist of Mussolini's pet ideals. Spengler, also to some extent a follower of Vico, expounded a similar philosophy and spoke of the culture of modern Germany as the greatest culture of our time on our planet in the phase of fulfilment. Ezra Pound, who believes in similar theories and who has had a tremendous influence on Yeats's thought, has not only been a regular contributor to the *British Union Quarterly*, but is today broadcasting Fascist propaganda to America. We have to be on our guard, because, as Stephen Spender suggested in a review, Fascism might try to work out through writers like these some theory or philosophy to fill its present yawning void of ethics, morality, religion or law.

THE LAST PHASE

YEATS once told Lady Gregory that the self-possession and power of his later poetry, particularly of *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*, were due to the incredible experiences he has so graphically related in the Introduction to *A Vision*. It would be indiscreet, inappropriate and perhaps even embarrassing to probe into the personal issues involved in such a situation. I do not like to question Yeats's personal integrity. But if it is true that the unknown writer did give him the striking metaphors of his later poetry and had so much to do with the creation of such masterpieces as *The Tower*, he should be decorated for services done to literature.

That Yeats was looking all his life for a system of thought which would leave his imagination free to create, we know. He looked for it in magic, occultism, astrology, symbolism, séances, crystal-gazing, Hindu philosophy—almost everywhere except Protestant Christianity and Marxian Dialectics, both of which he rejected for personal reasons. (It was typical of Yeats that the only things he did not consider seriously were the last two.) Each one of these fired his imagination in varying degrees and provided him with a stimulus to poetry. But he could not integrate these early experiences into one whole. He wanted all his work to be 'part of the one history, and that the soul's'. In this he was baffled. It was this failure that was largely responsible for a lull in his poetry after *The Wind among the Reeds*. But politicians, merchants and the clergy, and the needs of his 'fool-driven land', brought him out of it and made him write some of his best poetry. It was mainly a poetry of impatience, raillery, arrogance. It was like an exasperated, excited man's talk who went so far as to say: 'I think the common condition of our life is hatred . . . irritation with public or private events or persons'. Then came the Revolution, his election to the senate, committees, official receptions, affairs of state. He took his new activities seriously, studying new problems, speaking with eloquence and authority, entering public controversies. But he soon discovered that when it came to governing a nation, his wit and excitement could not match the shrewdness and experience of professional, hard-boiled politicians. And we notice again a reversion to a world of his own creation. This time he creates for himself an intellectual

solitude. The very names 'Tower' and 'Winding Stair' suggest loneliness and isolation. He achieved this solitude by himself creating the system he longed for all his life. This system, as we have seen, rejects science, progress, economics and psychology and forces one to surrender completely to the idea of Fate. Its determinism is not the rational type of determinism which makes every defeat the inevitable part of a forward-moving process. It is like the endless turning of a wheel into which civilisations and human beings drop groove by groove with a predestined regularity. But it provided Yeats with a useful and convenient framework for his poetry. The imaginative intensity he has achieved within the limitations set by himself is so remarkable that A. E. thought *The Winding Stair* justified his various adventures into strange realms. It is Yeats's habit of continual intellectual adventure, says A. E., which has kept his poetry fresh and alive. Soon after he had finished the first version of *A Vision*, Yeats said: "I have not . . . dealt with the whole of my subject . . . but I am longing to put it out of my reach that I may write the poetry it seems to have made possible. I can now, if I have the energy, find the simplicity I have sought in vain. I need no longer write poems like *The Phases of the Moon* nor *Ego Dominus Tuus* nor spend barren years . . . striving with abstractions. . . ."

In *The Tower*, no doubt, he writes with more simplicity, ease and precision, though perhaps with less edge. It does not show signs of obscurantism, at least none that one cannot trace. Most of the characters are real people who lived and breathed some time or other, and have been associated with the neighbourhood of Thoor Ballylee or Ballylee Castle. Thus the story of Mrs. French and the insolent farmer whose ears were clipped by her butler, of the man drowned in Cloone Bog, of Hanrahan and his adventures, are all stories which have gained currency in the neighbourhood and have no trumped-up symbolism about them. The tower itself, with all its meanings, is an actual tower in County Galway where Yeats lived for some time. And though he had a strong predilection for such places, I think he really bought the place to be near Lady Gregory's home. Robartes' words,

He has . . . chosen this place to live in
Because, it may be, of the candle-light
From the far tower where Milton's Platonist
Sat late, or Shelley's visionary prince,

certainly lends enchantment to the place, but I hardly think it is to be taken seriously.

The Tower is a mature work. Old age seems to have brought zest to his life, and in his plain-spokenness he is even coarse occasionally. The recognition of his greatness has given him a quiet confidence, and prosperity has brought with it a slightly affected but pleasant nobility. The work, on the whole, has about it a proud austerity, a mischievous arrogance. "Part of me looked on, mischievous and mocking":

In mockery I have set
A powerful emblem up,
And sing it rhyme upon rhyme
In mockery of a time
Half dead at the top.

Come, let us mock at the great, he says. Let us mock at the wise. Let us mock at the good. And mock mockers after that. That mockery and that arrogance are those of one whose soul has clapped its hands and sung and declared its faith.

. . . I declare my faith :
I mock Plotinus' thought
And cry in Plato's teeth,
Death and life were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul,
Aye, sun and moon and star, all,
And further add to that
That, being dead, we rise,
Dream and so create
Translunar Paradise.

This faith reflects his incursions into the realms of philosophy. In the twenties he read Spinoza, Leibniz, Swift, Berkeley, Vico. How carefully, how methodically, of course there is no saying. Berkeley held his imagination most. Yeats's commentaries and interpretations, of course, are not always true to the originals. They are like brilliant alloys. Yeats had a habit of turning everything that he read and touched into a bit of himself. He had also a genius for quoting from people, often out of context, the most extraordinary things, to suit his argument and purpose. Once, at some public meeting in Dublin, he coupled the names of Davis and Nietzsche. The next day the newspapers had big headlines which said: "Sinn

Feiners cheer Nietzsche". Of Plotinus, for instance, he said : " It is fitting that Plotinus should have been the first philosopher to meet his daimon face to face, though the boy attendant out of jealousy or in convulsive terror strangled the doves, for he was the first to establish as sole source the timeless individuality or daimon instead of the Platonic Idea, to prefer Socrates to his thought. This timeless individuality contains archetypes of all possible existences whether of man or brute, and as it traverses its circle of allotted lives, now one, now another prevails. . . ." With a little squeezing and manipulation he would fit Plotinus, Berkeley, Swift, Hindu Philosophy and everything else into his own fixed cyclic scheme of life and death. The number of authorities he refers to in *A Vision* is positively bewildering—Empedocles, Heraclitus, Simplicius, Macrobius, St. Thomas Aquinas, Swedenborg, Blake of course, Flaubert, Hegel, even Marx, Browning, Francis Thompson, James Joyce, Croce, Giovanni Gentile, W. H. Davies ! How he caricatured history with his own colours ! " When the physical world became rigid ; when curiosity inherited from the Renaissance, and the soul's anxiety inherited from the Middle Ages, passed, man ceased to think ; his work thought in him. Spinoza, Leibniz, Swift, Berkeley, Goethe, the last typical figure of the epoch, recognised no compulsion but the ' bent and current ' of their lives ; the speaker, Connolly, could still call out a posse of gentlemen to design the façade of his house, and though Berkeley thought their number too great, that work is still admired ; Swift called himself a poor scholar in comparison with Lord Treasurer Harley. Unity of Being was still possible though somewhat over-rationalised and abstract, more diagram than body ; whereas the best modern philosophers are professors, their pupils compile notebooks that they may be professors some day ; politicians stick to their last or leave it to plague us with platitudes ; we poets and artists may be called, so small our share in life, ' separated spirits ', words applied by the old philosophers to the dead. When Swift sank into imbecility or madness his epoch had finished in the British Isles, those ' elemental forms ' had passed beyond him ; more than the ' great Ministers ' had gone. I can see in a sort of nightmare vision the ' primary qualities ' torn from the side of Locke, Johnson's ponderous body bent above the letter to Lord Chesterfield, some obscure person somewhere inventing the spinning-jenny, upon his face that look of benevolence kept by painters and engravers, from the middle of the eighteenth century to the time of the Prince Consort, for such as he, or, to simplify the tale—

Locke sank into a swoon ;
 The Garden died ;
 God took the spinning-jenny
 Out of his side."

The brilliance of this is the type of cold analytical brilliance which gives all his dogmatism the appearance of a carefully reasoned-out argument. If it is illuminating, it is difficult to say what it illuminates or on what plane he is trying to be so. This is the sort of thing which made him one of the most brilliant conversationalists of our age. Impressive statements which glitter for a moment and leave us breathless. Taken down on paper and scrutinised carefully, this lovely façade of arresting words and phrases often appear just sententious, their significance no more than that of a commonplace. In poetry, his logical syntax, careful structure and subtle metric lend conviction to such dogmatism :

Where got I that truth ?
 Out of a medium's mouth,
 Out of nothing it came,
 Out of the forest loam,
 Out of dark night where lay
 The crowns of Nineveh.

There he states a fact, a belief, a point of view. Take it or leave it. And because of its imaginative intensity, more often than not, one takes it.

One also notices in *The Tower* that outside his pet theories of determinist cycles, etc., the sphere of his human sympathies is very restricted. And it seems a pity, for when he writes a poem like *Among School Children*, whose theme is essentially human, he is capable of reaching great heights. A bitterness has crept into even Ireland and Irish politics.

They hold their public meetings where
 Our most renowned patriots stand,
 One among the birds of the air,
 A stumpier on either hand ;
 And all the popular statesmen say
 That purity built up the State
 And after kept it from decay ;
 Admonish us to cling to that
 And let all base ambition be,
 For intellect would make us proud
 And pride bring in impurity :
 The old rascals laugh aloud.

Meditations in Time of Civil War is full of it. He broods meditatively on violence, bitterness, hatred ; on the tragedies enacted on the 'laborious stair' of the 'stark tower' ; on the changeless Japanese sword, a precious gift ; on the brown, heavily-built Falstaffian lieutenant who came

. . . Cracking jokes of civil war
As though to die by gunshot were
The finest play under the sun. . . .
. . . And I complain
Of the foul weather, hail and rain,
A pear-tree broken by the storm ;

on the stare's nest by the window. "Hitherto we have walked the road, but now we have shut the door and turned up the lamp."

We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal from the fare ;
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love ; O honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

He broods on all that 'senseless tumult' until there is nothing to do but

. . . Turn away and shut the door, and on the stair
Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth
In something that all others understand or share.

Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen is a heart-breaking poem. The ingenious lovely things are gone.

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
Rides upon sleep : a drunken soldiery
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free ;
The night can sweat with terror as before
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
And planned to bring the world under a rule,
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

Comfort is to be found nowhere. Everywhere is violence :

Violence upon the roads : violence of horses.

Evil gathers head. What is the use of ranting to the knave and the fool ?

The abstract joy,
The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,
Suffice the ageing man.

But even though he is constantly harping on the absurdity of decrepit old age, he shows himself no paltry thing, far from a tattered coat upon a stick.

1928 was a year of illness and pain. "Then in the spring of 1929 life returned as an impression of the uncontrollable energy and daring of the great creators ; it seemed that but for journalism and criticism, all that evasion and explanation, the world would be torn in pieces. I wrote *Mad as the Mist and Snow*, a mechanical little song, and after that almost all that group of poems called in memory of those exultant weeks, *Words for Music Perhaps*. Then ill again, I warmed myself back into life with *Byzantium* and *Veronica's Napkin*, looking for a theme that may befit my years."

That full-blooded love of life with its uncontrollable energy is seen everywhere in *The Winding Stair* :

Why should the imagination of man
Long past his prime remember things that are
Emblematical of love and war ?
Think of ancestral night that can,
If but imagination scorn the earth
And intellect its wandering
To this and that and t'other thing,
Deliver from the crime of death and birth.

What matter the frustrations and disappointments of living ? The toil of growing up, the ignominy of boyhood, the gaze of malicious eyes ?

I am content to live it all again
And yet again, if it be life to pitch
Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
A blind man battering blind men ;
Or into that most fecund ditch of all,
The folly that man does
Or must suffer, if he woos
A proud woman not kindred of his soul.

Of the two passages just quoted from *A Dialogue of Self and Soul* the first is attributed to the *Soul*, the second to the *Self*. Here the distinction between the *Is* and the *Ought* is somewhat confusing. And it is interesting that it is the final proclamation of the *Self* that emerges triumphant out of the argument. This is not what one

would have expected after the belittling of *Self* and the glorification of the *Soul* in *Sailing to Byzantium*. He was perhaps aware of this contrariness, because in a section of *Vacillation* he tries to be more explicit :

The Soul. Seek out reality, leave things that seem.
The Heart. What, be a singer born and lack a theme ?
The Soul. Isaiah's coal, what more can man desire ?
The Heart. Struck dumb in the simplicity of fire !
The Soul. Look on that fire, salvation walks within.
The Heart. What theme had Homer but original sin ?

All the noble egotism of *Vacillation*, the mockery and arrogance of *The Tower* and the continual assertion of the pagan position—' Who can distinguish darkness from the soul ? '—seem like a cover for his increasing pessimism. Von Hügel, because he rejected the theory of reincarnation, he dismisses, though with blessings. " All our thought seems to lead by antithesis to some new affirmation of the supernatural." The thought, the philosophy behind all this, is not the important thing. It is alternately exultant and cynical, defiant and retreating. It is the excitement of his temperament and of his imagination that makes it all so moving.

The symbolism of the ' winding stair ' is closely connected with that of the ' tower '. The tower has among other things been emblematical of solitude, asceticism, night. The winding stair is part of the tower. If the tower denotes a solitary intellect, the winding stair denotes its aspirations ascending up to heaven. It represents the philosophical gyres. Also,

I declare

This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my ancestral stair ;
 That Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley and Burke have travelled there.

Often, the symbolism is suggested by some little practical detail. The waste-room at the very top of Thoor Ballylee, for instance, ' where butterflies come in through the loop-holes and die against the window-panes ' suggested the thought—

Is every modern nation like the tower,
 Half dead at the top ?

On other occasions it is based on purely private associations as in *The Mother of God*, where the sur-realistic-sounding ' fallen flare through the hollow of an ear ' is a reference to some Byzantine mosaic

pictures of the Annunciation which Yeats had in mind. In these pictures a line had been drawn from a star to the ear of the Virgin. "She received the Word through the ear, a star fell, and a star was born." A ring on his hand with a hawk and a butterfly engraved on it suggests something else.

Compared with these difficult and intellectual poems, most of the ones under the heading *Words for Music Perhaps* and *A Woman Young and Old* are simple and direct. One also notices, reading the Crazy Jane poems, how far he has moved away from the cold proud women of his early days. Crazy Jane, lusty, coarse, self-forgetful ; Jack, the journeyman ; Tom, the lunatic ; these are everywhere. And he speaks of their loves and passions and incongruous philosophy, withholding nothing. Crazy Jane speaks with the bishop and is reproved. Crazy Jane discusses God and the Day of Judgement. Tom, the lunatic, expounds philosophy :

Whatever stands in field or flood,
Bird, beast, fish or man,
Mare or stallion, cock or hen,
Stands in God's unchanging eye
In all the vigour of its blood ;
In that faith I live or die.

Many of these poems—*Parting* and *A Last Confession* are good examples—deal with lust and bodily passion with a heartiness which would show that he revelled in it :

Could Crazy Jane put off old age
And ranting time renew,
Could that old god rise up again
We'd drink a can or two,
And out and lay our leadership
On country and on town,
Throw likely couples into bed
And knock the others down.

From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.

This is the song of a man who has not forgotten youth and the excitement of living. Sometimes this frank discussion of sexuality becomes somewhat of an obsession, as in the two songs of the chambermaid. But as F. R. Higgins said, "There were for him only two commingling states of verse. One, simple, bucolic, rabelaisian ; the other, intellectual, exotic or visionary." In his later work we see both side by side : the simplicity and directness of some of the ballads like *The Three Bushes* ; the bucolic, rabelaisian humour of

Colonel Martin or The Old Stone Cross. Besides these stands a poem like *After Long Silence* :

Speech after long silence ; it is right,
 All other lovers being estranged or dead,
 Unfriendly lamplight hid under its shade,
 The curtains drawn upon unfriendly night,
 That we descant and yet again descant
 Upon the supreme theme of Art and Song :
 Bodily decrepitude is wisdom ; young
 We loved each other and were ignorant.

“ I was good-looking once . . . but my unpractised verse was full of infirmity, my Muse old as it were ”, wrote Yeats in *The Bounty of Sweden* ; “ and now I am old and rheumatic and nothing to look at, but my Muse is young. I am even persuaded that she is like those angels in Swedenborg’s vision, and move perpetually ‘ towards the day-spring of her youth ’.” How he revels in that day-spring !

A most astonishing thing—
 Seventy years have I lived ;

(Hurrah for the flowers of Spring,
 For Spring is here again.)

Seventy years have I lived
 No ragged beggar-man,

Seventy years have I lived,
 Seventy years man and boy,
 And never have I danced for joy.

Whether he has danced for joy or not, he is dancing now. And he can hardly control himself. ‘ Why should not old men be mad ? ’
 Or,

How can I, that girl standing there,
 My attention fix
 On Roman or on Russian
 Or on Spanish politics ?
 . . . O that I were young again
 And held her in my arms !

One moment he is quiet :

My temptation is quiet.
 Here at life’s end
 Neither loose imagination,
 Nor the mill of the mind

Consuming its rag and bone,
Can make the truth known.

But the next moment he is off again :

Grant me an old man's frenzy,
Myself must I remake
Till I am Timon and Lear
Or that William Blake
Who beat upon the wall
Till Truth obeyed his call ;

A mind Michael Angelo knew
That can pierce the clouds,
Or inspired by frenzy
Shake the dead in their shrouds ;
Forgotten else by mankind,
An old man's eagle mind.

Last Poems and Plays is a worthy concluding volume. The underlying theme of the book, symbolised in a drawing on the cover, is described in a little blurb : " Nut the Egyptian goddess of the heavens is shown planted on a lion while she lifts the starry sphere (vide *Those Images*). Thus the royalty and ferocity of brute fact supports the intellect that projects a complete plan : or, taken in an aspect that returns again and again in these poems, the goddess and the ' noble animal ' are symbols for the fascination and ruthlessness of generation and raise above themselves ' the mind that Michael Angelo knew ' ; that mind which by persistence discerns the truth as William Blake did. Generation pleasurable, cruel and majestic, causes life and supports its sublimation which exalts the skyey sphere—both the astronomer's map and the astrological pattern of unembodied reality." That rounds off beautifully the last phase of his achievement.

He died on January 28, 1939, at Roquebrune on the French Riviera. To the very last his mind remained quick and alive ; his curiosity, stronger than ever. And it is strange but appropriate that simultaneously with his death appeared two poems of his in the *London Mercury* which would make one think that he almost prepared for his end.

Man

. . . All that I have said and done,
Now that I am old and ill,
Turns into a question till

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

I lie awake night after night
And never get the answer right.

And all seems evil until I
Sleepless would lie down and die.

Echo

Lie down and die.

In *The Circus Animals' Desertion*, the other poem, he sums up the achievement of his life ; and whatever one might say of it, we cannot but marvel at its technical perfection, its frankness and its ruthless integrity.

PLAYS

YEATS'S poetry, in spite of all its Irish imagery, myths, legends and symbolism, is as much a part of English poetry as of Irish. But his plays belong almost wholly to Ireland: This is mainly due to the fact that Yeats's work as a dramatist has centred round the Abbey Theatre, a theatre mainly of his own creation. It is when one thinks of his connection with the Irish Dramatic Movement that one feels, as George Moore has said, that all the Irish movement rose out of Yeats and returns to Yeats. Whether he was founding the Irish Literary Society or the National Literary Society or prophesying about the intellectual movement to come in the first lull of politics, it was a national theatre that he had at the back of his mind. "I had definite plans; I wanted to create an Irish Theatre", he wrote at the time of the founding of the Irish National Society. That was about 1890. He had not completed his *Countess Cathleen* then. But the plan needed money and had to be shelved. Not until a wet afternoon in 1898 when Edward Martyn took Yeats along to see his neighbour Lady Gregory, and the conversation turned on plays and theatres, did what seemed an impossible project suddenly seem possible. Money could be collected, or guarantees obtained. A Dublin theatre could be rented. As for the plays, Yeats's own *Countess Cathleen* and Martyn's *Heather Field* were there waiting to be performed. Lady Gregory promptly offered the first guarantee of £25 there and then. A letter to prospective guarantors was drafted straightaway. "We propose", it said, "to have performed in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which, whatever be the degree of their 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 of expression which is not found in the theatre of England and without which no movement in Art or Literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and 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." The response to this circular was excellent. A. E., Dr. Douglas Hyde, George Moore, Jane Barlow, Professor Lecky, even Aubrey de Vere who was so violently opposed to the idea of Home Rule for Ireland, among men of letters ; and outside literature, old John O'Leary, Lord Dufferin, William O'Brien, the agrarian agitator, Lord O'Brien, Chief Justice of Ireland, Sir Horace Plunkett, all supported the new idea. Rehearsals were soon started. And on the 8th of May 1899 the first performance of the Irish National Theatre was given at the Ancient Concert Rooms. The start was not auspicious. In spite of the enthusiasm and support given by almost all parties, factions and cliques, there was trouble from the very beginning. *The Countess Cathleen* offended public taste and was attacked as a blasphemous play. There was a chorus of protests, particularly from the clergy. The play went on all the same. Max Beerbohm and the London critics were generous and praised the performance.

In the two succeeding years there were short seasons at the Gaiety Theatre. Edward Martyn's *Maeve* was the success of 1900. The 1901 season included not only a production of *Diarmuid and Grania* by Sir Frank Benson and his company, but also a play in Irish, *The Twisting of the Rope*, by Dr. Hyde.

1902 saw the emergence of the Fay brothers, Irish actors of great individuality. This marked a further advance. So far, the players of the Irish National Theatre were English and they rehearsed in London. The Fays demonstrated not only their own great skill, but proved that Irish actors were, both temperamentally and technically, far better suited to interpret Irish works. The performance on April 2 at St. Teresa's Hall in Clarendon Street, when the programme consisted of A. E.'s *Deirdre* and Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, fully brought out the Irish character of the National Theatre. Followed a week-end trip to London in the spring of 1903. The trip was a sensational success and became the talk of London. *The Times* said : " A little band of Irish men and women, strangers to London and Londoners, gave some of us who, for our sins, are constant frequenters of the regular playhouse, a few moments of calm delight quite outside the range of anything which these houses have to offer ". Another well-known critic said : " The plays and players were like a summer breeze to jaded London ". Others went into eulogies over their delightful spontaneity, the complete absence of fussy stage movements, the simplicity of the *décor*. A member

of the audience, Miss A. E. F. Horniman, famous for her generous patronage of struggling players, wrote to Yeats and said that if he could keep the company together, she would present them with a theatre for themselves. "I can only offer to make a very little theatre, and it must be quite simple", she said. "You all must do the rest to make a powerful and prosperous theatre with a high artistic ideal." Yeats, of course, jumped at the chance. An old theatre in Abbey Street was found, and the work of renovation started. The architect, Joseph Holloway, was a genuine lover of the theatre. Soon the Abbey Theatre was ready, thanks to the generosity of an English woman who spent a sum in the neighbourhood of £13,000. The existing Dublin theatres, particularly those controlled by a powerful London syndicate, were hostile to the new project. They kicked up an agitation saying that the Society was given to the staging of immoral plays; Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen* was cited as an example. Ibsen and Macterlinck were mentioned. But the necessary patent was finally obtained and the Abbey Theatre had a grand opening on December 27, 1904, with four short one-act plays—Yeats's *On Baile's Strand*, and *Cathleen ni Houlihan*; Lady Gregory's *Spreading the News* and Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen*.

But there were disappointments. George Moore and Edward Martyn, two of the earliest adherents of the new venture, disagreed with the policy of the theatre. Edward Martyn maintained that the actors should be trained for the modern drama of society. Plays like *Cathleen ni Houlihan* with the speech of the country people did not seem to him the right ones for such preparation. Yeats insisted that the aim of the theatre should be a return to the people and there was division among the directors. "Plays about drawing-rooms", said Yeats, "are written for the middle-classes of great cities. . . . The training our actors will get from plays of country life, with its unchanging outline, its abundant speech, its extravagance of thought, will help to establish a school of imaginative acting. The play of society, on the other hand, could but train up realistic actors who would do badly, for the most part, what English actors do well, and would, when at all good, drift away to wealthy English theatres. If, on the other hand, we busy ourselves with Poetry and the countymen, two things which have always mixed with one another in life as on the stage, we may recover, in the course of years, a lost art which, being an imitation of nothing English, may bring our actors a secure fame and a sufficient livelihood.

Martyn and Moore would not subscribe to such ideas and they left the movement.

Troubles were always round the corner. When *The Playboy of the Western World* was staged by the Abbey, the Unionist papers described it as an insult to Ireland. Forty men in the middle of the pit with tin trumpets, etc., drowned the play right from the beginning. Every night there were disturbances and rioting in the neighbourhood. Five hundred policemen were on special duty on the last night. But the public controversy which followed it was a triumph for Yeats and the Abbey Theatre. Yeats's opening speech was not a denunciation of those who failed to appreciate the play. Neither was it a vindication of the play itself. If he denounced anything it was the unworthy instruments of tyranny and violence that were used in suppressing the play. Gentlemen of the little clubs and societies, he said, there are young men and women who are getting weary of the tyranny of your clubs and leagues and wish again for an individual sincerity. Terrorism is not worthy of manhood, because the root of manhood is courage and courtesy. The coarser means are easy, but they lead nowhere. "It needs eloquence to persuade and knowledge to expound."

This had a good effect on the public. But the *Playboy* had unfortunate sequels, not the least of which was the departure of one of the Abbey's most promising dramatists, Padraic Colum. Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island*, his special contribution to the Irish Theatre, was another bone of contention. But Lady Gregory's bold and fearless stand on this matter brought the theatre a good deal of Nationalist sympathy and support. But there were unfortunate incidents. When King Edward VII died and the theatre remained open, through a mistake it seems, Miss Horniman bade farewell to the Abbey. Soon the Fays, faithful friends of the Abbey and great artists, left Dublin. So did Maire O'Neill. Synge died. But Yeats and Lady Gregory, the main props of the theatre, were still there and nothing could shake their confidence. "It is better to fumble our way as children. We may grow up, for we have as good hopes as any other sturdy ragamuffin," said Yeats. Not only that. In the midst of all this turmoil Yeats set about the task of 'reforming' the theatre. He had a four-point programme :

"*First.* We have to write or find a place that will make the theatre a place of intellectual excitement—a place where the mind goes to be liberated as it was liberated by the theatres of Greece and England and France at certain great moments of their history,

and as it is liberated in Scandinavia today. . . . Such place will require, both in writers and audiences, a stronger feeling for beautiful and appropriate language than one finds in the ordinary theatre. . . .

“*Second.* . . . To restore words to their sovereignty we must make speech even more important than gesture upon the stage. . . . Whatever method one adopts, one must always be certain that the work of art, as a whole, is masculine and intellectual in its sound as in its form.

“*Third.* We must simplify acting, especially in poetical drama, and in prose drama that is remote from real life like my *Hour-Glass*. We must get rid of everything that is restless, everything that draws the attention away from the sound of the voice, or from the few moments of intense expression, whether that expression is through the voice or through the hands ; we must from time to time substitute for the moments that the eye sees the nobler movements that the heart sees, the rhythmical movements that seem to flow up into the imagination from some deeper life than that of the individual soul.

“*Fourth.* Just as it is necessary to simplify gesture that it may accompany speech without being its rival, it is necessary to simplify both the form and colour of scenery and costume. . . . They should be little more than an unobtrusive pattern. There must be nothing unnecessary, nothing that will distract the attention from speech and movement. . . . An art which smothers these things with bad painting, with innumerable garish colours, with continual restless mimicries of the surface of the life is an art of fading humanity, a decaying art.”

Yeats himself did try to practise a good deal of what he preached. But he soon realised that no movement can be prearranged into definite patterns.

Yeats's early plays, *Countess Cathleen*, *Land of Heart's Desire*, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, *The Pot of Broth*, all dealt with the countryside and the peasantry. Then we come to *The King's Threshold*, the first of a number of plays dealing with kings and queens and other heroic figures of Irish legendry. In *The King's Threshold* the original story is given a slight twist, and in establishing the pre-eminence of the poet, Yeats solves, as it were, a personal problem. *Deirdre* and *On Baile's Strand* are the highest achievements of this middle period. In spite of his continual assertions that in tragedy everything should be subordinated to the development of moods and

emotions, we notice the dramatic cohesion, the slow but relentless unfolding of the tragedy, the full plot concentrated to suit the needs of a one-act play.

In *Deirdre* Yeats makes a chorus of musicians and old Fergus reveal in a few lines for what A. E. and Synge required nearly two acts. The chorus is used as an integral part of the play, an excellent technical device. We meet Deirdre and Naoise after their return to Ireland. Deirdre is full of a strange foreboding that Conchubar's promise of forgiveness is a trap. But Naoise is trustful and happy. "Being High King, he cannot break his faith", he says, and as for the stories an ill-omens, "I will not weigh the gossip of the roads with the King's word". Not until the King's messenger arrives to summon Deirdre and Fergus, but not Naoise—"the traitor that bore off the Queen"—does he realise the treachery. Escape would be useless. "There is not one of the great oaks about us but shades a hundred men." Conchubar lures Naoise into a trap, and soon after, he enters with his dark-faced murderers. Naoise is dragged in, caught in a net like a helpless bird. The scene is now set for the most dramatic moments of the play. Conchubar promises Naoise his freedom if Deirdre would walk into his house before the people's eyes and save his face. Feeling that argument would be useless, Deirdre is about to give in. And as Naoise protests she makes a last appeal to the King's generosity. She goes down on her knees and pleads piteously for forgiveness. And as she pleads, unseen by her, Naoise is first gagged and then, a moment later, taken behind the curtain. As Conchubar laughs at her helplessness, knowing that he has won, the suspense becomes terrible. Deirdre is standing up now and she says :

You laugh.

Yes ; you are laughing to yourself. You say,
 ' I am Conchubar—I have no need of him.'
 You will cry out for him some day and say,
 ' If Naoise were but living '—— [*she misses Naoise*].
 Where is he ?

Where have you sent him ? Where is the son of Usna ?
 Where is he, O, where is he ?

The dark-faced executioner has entered with a blood-smeared sword in his hand and Conchubar points to it. And suddenly the full force of his revenge and wanton cruelty strikes her. As Conchubar looks on her astonished by her stupefied calm, she laughs abandonedly, feigning callousness.

There's something brutal in us, and we are won
 By those who can shed blood. It was some woman
 That taught you how to woo,

she says and asks permission to go behind the curtain to look at Naoise's dead face.

For I will see him
 All blood-bedabbled and his beauty gone.
 It's better, when you're beside me in your strength,
 That the mind's eye should call up the soiled body,
 And not the shape I loved.

And when Conchubar hesitates, she taunts him :

‘ Look at him
 That is so jealous that he lured a man
 From over sea, and murdered him, and yet
 He trembled at the thought of a dead face ! ’
Conchubar. How do I know that you have not some knife,
 And go to die upon his body ?

Deirdre. Have me searched,
 If you would make so little of your queen.
 It may be that I have a knife hid here
 Under my dress.

The audience knows that she *has* a knife hidden under her dress, and the short pause before Conchubar says ‘ Go to your farewells, Queen ’ is almost nerve-wracking. Yeats's own favourite comment about the play is—“ Red-heat up to Naoise's death, white-heat after he is dead ”.

Lennox Robinson often speaks of this as a perfect example of Yeats's stage-craft. Yeats repeats this device of putting the audience in possession of a dreadful knowledge of which the characters are quite ignorant in *On Baile's Strand*. Here, the intensity of the suspense is kept up, actually kept mounting up, by continually hinting at the dreadful truth, but not confirming it. Conchubar, the High King, has commanded Cuchulain to fight the young man from Aoife's country who has come to challenge Cuchulain to single combat. Conchubar in his old age, blessed with many children, taunts Cuchulain about his lonely state. Cuchulain himself, bitter and angry, cries out in cynical mockery :

I think myself most lucky that I leave
 No pallid ghost or mockery of a man
 To drift and mutter in the corridors
 Where I have laughed and sung.

But of all the women he has had in his wild impetuous life, his mind dwells on one :

Ah ! Conchubar, had you seen her
With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers
Thrown backward, and the bowstring at her ear,
Or sitting at the fire with those grave eyes
Full of good counsel as it were with wine,
Or when love ran through all the lineaments
Of her wild body—although she had no child,
None other had all beauty, queen or lover,
Or was so fitted to give birth to kings.

And it is Aoife with the stone-pale cheek and the light red-brown hair that he is thinking of, Aoife the great Queen of the North who has only once been defeated in battle, and that by Cuchulain. As he comes face to face with the young man, Cuchulain looks at him, at his light red-brown hair and pale cheeks, and the shape of his head brings the memory of Aoife back to his uneasy mind. Instead of fighting him, Cuchulain offers him his friendship. The High King and the other kings egg him on to fight, for Aoife is an enemy and her challenge must not go unanswered. Put back your swords, says Cuchulain, and he turns to the young man with paternal solicitude, until the impatient King shouts at Cuchulain to stop all this shilly-shallying and fight, and Cuchulain, his anger roused, lays his hand on the High King. Witchcraft has maddened Cuchulain, says the King. Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft, shout the others ; he has laid his hand on the High King himself ; the head of that young man seems to him like a woman's he had a fancy for. Cuchulain, staggered by the enormity of his offence, loses control of himself and rushes out to fight ; and the young man is killed. In a little while, as Cuchulain is wiping the blood off his sword, the Fool says :

That Blind Man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That Blind Man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him.

Cuchulain [to the Blind Man]. You knew him, then ?

Blind Man. I saw him, when I had my eyes, in Aoife's country.

Cuchulain. You were in Aoife's country ?

Blind Man. I knew him and his mother there.

Cuchulain. He was about to speak of her when he died.

Blind Man. He was a queen's son.

Cuchulain. What queen ? What queen ? [*Seizes Blind Man, who is now sitting upon the bench.*] Was it Scathach ? There were many queens. All the rulers there were queens.

Blind Man. No, not Scathach.

Cuchulain. It was Uathach, then? Speak! speak!

Blind Man. I cannot speak; you are clutching me too tightly.

[*Cuchulain lets him go.*] I cannot remember who it was. I am not certain. It was some queen.

Fool. He said a while ago that the young man was Aoife's son.

Cuchulain. She? No, no! She had no son when I was there.

Fool. That Blind Man there said that she owned him for her son.

Cuchulain. I had rather he had been some other woman's son.

What father had he? A soldier out of Alba? She was an amorous woman — a proud, pale, amorous woman.

Blind Man. None knew whose son he was.

Cuchulain. None knew! Did you know, old listener at doors?

Blind Man. No, no; I knew nothing.

Fool. He said a while ago that he heard Aoife boast that she'd never but the one lover, and he the only man that had overcome her in battle.

Then there is a pause. Like the still ominous calm before a thunder-storm. How often has Yeats used such pauses with devastating effect! We can actually hear the first rumblings of the storm which had been brewing for so long. And then it is the Blind Man who speaks:

Somebody is trembling, Fool! The bench is shaking. Why are you trembling? Is Cuchulain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchulain.

Fool. It is Cuchulain who is trembling. It is Cuchulain who is shaking the bench.

Blind Man. It is his own son he has slain.

The red-heat of this intensely dramatic moment is kept up almost to the very end. An extremely vivid piece of reporting dramatises for us Cuchulain's insane rage against King Conchubar and himself.

Fool. He is going up to King Conchubar. They are all about the young man. No, no, he is standing still. There is a great wave going to break, and he is looking at it. Ah! now he is running down to the sea, but he is holding up his sword as if he were going into a fight. [*Pause.*] Well struck! well struck!

Blind Man. What is he doing now?

Fool. O! he is fighting the waves!

Blind Man. He sees King Conchubar's crown on every one of them.

Fool. There, he has struck at a big one! He has struck the crown off it; he has made the foam fly. There again, another big one!

Blind Man. Where are the kings? What are the kings doing?

Fool. They are shouting and running down to the shore, and the people are running out of the houses. They are all running.

Blind Man. You say they are running out of the houses ? There will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, Fool !

Fool. There, he is down ! He is up again. He is going out in the deep water. There is a big wave. It has gone over him. I cannot see him now. He has killed kings and giants, but the waves have mastered him, the waves have mastered him !

Blind Man. Come here, Fool !

Fool. The waves have mastered him. . . .

Blind Man. Come here, I say.

Fool [*coming towards him, but looking backwards towards the door*]. What is it ?

I said, *almost* to the very end. Because we now get quite an uncalled-for bit of bathos for an ending. It is the Blind Man who speaks :

Blind Man. There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way ; come quickly ! The ovens will be full. We will put our hands into the ovens.

What a terrible anti-climax ! That Yeats is capable of winding up a play most effectively he demonstrated in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, where in one last sentence he conveys the whole symbolism and point of the play.

Peter [*to Patrick, laying a hand on his arm*]. Did you see an old woman going down the path ?

Patrick. I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen.

How, then, is such a deliberately bathetic ending to be accounted for ? An excessive fondness for characters which are oddities ? Perhaps. No doubt such fondness often cost him a sense of proportion. Or was it anxiety to establish the importance he attached to the conception of the Fool ? Whatever the reasons, whenever he tries to put across a philosophy, the result is a weak play like *The Player Queen*, which for all Yeats's claims seems rather effete and pointless. Yeats, no doubt, had an extraordinary dramatic sense. He understood the stage, *décor*, players, the use and value of verse on the stage. He had an unerring instinct to pitch upon dramatic situations. He could achieve great intensity of thought and passion. Yet his achievement as a dramatist would seem rather incommensurate with his gifts. This failure is worth analysing.

Yeats's advocacy of a return to the people did not imply a return to the living people or the real world. A return to the people meant to him a return to the sagas, myths and a primitive life. The

real world in his plays "is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty, we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance. . . ." Love and beauty he made unearthly so as to exclude character and subordinate it to motives and passions. In order to exalt lyric feeling, he substituted 'the purification that comes with pity and terror to the imagination and intellect' for the nervous tremors of commercial plays. In order to eliminate the unravelling and development of incidents, he usually started off with a discussion of a *fait accompli*. In order to eliminate the building-up of character, he started off with fully developed characters, sketched to us in a few formal lines of very effective hesitant speech by some subsidiary character, often his favourite, Fool. In order to achieve neat outlines and a finished beauty, he pruned his plots to the point of being bare. And then he had a few set tricks. A little twist in the syntax and the construction of a line to make the most matter-of-fact statements memorable; a focussing of attention on some ordinary little character, a beggar or an old man, so as to create something of an antithesis to the principal characters.

Yeats's verse everywhere has the taut beauty of 'a tightened bow', but lacks elasticity. He could certainly give the speeches of kings and their contenders and other heroic figures a rare compelling dignity; and he could equally well give the peasants simplicity and genuineness. But between these two there were the hundreds of subsidiary characters—merchants, demons, angelical beings, priests, tramps, soldiers, monks, sailors, executioners, musicians, chariot-drivers, ghosts, children, coach-builders, beggars, actors, stage-managers. Neither the formal lines of his prose nor the subtle incantation of his verse was plastic enough to achieve the spontaneity and the realism that even poetic drama requires.

Yeats was conscious of these limitations. After all, he himself set the limitations within which he was to function. His genius was not of an abundant type which could take in life with all its infinite variations. He could not realise that it was possible to create a living national theatre of a realistic kind. Others did. Within three months of the Abbey's birth, William Boyle's *The Building Fund*, a bitter, realistic comedy with vivid characterisation, broke all attendance records at the Abbey. Padraic Colum gave us the very quintessence of Irishism in another realistic play, *The Fiddler's House*. Colum's play, *The Land* (1905), dealing with the

conflict of ideas of two generations about the land they lived on, coming after the Land Act of 1903, was even topical. Even Lady Gregory and Synge did not try to create the remoteness Yeats longed for. Soon, the younger writers were coming to the fore—George Fitzmaurice, Lennox Robinson, T. C. Murray—and they found the audience excited and enthusiastic about their problem plays, satirical comedies, political tragedies. T. C. Murray's *Birth-right*, Lennox Robinson's *Patriots* were not only popular, but represented new live forces. But Yeats wouldn't budge from his original viewpoint. We see him writing in 1916: "Realism is created for the common people and was always their peculiar delight, and it is the delight today of all those whose minds, educated alone by schoolmasters and newspapers, are without the memory of beauty and emotional subtlety. The occasional humorous realism that so much heightened the emotional effect of Elizabethan Tragedy . . . was made at the outset to please the common citizen standing on the rushes of the floor ; but the great speeches were written by poets who remembered their patrons in the covered galleries." The half-truth of such sweeping generalisations must be admitted. But its snobbish pedantry is exasperating. But he is soon compelled to realise that even the Abbey Theatre did not have the necessary appetite for that 'high breeding of poetical style' he has always wanted. "Yet I need a theatre ; I believe myself to be a dramatist. . . . My blunder has been that I did not discover in my youth that my theatre must be the ancient theatre that can be made by unrolling a carpet or marking out a place with a stick, or setting a screen against the wall." And so in order to found a true theatre of beauty he turns to the studio and the drawing-room. *Four Plays for Dancers* was written for drawing-room audiences. The first performance of *At the Hawk's Well* was in an ordinary drawing-room where the actors came in by the same door as the audience. A screen against the wall at one end was the only device. The players wore masks. These plays, elegant, subtle, austere, remote, are full of an aristocratic pedantry. The themes are Irish. The philosophy is of *A Vision*. The technique is Japanese. They are to be played to the accompaniment of drum and zither and flute.

This new invention of a drama, 'distinguished, indirect and symbolic', is based essentially on the *Noh* plays of Japan. At one period he studied Sanskrit plays and tried to steep himself in the traditions of the old subtle dramatic art of the Hindus. But the severity and the ceremoniousness of the *Noh* plays as well as, perhaps,

the persuasiveness of Ezra Pound lured him. Besides, the *Noh* plays have a strong feudal flavour and were quite definitely entertainment for the aristocratic and warrior classes. And the carefully designed costumes, the masks, the simple severe *décor*, the use of music and the dance, were all suited to give credibility to strange events and elaborate words,

From now onwards, Yeats's plays take on the formal beauties of a ritual. The drum-taps, the peculiar music and the peculiar dancing make it a kind of esoteric and unhuman kind of activity. Yeats knew very little, if anything, about music or the dance, but he had definite opinions about them—"I love all the arts that can still remind me of their origin among the common people, and my ears are only comfortable when the singer sings as if mere speech had taken fire, when he appears to have passed into song almost imperceptibly. I am bored and wretched, a limitation I greatly regret, when he seems no longer a human being, but an invention of science. To explain him to myself I say that he has become a wind instrument and sings no longer like active men, sailor or camel-driver, because he has had to compete with an orchestra, where the loudest instrument has always survived. The human voice can only become louder by becoming less articulate, by discovering some new musical sort of roar or scream. As Poetry can do neither, the voice must be freed from this competition and find itself among little instruments, only heard at their best perhaps when we are close about them." Such statements, of course, should not be treated as serious musical criticism. Yeats no doubt was insensitive to the dramatic content of, say, Mozart's music. In any case, he was writing a play and not the libretto to an opera. As for dancing, all that he aimed at was concerted movement on the part of the players. More expressive and intimate gestures, but less declamation.

In these plays, the players, devoid of the conventional make-up, with their faces masked, and moving gravely and stiffly like marionettes from a medieval show, become quite impersonal. Heroic grotesque figures, they hold themselves firmly against a 'pushing' world. Cuchulain becomes a half-supernatural, legendary figure with a sculptured face which portrays the deep emotions only solitude and courage can give. Other characters, poets, Fools, Queens, become abstract symbols of a lost heroic age.

All this proved intensely interesting, though occasionally bizarre, in a drawing-room with a few intellectuals. But this drama of essence portraying a spiritual or intellectual conflict, with its

esoteric implications, almost completely failed on the public stage. All the genius of Hildo Krop, the Dutch sculptor, Edmund Dulac, George Antheil and Ninette de Valois (who was principal dancer at the Abbey once) could not save it. The inadequacy of his new model was clear. But he had set aside with an overweening gesture the European traditions of Play-writing. All he could do was to retire into his own shell and maintain his remoteness and austerity.

Here and there we get flashes of the old stage-craft and his dramatic resourcefulness. *The Words upon the Window-pane* as a vindication of Swift, or as an interpretation of History, is tiresome. But the passages between Swift and Vanessa are profoundly moving and show what he can do with dialogue. And the spectacle of a woman in trance, speaking now with the voice of a little girl, now with the powerful, deep eloquence of Swift, now with the deep affection of a woman in love, can be most effective on the stage. The vivid impression he can create of incidents and characters absent from the stage shows that the old dramatic instinct is still sure as ever. For instance, Stella, who is such an important part of the play, never speaks through the medium. And in *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, the central theme of the play, Salome's dance, does not take place on the stage. One also notices that in some of these last plays, the loose and somewhat sleepy Alexandrines of *Calvary* and *The Resurrection* make way for a more sinewy and close-knit verse. In the hands of a great actor, some of the speeches of Congal in *The Herne's Egg* would be terribly effective :

Congal

Mad ! This man is right,
But you are not to blame for that.
Women thrown into despair
By the winter of their virginity
Take its abominable snow,
As boys take common snow, and make
An image of God or bird or beast
To feed their sensuality.

Or, again, take another passage later in the play where he screams in excitement :

I am King Congal of Connaught and of Tara,
That wise, victorious, voluble, unlucky,
Blasphemous, famous, infamous man.
Fool, take this spit when red with blood,
Show it to the people and get all the pennies ;

What does it matter what they think ?
The Great Herne knows that I have won.

Purgatory shows even a greater strengthening of this new metric :

Great people lived and died in this house ;
Magistrates, colonels, members of Parliament,
Captains and Governors, and long ago
Men that had fought at Aughrim and the Boyne.
Some that had gone on Government work
To London or to India came home to die,
Or came from London every spring
To look at the may-blossom in the park.
They had loved the trees that he cut down
To pay what he had lost at cards
Or spent on horses, drink and women ;
Had loved the house, had loved all
The intricate passages of the house,
But he killed the house ; to kill a house
Where great men grew up, married, died,
I here declare a capital offence.

Here is another example :

Study that tree.
It stands there like a purified soul,
All cold, sweet, glistening light.
Dear mother, the window is dark again,
But you are in the light because
I finished all that consequence.
I killed that lad because he had grown up
He would have struck a woman's fancy,
Begot, and passed pollution on.
I am a wretched foul old man
And therefore harmless. When I have stuck
This old jack-knife into a sod
And pulled it out all bright again,
And picked up all the money that he dropped,
I'll to a distant place, and there
Tell my old jokes among new men.

A man with such gifts and strength could have been the greatest force in modern drama. With all his limitations, he has been a considerably important force. No man of our time has had half his genius to, in his own words, restore the sovereignty of words and revitalise poetry on the stage. What a pity his anti-middle-classishness finally drove him into a cul-de-sac of his own making ! Frank O'Connor said in a lecture at the Abbey Festival in the

summer of 1938 that Yeats thought of the middle class as having created a barrier between the simplicity of the peasant and the nobility of kings — a barrier of doubts, arguments, fuss, humanitarianism, liberalism, religious and political abstractions. They created ideas of progress, sensibility ; political clubs and race-tracks ; the novel, didactic poetry, and, above all, the commercial theatre with its sceneries, properties, lighting effects, its combat of circumstances, its restlessness. So he dismissed it all with one sweeping impatient gesture and turned to the creation of a people's theatre. But a popular theatre needed an objective approach and had to be intelligible. That meant hardening, externalising, deforming. He could not bring himself to do that. So finally he packed up everything. In a famous letter to Lady Gregory, he said : " 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 ". What a confession ! All that early excitement about creating a truly National Theatre has come to this. " I want to make . . . a feeling of exclusiveness; a bond among chosen spirits, a mystery almost for leisured and lettered people ", he says with a last flourish. He was not interested in creating a theatre any more. He was seeking the theatre's anti-self.

CONCLUSION

THERE is no better commentary on the intellectual struggles in Yeats's life and thought than his own *Autobiography*. No man could have given us more relevant facts and details about himself. Yet, how much of the Yeats that we have come to know was the real Yeats? There seems to be a curious duality about the person and his work. Everywhere the struggle between the emotional and intellectual self, between his vision and the mask, seem to draw a curtain over the whole intimate confidence into which he has taken us. On the one hand, we cannot but be impressed by his great artistic integrity and character. Yet, what is one to make of *A Vision*? Shall we set aside reason, intellect and argument, and accept a revelation of dubious authenticity? Yeats himself tries to answer this: "Some will ask whether I believe in the actual circuits of the sun and moon. . . . To such a question I can but answer that if sometimes, overwhelmed by miracle as all men must be when in the midst of it, I have taken such periods literally, my reason has soon recovered; and now that the system stands out clearly in my imagination, I regard them as stylistic arrangements of experience comparable to the cubes in the drawing of Wyndham Lewis and to the ovoids in the sculpture of Brancusi. They have helped me to hold in a single thought reality and justice."

Reality and justice. What are his conceptions of these? His awareness of the European situation as in the lines:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

would appear profound and his concern for the future of civilisation an overwhelming passion. But what do these lead to? To the exultant acceptance of authoritarianism as the only solution. Even violence and tyranny are not necessarily evil because the people, knowing not evil and good, would become perfectly acquiescent to tyranny.

Constrained, arraigned, baffled, bent and unbent
By these wire-jointed jaws and limbs of wood,

Themselves obedient,
Knowing not evil and good ;

Obedient to some hidden magical breath.
They do not even feel, so abstract are they,
So dead beyond our death,
Triumph that we obey.

As for justice, at one period he fought against prejudice, narrow-mindedness, the tyranny of religious societies, political clubs ; even for the rights of the working class demanding fair play and a share of the earth they lived on. But, in the main, justice for him meant authority and power for a select few. He very much lacked a sense of wide humanity. Everything must come from the top. Nothing can come from the masses. Responsibilities meant responsibilities to certain specific classes and types. He would quote with great relish Lady Wishfort's words from Congreve's *Way of the World* when turning out a servant : " Go, set up for yourself again, do ; drive a trade, do, with your three penny-worth of small ware, flaunting upon a pack-thread under a brandy-seller's bulk, or against a dead wall by a ballad-monger ; go, hang out an old frisoneer-gorget, with a yard of yellow colberteen again, do ; an old gnawed mask, two rows of pins, and a child's fiddle ; a glass necklace with the beads broken, and a quilted nightcap with one ear. Go, go, drive a trade."

This would suggest a strain of cruelty. How did he, who only a few years ago seemed a fighter for human rights, come to this standpoint ? The Great War destroyed for him the last vestiges of Victorian optimism. And his failure as a Senator convinced him that a fuller exercise of his responsibilities was difficult if not impossible in the new society. This period of disillusionment and frustration coincided with the impact with Ezra Pound. Pound's great catchword about Fascism is that it is the only political faith based on hope and optimism. Yeats's elegant packet for Ezra Pound was very significant.

In the first flush of admiration and enthusiasm most people dismissed the fantastical philosophy as the price we have to pay for a great and curious intellect. One did not quite realise where he was heading. And those who did, like Pound and perhaps Eliot, approved of the stand that he finally took. The first reaction to this did not come, as one might have expected, from the politically-minded young English poets. They were puzzled because a less

rigid or artificial system than that of *A Vision* might not have produced the great poetry of Yeats's last days. The first conscious reaction came from some of the more class-conscious young Irish poets. L. H. Daiken's anthology *Goodbye, Twilight* is an indictment of all that Yeats stood for. In one vicious little sentence Daiken summed up Yeats: "Bourgeois poets in Ireland have always heralded doomsday or kingdom-come like the crowing of a clairvoyant cock".

All this brings again to the top the age-long discussions about the connection of poetry and beliefs. A poet should not, of course, be judged solely by *what* he says; nor by *how* he says it. The poem is the thing. Its integrity as a work of art is what matters most. This implies a synthesis of several things. But even in the most complete synthesis, *what* a poet says still remains fairly audible. And if the greatest poet of our times is exultantly ringing in an era of Fascism, it seems a somewhat disturbing symptom. I do not wish to discuss the whole set of complicated relationships which exist between art and politics, and must confess, am a little afraid to do so. Between the younger Hegelians who damned books for the politics of their authors and the aesthetes of the nineties who maintained that poetry should deal only with the eternal and the absolute, there have existed a wide range of more or less tenable positions. But if one accepts the living relationship of art to life, then we must see the art of the poet as a social activity. The relevance of a poet's work to our struggles, even the direct or indirect part it plays in resolving them, then becomes important. After all, in a long-term objective analysis, poetry has played a great and necessary part in human history and the integration of human relationships.

Once the immediate problems which confront us are solved and our sense of values reintegrated, I think it will be easier to judge the achievement of such a towering figure as Yeats. Until then one can only repeat the well-known words that he was the last poet in the aristocratic tradition, and say that in his last days, with the bottom knocked out of his moral code, and unable to fully grasp the historical process, he fell back upon the pride and strength of the individual will, harping always on the type of nobility and greatness he had been brought up to accept. But his imaginative intensity never flagged, and everywhere his character and his personality stood out. Whatever the verdict of the future, his work will remain for ever the greatest personal document of our times.

