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YEATS AS PLAYWRIGHT

by

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Introduction

The poetry of William Butler Yeats is accorded a very high place in contemporary English literature; yet his other work has been neglected. The plays are customarily passed over as an appendage to his poetry, and the prose works are almost entirely neglected, except as philosophical documents. Though the poems are constantly being examined and explicated, the prose style is mentioned only incidentally: "one may observe in passing that the section on history in A Vision includes the finest rhythmic prose written in English since that of Sir Thomas Browne." The paradox is that though Yeats's dramatic movement, in the form of the Abbey Theatre, exerted great influence on English and American drama, his plays themselves remain outside the realm of influence and have not passed into the tradition of English drama. This may be explained in two ways, if it can be explained at all: either because he wrote one-act plays, a form that is as unfashionable as the short-story, or because he was concerned with poetic drama, a form that is as unfashionable as poetry.

Yeats attached great importance to his work in and for the theatre. He wrote in the preface to Poems 1892-1905:

Some of my friends...do not understand why I have not been content with lyric writing. But one can only do what one wants to do, and to me drama—and I think it has been the same with other writers—has been the search for more of manful energy, more of cheerful acceptance of whatever arises out of the logic of events, and for clear outline, instead of those outlines of
lyric poetry that are blurred with desire and vague regret.

By undertaking the practice of the stage Yeats was forced to revise his art, to trim decorations that grew from lyric impulse, to cut away excess description and narration. This process can easily be seen in comparisons of the early and late plays as well as in comparison of poems. As Parkinson says: "By its very nature dramatic poetry demands conflict, and through the demands of the theatre Yeats was forced to objectify the conflict that implicitly underlay the early poems." He develops the point at length, concluding that when working in dramatic verse

...he had to make his characters speak to one another, to subdue his inclination toward the rhapsodic. The same motives compelled him to reduce the number of esoteric symbols in the poetry and to provide for those retained an elucidating context of common speech. He also learned to modulate his diction so as to be able to express several points of view and to shape his metrics to the demands of a living voice.

But Yeats's adventures in the theatre were not motivated only by a desire to strengthen his poetry by dramatic practice; he was also a part of the Irish Renaissance, and more important he sought reform of the modern stage. "As a critic," writes Moody E. Prior,

Yeats sought to reveal the failings of the current drama and to trace the foundations on which a new attempt might be raised; as a poet, he experimented over a long period of time in the hopes of discovering a new means which would enable the poet to find once more his proper place in the theatre, and he brought to his task one of the unquestionably great poetic gifts of our time.

Prior might have added that Yeats wanted not only to trace the foundations on which a new attempt might be raised, but to trace to the foundations, for Yeats was concerned with renewing the ancient drama of poetry, ritual, and myth. It is toward the definition of these aims of Yeats as playwright and an examination of the theories he proposed in his attempt to achieve those aims that this thesis is written.
It is, to say the least, disconcerting to be confronted with the great divergence of opinion on Yeats as playwright. T. R. Hem, writing in 1950, observed that "it is curious to observe the unanimity of critical opinion that Yeats is not a dramatist." The unanimity has broken itself in the past few years, however, and a more tempered position is being reached.

Louis MacNeice had written that "Yeats was the cause of drama in other men but he does not seem to me to have been properly a dramatist. ...On the whole the poetry of the plays is less interesting, less powerful, and less original than that of the lyrics, but it is always the same man writing." Joseph Holloway wrote that Yeats "is more a lyric poet than a dramatist, and is never satisfied with his work for the stage, but keeps eternally chopping and changing it," as though revision and correction were sinful. And A. E. Morgan stated triumphantly that "Mr. Yeats suffers as a dramatist from the defects of his merits as a poet." Morgan continues:

He will be remembered as a lyricist capable of embodying in fine verse and with lovely symbolism the subtleties of his mystical thought. This quality is not wholly advantageous as a dramatist; and in effect Mr. Yeats's plays are apt to be so strange in thought and so vague in expression that the meaning is difficult to grasp.

It is no condemnation of these plays that their form is incomprehensible to the ordinary man, but it is a serious thing if they are made not of real human stuff but of the unreal imaginings of a visionary.

Since Morgan's time there has been some revision of our ideas of reality and of our ideas of drama, and the concept of "real human stuff" has been questioned. The theories to be discussed in the body of this thesis may give some clue for the absence of such "stuff" from some of Yeats's plays.

Edmund Wilson believed that "Yeats's plays have little dramatic
importance because Yeats himself has little sense of drama, and we think of them primarily as a department of his poetry, with the same sort of interest and beauty as the rest," whereas Joseph Hone, Yeats's biographer, wrote that "Yeats was one of the few poets with a born dramatic gift, not only in the effect and economy with which he could nail down a really dramatic theme on the barest of boards in the rarest of words...but in the fact that he knew exactly what effect he wanted and how it should be obtained."

William Archer, with his realistic bias, missed the point of Yeats's work in the theatre when he wrote that "Mr. Yeats contributed one or two plays, notably The King's Threshold and the beautiful symbolic playlet, Kathleen-ni-Houlihan; but this first of Irish poets is scarcely a born dramatist." Eglinton, on the other hand, makes such a stout defence of Yeats as playwright that he praises even the faulty early plays, such as The Land of Heart's Desire, because in them Yeats "had already succeeded in doing what the Shakespearian dramatists longed and tried unsuccessfully to do; and he was able to do so because that 'Celtic' element which survived in Shakespeare was the element in which Yeats moved with real power and understanding." T. S. Eliot, though he shows greater critical insight than either of these critics, is too preoccupied with finding a new verse form for the stage and therefore praises the late Yeats plays, though justly, while neglecting masterpieces of the middle period written in blank verse. Yeats realized that good poetic plays could still be written in that measure, if the verse was not diluted Elizabethan and if the diction was as modern as the theatre in which it was to be spoken. In his 1951 essay on "Poetry and Drama," Eliot wrote:
Yeats is a very different case, from Maeterlinck or Synge. A study of his development as a dramatist would show, I think, the great distance he went, and the triumph of his last plays. In his first period, he wrote plays in verse about subjects conventionally accepted as suitable for verse, in a metric—which—though even at that early stage having the personal Yeats rhythm—is not really a form of speech quite suitable for anybody except mythological kings and queens. His middle-period *Plays for Dancers* are very beautiful, but they do not solve any problem for the dramatist in verse. It was only in his last play *Purgatory* that he solved his problem of speech in verse, and laid all his successors under obligation to him. 16

A study of Yeats as dramatist in the Eliotic manner is beyond my scope, and I have had to content myself with the line of investigation suggested by T. R. Henn:

But before Yeats is dismissed, we must first, I think, consider precisely what he was trying to do; and whether, within that intention, he was successful. The structure of a short verse play is in any case peculiar, and calls for special handling by poet and judgement by critic. Character must be presented as complete, or almost complete, at the outset. 17

His last sentence is important, since it accounts for the lack of much "real human stuff" in the one-act plays.

In alternating chapters I try to give a general picture of the period and of Yeats's activities in it, followed by an examination of the theories and plays of the period. I have rather arbitrarily broken his career into three segments: 1884-1906, which covers the early development and the plays written without experience of the stage; 1902-1912, which is roughly the period during which Yeats worked actively in the Irish theatre; and 1912-1939, which is the time during which he continued to write plays though now more for his own pleasure and from his own motives than specifically for any theatre movement. By arranging the career in this way I hope that the intentions and the re-
sulting compositions will be shown in relationship to one another and to the theatre for which the plays were written.
Chapter I

Background: historic and dramatic

1. The Political and Literary Revival
2. Irish Drama before the Revival
3. Related Movements
The modern revival of literature in Ireland came in hard times. Perhaps the upsurge of national consciousness, and the products of this consciousness in literature, is always accompanied by turbulence or revolution. In Ireland there had long been dissatisfaction and unrest, leading more often than not to mass migrations. Between 1846 and 1851, a quarter of a million Irishmen emigrated each year, and in the next decade over 100,000 people were annually leaving Ireland.

"It is probable," writes Lecky, in a passage which Sir Horace Plunkett quotes as confirmed by his own experience, "that the true source of the savage hatred of England that animates great bodies of Irishmen on either side of the Atlantic has very little connection with the penal laws, or the rebellion (1798), or the Union. It is far more due to the great clearances and the vast unaided emigrations that followed the famine."

The triple woe of famine, eviction, and emigration not only left its mark on the conscience of the Ireland into which William Butler Yeats was born in 1865, but generated a desire to banish everything English from Ireland, even the English language.

Though he came to be identified with the Irish Renaissance, both literary and political, Yeats often differed with the policies and desires of the more fanatical elements in the nationalistic movement, as shown by his refusal to join the movement to banish English as the
national language of Ireland. He personally elected to remain in the
great Anglo-Irish tradition of Swift, Goldsmith, Burke, Berkeley, Sheri-
dan, Wilde, and Shaw. Reasons for this position were various: perhaps be-
cause of his father's influence and his early fascination with the pre-
Raphaelite movement; but more likely because of his belief that if every-
thing English were expelled from Ireland, the new nation would lose most
of her culture and civilization. Yeats wished, of course, to retain
whatever might be of use, whatever would keep Ireland from regressing in-
to a primitive nation. Yet, for all his fame as poet and senator, and as
leader in the Irish Renaissance, Yeats almost always found himself on the
fringe of things. Eglinton says that "he lived completely in an Ireland
of his own imagination, and without the least perception of the real
trend of events." Though this pronouncement may be too extreme, it is
true that Yeats had a romantic idealist's conception of Ireland and of
Ireland's future. "I am of Ireland," he once wrote, "And of the Holy
Land of Ireland," and once lamented, discouraged by the Ireland of
1913, "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,/ It's with O'Leary in the
grave." John Eglinton writes that he wonders sometimes "whether this
scornful refrain was not the spark which fell upon the inflammable minds
of the young Gaelic enthusiasts, poets most of them, and kindled their
vague aspirations into a realistic purpose." Yeats himself wondered
whether he was responsible for Easter 1916, responsible for that which
was "All changed, changed utterly;/ A terrible beauty is born." He
asked in one of his last poems, "Did that play of mine send out/ Certain
men the English shot?" But this must have been about the only time
Yeats found himself responsible for the actions of a mob, because for the
most part he disliked politics, entering it more from a desire to win the
affection of Maud Gonne than from patriotic zeal. He also felt a re-
sponsibility toward himself to take part in the political aspects of the Renaissance, and by so doing to combine in himself incompatibles, working toward what he termed a "Unity of Being." It was probably a similar desire for a unified sensibility which led Ezra Pound into political and economic studies.

But Yeats, holding his romantic and aristocratic theories about Ireland, was always in the minority, and was rather proud of it, for he said in a speech in the Irish Senate:

I am proud to consider myself a typical man of the minority. We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan; we are the people of Swift, the people of Parnell. We have created most of the modern literature of this country. We have created the best of its political intelligence.

He chose, in "The Tower," upstanding men who would inherit his pride,

The pride of people that were
Bound neither to Cause nor to State,
Neither to slaves that were spat on,
Nor to the tyrants that spat,
The people of Burke and of Grattan
That gave, though free to refuse—

His friendship with O'Leary was a primary factor in the development of Yeats's proud, romantic attitude.

O'Leary, whom he first met at the Contemporary Club, had the air of sage and martyr that Willie's reading and imagination demanded of any leader. His personality was large and interesting; and his appearance, bearded and venerable, revealed a passionate nature, strengthened by a moral genius the more real for having been tested in suffering. Though initially moved by the political sentiments which prompted the writings of Davis and other patriots he was intensely critical of their lack of literary taste. This was a common ground between him and Willie...

O'Leary was famous as a Fenian, an early revolutionary force which favored the use of physical force to attain freedom. Though they drew their name from Irish legend, the Fenians had organized on American soil, an outgrowth of the American Civil War in which expatriate Irish—
men had learned to use arms in combat. A revolution was planned in con-
junction with the Irish Republican Brotherhood, a society already formed
in Ireland; but the attempt was thwarted when the forewarned English
captured the American ship, Erin's Hope, on which men and arms were be-
ing transported. Only isolated acts of violence followed. Perhaps
the most famous of these minor skirmishes was the freeing of two Fen-
ians from a prison van in Manchester, accomplished only after a police-
man had been killed. In 1867, three of the rescuing party were hanged
for the murder: Allen, Larkin, and O'Brien, later known as the "Man-
chester Martyrs." In the same year the Reform Bill was passed as a
measure of concession and conciliation.

Following the disestablishment of the Irish Church in 1869, making
land available to tenants who wished to purchase it, the Land Act of
1870 focused attention and interest on tenant farmers who were then
allowed to purchase land they worked. Ireland was comparatively
prosperous and peaceful until the Home Rule movement, Catholic and
Nationalistic in spirit, was launched in May of 1870 by Isaac Butt.
Contending with Home Rule for the interest of the Irish electorate
were the reorganized Fenians, under the name Sinn Fein, who prefer-
red direct action to the Home Rule policy of parliamentary and con-
stitutional action. Little was achieved by the Home Rule movement
under Butt; but in 1878 Parnell came to the front, and, being the
antithesis of Butt, altered the party's methods. It was Parnell's
genius that he was able to effect a coalition between the National-
ists and the Fenians, bringing both in contact with the will and
needs of the peasantry. Economics and politics were one under Par-
nell, and using his strategy of obstruction, he was able to unite
the political agitation for home rule and the agrarian agitation against landlordism.

Fear swept Ireland in 1879. The potato crop had failed, and the corn crop was under average. Everyone feared that there would be another famine, as in 1846. Though prompt relief prevented a repetition of the earlier disaster, the small crop meant that tenants would not be able to pay rents, and under the Land Act of 1870 they were given no protection from the landlords. A new period of evictions began. Using as its most powerful weapon boycott, the Land League, of which Parnell was president, was formed to agitate for the tenant farmers. A new land act was passed under Gladstone in 1881; but the Irish were not appeased. In the same year the English suppressed the Land League and put Parnell in prison, only to release him the next year when boycott and refusal to pay rents led to an impasse.

The complete history of "the Irish Question," or of English misrule in Ireland, is much too long to recount in full; but this will perhaps suffice to illustrate the emphasis being placed on the peasantry, and to give some background for the literary revival of interest in the peasantry which later paralleled the political interests. Almost all the political action of the time centered around land reform. Home Rule had almost completely failed; Gladstone was unable to get any of his various bills passed. But in proportion to the failure of Home Rule, agrarian agitation increased, culminating in the famous Parnell case of 1888-1889 in which he was accused of complicity in agrarian crime. Though he was entirely exonerated from these accusations, Parnell was irrevocably ruined as a political figure the next year when he was proved guilty of adultery. He was deserted by Home Rulers in England
and by most of his supporters in Ireland. The loss of Parnell as a uni-
ifying force was disastrous for Ireland, for when Gladstone again failed
in 1892 to get a Home Rule Bill passed, a reaction set in among the Irish
against the policies followed in the past twenty years. Though the land
problem seemed to be settled by the Wyndham Act of 1903, "the fall of
Parnell convinced Irishmen that the campaign for constitutional reform
had failed at any rate for many years to come. The result was a shift
of interest from Westminster to Ireland, from the source of constitution-
al reform, to the breeding-ground of rebellion."

The necessity of direct action was proclaimed, taking, mainly, two
forms: The Sinn Fein Society of Arthur Griffith, and The Gaelic League
of Douglas Hyde.

Sinn Fein Amhain ("ourselves alone") was the name taken by the ex-
treme or separatist party. Its objective was the foundation of an
independent Ireland, and national self-development by the support of
organizations and movements within Ireland. Griffith's admiration for
the Austria-Hungary Dual Monarchy led him to believe that a similar
solution of the Anglo-Irish problem could be worked out. Sinn Fein
modeled its policy on the movement in Hungary against Franz Joseph in
eighteen

the \( \wedge \) years between the end of the Hungarian Revolution (1849) and the
winning of the Dualistic System (1867) —— a policy of absolute passiv-
ity, a refusal to take a single step which admitted or even implied re-
cognition of the existing regime. Boycotting all things English, the
organization gained strength and power, aided by labor propaganda and
unrest, and getting a chance to show its strength in the 1916 uprising.
From April 24 to April 30, Easter Week of 1916, "The Provisional Govern-
ment of the Irish Republic" ruled in Dublin. Its six-day rule was ended
only after great destruction and only after a reinforced English army made it impossible for the revolutionary forces to continue. Leaders were shot, commemorated in Yeats’s poem “Sixteen Dead Men,” and about 1,000 people, suspected of supporting sedition, were exported to England and were put into prison without trial.

Meanwhile, in 1893 Douglas Hyde formed the Gaelic League which was intended to do in the intellectual sphere what the Irish Agricultural Organization Society (1889) attempted in the industrial: "the rehabilitation of Ireland from within." One of the League’s primary objectives was to revive the use of Erse and to revive native Erse literature. The young men who took up the movement said that "a separate language was to a country what its flag should be, and more, because it was a real thing and not a symbol." Though Hyde was determined that the League should be confined to linguistic interests, the movement had much the same political ramifications as the revival of Magyar, Czech, Serb, and Croat earlier in the century. This wide-spread tendency toward the re-establishment of languages and dialects led to separatist feelings and consciousness of nationality among the people of the areas. "It is our Gaelic past," Hyde once said, "which, though the Irish race does not recognize it, is really at the bottom of the Irish heart and prevents us becoming citizens of the Empire." Patrick Pearse, leader of the Easter 1916 rising, gave considerable credit to the League for stimulating revolutionary sentiments when he said that "the Gaelic League will be recognized in history as the most revolutionary influence that has ever come into Irish history." Thus, for all its scholarly and non-political intentions, the Gaelic League taught that association with England had almost killed the Irish language, and that
for restoration of what had been lost separation from England was perhaps the best policy.

About the same time, a literary revival began to take form, founded by Irish nationalists who took their subjects from Irish history and legend, a revival which was to have political implications much like those of the Gaelic League, though the influence on politics was indirect. Along with the risings and wars came this flowering of Irish literature, used at first as a propaganda weapon and later produced for its own sake. Those participating in the literary revival were not necessarily part of the political movements, but by glorifying the nation they contributed pride in the new national literature, reminiscences of the past heroic days, and thereby created a romantic image of a Celtic nation. They conjured up an image which their contemporaries could be admonished to revere and to re-establish, thus serving, even though not created for that purpose, propaganda purposes.

The famine of 1847 had destroyed what literary activity had remained in the rural areas, among the peasantry who had maintained until that time the rural social-structure of the eighteenth century, in which poetry had been a flourishing art. The young literary men set out to restore what had been swept away by hunger, emigration, and eviction. The agitation of the agrarians, along with the renewed interest in the sagas, led Yeats to formulate his theories of the peasantry as a source for literature, and the heroic days as subject for poetry. Such acts as sending Synge to the peasants of Aran and advising Lady Gregory to translate the sagas, as well as his own work and advice to others, established Yeats as a leader of the renaissance. Though he was not its founder, he was the greatest of the writers associated with the renaissance, and being so became for the world a symbol of its activities. Actually he played
only a part in the culmination of a long development in the desire to
reconstruct Irish life in all its phases. As Lennox Robinson points
out, it was not one literary or political man's ideas or ambitions which
was the catalytic element in bringing all the latent forces in Ireland
together, in beginning what we call the Irish Renaissance.

The Irish Renaissance... owed its birth, strange to say, from a
débâcle—the downfall of Parnell. Ireland for nearly a hun-
dred years had been politically-minded; there were three great
questions to solve, Catholic Emancipation, the Land Question,
political Independence from England—in the eighteen-seventies
they named it 'Home Rule.' But there was a minority, and we
must not forget it, who wanted to cut every connecting rope with
England. The Parnell crash came in 1892 and made Ireland po-
litically divided. It seemed almost certain that no political
progress could be made for forty years, it would take these
years or more than that time for the wounds to be licked clean.
It was then that certain young men and women in Ireland realized
that their country, in seeking material gains, had lost sight of
more spiritual things. And so the young enthusiasts set to
work. 31

Yeats had foreseen such a moment of crisis, when politics would no longer
have the center of attention. He wrote in "Ireland after Parnell":

A couple of years before the death of Parnell, I had wound up
my introduction to those selections from the Irish novelists
with the prophecy of an intellectual movement at the first lull
in politics, and now I wished to fulfill my prophecy. I did
not put it in that way, for I preferred to think that the sudden
emotion that now came to me, the sudden certainty that Ireland
was to be like soft wax for years to come, was a moment of super-
natural insight. How could I tell, how can I tell even now? 32

When the lull came, Yeats was prepared to make the most of it, founding
literary societies and encouraging writers, becoming a leader in the Renais-
sance.

To show this literary revival in its perspective, it is necessary to
recall the wars of the seventeenth century which brought about the final
and complete destruction of the once powerful bardic order. The breakup
of the Gaelic order had, according to Stephen Gwynn, lamentable conse-
quences.
It caused the loss of a great deal of literature and learning. Every Gaelic chief had his own poet and his own historian, for whom provision was made at the public expense. But when there was no longer a ruler of Thomond or Tyrconnell, the learned men and the poets must become peasants, cultivating the ground, or starve. 33

With the collapse of the Bardic orders, poetry almost disappeared from Ireland, being followed by no distinctive national literature. This early collapse might be compared to the collapse of the modern Irish literature following the censorship bill of 1929 which had the effect of relegating contemporary Irish literature to a minor instead of major position in world literature. Likewise, the modern establishment of Gaelic as the national language had as disastrous an effect on the Renaissance as the earlier suppression of Gaelic had had on the Bardic poetry. Poetry in Erse, national poetry, was created only among the peasants who harbored the language and the literature of the bards; but even here there was, as Yeats wrote, "a flitting incoherence, a fitful dying out of the sense, as though the passion had become too great for words, as must needs be when life is the master and not the slave of the singer." 34

English-speaking Ireland had no poetic voice,

... for Goldsmith had chosen to celebrate English scenery and manners; and Swift was but an Irishman by what Mr. Balfour has called the visitation of God, and much against his will; and Congreve by education and early association.... Nor did the coming of the new century of the fame of Moore set the balance even, for all but all of his Irish melodies are artificial and mechanical when separated from the music that gave them wings. 35

Translations of sagas by J. J. Callanan followed, and later O'Connell led a group of young intellectuals known as "Young Ireland." The Nation began to publish propaganda in mechanical verse and oratorical prose by such writers as Thomas Davis, Edward Walsh, and James Clarence Mangan, as well as "Speranza" (Lady William Wilde). Another outlet for the new verse was James Mitchel's The United Irishman, a newspaper which preached the
doctrine of iron and blood. When his outspoken articles and acts culminated in the revolution of 1848 and his subsequent imprisonment, the Fenians took up his doctrines. Most of the Fenian writings, including the verse of Charles Kickham and Ellen O'Leary (sister of John O'Leary), was patriotic and political propaganda. This kind of literature continued to take up most of the young writers' energies until after the death of Parnell in 1891, when there were so many factions "of nationalism tearing each other to pieces in the public eye," that "the younger men inclined to seek some other expression for their nationalistic ideals." But, this early propagandist period had focused the interest of verse writers on social issues: to improve the living conditions of the peasants and to restore that which was Irish. Artistic and social forces were interacting, forming a tradition which the later, non-propagandistic, writers would be able to use. Thus, Yeats's interests were drawn to the peasantry, not only as a source of material for literary composition, but for political reasons already established.

Even before the death of Parnell, however, in 1889, two books were published which would become the two examples of Renaissance between which writers found themselves choosing. Rival movements grew from Yeats's retelling of a saga story in English, "The Wanderings of Oissin," and Douglas Hyde's Leabhar Sgeuluischechta (A Book of Gaelic Stories). Yeats had been associated with the "Young Ireland" movement and followed its ideal of establishing a literature in English which would draw from and express the national conscience of Ireland; whereas Hyde proceeded from the idea that the essence of nationality is contained in language, a tenet of his Gaelic League. Yeats opposed Hyde, hoping for an interaction of national and cosmopolitan elements.
If Ireland is about to produce a literature that is important to her, it must be the result of the influences that flow in upon the mind of an educated Irishman to-day, and, in a greater degree, of what came into the world with himself. Gaelic can hardly fail to do a portion of the work, but one cannot say whether it may not be some French or German writer who will do most to make him an articulate man. 37

The arguments concerning relative values of national and cosmopolitan art delimit the ideas and work not only of George Russell, W. B. Yeats, and John Eglinton, but of most modern art. The paradox is that whether using local or international styles, each method subsumes the other: the local attains universal significance, the international has national significance. Whether one uses the Organic or the International style in architecture, non-objective or representational in painting; whether one uses a single myth (as in Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Yeats’s plays on Cuchulain) or uses cycles and parallels of many myths (as in Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* or Yeats’s *A Vision*); whether one implies the whole by using the parts, or implies the parts by use of the whole—one is always working toward the same end: style and significance.

To the problem of where to get subjects and styles for art there are many answers. Yeats solved his own problem earlier than the expatriate generation of Americans. He had already been to the London of the Pre-Raphaelites and to the Paris of the Symbolists; now he was coming home to the rich speech of the Irish peasantry which could revitalize the impoverished English of the literary coteries. To deny this colloquial speech, to insist on the revival of Erse, was for Yeats eccentricity and waste, needless waste of language. Further, the soul of Ireland, Yeats thought, could be found in her history, folk-legends, and sagas, but certainly not in her dead language. From Thomas Davis he had inherited the desire for a spiritual, not a linguistic, renaissance. Yeats would
have Ireland recreate the ancient arts.

The Greeks looked within their borders, and we, like them, have a history fuller than any modern history of imaginative events; and legends which surpass, as I think, all legends but theirs in wild beauty, and in our land, as in theirs, there is no river or mountain that is not associated in the memory with some event or legend; while political reasons have made love of country, as I think, even greater among us than among them. I would have our writers and craftsmen of many kinds master this history and these legends, and fix upon their memory the appearance of mountains and rivers and make all visible again in their arts, so that Irishmen, even though they have gone thousands of miles away, would still be in their own country.

Also opposed to the theory of the Gaelic League’s language movement was John Eglinton (W. K. Magee). He too believed that the essential spirit of nationality is contained in the peasantry, and that language and literature are imposed by a superior culture, in this case the superior culture of the Anglo-Irish mind. To dispense with the accumulated centuries of English intellectual development, to insist on Sinn Fein (ourselves alone), would deprive Ireland of her hope for fulfillment. Thoughts, the out-growth of the Anglo-Irish mind, not Erse, produce nationality. Eglinton was, then, as antagonistic toward Yeats’s theory as he was to Hyde’s. Neither language nor the peasantry nor legends alone can produce great literature. Yeats’s practice shows this, though his theory does not admit it.

"AE" upheld the nationalistic theory of literature. He placed his allegiance with neither of the other two movements, neither Erse nor peasantry, but with the concept of nationality as a spiritual force which creates ideals. But, for all their differences, these men were seeking a renewal of Irish literature. They were creators of ideas which stimulated young writers and shaped the course of the Renaissance.

The first literary form to attract new writers in Ireland was verse,
perhaps as an extension of the propaganda poetry which had been popular in preceding years. Then, through the work of Yeats, drama became the most popular and most successful form in which the nation could express itself.

The history of drama in Ireland before the Renaissance is bleak. Even though the Irish had contributed playwrights to the English stage, though the stereotype of "the stage Irishman" was often seen on the stage, and though the Irish are believed to be characteristically dramatizers of events, "born story-tellers", drama had not flourished in Ireland, despite the existence of theatres in Dublin and other cities. These theatres were merely provincial outposts of the London managers. It is rather astonishing, therefore, to find a great dramatic and poetical revival in this country which had little stage history before 1899. "The history of dramatic representation in Ireland," writes La Tourette Stockwell, "belongs to the history of the English in Ireland, and its progress has been in a line which parallels the evolution of the theatre in England." Thus, though there were, as early as the fifteenth century, plays acted and made popular on Corpus Christi and St. George's Day by the clergy and guilds, the presentations were English or Anglo-Irish, not Irish. In the pageants given by Dublin's Lord Deputy on festival days...

...we hear nothing of St. Patrick; it was rather his equivocal rival St. George who triumphed, on what was afterwards known as College Green, in the presence of both Irish and English Lords... But except at the Castle, and perhaps at King's Inns, Dublin had seen nothing before Shirley's visit of what the
mediaeval drama has grown into; and it is interesting to find that the first play which seems to have interested an Irish audience had in it something of the character of a miracle-play. 45

Even earlier than the miracle-plays there had been hints that there was substance for a dramatic literature in Ireland. One of the few extant pieces of dramatic writing is a dialogue between St. Patrick and Oisin, of which Douglas Hyde writes:

The dialogue between St. Patrick and Ossian—of which there is, in most of the poems, either more or less—is quite dramatic in its form. Even the reciters of the present day appear to feel this, and I have heard the censorious self-satisfied tone of Patrick, and the querulous vindictive whine of the half-starved old man, reproduced with considerable humour by a reciter. But I think it nearly certain—though I cannot prove it—that in former days there was real acting and a dialogue between two persons, one representing the saint and the other the old pagan... The conception of bringing the spirit of Paganism and of Christianity together in the persons of the last great poet and warrior of the one, and the first great saint of the other, was truly dramatic in its conception, and the spirit of humour with which it has been carried out in the pieces which have come down to us are a strong presumption that under happier circumstances something great would have developed from it. 47

The reasons for the tardy flowering of Irish drama, for a great national drama not springing up from these early attempts are numerous. Maurice Bourgeois, in J. M. Synge and the Irish Theatre, summarized them as follows:

In the first place, the mysticism and undemonstrative contemplativeness of the Irish Gael...conceivably hampered the free development of his dramatic impulse. Next, the literature of ancient Ireland is mostly narrative; there were professional story-tellers, the fili and, more especially, the shanachies or seanachuidhe; and the narrative relation of events, from a literary point of view, is the very opposite of their dramatic externalization or visualization. Besides, had the Irish had a drama of their own, they could not have got it printed under the regime of oppression enforced on Ireland by her successive invaders. But there is one reason deeper than all, which lies in the fact that Irish history, for a considerable number of years, was itself the most poignant of tragedies. Ireland, living through real drama, had no time nor desire for dramas of imagination. 48
The lack of mystery and miracle plays in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in a country in which religion plays so important a part in shaping the minds of the people is due...first, to the unsettled state of the country in the period, then, and chiefly, to the precise, almost literal Catholic orthodoxy of the Irish people, which makes them think the representation of the divine mysteries on the stage profane and sacrilegious. 49

This literal-minded religiosity explains partly the motivations for the famous riots and rows later at the Abbey Theatre.

No native drama grew up, and for Ireland there were only English and imitations of English plays performed by the licensed companies of wandering players who provided entertainment in Dublin and the provinces as early as 1539. Not even when the first pre-Restoration theatre built outside London was erected in Dublin by John Ogilby, between 1634 and 1638, was there development. An English playwright, James Shirley, was imported to furnish plays for this theatre, and it is interesting to notice that he had no imitators, that no Irish School of dramatists grew up around him, even though he wrote a play on Irish themes, a play somewhat similar to the early dialogue between St. Patrick and Oisin. Having left London after the outbreak of the plague and closing of the theatres in 1636, Shirley spent about four years in Dublin, revising old plays, writing prologues and several new plays for Ogilby's theatre. On April 28, 1640, his Irish play, St. Patrick for Ireland, was entered in the Stationer's Register for R. Whitaker. Nason characterizes the play as follows:

Nominally a drama centering about the struggle between paganism and Christianity in Ireland, the play becomes, in fact, a jumble of lofty religious fervor, blood-and-thunder magic, miracles, licentiousness, and horse-play. On the one hand, two youths disguise themselves as statues in the temple, and
thus gain opportunity to meet the king’s daughters, their willing mistresses; another maiden is violated by a prince masquerading as a god; and a magic bracelet that renders the wearer invisible, enables a servant to play all sorts of pranks. On the other hand, the play presents a not unworthy picture of St. Patrick, includes the conversion of the royal family, and culminates gloriously in the expulsion of the snakes from Ireland. 54

Stockwell traces the history of Dublin Theatres from 1637 to 1820, and though several theatres flourished, the drama presented was derivative. When Yeats began his work in the theatre he found only commercialism, which he set about to reform.

3.

Though Yeats’s theories of reform were new and courageous for their time, they were not entirely without precedent. Though different from any other movement, taking a wholly new approach, the Irish drama of the Renaissance is related, especially in the early phases, to a general theatre movement on the continent and in England. It differs from the other movements by having been the center of the creation of a national drama, rather than having been an experimental appendage to the commercial theatre. In this respect it resembles the dramatic movement in Norway, in which Bjørnson and Ibsen worked toward a release from Danish influences.

Ibsen and Bjørnson fought a war on two fronts; against the Danish influence and the stifling of everything truly Norwegian in character, but also against those who agitated for the wider use of the country dialect. In the same way Yeats and Synge and their friends have had to struggle both against those who did not wish Irish literature to differ in any way from English literature, and also against the tenets of the finally victorious Sinn Fein party. They [Sinn Fein] wished to do away with English writing in favor of Erse, and regarded every realistic representation of Irish peasant life with suspicion, as being profanation and
Also closely allied to the general trend which led to the foundation of the Abbey Theatre was the Théâtre-Libre of André Antoine who "sought to satisfy the demand, not only of the bohemians, but also of thoughtful lovers of the drama who desired scope for its untrammeled development." This desire for a free theatre had been stimulated by the revolutionary voice of August Strindberg who had been "demanding a free theatre 'where we can be shocked by what is horrible, where we can laugh at what is grotesque, where we can see life without shrinking back in terror if what has hitherto lain veiled behind theological and esthetic conceptions is revealed to us.'" Antoine, in the beginning, was champion of the new naturalistic drama. He staged plays by native authors, and introduced foreign playwrights such as Tolstoy, Ibsen, Hauptmann, Strindberg, Bjornson, and Turgenev. His aims were similar to those Yeats later adopted, though Yeats would have nothing to do with the naturalistic drama.

Antoine founded his theatre with the idea of introducing new and original dramatists, to produce works which the prejudice of managers and public otherwise afforded no opportunity of producing. The French stage of the day was so conventional that only plays written according to accepted standards would attract audiences. At least this is what the managers thought—and the result was the same. Together with conventional plays went conventional acting and conventional stage-setting.

A small group of amateurs, presenting their four new and original one-act plays on an improvised stage, began the "independent theatre" movement. The plays were constructed on simple stories in which studies of reality took the place of the play of intrigue which had become long and verbose. The new drama aimed at short, concise statements about the life of natural characters, thereby expelling bombast, bathos, and ti-
rades from French dramatic art.

As a reformer, AntoCine did the French drama good service. He advocated the simplification of theatrical technic—the minimising of intrigue, the curtailing of preparations, the omission of tirades, and the suppression of comments by a raisonner. He objected to the stressing of a thesis, and equally to the inclusion of the stock personage meant to awaken tenderness in the spectators. In his stage settings, he strove for greater naturalness... In acting, he insisted upon a similar return to nature, the avoidance of bombast, the minimization of tricks of the trade, a revolt against the observance of tradition in the performance of each rôle...60

The similarities of AntoCine's reforms of acting and stage setting with the reforms Yeats advocated will become apparent in chapter three, in which Yeats's theories are discussed.

A similar revolt against the flaccid dramas of society was launched by Heinrich and Julius Hart, and Otto Brahm in the Berlin "Freie Bühne," modeled on AntoCine's theatre, which gave for its first production a German translation of Ibsen's Ghosts in 1889. Also modeled on AntoCine's experiment was the Independent Theatre in London, organized by J. T. Grein in 1891 to provide an outlet for Ibsen and the new English drama. These were all three realistic stages. Allardyce Nicoll says of the period:

Realism was obviously desired by the public, and in all centers of theatrical activity the enthusiasts forged sadly ahead of the great mass of their contemporaries, so that by the nineties there existed a very considerable gap between what ordinary spectators were prepared to accept and what the more ardent spirits wished to impose upon the stage. The result was the introduction into the theatrical realm of an entirely novel element—the growth of the "independent" theatre. In 1889, largely owing to the inspiration of Otto Brahm, the Freie Bühne was opened in Berlin, and throughout its career specialized in the presentation of realistic plays too extreme for public representation. Two years earlier a young French devotee of naturalism, André AntoCine, succeeded, by the sheer drive from within him, in opening the Théâtre Libre in Paris. This lasted from 1887 to 1894....Again under the inspira-
tion of one man—in this instance J. T. Grein—the Independent Theatre Society was established in London in 1891. While it is true that the effect of these efforts was perhaps felt rather through their offshoots in our century, we must give them all credit for their experimental aims, for the way in which they spread among their members knowledge of what was being accomplished in countries other than their own, and for their encouragement of new playwrights: Strindberg, Hauptmann, Brieux, and Shaw all stand in debt to the "independents." 62

Jones, Pinero, and Archer, for all their short-comings as dramatists, also saw the need for reform. From 1660 to 1843 there had been a struggle to free the English stage from the patent monopoly granted by Charles II.

After the noise of the final conflict had ceased, which had raged for the decade (1832-1842) between the monopoly on the one side, and the authors, actors, the minors, and the general public on the other, Parliament came in (1843) and, with an echo of the reform movement, gave legislative sanction to the verdict that the monopoly had died a natural death. 63

But this physical freedom was not enough. There needed also to be spiritual and creative freedom, and it was on the behalf of this that Jones and Archer worked, trying to gain copyright reform, a more general recognition of drama as literature, a national theatre, abolition of censorship, revival of the practice of printing plays, and most important a more intelligent and sympathetic view of drama. Typical expressions of these aims and ideals may be found in the lectures Jones delivered or printed between 1896 and 1912, collected in The Foundations of a National Drama.

J. T. Grein, a critic for the Sunday Times, had produced plays by Jones and Pinero in Holland in 1890 with great success. With a grant of £50 from the Royal Subsidised Theatre, he decided to try his luck in London. He began with a production of Ghosts, a performance "which elicited no less than five hundred articles, mostly vituperat-
and which had elicited the interest of George Moore, whose theatre experience was later to be of value to the Irish drama. Other members of the Society were George Meredith, Hardy, Pinero, and Jones. The Independent Theatre, as William Archer reports,

"...dealt more in foreign than in English drama, producing, for instance, Ibsen's *Ghosts* and *Wild Duck*. But in 1892 it secured for Mr. Bernard Shaw his first hearing on the stage, when it produced *Widowers' Houses*. Two years later, *Arms and the Man* was produced at the Avenue Theatre. This was ostensibly an ordinary theatrical venture; but I think I am letting no cat out of the bag in stating that the enterprise was backed, at considerable loss, by Miss Horniman, a lady whose generous and judicious employment of her wealth has done wonders for the drama."

Archer, however, does not note another extraordinary aspect of this production of *Arms and the Man*, for Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire* was performed as a curtain-raiser to the Shaw play. Yeats too had his first hearing on the stage through the Independent Theatre Society.

It is also interesting to notice that from the first the names of Yeats and Horniman are linked in theatrical activities, since her later generosity resulted in the purchase of the Abbey Theatre as a permanent home for the Irish Players. When, in 1897, the Independent Theatre ceased operations, it had not only "left a mark upon the history of the English stage," but had prepared for the Irish drama, having given Yeats his first, and valuable, experience in working for the stage as a poet, and having introduced Miss Horniman to the Irishman. Yeats began to realize the problems of writing for the stage instead of for the closet, and this 1894 production may very well mark the beginning of his revision of his dramatic practice.

Yet, for all the success of the "free" theatre movement, for all its discoveries and gifts to modern drama, there was a countermovement,
especially when the naturalistic technique which it had championed was seen to be, if not faulty, at least inadequate.

Even the naturalists outgrew naturalism. Among the foreigners, Strindberg and Hauptmann turned to romance now and again in order to express a mood as authentic as the mood of despair that had found voice in their earlier works. In France, those who had been content with carving out slices of life for Anticline began to select and combine more artfully with a view wither to entertainment or to expounding ideas.

Shaw was a part of this counter-movement, using his drama to expound ideas, as much as Yeats was in his advocating a return to romance and poetry in plays. But, the Irish Literary Theatre was in the older line of the realistic "new" drama; only later, when Yeats gained full control, after the formation of the Irish National Theatre, did the Irish drama, at least in theory, return to romance, at the expense of the "slice-of-life" exponents.

Under Edward Martyn's influence, the Irish Literary Theatre followed in the Ibsenite movement, or at least what was thought to be the quintessence of Ibsenism. This influence must be emphasized because the current misconception as to the origins and founders of our Dramatic Revival is due to the fame which accompanied the second phase of that revival, making of it the best known aspect of the Celtic Renaissance. We must, therefore, first establish the separate identity of the original Irish Literary Theatre Society. The former was essentially a part of the so-called 'Ibsenite movement,' which led to the establishment of the Independent Theatre in London; the latter was a part of the general renascence of Irish literature, whose progress made it possible for the national to embrace and transform the international movement of ideas.

It was to Martyn that the Literary Theatre, founded in 1899, owed its title, and to a great extent its existence. His interest in drama had been stimulated by the acting of Ibsen and other Scandinavian and Russian dramatists at the Independent Theatre. He planned to give Ireland a similar theatre, in which literary or "art" plays could be performed.
"His resolve was strengthened by the fact that he had been unable to find a London manager sufficiently appreciative to produce either *Maeve* or *The Heather Field,* even though these plays were favorably received by critics when printed in 1899. With his friends George Moore and Yeats, Martyn found guarantors and brought the experiment into existence on May 8, 1899, with a production of Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen,* which was followed on May 9 by *The Heather Field.* Dublin audiences had the choice between these plays or *What Happened to Jones* at the Gaiety, *A Pantomime Rehearsed* at the Old Royal, and *The Man in the Iron Mask* at the Queen's. They chose the Irish Literary Theatre, making the enterprise successful. Though the Literary Theatre produced six plays in English and the first play in Erse ever performed in the world, all using the Irish themes, it is doubtful, however, if the creation of a national drama was ever the main purpose of the enterprise. W. B. Yeats certainly had this object in view, but both his coadjutors were far more concerned to facilitate the production of literary drama, without special reference to its nationality. Only when Yeats gained control of the National Theatre were his aims carried out, and under his guidance the Irish theatre began a lasting existence, not dying after it had gained audiences for a few new playwrights as the "free" or "independent" theatres had done. (The Abbey, though it has produced no new playwrights of international prominence, still presents plays and trains actors.) It also served the purpose of popularizing the idea of a local "little theatre" during the American tours. But this is the product of the second phase of the Irish theatre, which must come later.

Perhaps this will suffice to show the background against which Yeats began his career as a dramatist and reformer of the theatre.
Chapter II

Dramatic Theory and Practice, 1884-1906

1. The 1884 plays
2. Changing ideals
3. Plays of the '90s and revision

"I could not now write of any other country but Ireland, for my style has been shaped by the subjects I have worked upon, but there was a time when my imagination seemed unwilling...."

—— Yeats, "Ireland and the Arts"
Since Yeats's very early plays are either in unpublished manuscript or are included in rare editions, it will be difficult to trace the progress he made in adapting his talents to a dramatic form before his first play was produced, *The Land of Heart's Desire* on March 29, 1894, as a curtain-raiser for John Todhunter's *Comedy of Sighs*, and later for Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, at the Avenue Theatre in London. One can only surmise from fragments printed in studies and biographies, and conjecture from comments of scholars who have worked with the manuscripts in Mrs. Yeats's possession, what Yeats's early dramatic theory was.

Yeats began to write poetry when he was seventeen, in 1882, and must have turned to drama soon after. Alan Wade reports that "much of his early work was in dramatic form, and several notebooks still exist bearing various dates in 1884, each containing a dramatic poem of some length." These early works reflect the young Yeats, the day-dreamer at Sligo, who formulated his first aesthetic theories while wandering on Howth, for whom poetry was a refuge from the unrest of the active world. When he began writing verse he was influenced by his father, a pre-Raphaelite painter, and favored chivalric or pastoral characters.
who struck Shelleyian attitudes in Spenserian landscapes of allegorical gardens and islands. There is no consistent or well-thought-out system of symbols in these very early poems and plays; the projection of a dream-world was comfort enough. But gradually his verse improved. In a postscript to the earliest extant Yeats letter ("probably not later than 1884, and may be earlier") the young poet states that his "aim is directness and extreme simplicity." Even though he was not very successful, he followed aims which his father would have approved.

But he is steadily improving at his trade, and attempting ever larger projects. In the prefatory poem to his play, Vivien and Time, dated January 8, 1884, five months before his nineteenth birthday, the syntax is sometimes tortured and the sense has little to recommend it, but the poem is smoother than anything he had done before.

The poem follows in its entirety that it may be compared with the later poems or songs which introduce the Plays for Dancers.

I've built a dreaming palace
With stones from out the old
And singing days, within their graves
Now lying calm and cold.

Of the dreamland marble
Are all the silent walls
That grimly stand, a phantom band
About the Phantom halls.

There among the pillars
Are many statues fair
Made of the dreamland marble
Cut by the dreamers care.

And there I see a statue
Among the maids of old
On either hand, a goodly band
So calmly wise and cold.

The poem reflects the preoccupation with dreams and with the otherworld which fascinated Yeats, and sets the tone for the play. Typical is the second scene of the second act in which "reluctantly, but with
a sense of moral necessity, he surrendered his heroine to the oncoming spectre of Time."

Room in the castle as in scene 2 and 3 of Act 1. Time night a pale taper burning before the Magic Mirror. Queen alone.

Queen—The lily wristed asphodel has slept
These summers three, and I have quaffed full deep
The glorious cup of magic, till in drinking
That dreb forbidden wine that once I dreamed
And read of only my soul gros
The image of the mighty viewless ones
No tis changed, sweet metamorphosis
To one great throbbing string that throbing calls
Only one wild word, one wild word
Power, power outspeeding envy self
The only drink for my unceasing thirst
O word as the song of the sea to streams
Art thou to me, in thee I'd lose myself
Outgrowing human sense and human thought
As I have pity for the fleeting race
Of men who bend to every sudden blast
Of joy or grief or scorn and as they bend
Say it is human thus to bend, well then
So much less human I who shall not bend
Until upon the steeps the fountains rest
And 'fore the sun the flower lips are closed.

(She starts and trembles)

Some great spirit passes in the desert
Turning it enters by the city gate
I felt its influence through all my veins.
Tis swifter far than swiftest dream
Now t'as passed the sentries, t'is at the door
It is here. 10

This scene at least shows that Yeats had a sense of the melodramatic, and reveals his favorite early method: soliloquy. Only later, when revising The Shadowy Waters, would he begin to solve the problem of making his characters talk to one another; only later, when he began to become a public figure would he begin to make his characters take part in and react to action. But, for 1884, the play was very impressive. Yeats's father was so pleased that he sent the play to Edward Dowden, as a sign of the boy's promise as a poet. A letter of January 7, 1884,
(John Butler Yeats to Edward Dowden) reveals also the rehearsal of the play:

Could you send me Willie's MS....He wants it for a rehearsal which is to come off immediately.

Of course I never dreamed of publishing the effort of a youth of eighteen. The only passage in it which seems to me finally to decide the question as to his poetic faculty is the dialogue between Time and the Queen. There was evidence in it of some power (however rudimentary) of thinking, as if someday he might have something to tell. 11

The play was presented to a group of friends at the home of Judge Wright, with Laura Armstrong, who appears to have been Yeats’s first love, playing Vivien. Yeats later wrote of Laura Armstrong to Katharine Tynan:

She woke me from the metallic sleep of science and set me writing my first play....'Time and the Witch Vivien' was written for her to act. The 'Island of Statues' was begun with the same notion, though it soon grew beyond the scope of drawing-room acting. The part of the enchantress in both poems was written for her. 13

Yeats had apparently given himself up to an enthusiasm for the drama, for his next play is dated April, 1884, and is the second of four plays written that year. Love and Death is the grandiose title he picked for the play, "the worst and most ambitious of the group."

A god and a mortal are twin brothers; the secondary plot which deals with the mortal is ill-conceived, but in the primary plot the daughter of a king falls in love with the god and, to make herself queen and thereby worthy of him, kills her father. The god at last appears but, since no mortal can behold his glory and live, the queen is destroyed by her own love. At the end of the play everyone on stage is dead: a mortality rate comparable to that in Thomas Kyd's works. Yeats is groping here towards his later use of the theme of father against child; in the twin brothers who are mortal and immortal counterparts of one another, and in the mixture of ideal love and carnal murder in the queen's character, he shadows forth his later theory of the divided or double self. 15

This is probably the play to which Yeats refers in his autobiography as having been inspired by one of J. B. Yeats's designs:
I was writing a long play on a fable suggested by one of my father's early designs. A king's daughter loves a god seen in the luminous sky above her garden in childhood, and to be worthy of him and put away mortality, becomes without pity and commits crimes, and at last, having made her way to the throne by murder, awaits his coming among her courtiers. One by one they become chilly and drop dead, for unseen by all but her, her god is in the hall. At last he is at her throne's foot and she, her mind in the garden once again, dies babbling like a child.  

Yeats's next play was *Mosada*, which Ellmann cites as an example of Yeats's development and improvement, at least in metrics, though not in plotting which is still fantastic:

The poetic drama *Mosada*, the story of a Moorish enchantress burned at the stake by order of her unsuspecting boyhood sweetheart, shows Yeats still setting his scene in the most exotic clime, but also exposing the magician, not as in *Vivien and Time* to the ravages of old age, but to the inquisitors of the Catholic church. This opposition is one that he was to employ continually for the next ten years to represent what he called the war of spiritual and natural order, all organized churches typifying to his mind the latter.  

And it was a similar opposition, the natural or materialistic against the supernatural or spiritual, which he would later use as the basic pattern for his plays. This pattern was varied with art and ingenuity, but the conflict between the opposites is at the center of most of his plays, as will be seen in chapters four and six. These philosophic contemplations were as yet embryonic.

Norman Jeffares writes that "there is a more dramatic approach to tragic feeling in this story..." and it was evidently regarded as the boy's most important production, for his father had it printed, and distributed copies. Gerard Manley Hopkins, one of the recipients, wrote in a letter:

I called on his, young Yeats's, father by desire lately; he is a painter; and with some emphasis of manner he presented me with *Mosada: a Dramatic Poem* by W. B. Yeats, with a portrait
of the author by J. B. Yeats, himself; the young man having finely cut intellectual features and his father being a fine draughtsman. For a young man's pamphlet this was something too much; but you will understand a father's feeling. Now this Mosada I cannot think highly of... 19

Father Matthew Russell, on the other hand, liked the play, and as editor of the Irish Monthly was in a better position than Hopkins to help Yeats. Russell, a "courteous man who was not afraid to publish poems about fairies by a Protestant," praised Mosada as "the voice of a new singer of Erin, who will take a high place among the world's future singers." From the evidence, one is inclined to believe Russell a prophet, but not much of a literary critic. Yeats later recognized the faults of the play, writing to Katharine Tynan in 1888:

I have much improved 'Mosada' by polishing the verse here and there. I have noticed some things about my poetry I did not know before, in this process of correction; for instance, that it is almost all a flight into fairyland from the real world, and a summons to that flight. The Chorus to the 'Stolen Child' sums it up—that it is not the poetry of insight and knowledge, but of longing and complaint—the cry of the heart against necessity. I hope some day to alter that and write poetry of insight and knowledge. 22

This is an early example of Yeats's capacity for self-criticism which, as Parkinson shows, combined with Yeats's experience in the theatre to form the basis for his revisions of his verse, and for his development into a major poet.

There was, in Mosada, an excess of action. "His poetic imagination groups and relates and does not transmute; dramatic episodes fit for a novel of Mrs. Radcliffe are hurled together to keep the passions as intense as possible." The contrary is true of the last of the 1884 cycle of plays, The Island of Statues, in which there is only slight action:
A shepherd and shepherdess succeed, after numerous contretemps, in overcoming the Circe of an enchanted isle, and in finding the flower which will restore to life the men who have been turned to statues. Once reanimated, the statues are given their choice to live on in Arcady or to return to the world. They chose to remain Arcadians. In an epilogue the poet praises and defends their choice, exalting literature above life and song above science.

The play, finished in August of 1884, and subtitled An Arcadian Fairy Tale, appears to be the climax of Yeats's youthful verse. His enthusiasm for it is revealed in a letter to Katharine Tynan in 1888:

I am sure the 'Island' is good of its kind.
I was then living a quite harmonious poetic life. Never thinking out of my depth. Always harmonious, narrow, calm. Taking small interest in people but most ardently moved by the more minute kinds of natural beauty. 'Mosada' was then written and a poem called 'Time and Vivien' which you have not seen. It is second in my book. Everything done then was quite passionless. The 'Island' was the last. Since I left the 'Island,' I have been going about on shoreless seas. Nothing anywhere has clear outline. Everything is cloud and foam.

For all this early enthusiasm, the mature Yeats rejected the play from his canon, after part of it was published in the 1889 edition of The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems, because it was "too much influenced by the romantic vocabulary of Prometheus and was weak in the handling of the longer meters." The play is important because it presents a theme which is central to Yeats's dramatic writings, and indeed to all his poetry: the dichotomy between literature and life, spirit and matter, imagination and science. Stylistically, however, the play is derivative, showing "the influence of Spenser and Shelley, the one for setting, the other for vocabulary." Yeats used diction which was consciously poetic to establish the tone of melancholy which permeates the play, with much repetition, personification, and an abundance of poeticisms, as illustrated by this passage:

Maiden, come forth; the woods keep watch for thee;
Within the drowsy blossom hangs the bee;
'Tis morn: thy sheep are wandering down the vale—
'Tis morn: like old men's eyes the stars are pale,
And thro' the odorous air love dreams are winging—
'Tis morn, and from the dew drench'd wood I've fled
To welcome thee, Naschina, with sweet singing. 29

Or this:

For what is glad?
For, look you, sad's the murmur of the bees,
Yon wind goes sadly, and the grass and trees
Reply like moaning of imprisoned elf:
The whole world's sadly talking to itself.
The waves in yonder lake where points my hand
Beat out their lives lamenting o'er the sand. 30

Norman Jefferes says that the main impression left by the play is "cloying and uneven."

From this brief account of the earliest work of Yeats as playwright it is apparent that Yeats was working in the tradition of the closet drama, and was working without much knowledge of the theatre or of drama other than the plays to which his father took him. His father read to him, took him to the theatre, and dominated his ideas. He was much impressed by Irving's Hamlet and by later productions of Coriolanus; but, "it was my father's voice that I hear and not Irving's or Benson's."

Further,

My father's influence upon my thoughts was at its height. We went to Dublin by train every morning, breakfasting in his studio....and at breakfast he read passages from the poets, and always from the play or poem at its most passionate moment. He never read me a passage because of its speculative interest, and indeed did not care at all for poetry where there was generalisation or abstraction however impassioned. He would read out the first speeches of the Prometheus Unbound, but never the ecstatic lyricism of that famous fourth act.... 34

This probably accounts for the excess of passionate scenes in the 1884 plays, and for their diction:

All must be an idealisation of speech, and at some moment of passionate action or somnambulistic reverie. I remember his
saying that all contemplative men were in a conspiracy to overrate their state of life, and that all writers were of them, excepting the great poets. ...He disliked the Victorian poetry of ideas, and Wordsworth but for certain passages or whole poems. 35

Only later would he be able to write:

In later years, through much knowledge of the stage, through the exfoliation of my own style, I learnt that occasional prosaic words gave the impression of an active man speaking. In dream poetry, in Kubla Khan, in The Stream's Secret, every line, every word, can carry its unanalysable, rich associations; but if we dramatise some possible singer or speaker we remember that he is moved by one thing at a time, certain words must be dull and numb. Here and there in correcting my early poems I have introduced such numbness and dullness, turned, for instance, "the curd-pale moon" into the "brilliant moon," that all might seem, as it were, remembered with indifference, except some one vivid image. When I began to rehearse a play I had the defects of my early poetry; I insisted upon obvious all-pervading rhythm. Later on I found myself saying that only in those lines or words where the beauty of the passage came to its climax, must rhythm be obvious. 36

It shall be my purpose in the next section of this chapter to show the crucial period of Yeats's life when he began to repudiate these early theories of literature, derived from his father, and became interested in people, ideas, and his nation.

2.

Yeats's letters of 1888-1890 reveal the upheaval in his ideas. The calm life of poetry was beset by many and diverse ideas, uncertainties, and passions. He wrote to Katharine Tynan, in a letter already quoted, that "nothing anywhere has clear outline. Everything is cloud and foam," and adding that "the clouds began about four years ago. I was finishing the 'Island.'" There was a growing need for self-expression, for self-discovery, for freeing himself from his father. He writes in his autobiography: "I was constantly troubled by philosophic questions."
This discontent and searching was to become a characteristic mark of Yeats's mind and would lead him, who never received a formal education, to educate and re-educate himself for the rest of his life, absorbing ideas, formulating systems, and then rejecting what he had created to search in other directions. We are dealing now with the first of the two major periods of education, out of which he formulated his "mystical" and national ideas. The second was a broader re-education, culminating in the system outlined in A Vision, though he was constantly re-examining and modifying his ideas in the search for reality.

At this crucial juncture, while finishing "The Island of Statues," Yeats's energies diverged from the simplicity of his previous life in poetry, ranging in three directions, which he later defined as: "in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy, and a belief in nationality." The three are of equal importance, but since Yeats's assumption of a nationality is decisive for his later development it will be treated first.

He wrote in an article published on September 2, 1888:

To the greater poets everything they see has its relation to the national life, and through that to the universal and divine life: nothing is an isolated artistic moment; there is a unity everywhere; everything fulfils a purpose that is not its own....But to this universalism, this seeing of unity everywhere, you can only attain through what is near you, your nation, or, if you be no traveller, your village and the cobwebs on your walls. You can no more have the greatest poetry without a nation than religion without symbols. One can only reach out to the universe with a gloved hand—that glove is one's nation, the only thing one knows even a little of.

At last he was beginning to assume a nationality, to think of local subjects and places for literary composition, to return from Arcady. He also began to advise others to do the same. To a young woman who sent
him a book of her poems Yeats wrote, in 1889: "You will find it a good thing to make verses on Irish legends and places and so forth." His reasons are stated in the same letter: association with the nation helps originality, giving one fewer competitors, since an Irishman competing with his own countrymen did not have to make his reputation in a literary world dominated by Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti, Swinburne, and Morris. His decision to adopt Ireland as muse was quite deliberate.

The Victorian poets "gave little conscious thought to literature as a vehicle of nationality." Though Yeats did not take up the theme until he was twenty, Ireland remained central in his thought for the rest of his life, and was closely associated with his theories of a theatre shown in chapter three. The reasons for this change in attitude were not, I feel sure, merely a matter of literary expedience, for in such turbulent times it would have been difficult to have remained aloof from some form of patriotic fervor. Yeats's assumption of a nationality not only sets him off from the Victorian poets, but from the later Expatriate Generation of Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Hemingway, etc., who insisted on a cosmopolitan theme or setting for literature.

One of the first people to spur Yeats's nationalistic feelings was Charles Hubert Oldham who, with others, founded the Dublin University Review in which Yeats's first poems were published. Oldham, a professor of political economy, also founded the Contemporary Club, which Yeats attended. He wrote in the autobiographies:

I had begun to frequent a club founded by Mr. Oldham, and not from natural liking, but from a secret ambition. I wished to become self-possessed, to be able to play with hostile minds as Hamlet played, to look in the lion's face, as it were, with unquivering eyelash. 44

This early training in public speaking not only helped Yeats overcome his
timidity, but prepared him for events to follow, when he would have to speak to rioting mobs at the Abbey, or to persuade actors to accept his theories. Though Oldham encouraged and helped Yeats at this period, the major influence was John O'Leary. The old Fenian hero, whom Yeats called "the handsomest man I had ever seen," returned to Ireland in 1885 after five years imprisonment in England, and soon became a focal point for ardent young patriots and writers. O'Leary did not hold with Parnell on the policy of legislative action for freedom; on the other hand, he also opposed terrorism, saying that "there are things that a man must not do to save a nation." This heroic figure, with his persuasive oratory and idealistic politics, has an interest in literature as well as the affairs of the nation. He tried to establish high standards in his newspaper, saying in his *Recollections* that "we protest against the right of patriots to perpetrate bad verses." Such people as Douglas Hyde, Katherine Tynan, Maud Gonne, and Yeats clustered around the venerable man and were educated by him. He formed a link with the glorious days of 1848 and with the earlier generations of national poets in Ireland, so that through him Yeats found a tradition. As Ellmann points out, however, the two men differed in ideas.

Yeats learned from O'Leary, as from Morris, only the lessons he chose to have him teach. O'Leary, a sincere but limited man, saw the problem of the poet chiefly as patriotic.... Yeats was patriotic too, and agreed that poetry could serve this function, although he disliked sentimental nationalism. But he also saw the problem as literary. He had evidently begun to realize that the eclecticism of the Victorians, which led them to set their poems in Asia Minor or Timbuctoo, had become an affectation, and that freshness lay in avoiding the exotic in favour of familiar scenes. 48

Later F. R. Higgins could write that "Ireland was the moulder of Yeats's mind, as it eventually became the sounding-board for most of his verse
and the great stimulating impact on his life."

And Maud Gonne could say: "We were both held by the mysterious power of the land.... to Willie, less aware of the People than of the Land, Ireland was the beauty of unattainable perfection, and he had to strive to express that beauty so that all should worship." Stephen Gwynn points out what is probably most important about Yeats's relationship with Maud Gonne, when he writes: "I think also that she prevented him from becoming lost in a vague mysticism; and, in binding him to the service of Ireland,—because it was her service also,—she helped to make humanity real to him, as it never seemed to be real and vital to the lad that I remember,—preoccupied solely with himself." This is perhaps oversimplification, but it shows the relationship between the threads being spun in these years, when Yeats's ideas on nationalism, philosophy, and literature were all being changed into something rich and strange.

Yeats says in his Autobiography: "It was only when I began to study psychical research and mystical philosophy that I broke away from my father's influence." His occult studies took tangible form when he, George Russell, Charles Johnson, Claude Wright, and Charles Weeks formed the Dublin Hermetic Society, which met for the first time June 16, 1885, with Yeats as chairman. They discussed Eastern philosophy, the failure of science, magic, the fourth dimension, "Esoteric Buddhism," and other occult matters. For Yeats, philosophy was not to be abstract, but was to be found in poetry: "...whatever the great poets had affirmed in their finest moments was the nearest we could come to an authoritative religion, and ... their mythology, their spirits of water and wind were but literal truth," and further, "I thought that whatever of philosophy was made poetry is alone permanent, and that one should
begin to arrange it in some regular order, rejecting nothing as the
make-believe of poets."

It is probably not too surprising that Yeats took up these ideas,
since the period was rife with what Sean O'Faolain has called, since
no period is now respectable without its "ism," spookism.

And one reads up the period: reads that spiritualism arose, in
America, some time around 1848;...and that Madam Blavatsky
was working towards Theosophy; and that the Theosophical
Society was founded in 1875; it had reached Dublin with the
usual time-lag of ten years—-Yeats gave the opening address
to the Dublin Hermetic Society....Christian Science was
founded by Mrs. Eddy in 1866; the First Church was estab¬
lished in Boston in 1879....There was at the same time a
revival of interest in Swedenborg, Hinduism, Buddhism, the
Hermetic Writings, Rosicrucianism, Egyptian religions, Jakob
Boehme. 56

Yeats met Madame Blavatsky probably in 1888, though an Indian sage who
was her associate, Mohini J. Chatterji, visited Dublin in 1885 or 1886
at which time Yeats met him and was inspired to write Indian poems,
such as "The Indian upon God," and "The Indian to his Love." When
Yeats met the Madame herself he was much impressed, calling her a female
Doctor Johnson. He rose rapidly in the society, and "soon reached the
esoteric section, or inner ring of devout students who met to study
tables of oriental symbolism." Madame Blavatsky's theosophy was

...a fusion of oriental mysticism and occultism which at once
appealed to Yeats' emotional and romantic nature. It offered
spiritual objectives more ambitious than the religion of the
day could do—-release from the cycle of birth and rebirth; it
also offered a reinterpretation of the scriptures of the
West which linked them to gnosticism and neo-platonism and
also to the teachings of the East. 60

In 1885 Yeats read A. P. Sinnett's Esoteric Buddhism, and later passed
into the circle of MacGregor Mathers who initiated him into the order
of the Golden Dawn. The order's rituals were secret until Aleister
Crowley exposed them in 1909-1910. Important elements of which Yeats
made use were the symbols with which novices were confronted: the sephi-
rotic tree of life, the seven planets, the sphinx, and the four elements.
Candidates for the fourth grade were called Unicorns from the Stars, a term
which Yeats used as title for one of his plays; these candidates spent
most of their time learning the doctrine of correspondences between micro-
cosm and macrocosm, as well as being permitted to inhale the perfume of
a rose. Yeats probably got most of his Rose symbolism from the class
known as Higher Initiates. These select few were admitted to the secrets
of the Rose of Ruby, the Cross of Gold, and rituals which made use of
such symbols as daggers and cups. The rose and the cross symbolized ec-
stasy and suffering, union with God, or life itself, and are used in a
passage in the play The Shadowy Waters as the union of body and soul,
life and death, sleeping and waking. Yeats's participation in this order
was an early manifestation of his search for Unity of Being, since he
feared isolation of spirit from matter. A full account of the order and
its symbols may be found in The Unicorn by Virginia Moore. He did ex-
tensive reading in certain philosophies. From Swedenborg he received the
doctrine of correspondences: all material things correspond to ideas in
the world of spirit. (Compare Baudelaire's reading of Swedenborg, and
the famous sonnet "Correspondences.") From Eliphas Levi he learned the
doctrine of magical incantation: symbols have power over spiritual and
material reality, and through the incantation of symbols one may call
down disembodied powers. The ideas of Boehme verified Yeats's discover-
ies in other works. He sums up his thoughts and formulates his system
in the essay called "Magic" in Ideas of Good and Evil. The real im-
portance of all this for Yeats was his discovery that symbols could
yield esoteric meanings, and that poetry could be more than beautifully
stated sensation. Thus, the philosophic search is linked with the literary search.

Yeats's evolution as a writer in these years is traced by Ellmann from unpublished manuscripts:

Early in 1886 he was working on a draft of a new tragedy, entitled variously The Blindness, The Epic of the Forest, and The Equator of Wild Olives. This play he says he had located in a crater of the moon, but his memory or myth-making sense deceived him, for the scene in the manuscript is Spain. Katharine Tynan, under O'Leary's influence suggested that Yeats too should try his hand at an Irish subject, and very soon afterwards he began the Wanderings of Oisin, which was to set the tone for the Irish literary revival.

The narrative poem was begun in 1886, finished in 1888, and published in 1889. For a time he set aside his preoccupation with drama, turning to Irish folk-lore. In 1888 he edited a collection of fairy and folk tales, in 1890 a collection of representative Irish tales, and in 1895 a book of Irish verse. His continuing interest in symbolism and symbolical poets is evidenced by the 1893 Works of William Blake, which he edited with Edwin John Ellis. A letter to Katharine Tynan reveals his changing conception of a poem: the "Island of Statues" had been a region; "Oisin" was a "series of incidents."

Though he adopted many elements from translations of the Irish original, he stamped Oisin with his own personality, and made it, to paraphrase Goethe, a part of the grand confession of his life. The poem is Irish in name and to some extent in scenery, otherwise Pre-Raphaelite in style but symbolist in method.

This same attack, this conception of poetry is carried over into the early Irish plays, The Land of Heart's Desire, and The Countess Cathleen. Through his father's influence he had been "in all things pre-Raphaelite," and even with the new influx of Irish subjects and symbolic method he still retained much of the pre-Raphaelite diction.
His constant return to the theatre was another, even more lasting, product of his father's teachings, for his father believed that the greatest poets had written for the public theatre. He said in 1889 that "to me the dramatic is far the pleasantest poetic form." The renewal of interest after many years was caused by two factors: meeting Florence Farr, who delighted him with her speaking of verse, and his love for Maud Gonne, whom he wanted to impress, since his contemplative life seemed pallid when compared to her active life. He offered to write The Countess Kathleen for her. This leads directly into his second phase as a playwright.

3.

It is probably best to consider the early plays as an extension of Yeats's lyric poetry. He had gained no experience of the theatre, and was merely expressing complex experiences in dramatic form. Further, "Yeats's endeavors to found an order and to found an Irish theatre came about the same time, and the synchronization is significant." Occultism and Irish subjects underlie his theories of the drama, his desire for miracle plays. He said in the 1889 Beltaine: "I wished my writings and those of the school I hoped to found, to have a secret symbolical relation to those mysteries, for in this way I thought there would be a greater richness, a greater claim upon the love of the soul." The theatre gradually replaced the order as a religious source:

The new theatre would give Irishmen a drama like that "acted of old times in the hidden places of the temples," said Yeats. It would be the "preparation of a Priesthood," the members of which, please God, would "spread their Religion everywhere." The priesthood and religion in Yeats' mind were "Druidic," stressing the spiritual origin, nature, and
destiny of man, and stressing, also, reincarnation as the means by which, in freedom, man could—not metaphorically but literally—win a place among the gods. 73

The Countess Cathleen, written before this theatre had been created, though with such a theatre in mind, was subtitled a "miracle play," because it took as theme a central Druidic belief in an invisible, all-motivating world. His theory of drama is stated in a letter to Fiona Macleod (William Sharp), dated 1897, in which he says:

My own theory of poetic or legendary drama is that it should have no realistic, or elaborate, but only a symbolic and decorative setting. A forest, for instance, should be represented by a forest pattern and not by a forest painting. One should design a scene which would be an accompaniment not a reflection of the text. This method would have the further advantage of being fairly cheap, and altogether novel. The acting should have an equivalent distance to that of the play from common realities. The plays might be almost in some cases, modern mystery plays. 75

By miracle, Yeats of course did not mean Christian miracle, but rather a manifestation in one way or another which presented or demonstrated the existence of an invisible world. Typical of this type of drama is The Countess Cathleen which was built on a story Yeats found in an Irish newspaper and which he later learned was a translation from Les Matinees de Timothee Trimm. He prints the French version in the note to the play. Yeats was fond of the story since he associated the countess with Maud Gonne who had given much to the evicted tenant farmers of Ireland, appearing as "a sort of miracle-worker among the poor in Donegal...." The plot, which has the universal theme of vicarious expiation found in many myths, is basically this:

Ireland has been struck by severe famine. Three peasants, reflecting Yeats's early interest in the peasantry as characters for an Irish drama, are visited by the Countess Cathleen, reflecting Yeats's
interest (almost obsession) in the aristocracy. In a scene which reveals her compassionate nature and foreshadows her heroic sacrifice, she gives the peasants what little gold she has with her, having given most of it to other starving peasants. After she leaves, the husband and son of the family, in despair, call on the Devil for aid. His agents arrive in the guise of Merchants who proceed to barter for souls, winning the confidence and souls of the men who rush out to spread the news that gold is available, but failing to convince the wife who will have none of them. The Countess learns from a Steward not only of the plight of her people, who have been stealing from her garden (she forgives them immediately, saying that starving men do not sin when they steal), but of the selling of souls for gold and food. She gives up her reveries and the songs of Aleel and determines to fight the forces of evil by buying back the purchased souls with her own gold. At this time Aleel, her poet and lover, pleads with her, bidding her flee with him to a safe country. He says that the voice of the old gods has counseled him and advises her to leave it to God to straighten out what he has created and to accept his love. She refuses his offer of love and safety, being more interested in the fate of others than in her individual existence, and sends him from her. Her aristocratic nature will not be swayed; she will stay and do battle for her people. Then the Merchants break into her castle, robbing her. Now, without gold and believing her food-bearing ships, which she had financed by selling all her possessions, are lost, she is helpless. From this point on, the play is a series of ritual actions: she offers her own, and quite valuable, soul for money to feed the poor until the famine is over and for the release of the souls already purchased—she makes herself the Victim in time of trouble, the sacrifice
for the welfare of the tribe. This is contrasted with Aleel's offer to give, rather than to sell, his soul, an offer which is refused by the Merchants who cannot understand the Poet's selfless action. After the Merchants buy her soul Cathleen dies; but, there is a combat (symbolically represented by a storm, and reported, as in classical tragedy, by a Messenger, Aleel) for her soul, following which it is borne to Heaven by a host of angels, a ritual of redemption and resurrection, told in traditional images of light. An angel states the play's moral:

The Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone. 78

Yeats was doing two things in the play: first, writing a play in the second, Fustian Pact tradition; and expressing his new found nationalism by using Irish lore and by describing Irish poverty under English rule. Perhaps more important was his taking a philosophical problem as subject for a play, the construction of which Lennox Robinson, who directed it many times, says is "almost faultless," instead of being content to relate dreams without connection to his or his nation's life. He said in his autobiography, concerning the process by which a play is written:

At first, if it has psychological depth, there is a bundle of ideas, something that can be stated in philosophical terms; my Countess Cathleen, for instance, was once the moral question, may a soul sacrifice itself for a good end? but gradually philosophy is eliminated until at last the only philosophy audible, if there is even that, is the mere expression of one character or another. When it is completely life it seems to the hasty reader a mere story. 80

To achieve this sense of life he wrote the play twice in prose before attempting the verse which he hoped would avoid "every rhetorical trick and cadence." Yeats says that the play was "planned
and partly written out when I was little more than a boy," and that it "as all thought out in the first fervour of my generation's distaste for Victorian rhetoric." Hone reminds us that

Shelley's Cinci had just been played for the first time and Yeats used to argue with Todhunter that The Cinci, and Tennyson in Becket, were deliberately oratorical; where they should have created drama in the mood of the Lotos-Eaters and the Epipsychidion they tried to escape their characteristics, that is, thought of the theatre as outside the general movement of literature. In his new play, The Countess Cathleen, ... he was endeavouring to avoid every oratorical phrase and cadence.

He said in a letter to Father Russell that he meant the play for the stage, which was a new departure for Yeats who previously had not thought of the stage nor, apparently, intended his plays for it. Yeats was, however, inexperienced in the theatre, and was not able to succeed in his objective of making the philosophy seem "a mere story," for when the play was performed in Dublin in 1899, it was greeted by cries of blasphemy and lack of patriotism. Typical of the controversy stirred up, and typical of the attitude of mind with which Yeats had to contend, is F. Hugh O'Donnell's The Stage Irishman of the Pseudo-Celtic Drama, which attacks from an Irish-Catholic point of view The Countess Cathleen and The Land of Heart's Desire. Yeats smarted under the attacks, and set out to revise and justify the play. He wrote:

I did not want my play turned into an anti-clerical demonstration, and decided from the general feeling of discomfort when an evil peasant in my first act trampled upon a Catholic shrine that the disturbances were in part my own fault. In using what I considered traditional symbols I forgot that in Ireland they are not symbols but realities. But the attacks in the main, like those upon Synge and O'Casey, came from the public ignorance of literary method.

He removed much that the audience had found offensive, but most of the revision was for dramatic purposes, tightening up the action,
purging irrelevant digressions and incidents, and purifying the speech of decoration, and removing much of the excess of Irish mythology which only encumbered the dialogue.

Stylistically, the play shows the influx of occult and Irish symbols into the pre-Raphaelite texture of Yeats's early diction. It shows him working toward a more natural form of verse for dramatic purposes. It was, like almost all the plays, ritualistic. Yeats wrote in a program note for The Shadowy Waters that his purpose had been to "create for a few people who love symbol, a play that will be more a ritual than a play, and leave upon the mind an impression like that of a tapestry where the forms only half-reveal themselves amid the shadowy folds." The statement is partially applicable to the Cathleen play, especially in the use of symbols and ritual, an approach to drama which is typically modern and will be treated with more detail in another chapter. It will be sufficient for the purposes of these early plays to note the slow, sacramental movements, the use of myth and ritual, and the grouping of details around a symbol or image. Later the plots of the plays for dancers will be shown to hinge on symbols or "symbol clusters."

The early plays have simple, repetitious language, with long sentences made up of a chain of reactions to verbs, simple subjects followed by a long compound predicate. Yeats later criticised his early style saying that the dialogue turned "aside at the lure of word or metaphor," and that the play was no more than "a piece of tapestry." Ellmann makes a case for the tapestry analogy, saying that "the example of the weaver's art probably helped Yeats, as the musical analogy of Four Quartets helped Eliot, to specialize and intensify his means and attitudes in the same way that he had localized his setting and subject-matter."
characters were to be statuesque and static, like the figures in a William Morris tapestry. "They should have the air not of acting but of re-enacting, as if they were characters in some ancient drama or ritual." The tone of the plays, like that of the poems of the period, is unified and close in texture.

Just as the diction is typical of the early "mystery" plays, the set is symbolical, using a few details to imply the whole, and making those few details crucial to the action. Beyond the peasant cottage is the forest, which in early texts is described as half hidden in twilight, which represents the dim, surrounding powers of evil. In the castle of scene three, Heaven (the altar), Hell (the trees outside), and Earth (the tapestry) are all present, and all play their part in what might be called the "temptation" scene. There is much use of foreshadowing through sound-effects and description, as in the first line of the play, "What can have made the grey hen flutter so?" and in the relation of dreams, visions, and apparitions. Also significant is Yeats's ease in introducing incidental music and song. Song is present in the early plays, and there is dance in The Land of Heart's Desire at the climactic moment when the fairy child is gaining control over the humans. This is important, as I will try to show, in Yeats's later development: he made no sudden changes in his theories, but rather developed the potentials found in these early plays—rituals with music and dance, enriching the poetic play. Also important to notice is Yeats's early use of bird imagery and symbolism, perhaps best exemplified by The Shadowy Waters.

When it was performed by the Irish Players in 1904 The Shadowy Waters had already passed through several states of revision, and
was to be revised again, the version printed in *Collected Plays* being dated 1911. For this reason, that the revisions reveal Yeats's growing knowledge of stage-craft as well as his use of occult symbols and Irish themes, I shall consider *The Shadowy Waters* in some detail.

The history of the play's composition covers a wide span. Apparently he had had the idea in mind "since he was a boy," and began to cast it into dramatic form around 1894. There was, apparently, a very early and entirely different version, of which Yeats wrote:

"Sometimes the barrier between myself and other people filled me with terror, and the first and never finished version of *The Shadowy Waters* had this terror for their theme." He was somewhat aware of the difficulty of writing for the theatre, for he wrote to his father:

> I am doing nothing except the play *The Shadowy Waters* which will I think be good. It is however giving me a devil of a job. More than anything I have done for years. In my struggle to keep it concrete I fear I shall so overload it with legendary detail that it will be unfit for any theatrical purposes—at least as such are carried out at present. 93

Later the same month he planned to send the play, near completion, to Elkin Mathews for publication; but he did not finish the play to his satisfaction. By 1900 a version had been finished, was published, and was read before the London Theosophical Society that year.

Florence Farr performed in the play in 1905, at a Theosophical Convention in London. Thereupon it was revised, taking two forms: the acting version (1911) in *Collected Plays*, and the 1906 version in *Collected Poems*. *The Countess Cathleen* and *The Land of Heart's Desire*, as well as later plays, had as intensive though not as extended periods of revision. Yeats later commented that he had "altered them so many times that I doubt the value of every passage."
Though the form and style of the play varied, the plot and main symbols were constant. The best summary is Yeats’s own program note in the November 24, 1906 number of The Arrow:

Once upon a time, when herons built their nests in old men’s beards, Forgael, a Sea-King of ancient Ireland, was promised by certain human-headed birds love of a supernatural intensity. These birds were the souls of the dead, and he followed them over the seas towards the sunset, where their final rest is. By means of a magic harp, he could call them about him when he would and listen to their speech. His friend Aibric, and the sailors of his ship thought him mad, or that this mysterious happiness could come after death only, and that he and they were being lured to destruction. Presently they captured a ship, and found a beautiful woman upon it, and Forgael subdued her and his own rebellious sailors by the sound of his harp. The sailors fled upon the other ship, and Forgael and the woman drifted on alone following the birds, awaiting death and what comes after, or some mysterious transformation of the flesh, an embodiment of every lover’s dream.

Ellmann points out the fact that the alternative possible expectations are "characteristic of Yeats’s unwillingness to commit his poetry to locating the perfect state definitely in death or in life. Though he objected to explaining his work, saying that "the more one explains, the more one narrows the symbols," he did state his intentions further in another program note:

The main story expresses the desire for a perfect and eternal union that comes to all lovers, the desire of Love to "drown in its own shadow." But it has also other meanings. Forgael seeks death; Dectora has always sought life; and in some way the uniting of her vivid force with his abyss-seeking desire for the waters of Death makes a perfect humanity. Of course, in another sense, these two are simply man and woman, the reason and the will, as Swedenborg puts it.

The second flaming up of the harp may mean the coming of a more supernatural passion, when Dectora accepts the death-desiring destiny. Yet in one sense, and precisely because she accepts it, this destiny is not death; for she, the living will, accompanies Forgael, the mind, through the gates of the unknown world. Perhaps it is a mystical interpretation of the resurrection of the body.

The mention of Swedenborg of course relates the play to Yeats’s early
quest for a philosophical system. He did not mention an early literary exemplar, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, whose play *Axel* bears definite relationship to *The Shadowy Waters*. Tindall says: "that the reading of *Axel* had a lasting effect upon Yeats is proved by 'Rosa Alchemica' and 'Out of the Rose,' short stories of the nineties. And his symbolic play *The Shadowy Waters* (1900) is a translation of *Axel* into nautical terms."

Yeats wrote to Mrs. Shakespeare that "*Faust*, *Louis Lambert*, *Seraphita* and *Axel* are our sacred books...." The great importance of this "influence" is stated by Hone when he says that "*Axel* became Yeats' guide and beacon in his theory and practice of a dramatic art where symbol replaces character, events are allegories and words keep more than half their secrets to themselves." As will be shown, this theory though modified is at the base of all the subsequent theories of dramatic construction which Yeats formulated, especially in the plays for dancers.

Perhaps too much has been made of Yeats's connection with the French symbolists. He was certainly using symbols before he knew the Frenchmen, taking Shelley and Blake as models. As Tindall says, "it is unnecessary to look to him or to any Frenchman for the symbolism of Yeats, who was a symbolist long before he had heard of the French. He based his symbolism upon the poetry of Blake, Shelley, and Rossetti and, above all these, upon the occult." As with other "influences" the poets most quoted as influencing Yeats probably acted more as catalysts for Yeats's thought: he was working toward a form of poetry and drama when a man or book would help him crystallize his own ideas. "the influence" Or, as with Maeterlinck, though *The Countess Cathleen* appears to be allied to the Frenchman's drama, Yeats wrote his play before he had
heard of Maeterlinck. Nevertheless, Yeats admired the symbolists, and "regarded them as significant protests against the external, and he was fascinated with Maeterlinck's repeated symbols of mysterious intruders, light-houses, and wells in the woods." The early versions of the play are unsuited for the stage. "In its first form it suffered from more than its lack of action; the exquisitely elaborate speech, curtailed and pruned later, is not the speech of men and women but of the poet." The play is subdued by its atmosphere of dreamy inactivity in which all the characters speak in lush, slow accents. After its many revisions the play was improved though never made a masterpiece. Yeats wrote to Florence Farr, in 1903 (?):

I am at work on Shadowy Waters changing it greatly, getting rid of needless symbols, making the people answer each other, and making the ground work simple and intelligible. I find that I am enriching the poetry and the character of Forgael greatly in the process....I am surprised at the badness of a great deal of it in its present form. The performance enabled me to see the play with a fresh eye. It has been like looking at a picture reversed as in a looking glass. 108

As an example of his getting rid of needless symbols and images we may compare two versions of a speech, which in the 1900 version read:

No man or woman has loved otherwise
Than in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness: and he who longs
For happier love but finds unhappiness.
And falls among the dream the drowsy gods
Breathe on the burnished mirror of the world
And then smooth out the ivory hands and sigh. 109

which was changed, in the 1906 and 1911 versions to:

But he that gets their love after the fashion
Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
The bed of love, that in the imagination has seemed to be the giver of all peace,
Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting,
And as soon finished. 110
There is not only a new philosophy of love stated, but a new rhythm which is quicker and more dramatic. The important difference between the 1906 and 1911 versions is in the characterization of the sailors, and that in the later version they speak in prose and to more purpose as ordinary men and as foils for Forgael. The dramatic structure was also improved when Yeats gave Aibric a dramatic purpose in the play.

In the 1900 version he followed Forgael because of affection, with little other explanation, but was later characterized as a loyal retainer and as a secondary conflict. He, the old man experienced in the ways of the world, tries to prevent Forgael's adventure into the mysterious, and is characterized as jealous of Dectora. His language is homely, blunt, and direct, contrasting with Forgael's exalted, vague, visionary language. These are only examples of Yeats's heightening of conflicts between characters, a part of his "making people answer each other," by clearing away the vagueness, clearly delineating motives and motivations, and making the dialogue more colloquial and more fitting for the individual characters.

As with the other plays, the stage-set is symbolic, though greatly simplified from the 1900 set-description which Yeats had to explain in a program note. The three hounds on the sail correspond to the Tamas, Rajas, and Satva qualities of Vedanta philosophy; the symbolized thesis, antithesis, and reconciliation—Forgael's death-wish, Dectora's life-wish, and their mysterious fusion. The hounds reappear in the play, as do the harp, deer, roses, lilies, and other symbols, cluttering the early version of the play. In its final form the play is not merely Celtic or occult, but has universal motifs and themes. Forgael is the man who refuses to return after the hero-quest, who cannot return
to the banalities of the world after a vision or some act of attain-
ment. Instead he sails, with his magic harp to quell the mutinous
crew, on the shadowy sea in search of happiness, sure that the voyage
will bring spiritual riches. He is in conflict with the materialistic
crew, reminders of the world he is trying to escape. After the capture
of another ship, Forgael takes Dectora, charming her with his magic
harp, and performing a ritual marriage, the conquering and marrying a
Beauty is of course a universal myth or folk-lore. The end of the play
is especially rich in ritualistic actions such as the cutting of the
rope (symbolizing the death which faces the lovers as they sail out
alone on the sea) followed by the coronation (a ritual of ancient
origins, symbolizing renewal, survival, resurrection) which uses resur-
reption symbols of flower, bird, fish, stream, and morning star; and
the guiding birds. Yeats used these birds to reflect the attitudes of
his characters. Aibric sees them, as a reasonable, practical man would:
they are creatures to be shunned, birds of prey, a bad sign for this
voyage which he believed folly anyway. Forgael, who desires spiritual
discoveries on this dark sea (perhaps symbolizing a voyage into the
shadowy recesses of the mind, the sea or water being a common symbol for
the unconscious), sees the birds as friendly guides to the land of pro-
mise, as symbols of freedom and aspiration. The play uses the situation
and many of the images of a poem, "The White Birds," of the period. One
should notice, concerning birds, that The Land of Heart's Desire, a
slight play in which a similar willingness to give up this world to
achieve happiness in another is expressed, uses a bird image at the end
to indicate the soul of the girl passing into the eternal. Again, in
The Death of Cuchulain, his last play, Yeats indicates the immortality
of the hero, the soul in eternity, by having "a few faint bird notes."

Yeats had, as early as the 1890's, established a symbol which many people found baffling when he used it in the poems on Byzantium:

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
In glory of changeless metal
Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood. 114

The dramatic theory of this period was, then, fragmentary, still in a state of flux as Yeats learned more about his craft. He had not solved the problem of poetic drama, but was working toward an understanding of drama on the stage, and of spoken verse. His plays are basically a dramatic presentation of action involving a conflict between the visible and invisible (symbolically represented) worlds, between the natural and the supernatural. His protagonists are concerned with efforts that will help them transcend the mundane shell of material existence and to enter into the spiritual world. This drama was to be the signature of all things, told in myths and rituals that would have religious significance.

The dramatic practice is well characterized by Allardyce Nicoll who writes:

Now that fifty years have passed since the publication of this work, its loveliness may seem a trifle precious, its rhythms too exquisitely beautiful, its theme too far removed into a world of the romantic imagination. Nevertheless Yeats' effort must be esteemed as one of the most worthy among the many attempts, made over numerous generations, to bring new life to the poetic drama. Unlike most of the poetic dramatists of the nineteenth century, the poet has here abandoned the Shakespearian music and sought to compose a new music of his own. 115
Chapter III

Formation of a Public Theatre

1. The Irish Literary Theatre
2. Interim
3. The Irish National Theatre
4. Reform of the theatre

"I had definite plans; I wanted to create an Irish Theatre...."
——Yeats, "Ireland after Parnell"

"Players and painted stage took all my love,
And not those things that they were emblems of."
——Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion"
Yeats, as I have shown, had long been interested in drama, and had made progress in adapting his style to the requisites of dramatic presentation. He writes in "Ireland after Parnell" of his early plan (probably in 1892) for the establishment of a theatre in Dublin:

I had definite plans; I wanted to create an Irish Theatre; I was finishing my Countess Cathleen in its first meagre version, and thought of a traveling company to visit our country branches; and before that there must be a popular imaginative literature. 1

This theatre was to have been part of his newly formed National Literary Society, for which he had large hopes, and though he solicited the rich for support he was unable to finance either the theatre or the series of books with which he hoped to establish a popular literature. His first produced play, The Land of Heart's Desire, was given in 1894 at the Avenue Theatre, London, as a curtain-raiser for Shaw's Arms and the Man. This play, unlike the 1884 series of plays, is typically Celtic Twilight in tone and theme, as is his next play to receive recognition, The Countess Cathleen, published though not produced in 1892.

But Yeats was not easily put off once he had an idea of what he wanted. He says in his autobiography: "I wanted a Theatre—I had
wanted it for years, but knowing no way of getting money for a start in Ireland, had talked to Florence Farr, that accomplished speaker of verse, less accomplished actress, of some little London hall, where I could produce plays." Yeats would have been content to have his plays acted outside Ireland for a while, but Lady Gregory, "with her feeling for immediate action, for the present moment, disapproved of my London project. She offered to collect or give the money for the first Irish performances." By 1893 he was meeting regularly with Lady Gregory in London and in Ireland. She says of him in Our Irish Theatre that "he is very full of play-writing," and that

he, with the aid of Miss Florence Farr, an actress who thinks more of a romantic than of a paying play, is very keen about taking or building a little theatre somewhere in the suburbs to produce romantic drama, his own plays, Edward Martyn's, one of Bridges', and he is trying to stir up Standish O'Grady and Fiona Macleod to write some. He believes there will be a reaction after the realism of Ibsen, and romance will have its turn.

The meetings continued, growing finally into the first plans for the Irish Literary Theatre. Lady Gregory records the events of the climactic meeting almost casually:

One day at Duras (Co. Galway) in 1893, Mr. Edward Martyn, my neighbor, came to see me, bringing with him Mr. Yeats, whom I did not then know very well, though I cared for his work very much and had already, through his directions, been gathering folk-lore. They had lunch with us, but it was a wet day and we could not go out....We sat there through that wet afternoon, and though I had never been at all interested in theatres, our talk turned on plays. Mr. Martyn had written two, The Heather Field and Maeve. They had been offered to London managers, and now he thought of trying to have them produced in Germany where there seemed to be more room for new drama than in England. I said it was a pity we had no Irish theatre where such plays could be given. Mr. Yeats said that had always been a dream of his, but he had of late thought it an impossible one, for it could not at first pay its way, and there was no money to be found for such a thing in Ireland.

We went on talking about it, and things seemed to
grow possible as we talked, and before the end of the afternoon we had made our plan. 5

A formal letter was composed to send out to potential guarantors, stating the aims and objectives of the new society:

We propose to have performed in Dublin in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us. 6

A sum of three-hundred pounds was needed for the three-year experiment. Once finances were assured, primarily by the offer of Martyn, who was anxious to have his plays produced, to defray expenses, further plans were made. For Yeats, then thirty-three years old, it was the fruition of one of his chief dreams: a theatre of ancient idealism. For Lady Gregory, by ten years his senior, it was the beginning of a notable career as manager and, through the inspiration and encouragement of Yeats, as playwright.

The history of drama in modern Ireland is full of sudden entrances and exits. Perhaps the first was the abrupt entrance of George Moore into the affairs of the newly-formed Literary Theatre Society. Yeats and Martyn knew little of stage craft, and the rehearsals of The Countess Cathleen and The Heather Field in London were going badly. Then Moore, a friend of both men, seized the reins after he had heard of Martyn's
complaints about rehearsals. With his practical knowledge of the stage, Moore was able to get the plays ready for their Dublin opening in The Ancient Concert Rooms. Yeats pays tribute to this timely arrival when he writes in 1901 that "a little later, Mr. George Moore joined us; and, looking back now upon our work, I doubt if it could have been done at all without his knowledge of the stage; and certainly if the performances of this present year bring our adventure to a successful close, a chief part of the credit will be his." But Moore's intrusion into the rehearsals was not without trouble. Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory in 1899:

"Moore first got rid of practically the whole cast," putting X (the Dublin amateur actor) out of the part of Usher. "He ran at the chairs, kicked them and called Moore names, upon which the prompter threatened him with personal violence if he used such language in the presence of ladies."

Then Moore descended upon my rehearsals. I was relieved, for I was rehearsing in the part of Countess Cathleen a young girl who had made a great success some years before as the Faery Child in my Land of Heart's Desire. She had a beautiful speaking voice but lacked experience.

There was considerable advance publicity given the plays, especially to The Countess Cathleen which was rumored to be immoral, obscene, and irreligious. Edward Martyn, as a matter of fact, told Yeats he was withdrawing his support from the Society, because some monk had told him the play was heretical. A political enemy of Yeats wrote a pamphlet, "quoting the opinions of the demons as if they were the author's, sold it in the shops, in the streets, dropped copies into every doctor's letter-box...." A full account of these arguments may be found in Kavanaugh's book on the Abbey. It is perhaps sufficient to say that no riot was stirred up: the rows and public demonstrations in the theatre would come later. Yeats later said of
the matter: "We thought our plays inoffensive last year and the year
before, but we were accused the one year of sedition, and the other of
heresy." An appreciative audience did not materialize as the founders
of the Society had believed and hoped it would. But Edward Martyn was
so pleased with seeing his plays on the stage that for the 1900 season
he engaged Dublin's largest and finest theatre, the Gaiety, for the
week of performances. Three plays were given: Moore's The Bending of
the Bough, Martyn's Maeve, and Alice Milligan's The Last Feast of the
Fianna. A fairly undistinguished year, to be followed by another un-
distinguished year in 1901 when the Yeats-Moore Diarmuid and Grania
and Douglas Hyde's Casadh an tSugain (the first play in Gaelic ever
produced) were given.

The triumvirate, Yeats-Martyn-Moore, did not function smoothly.

There were continual quarrels, sometimes because both were
woman-mad, Martyn with contempt, sometimes because Moore
did not want to go to Mass, once because he had over-slept
himself "on purpose." Yet Moore was at this time neither
anti-clerical nor anti-Catholic. Martyn could not long endure in this atmosphere. His opportunity to
withdraw came in 1901 when, enraged because none of his plays were
being given that year, he cut off his support, thus depriving the
Literary Theatre of its main source of financial aid. Shortly there-
after Yeats quarreled with Moore about censorship, and the Literary
Theatre came to an end.

One of the central difficulties of the Literary Theatre was
pointed out by the Dublin papers, especially the Leader which was
quite outspoken in its objections to having Irish plays performed
by English actors. But again, a sudden entrance saved the Irish
drama, for the Fay brothers, Frank and William, made a "nick-of-time"
appearance. With their talent and cooperation, Yeats was able to continue his attempt to establish a national drama for Ireland. Martyn and Moore had wanted a cosmopolitan drama of ideas, a literary theatre like those on the continent. The Fays' ideas about a theatre for Ireland were similar to Yeats's ideas for reform of the theatre and for use of the untapped resources for literary composition that lay in the language and lore of the peasants. The merging of the efforts of the Fays and Yeats set the path which later development in Irish drama was to take. At this crucial juncture "AE" also played an important part, since it was his *Deirdre* which interested the Fays, and since it was he who suggested the Fays call on Yeats to be president of the new Irish National Theatre Society. The fusion of these several forces resulted in the virile movement which culminated in the great years of the Abbey Theatre.

2.

In the first number of *Samhain*, official organ of the Irish National Theatre, Yeats wrote the obituary of the Irish Literary Theatre, stating its achievement. "Whether the Irish Literary Theatre has a successor made on its own model or not, we can claim that a dramatic movement, which will not die, has been started." The *United Irishman* was more pessimistic in its assessment:

The fault seems to have been that the whole scheme was far too ambitiously conceived. There is not a public here capable of supporting at such a level such a theatre and on such a scale as the experiments have indicated...I would say that the Irish Literary Theatre has shown too strong a partiality for the mythical and the semi-supernatural. 21

Yeats said that they had "thought that three years would show whether
the country desired to take up the project, and make it a part of the
national life," since the Irish people were "at that precise stage
of their history when imagination, shaped by many stirring events, de-
sires dramatic expression." Yeats had hoped that Ireland would re-
peat the Elizabethan English pattern of expressing its new-found
nationalistic spirit on the stage. Many years were to pass, however,
and many battles were to be fought before Yeats could make Ireland
proud of her drama.

The complex forces at work in forming what was to become the
Abbey Theatre Players have been but briefly indicated. There is still
controversy about the importance of each factor. The popular notion
that Yeats was the prime mover must be balanced with W. G. Fay's in-
sistence on a "great point that can never be sufficiently emphasized,"
which is that "The Abbey Theatre was first and foremost a theatrical,
not a literary movement." Yet, though the Fays played an important
part in the movement, one is inclined to take W. G. Fay's assertion
as over-statement. Yeats paid tribute to Fay in a letter to The
Academy, May 16, 1903:

SIR,—Your sympathetic notice of our Irish plays and
players has it that they were produced under my direction.
They were produced under the direction of Mr. W. Fay, our
stage manager, and Mr. Frank Fay, our teacher of speech,
and by the committee of our Dramatic Society. Mr. Fay is
the founder of the society, and from the outset he and I
were so agreed about first principles that no written or
spoken word of mine is likely to have influenced him much.
On the other hand I have learned much from him and from
his brother, who knows more than any man I have ever known
about the history of Speech on the Stage. Yours, etc.,
—W. B. Yeats. 25

Fay was indeed the founder of the society. After the Literary
Theatre had ended its activities, Yeats went to London, while at the
same time the Fays in Dublin held meetings and "decided to form a society to be called the Irish National Theatre Society, with 'AE' as our president and Miss Gonne and Dr. Douglas Hyde as vice-presidents." "AE," however, refused to accept the position, suggesting instead that Yeats be consulted. "Mr. Yeats agreed to be our president, and hence, from the first production of the Irish Literary Theatre down to the present day, he has been the head and guiding influence of the Irish Theatre."

This, however, was only after Fay had begun his work in Dublin. His interest had been kindled by the first production of the Literary Theatre. The fact that The Countess Cathleen was the first Irish play to be seen that was not a melodrama like The Coleen Dawn or The Shaughran (26) and that it was written by a poet, made Frank and me particularly keen on seeing it. We liked it very much and thought the company gave an excellent performance, one thing very noticeable—the admirable delivery of Mr. Yeats's verse, which was not so speakable then as in his later plays, for he had had little experience of writing for the stage. Later he had the Abbey company to experiment with and made On Baile's Strand as easy to speak as any play of Shakespeare's. It was this performance of The Countess Cathleen that first suggested the idea of the company that eventually became known as the Irish Players. 29

But for all their delight in the performances, the Fays knew something was wrong. "Then it suddenly flashed upon me that what was wrong with the performance was that, though the artists were most efficient, they were not Irish." Fay thereupon formed a company which Yeats saw perform, taking as much delight in their production as they had taken in his. He writes:

I saw William Fay's amateur company play Miss Milligan's Red Hugh, an historical play in two scenes in the style of Walter Scott. "Yonder battlements," all the old rattles-traps acquired modernity, reality, spoken by those voices. I came away with my head on fire. I wanted to hear my own unfinished Baile's Strand, to hear Greek tragedy, spoken
with a Dublin accent. After consulting with Lady Gregory I gave William Fay my Cathleen ni Houlihan, the first play where dialect was not used with an exclusively comic intention, to be produced in April 1902, in a hall attached to a church in a back street. 31

A year after the Literary Theatre had ceased its activities, W. G. Fay's Irish National Dramatic Company performed, in April of 1902 as scheduled, "AE"s Deirdre and Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan at the Hall of St. Teresa's Total Abstinence Association. The plays were given under the auspices of Inginidhe na hÉireann, the nationalistic society of Maud Gonne, who played Cathleen in the Yeats play. The plays were well received, and the success led Fay to plan a permanent company which, as noted above, led to the calling in of Yeats and the formation of the Irish National Dramatic Company. The following year the company was reorganized and given the name by which it was best known, the Irish National Theatre Society.

3.

Yeats once more had hope for a national theatre. A hall in Camden street was rented, and Dublin citizens accepted the tasks of making scenery and costumes, and of acting without wages. Plays for the first season, in 1902, were "AE"s Deirdre, Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan, Seumas O'Cuisin's The Sleep of the King, Fred Ryan's The Laying of the Foundations, Yeats's The Pot of Broth, Seumas O'Cuisin's The Racing Lug, and P. T. MacFhionnlaioch's Kilis Agus An Bhean Deirce.

The first performances were discouraging. The hall was no more than a room with a crude platform and benches, and was almost inaccessible. There was great difficulty in getting audiences to attend, and,
once they were there, in getting them to sit still. There was, on one side of the narrow entrance, a butcher shop, and on the other a provision dealer. One lady was heard to say as she slithered between crates of eggs and carcasses of beef, "Well, ye told me that Mr. Yeats was queer, but this is the queerest theatre that ever I saw." The general opinion of the venture is stated in a newspaper article quoted by W. G. Fay:

Why...should the Muse of Irish Drama hold her levee in surroundings that would spell bankruptcy for a penny gaff? Why should she declaim from a stage which is not a stage, surrounded with scenery which is not scenery...to an audience that is cultivating rheumatism or pains in the spinal column on seats that have no backs? I may be told it is classic simplicity. I answer it is merely downright commonplace discomfort, which not even a red-hot enthusiast would endure for long....To put it plainly, Sir, if there is ever to be a national theatre, its promoters must remember the dignity of dramatic literature and the comfort of the playgoing public.

The following season the National Theatre moved to Molesworth Hall.

A key year in the history of Irish drama is 1903. On March 14, after a performance of his The Hour Glass, Yeats delivered his first lecture on a topic which was to occupy his mind for many years to follow: reform of the theatre. Miss Horniman came that year to design and sew costumes for Yeats's The King's Threshold. Her sudden entrance is crucial, for she was in 1904 to give the Abbey theatre to the company. This year also marked the entrance of Synge, with the production of In the Shadow of the Glen. From the first Synge caused controversy. There was a minor row after the performance, the Daily Independent and Nation reporting next day that the play was a "libel on the character of the average decently reared Irish peasant woman." The performance marked the departure of Maud Gonne from the National Theatre Society,
resigning her vice-presidency. She is even said to have left the hall during the play as a protest against what she called "a decadent intrusion where the inspiration of idealism rather than the down pull of realism was needed." Yeats began one of his most arduous tasks, which he continued throughout his life: the defense of Synge. "AE" did not agree with Yeats on matters of policy, and when, shortly after this first Synge row, Yeats proposed a tour of America, "AE" let his dissatisfaction be known by resigning his vice-presidency.

Thus, in 1903, Yeats was left almost alone in charge of the National Theatre, with almost absolute control; but he was not alone, for he had made his greatest discovery, Synge, and had the friendship of the rich and generous Miss Horniman, in addition to which there was always Lady Gregory's friendship and support.

Lady Gregory and Miss Horniman were both interested in Yeats's work in the theatre; they were, in fact, competing for his attentions. Lady Gregory gave no indication she resented the intrusion of another woman into her friendship with Yeats. She was sure of herself, she had intellectual and emotional repose, and she knew she could always hold Yeats's interest. Too, she perceived that Miss Horniman had no genius and very slight talent; and Yeats hated mediocrity. Yeats was also disconcerted by Miss Horniman's meddling in the affairs of his theatre, which he refused to allow her to run. But, balancing his dislike of Miss Horniman, was his awe of Lady Gregory which is related by Frank O'Connor.

...I nourished something like an inferiority complex about the old lady until long after Yeats' death. Mrs. Yeats revealed to me that he was as terrified of her as I was. She had always treated him as a talented but naughty child. When at last he married and took his young wife to Coole, he felt the time had come for him to assert his manhood. No animals were permitted in Coole...and Yeats was fond of his cat. Now that he was a married man, a mature man, a
famous man, he was surely entitled to his cat. So Pangur was duly bundled up and brought to Gort. But as the outside car drove up the avenue of Coole the married, mature, famous man grew panic-stricken at the thought of the old lady's forbidding countenance. He bade the jarvey drive him first to the stables. There Pangur was deposited until, everyone having gone to bed, Yeats crept out in his slippers and brought him up to the bedroom. Yet till the day she died he secretly nursed the hope of being able to treat her as an equal. 42

The rivalry is doubly amusing when one considers Maud Gonne, the woman Yeats loved, who was watching the struggle with mild amusement. She wrote in _A Servant of the Queen_ that

...both were interested in Willie and both were interested in the Irish theatre. Miss Horniman had the money and was willing to spend it, but Lady Gregory had the brains. They should have been allies for both stood for art for art's sake and deprecated the intrusion of politics, which meant Irish Freedom; instead they were rivals; they both liked Willie too well. Lady Gregory won the battle. Miss Horniman's money converted the old city morgue into the Abbey Theatre, but it was Lady Gregory's plays that were acted there. Miss Horniman brought back Italian plaques to decorate it but Lady Gregory carried off Willie to visit the Italian towns where they were made.... 43

But, for all her absurdities, Miss Horniman did give Yeats the Abbey, and later was willing to pay the actors' salaries, to the extent of £500 per year. This generosity caused a rift in the affairs of the Abbey, for the actors believed they were performing from patriotic causes, and that to be paid would be to destroy the labor of love in which they were engaged. Yeats, however, accepted the subsidy, realizing how much easier the actor's life would be if he did not have to work outside the theatre to provide himself a living. Many actors left the Abbey, setting up a rival group. They were not able, for all their patriotism, to repeat the success of the Abbey players. New actors were found to fill the vacant places at the Abbey, and all appeared well, except for the audiences which grew and diminished, show-
ed patience, pleasure, and ignorance at various intervals. Then in 1907, The Playboy of the Western World was produced and was greeted by the famous row, the greatest such demonstration to occur until the plays of O'Casey were put on the boards. Yeats championed Synge and won the battle; but the effect on Yeats of these prolonged riots, of his having to face the ignorance and stupidity of press and public, must have increased his scorn for the public, a scorn which was to become one of the reasons for his later withdrawal from the Abbey.

The following year Yeats was faced with the crisis of the Fays' sudden departure. For a time the company was very weak, but it gradually replenished itself, and grew. Varying reasons are given for the Fays' leaving, and varying justifications of the Fays' action and of Yeats's action, but it hinges on the matter of control and final authority. The struggle between the Fays and Yeats ended in Yeats's victory. Miss Horniman withdrew her support in 1910. Her departure was probably imminent in any case, since Yeats was not allowing her her way in the finance and policy of the Abbey, but she took particular offense because a matinee was given the day after King Edward VII died. All other Dublin theatres had closed for the day in respect. No night performance was given, and apologies were sent; but Miss Horniman withdrew anyway.

The Abbey, however, was a resilient organization. The players' departure in 1905 had been a serious blow; but their places were quickly filled, new actors being trained all the while. The loss of the Fays was not fatal either, for the theatre was greater than those two men and their friends. The Abbey survived many crises, many departures, especially after the American tours, when many actors went
to Broadway or Hollywood. It survived even the departure of Yeats himself when he went in search of a private theatre, though he was always ready to return, to help reorganize the Abbey. Frank O'Connor writes that, when he was director of the theatre, Yeats "in the last letter I received from him, written on his death-bed,... suggested that if I wanted his help I should wire and he would return and reorganize the entire Board of the theatre!"

The remainder of the history of the Abbey theatre is complex and long and bears little connection with Yeats's work as playwright. After a final attempt in 1911 to turn the Irish theatre to poetry, Yeats gradually relinquished directional control (though he owned the theatre, and managed its policies), realizing that a new Ireland was growing up, and that the young must take charge. He became preoccupied with his philosophical meditations, with the formation of his myth, which culminated in the system set forth in A Vision. Realizing his failure to establish a popular poetic theatre, he sought an unpopular theatre—the drawing-room, which contained only a select audience. Perhaps he was right; perhaps it is only in the drawing-room that verse-drama can survive in our day. At any rate, he was tired of the public theatre. In 1912 he let Lady Gregory assume full control of the Abbey.

Yeats was not primarily concerned with the organization of the theatre, so long as he had complete artistic control. He had said of the rival theories for organizing the Irish Literary Theatre:
"I do not know what Lady Gregory or Mr. Moore thinks of these projects. I am not going to say what I think." His main interests lay in the reform of the theatre, for "the theatre must be reformed in its plays, its speaking, its acting, and its scenery. That is to say, I think there is nothing good about it at present." Yeats placed special emphasis on the speaking of verse on the stage. He wrote in 1901, when the Irish Literary Theatre had ended its three-year existence, that he had "spent much of my time and more of my thought these last ten years on Irish organization, and now that the Irish Literary Theatre has completed the plan I had in my head ten years ago, I want to go down to primary ideas." These ideas took final form in his proclamation called "The Reform of the Theatre" in 1903, and remained virtually unchanged, even after he abandoned the public theatre. He said:

I want to put old stories into verse, and if I put them into dramatic verse it will matter less to me henceforth who plays them than what they play, and how they play. I hope to get our heroic age into verse, and to solve some problems of the speaking of verse to musical notes.

The predominant quality the Irish theatre attained under the leadership of Yeats and the Fays was an appeal to the eye and ear. The speaking of verse has always been his chief concern in the theatre, and the well-known superiority of the Irish Players in their interpretation of poetic and peasant plays is due to the rhythm of their speech. The English actors, with the exception of Florence Farr, who played during the three years of the Literary Theatre, could not assert the superiority of the human voice over print so wonderfully as the later group of players, trained by the brothers Fay for the Irish National Theatre. Consequently, this fact alone constituted a serious obstacle to the reconciliation of the conflicting ideals cherished by the founders of the original theatre.

In the second number of Beltaine, the official organ of the Literary Theatre, Yeats stated his disappointment in the performance of his
verse plays. I rather shrink," he wrote, "from producing another verse play, unless I get some opportunity for experiment with my actors in the speaking of verse." He got this opportunity at the Abbey, but this concern for speech and verse is not characteristic of the essays in Beltaine which reveal the cosmopolitan attitude of Moore and Martyn, and their interest in the innovations on the continent rather than in the possibilities of a peasant-poetic drama in Ireland.

To restore words to their sovereignty on the stage was Yeats's ideal. After his withdrawal from the public theatre this tenet was modified to some extent, with his growing realization of the power of non-verbal arts on the stage, especially dancing, but words and style were always focal points for Yeats. Thus his interest in dramatic verse, in restoring the sovereignty of words on the stage, dove-tails with his preoccupation with style, with doing away with the literary language and with restoring to words "the breath of men's mouths." He was fond of quoting Sainte-Beuve as saying that "there is nothing immortal except style," and extended the statement by adding:

One can write well in that country idiom without much thought about one's words; the emotion will bring the right word itself, for there everything is old and everything alive and nothing common or threadbare.

Let us get back in everything to the spoken word, even though we have to speak our lyrics to the Psaltery, or the Harp, as A.E. says, we have begun to forget that literature is but recorded speech, and even when we write with care we have begun "to write with elaboration what could never be spoken." But when we go back to speech let us see that it is the idiom either of those who have rejected, or of those who have never learned, the base idioms of the newspapers.

This, of course, is central to Yeats's work. The return to the peasantry and the formation of poetic drama were to work hand-in-hand,
for even though he desired to create poetic drama, he encouraged the prose plays of Lady Gregory and other dialect writers.

In time, I think, we can make the poetical play a living dramatic form again, and 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. If we busy ourselves with poetry and the countrymen, 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. 60

He hoped that poetry would grow out of the folk-plays, but later he came to realize that his hopes were not to be granted. The younger generations of playwrights (Synge and O'Casey being the greatest) were for the most part prose writers, and those who did try to write in verse were unsuccessful. A bitterness about the outcome of his movement, and about the rows (the public refusing to understand at first, and refusing to be educated to the last), must have motivated at least in some measure his withdrawal from the public theatre. This audience and its powerful reactions is an important aspect of the Abbey, because it kept the theatre from being a toy of a literary coterie. The Abbey was not a literary but a national theatre, as the title indicated, and in that way differed from other "poetic" theatres.

Writing in the 1905 Samhain, Yeats already showed signs of realizing that the movement was not progressing as he had wished:

Nobody can force a movement of any kind to take any prearranged pattern to any very great extent; one can, perhaps, modify it a little and that is all. When one says that it is going to develop in a certain way, one means that one sees, or imagines that one sees, certain energies which left to themselves are bound to give it a certain form. Writing in Samhain some years ago, I said that our plays would be of two kinds, plays of peasant life and plays of a romantic and heroic life, such as one finds in the folk-tales. Today I can see other forces, and can foretell, I think, the
form of technique that will arise. But, in the early years, the interest in reform of the theatre, in promoting his friends' work, and in searching out new material for poetry or play kept him in the theatre.

Yeats was troubled by the poor quality of much Irish writing, mostly done for commercial purposes and often done on English models. He wrote of one young woman who had ground out a poem or play for commercial reasons that she should get "into an original relation with life." To her the Abbey would be an important source of inspiration and guidance in achieving a relation with life, since

This movement should be important even to those who are not especially interested in the Theatre, for it may be a morning cock-crow to that impartial meditation about character and destiny we call the artistic life in a country where everybody, if we leave out the peasant who has his folk-songs and his music, has thought the arts useless unless they have helped some kind of political action, and has therefore, lacked the pure joy that only comes out of things that have never been indentured to any cause.

The problem of propaganda was especially difficult in a young country like Ireland, in which revolutionary and nationalistic spirit was high. Yeats argued that a national play is not a page from a newspaper or some sentimentally patriotic book put into dramatic form, but is a theatre or a play or a movement which reflects the national life with permanence. Transitory rhetoric was not enough. Instead they would have to create "a living art in Dublin, with principles that have become habits, and a public that has learnt to care for a play because it is a play, and not because it is serviceable to some cause."

The performance of Cathleen ni Houlihan had made Yeats something of a national hero. He insisted, however, that this play was not merely propaganda: it was patriotism transformed into personal emo-
tion, and further that it was the product not of nationalistic fervor but of a dream.

I am a Nationalist, and certain of my intimate friends have made Irish politics the business of their lives, and this made certain thoughts habitual with me, and an accident made these thoughts take fire in such a way that I could give them dramatic expression. I had a very vivid dream one night, and I made Cathleen ni Houlihan out of this dream.

But if some external necessity had forced me to write nothing but drama with an obviously patriotic intention, instead of letting my work shape itself under the casual impulses of dreams and daily thought, I would have lost, in a short time, the power to write movingly upon any theme, I could have aroused opinion; but I could not have touched the heart, for I would have been busy at the oakum-picking that is not the less mere journalism for being in dramatic form. 65

If I had written to convince others I would have asked myself, not 'Is that exactly what I think and feel?' but 'How would that strike so-and-so? How will they think and feel when they have read it?' And all would be oratorical and insincere. 66

In chapter two I tried to show Yeats's assumption of a nationality: "A Nation is the heroic theme we follow, a mourning, wasted land its moving spirit...." Paradoxically, he used this not as an end in itself, as the political writers did, but in order to transcend it, to achieve universality. Yeats had to fight the easy tendency toward journalistic propaganda, just as he had to fight against the bigotry of the audiences which hooted at The Playboy of the Western World. Most of his time in these years was spent in composition for the stage and in fighting battles. The shy young man had become a public man. Once again, there is a paradoxical situation in that Yeats was constantly being reminded of the audience's existence and was at the same time advising playwrights to ignore it because "the modern theatre has died away to what it is because the writers have thought of their audiences instead of their subject." This point of view could easily lead to an "undramatic" or
"untheatrical" art, and Yeats realized it. He said that the reform movement was a struggle against the play of historical intrigue and that "the sincere play, the logical play, that we would have in its place, will always seem, when we hear it for the first time, undramatic, unexciting." Yeats did not think of the theatre as a place of entertainment, but as 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 Scandanavia to-day." Yeats wanted playwrights, actors, and an audience aware of ideas and aware of the words with which these ideas were expressed. An awareness of style and imaginative language would prevent the ideas from becoming political or didactic. He planned to restore words to their ancient sovereignty on the stage, and by so doing, restore true drama. But, he realized, form and content were not the only problems, since "if we are to restore words to their sovereignty we must make speech even more important than gesture upon the stage," and even more important than acting and setting. His reforms spring not only from his desire to simplify the physical aspects of production and thereby restore emphasis on the play instead of on the splendor of the designers and actors, but from his conception of tragedy and comedy. The simplicity of acting, the suggestive bareness of the stage, the few noble gestures, the beautiful delivery of verse, these were appropriate to the new form of drama Yeats had in mind, the noble action of mythical personages being represented as rather removed from the appearances of this world.

"We must," he wrote, "simplify acting, especially in poetical drama, and in prose drama that is remote from real life like my Hour Glass."
Gesture and movement were to be held to a minimum, that the poetry could make its full effect on the audience without the detraction of naturalistic or melodramatic acting. He especially admired the Phedre of Sara Bernhardt, for she used stillness and slow gesture, giving an impression of quiet nobility. For the play that is remote from real life and to emphasize the words in poetical drama, the actors' movements must have the effect of being "decorative and rhythmical as if they were paintings on a frieze. They must not draw attention to themselves at wrong moments...." We have since learned from his pioneer work that a minimum of scenery and props can suggest reality much more effectively than painted sets and elaborate illusions can copy reality. Yeats was among the first in this century to insist that we stop pretending that a theatre is not a theatre and to advocate a clear recognition of the artificiality of the theatre as a starting point for composing and producing plays. It is difficult now, after most of his reforms have been incorporated into theatre practice, to realize how new his ideas must have seemed, how revolutionary.

The possibilities for reform of the theatre were easier in Dublin than elsewhere since "the players were quite natural, because they did not know what else to do. They had not learned to do wrong." The cutting out of all excess or distracting gesture, saving what gestures there were for the most intense moments, cut against the grain of naturalistic acting just as the simplification of scenery was a denial of the validity of naturalistic traditions. As movements were to accompany speech without being its rival, so the form and color of costumes and settings were to be simplified to harmonize with, not overpower, the words spoken. It is not my purpose to ascertain the amount or the effect
of influence which passed between Yeats and Gordon Craig, though the similarities between their ideas on stage production are clear. Craig, born in 1872, began his study of the art of the theatre in 1897, and by 1901 we hear that Yeats "longed for productions of his poetic plays by Gordon Craig, still young and unknown...." Yeats's essay on the reform of the theatre appeared in 1903; Craig's monumental and equally uncompromising The Art of the Theatre appeared in 1905. Yeats consulted with Craig on a production of Deirdre and was so impressed that he almost went off to Florence to join the school Craig had founded in 1913. Craig, however, discouraged Yeats, writing that "my school is not for the likes of you I fear. You could learn nothing there. What you've learnt already—and how much you have learnt about the theatre is positively appalling." For all he had learned Yeats was sorry that he could not experiment more, lacking the money and leisure such experiments require. He was aware not only of Craig's achievements, about which he expressed some reservations, but also of Appia and Fortuni, whom he admired but did not fully understand. This, however, was not Yeats's main concern, for he wrote that "one can only perfect an art very gradually; and good playwriting, good speaking, and good acting are the first necessity."

The matter of construction and setting are related. Playwrights were still following a convention of writing plays in many scenes which arose when there was not the difficulty of changing painted scenery. Yeats objected to "plays in many scenes, with no scene lasting longer than four or six minutes, and few intervals shorter than nine or ten minutes, which have to be filled up with songs." The solution was either to simplify stage-sets to allow rapid transitions
between scenes and to prevent "breaking up the emotion and sending our thoughts here and there," or, as most of the Abbey dramatists did, to write one-act plays. Yeats later found another solution in the conventions of the Japanese theatre, treated in chapter five. Instead of the naturalistic scene-painting which was "not an art, but a trade, because it is, at best, an attempt to copy the more obvious effects of nature by the methods of the ordinary landscape-painter, and by his methods made coarse and summary," Yeats wanted back-cloths of, for the most part, a single color so that the people standing before them would occupy the whole attention, or would force attention on the actors who would in turn force attention to the words. Nothing must be allowed to overwhelm the art of the writer; everything must fix attention upon the drama.

Yeats once said that "Greek acting was great because it did all but everything with the voice, and modern acting may be great when it does everything with voice and movement." He was very concerned about the speaking of verse, and formulated various theories about achieving greatest effectiveness. One solution for getting the actors to stand still and deliver their verse was to put them in barrels during rehearsal.

They showed plenty of inexperience, especially in the minor characters, but it was the first performance I had seen since I understood these things in which actors kept still enough to give poetical writing its full effect upon the stage. I had imagined such acting, though I had not seen it, and had once asked a dramatic company to let me rehearse them in barrels that they might forget gesture and have their minds free to think of speech for a while. The barrels, I thought, might be on castors, so that I could shove them about with a pole when the action required it. 85

He was accused of wanting a monotonous chant, but he replied that "though monotonous chant may be a safer beginning for an actor than
the broken and prosaic speech of ordinary recitation, it puts me to
sleep none the less."

These technical matters may seem unimportant, but they reflect
Yeats's theory of drama through his theory of drama production, for he,
like the ancients he admired, "did not desire to picture the surface of
life, but to escape from it," to get to the core both in the play and
in its presentation. His was merely one method; others have been de-
veloped since his beginnings, and today the greatest part of our the-
atrical activity is done in non-naturalistic terms, and we are perhaps
coming closer to true drama than the nineteenth century. It is impor-
tant to remember, as Yeats insisted, that "whatever method one adopts,
one must always be certain that the work of art, as a whole, is mascu-
line and intellectual, in its sound as in its form." His own attempt
at this kind of drama is the subject of the following chapter.
Chapter IV

Dramatic Theory and Practice, 1902-1912

1. Theories
2. Plays

"Sing the peasantry, and then
Hard-riding country gentlemen,
The holiness of monks, and after
Porter-drinkers' randy laughter;
Sing the lords and ladies gay
That were beaten into the clay
Through seven heroic centuries;
Cast your mind on other days
That we in coming days may be
Still the indomitable Irishry."
——Yeats, "Under Ben Bulben"

"And when the Fool and Blind Man stole the bread
Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea;
Heart-mysteries there, and yet when all is said
It was the dream itself enchanted me:
Character isolated by a deed
To engross the present and dominate memory."
——Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion"
Some men are born playwrights, some achieve skill as playwrights, and some have play-writing thrust upon them. Yeats seems to fit all categories, having already shown himself interested, if not obsessed, with the dramatic form, and in the present period having the duties of a dramatist thrust upon him by the necessity of supplying plays for the Abbey repertory; and all the while he was achieving style and skill as a playwright. Since Yeats expended so much of his energy on establishing and maintaining the Abbey, and since the theatre itself was more successful than his plays themselves, one may ask which was his greatest achievement, especially now when the plays are in eclipse. The two, perhaps, should be studied together, since Yeats's theories about the play and its production are similar, one motivating the other. The Abbey, once its course had been established, tended to advance and maintain itself despite Yeats's hopes and theories. This difference between what he wanted to create and what he did create led him to go his own way, at last working independently of his first theatre and forming a new one. The Abbey became an established fact, but Yeats's theories about the theatre continued to be changed and
modified. He maintained his hope for a poetic drama, but changed his mind about how and where to found it. His plays shall be examined in relation to his ideas of theatre and his criticism.

When Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory that "we have been the first to create a true 'People's Theatre'" he was restating his idea that the theatre must, of necessity, return to the people. He took his term from an essay by Romain Rolland, Le théâtre du peuple, in which Rolland had censured the triteness and commercialism of contemporary drama. The French stage was dominated by a clique of playwrights whose eternal theme was adultery and petty erotic conflicts. The theatre was lagging behind, Rolland believed, the revelations of Zola and the naturalists concerning human life. The theatre was not to be a luxury for a few but a national institution; not a place of caviare, but a place of wholesome fare for the people. Yeats, too, believed that the theatre should be a national institution, and that drama should be more than a trifle to make the rich upper classes smile. He wrote:

"Our movement is a return to the people, like the Russian movement of the early seventies, and the drama of society would but magnify a condition of life which the countryman and the artisan could but copy to their hurt. The play that is to give them a quite natural pleasure would tell them either of their own life, or of that life of poetry where every man can see his own image, because there alone does human nature escape from arbitrary conditions. Plays about drawing-rooms are written for the middle classes of great cities, for the classes who live in drawing-rooms; but if you would enoble the man of the roads you must write about the roads, or about the people of romance, or about great historical people." 4

This is the general theory, and is the basis for Yeats's writings for the Abbey, though he specialized in enobling man by writing of romance and historical people with poetry in which every man can see himself. As will be seen, the "return to the people" was but a passing phase,
for though Yeats depended on the audience of common citizens and on peasants for language he could not allow them to dictate to him about art. He probably meant returning to the people for language and legend, but he was misunderstood by a brilliant young man in Dublin who retorted to Yeats's statements, saying that "no man...can be a lover of the true or the good unless he abhors the multitude; and the artist, though he may employ the crowd, is very careful to isolate himself." This was not all James Joyce, who was already generating his insight and penetrating hatred and preparing for his own isolation from the rabblement, had to say in his pamphlet on the Irish Literary Theatre, "The Day of Rabblement," published in 1901.

When Yeats met Joyce the next year Yeats tried to explain his intentions:

...he [Joyce] said that...his own little book owed nothing to anything but his own mind which was much nearer to God than folklore.

I took up the book and pointing to a thought said, 'You got that from somebody else who got it from the folk'. I felt exasperated and puzzled and walked up and down explaining the dependence of all good art on popular tradition. I said, 'The artist, when he has lived for a long time in his own mind with the example of other artists as deliberate as himself, gets into a world of ideas pure and simple. He becomes very highly individualized and at last by sheer pursuit of perfection becomes sterile. Folk imagination on the other hand creates endless images of which there are no ideas. Its stories ignore the moral law and every other law, they are successions of pictures like those seen by children in the fire....'

Joyce still believed Yeats's interest in folk-lore chauvinistic, not understanding Yeats's desire for freedom from the coteries of London which perpetuated stilted traditions, nor his desire to gain images and spontaneity from the legends and stories of the peasantry. The two men were to pursue different paths in their creation of the
great English literature of the twentieth century, Yeats universalizing the particular, and Joyce particularizing the universal, both using Irish material only to transcend the merely local.

Yeats persisted in founding his theories on the belief that an audience and society existed which would furnish the language and stories from which drama could be fashioned. He wanted a language that is alive, "as language is in Gaelic today, as it is in English-speaking Ireland where the Schoolmaster or the newspaper has not corrupted it." He had gotten his ideas by "listening to that conversation of the people which is so full of riches because so full of leisure, or to those old stories of the folk which were made by men who believed so much in the soul, and so little in anything else, that they were never entirely certain that the earth was solid under the foot-sole." He wanted nothing to do with "words with an air of literature about them."

Yeats's whole outlook was similar to the poetical reform of Wordsworth, returning literature to the diction and phraseology of common people, selected and given form by the poet. Just as Yeats discarded the tricks of commercial theatre, he discarded tricks of poetry, gradually purging his verse of all that was undramatic. He was searching for a tradition, and for continuity through contact with the peasantry and with simpler forms of drama. Chandler has written:

At a time when the art of the theatre has become sophisticated, the plays of the Irish are simple in theme and structure. In place of the problems of conventional society, they present the natural life of a people free from mannered graces. In place of high-wrought technic, they offer a few single situations; and in place of 'well-made' plots, they exhibit character at a crisis. They cast back to the sources of things in nature for the representation of things in art.

This contains two important aspects of Irish drama which bear
relationship to Yeats's theories: refusal to treat problems of conventional society, and the casting back to folk-lore for plots and points of view. I shall treat first Yeats's opinion of the direction modern drama had taken (through the work of Ibsen), and then turn to Yeats's alternative (his search for the main tradition of drama).

Ibsen, of course, was a prime mover in the modern dramatic movement. He influenced many writers and set the tone of drama for many years. He was not, however, without opposition, some valid though for the most part invalid. Among those who had objections based on more than an outraged moral sense was W. B. Yeats, who believed that through this new drama"...the playwrights of every country in the world became persuaded that their plays must reflect the surface of 12 life...." This change from problems of the soul to problems of society coincided, said Yeats, "with the substitution of science for 13 religion in the conduct of life." The content of "problem-plays" would quicken the pulse, but only as a drug: the effect is stimulating and exciting, but without permanence. Yeats wanted a drama which did not repeat or re-depict those things we observe, but rather a drama which would move us deeply, not with transitory problems but with ideas. He believed Ibsen had taken the wrong approach, and that there would be a reaction and a return to the folk.

The scientific movement [he wrote] is ebbing a little everywhere, and here in Ireland it has never been in flood at all. And I am certain that everywhere literature will return once more to its old extravagant fantastical expression, for in literature, unlike science, there are no discoveries, and it is always the old that returns. Everything in Ireland urges us to this return, and it may be that we shall be the first to recover after the fifty years of mistake. 14 Yeats's misconception of Ibsen's work and the direction of modern drama
probably stemmed from his fear that concern with contemporary problems would lead to more propaganda plays and poems. "A certain number of propagandist plays are unavoidable in a popular movement like the Gaelic revival," he wrote, "but they may drive out everything else." Then too, he was concerned with the revival of poetic drama as a theatrical art, and, by extension, with the regeneration of English poetry. "If we accomplish this great work, if we make it possible again for the poet to express himself, not merely through words, but through the voices of singers, of minstrels, of players, we shall certainly have changed the substance and the manner of our poetry." The modern prose drama diminished the chances for success. He probably felt as Synge did when he said that "the drama, like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything. Analysts with their problems, and teachers with their systems, are soon old-fashioned...—look at Ibsen and the Germans—but the best plays of Ben Jonson and Molière can no more go out of fashion than the blackberries on the hedges." Synge also said:

On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality....In Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks. 18

Synge was correct to see the situation in Ireland as a matter of having a popular source for literature "for a few years more," rather than of the beginning, as Yeats saw it, of a great revival. Neither of them could foresee the ruin of their renaissance by the politi-
Yeats, though he was primarily interested in the lore and language of the peasants, recognized the need for a broad context for the writer's education. His attitude was: "let us learn construction from the masters, and dialogue from ourselves." Nor was he so prejudiced that he could not see Ibsen's mastery of the dramatic form, and he advised:

If Irish dramatists had studied the romantic plays of Ibsen, the one great master the modern stage has produced, they would not have sent the Irish Literary Theatre imitations of Boucicault, who has no relation to literature....The moment we leave even a little the folk-tradition of the peasant, as we must in drama, if we do not know what has been said and written in the world, we do not even know ourselves....We Irish must know it all, for we have, I think, far greater need of the severe discipline of French and Scandinavian drama than of Shakespeare's luxuriance. 20

He also hoped that, after the romantic and poetical plays were well established, dramatists would arrive who could write about drawing-room society, "and...create plays of that life and means to play them as truthfully as a play of Hauptmann's or of Ibsen's upon the German or Scandinavian stage."

Plays about modern educated people, Yeats said, "fill one's soul with a sense of commoness as with dust," because "it cannot become impassioned, that is to say, vital, without making somebody gushing and sentimental." If these characters are to speak as themselves, they cannot be tragic personages, since modern people have forgotten how to express themselves, and especially how to express tragic or deeply felt emotions: "...when they are deeply moved they look silently into the fireplace." Yeats wanted, then, plays of passion, and of language rich and moving enough to express this passion. For himself, the best characters were mythological, heroic, slightly removed
from the society of the modern educated men who cannot feel or express feeling. He and Lady Gregory went about the Irish countryside collecting folk-tales which Lady Gregory translated and published in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* and *Gods and Fighting Men*. Yeats became interested in the Sagas, using stories from them, or inventing episodes for his own purposes, as in *At the Hawk's Well*. He had taken up Irish themes in the early plays, but now he began to write heroic rather than mystery or miracle plays. He wanted "to get our heroic age into verse...."

This again was part of his reaction from Ibsenian drama.

The lovers and fighters of old imaginative literature are more vivid experiences in the soul than anything but one's own ruling passion that is itself riddled by their thought as by lightning, and even two dumb figures on the roads can call up their glory. Put the man who has no knowledge of literature before a play of this kind [i.e. a play about modern educated people] and he will say, as he has said in some form or other in every age at the first shock of naturalism, 'Why should I leave my home to hear but the words I have used there when talking of the rates?' And he will prefer to it any play where there is visible beauty or mirth, where life is exciting, at high tide as it were.

Yeats was convinced that "there is something of an old wives' tale in fine literature," something of the ancient myth-maker's art, and this brings us to his theory of the history of drama and of what drama should be.

In its inception, drama was the art of the people, and later, "in the second day, like the dramas acted of old times in the hidden places of temples, it is the preparation of a Priesthood." As the drama grew older, actors found that the large audiences did not like tiring emotions, and consequently the drama became diluted to make it easier. Then, "as audiences and actors changed, managers learned to substitute meretricious landscapes, painted upon wood and canvas, for
the descriptions of poetry, until the painted scenery...became as im-
portant as the story." Verse came to be read as though it were some
newspaper article, and even if actors on the commercial stage learned
to speak poetry again their speeches would seem out of place on the
naturalistic stage, "for poetry is founded upon convention, and becomes
incredible the moment painting or gesture remind us that people do not
speak verse when they meet upon the highway." Thus, as early as 1899
Yeats was seeking a reform of stage practice to make reform of drama
possible. Similarly, Raymond Williams has said: "It seems to me that
the most valuable drama is achieved when the technique of performance
reserves to the dramatist primary contro1." Today "stars" get more
credit than the playwright, and the actors consider the play merely a
"script." The Greek and Elizabethan dramatists acted and directed their
plays and did not have to depend on the whim of a producer.

Yeats had made a great advance from his early theories, realizing
that an elevated, poetical style is not mandatory. "The speeches of
Falstaff are as perfect in their style as the soliloquies of Hamlet," he said, and added that "one must be able to make a king or faery or
an old countryman or a modern lover speak that language which is his
and nobody else's, and speak it with so much of emotional subtlety that
the hearer may feel it hard to know whether it is the thought or the
word that has moved him, or whether these could be separated at all." His own success in differentiating characters' speech is evidenced by
his revisions of the early plays, treated in chapter two. Yet, Yeats
did not set much store by the existence of "character" in drama....
"When we go back a few centuries and enter the great periods of drama,
character grows less and sometimes disappears...." Character, in
fact, is present in comedy, but not in tragedy, and while rehearsing a play he saw "what should have been plain from the first line I had written, that tragedy must always be a drowning and breaking down of the dykes that separate man from man, and that it is upon these dykes comedy keeps house." Surface detail, therefore, and personalities, idiosyncrasy and everything that separates men was to be cast out of poetic tragedy. As he wrote in a notebook when he was twenty-one, "Talent perceives differences, Genius unity."

Yeats was presaging a contemporary trend of putting emphasis on other aspects of a play than on the characters. This can be seen in G. Wilson Knight's reinterpretation of Shakespeare's plays, the twentieth century reaction from Bradley's interpretations. There had been the neo-classical phase of Shakespeare criticism, which took as point of departure Aristotelian unities, and which concerned itself with whether or not Shakespeare followed Aristotelian theories and whether or not he could be excused for his breaches of the unities. Coleridge then began to turn attention from the plot and to focus on the characters, A. C. Bradley pushing this "character criticism" to its logical conclusion. In our own time Eliot and Richards wrought a new mode of criticism, and Knight took a new approach to Shakespeare's plays, considering them as plays for the stage, as "spacial" rather than as "temporal."

Wilson Knight's word 'spacial' suggests that we do better to imagine the play as a kind of narrative tapestry than as a three-hour slice of life...Let me try to show how this works in practice. 'Hamlet' was the great success with the older school. Hamlet has a wonderful real-life richness about him, and the temporal imagination has much to get hold of because 'Hamlet' is, among other things, a revenge play with a strong detective interest. But 'Measure for Measure' has been one of the hopeless fail-
ures: the old school was defeated by the lack of human probability in it and by the clockwork movement of its plot. Then Wilson Knight pointed out that both these qualities are essential to the success of the play: its tone is critical and analytic, and it is about a posed ethical problem.... And so we have, literally, a problem play, a study in orthodox Christian ethics, which needs this flatness and artificiality in order to realise its own nature.... Behind Wilson Knight's spatial metaphor is the vision of each play as an independent universe, saying itself, acting itself, presenting its own myth.

Taking, then, the play as a whole, rather than taking the leading character and relating everything (or trying to) to him and his personality and actions, Knight has emphasized the ritualistic elements of certain scenes, and has pointed out ways by which unity has been achieved through symbols. Francis Fergusson was also aware of the necessity for a broader scope in interpreting drama, for in his The Idea of a Theatre he studies the plays from the point of view of more than the leading character, and often in terms of ritual and myth.

Raymond Williams, in his study of modern drama says of the play that

Its interestingness, its truth cannot be judged as if it were an action in real life. Similarly, with characters, the important dramatist is concerned, not necessarily to simulate 'real, live people,' but rather to embody in his personages certain aspects of experience. That this will frequently result in the creation of characters which we feel we can accept as 'from the life' is certain; but the result will not always be so, and we must be careful that our judgement depends not on whether the characters are lifelike, but on whether they serve to embody experience which the author has shown to be true. All we are obliged to remember, for ordinary purposes, is that character and action... are ordered parts of a controlled expression, and that the author's control over their presentation ought to be final.

Drama, then, is not life but an abstraction from life; nor are the characters independent of the design of the playwright, but must function within the limits of the writer's conception.

Yeats, when he saw the cycle of history plays from Henry IV to
Richard III played at Stratford on Avon, was not impressed by the "life-like" quality of the characters, but by "something extravagant and super-human, something almost mythological. These nobles with their indifference to death and their immense energy seem at times no nearer the common stature of men than do the Gods and the heroes of Greek plays." Likewise in his own plays Yeats was not so much interested in the characters as in the controlling myth or idea. This has led Ellmann to say that "in his earlier treatment...we feel an equivocation between formalized and realistic drama," which is, for the most part, true, because Yeats was working toward his later theories, toward formalized or ritualistic drama which, to attain its form, had to separate itself from the public stage. He was fond of quoting Goethe's "art is art because it is not nature," and added that art "brings us near to archetypal ideas themselves, and away from nature, which is but their looking-glass."

This brings us directly to Yeats's theory of tragedy. As with his other artistic beliefs, the theory was never systematically stated, and therefore must be pieced together from statements in the prose works. There is a relationship between his desire for remoteness, for lack of character, and his conception of tragedy. He said that the theatre must be made "a place of intellectual excitement," and it was to be through intellect, through ideas and myths that tragedy would find its fullest expression, unencumbered with accidents of personality. He said of a speech in Synge's Deirdre of the Sorrows that it was a "cry at the outset of a reverie of passion that mounts and mounts till grief itself has carried her beyond grief into pure contemplation." Yeats wanted to go directly to the center, to present
the tragic ecstasy and significance as such, stripped of the envelope of lengthy plots, temporal allusions, and characterizations. This theory finds its fullest ramifications in the later plays for dancers, treated in chapter six; but even in this early period, remoteness and the tragic moment were almost equated. I shall quote at length one of Yeats's fullest statements of his theory of the relationship of character and tragedy, a passage which also has bearing on his theory of poetic drama. He wrote in "The Tragic Theatre:"

One dogma of the printed criticism is that if a play does not contain definite character, its constitution is not strong enough for the stage, and that the dramatic moment is always the contest of character with character.

In poetical drama there is, it is held, an antithesis between character and lyric poetry, for lyric poetry—however much it move you when read out of a book—can, as these critics think, but encumber the action. Yet when we go back a few centuries and enter the great periods of drama, character grows less and sometimes disappears, and there is much lyric feeling, and at times a lyric measure will be wrought into the dialogue, a flowing measure that had well-befitted music, or that more lumbering one of the sonnet. Suddenly it strikes us that character is continuously present in comedy alone, and that there is much tragedy, that of Corneille, that of Racine, that of Greece and Rome, where its place is taken by passions and motives, one person being jealous, another full of love or remorse or pride or anger. In writers of tragi-comedy (and Shakespeare is always a writer of tragi-comedy) there is indeed character, but we notice that it is in the moments of comedy that character is defined, in Hamlet's gaiety let us say; while amid the great moments, when Timon orders his tomb, when Hamlet cries to Horatio 'absent thee from felicity awhile,' when Anthony names 'Of many thousand kisses the poor last,' all is lyricism, unmixed passion, 'the integrity of fire.' 44

And in Dramatis Personae he wrote:

Tragedy is passion alone, and rejecting character, it gets form from motives, from the wanderings of passion; while comedy is the clash of character. Eliminate character from comedy and you get farce....In practice most works are mixed: Shakespeare being tragi-comedy. 45

This is especially true of poetic drama since "a poet creates tragedy
This likeness, this dealing in what is identical in all men diminishes the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities which delineate characters. Here, then, we have the basic definition: tragedy is passion, comedy is character. Further, in "tragic art one distinguishes devices to exclude or lessen character, to diminish the power of that daily mood...." Yeats wanted drama to concern itself with the deeper levels of personality which traditional literature had explored, but which he felt were being neglected by the naturalistic drama. He would probably have agreed with Eric Bentley who said, concerning recent Broadway plays, that the proper subject of drama is not neurosis but immorality.

If there was to be no character development, no discrimination and distinction of individuality, would there still be drama? Yeats dealt with this problem in a fragment of a dialogue written in 1915, only recently published. He defined his position as:

Now the art I long for is also a battle, but it takes place in the depths of the soul and one of the antagonists does not wear a shape known to the world or speak a mortal tongue. It is the struggle of the dream with the world—it is only possible when we transcend circumstances and ourselves, and the greater the contest, the greater the art.... In every play—in Shakespeare for instance—you will find a group of characters—Hamlet, Lear, let us say, who express the dream, and another group who express its antagonist and to the antagonist Shakespeare gives a speech close to that of daily life. But it is not only the mere speech that must be heightened, there must be whole phantasmagoria through which the lifelong contest finds expression. There must be fable, mythology, that the dream and the reality may face one another in visible array. Even when real life moves us deeply, so profound is the scorn the heart feels for all created things, so unutterable proud it is, we cease to be realists. The lover forgets the living woman who has set fire to his haystack, to think of Helen, and the mother forgets her own child, so full of idiosyncrasy, to dream of the child at Bethlehem....Those who try to create beautiful things without this battle in the soul, are
merely imitators, because we can only become conscious of a thing by comparing it with its opposite. The end of art is ecstasy and that cannot exist without pain.

This, of course, does not necessitate the use of abstractions instead of characters, nor the use of archetypal figures only. As Ellis-Fermor points out, "whether the character is first revealed, like Orestes, in generic terms or, like Hamlet, in the subtlest possible individual detail, it is still the tragic moment, and the man's bearing in face of it, that is the essence of the play," and it was with the essences which Yeats wished to deal, and he wished to deal with them in verse.

Whatever else it was to be, Yeats wanted his theatre to be poetic. He wrote that

a common opinion is that the poetic drama has come to an end, because modern poets have no dramatic power....I find it easier to believe that audiences, who have learned, as I think, from the life of crowded cities to live upon the surface of life, and actors and managers, who study to please them, have changed, than that imagination, which is the voice of what is eternal in man, has changed.

Yeats found hope for a revival of poetic drama in Ireland because he believed that "the audiences of Sophocles and of Shakespeare and of Calderon were not unlike the audiences I have heard listening in Irish cabins to songs in Gaelic." This was in 1899, before the disillusionment of riots and attempts at mob-censorship.

Despite T. S. Eliot's argument in "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry," that

...prose drama is merely a slight by-product of verse drama. The human soul, in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse. It is not for me, but for the neurologists, to discover why this is so, and why and how feeling and rhythm are related. The tendency, at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasize the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse.
the theatre, since the Restoration, has not been a fortunate outlet for English poets. It was not that the poets were not trying to write for the stage, or that they did not have encouragement.

In the 1830's Macready was begging his poetic friends to write for him, and got for his pains Browning's "A Blot in the Scutcheon" and a dozen crabbed imitations of Shakespeare. ...Henry Irving tried to make stageworthy vehicles out of the dramatic poems of Tennyson and treated the hack-written works of W. G. Wills as if they were genuinely poetic. In 1901, George Alexander commissioned Stephen Phillips to write "Paolo and Francesca." Only the last of these dramatists can be said to have had any success in his own right; the others succeeded, when they succeeded, because of the superior stage-wisdom of the personalities of their leading players.

The earlier generations, the Romantics, had less success, for though Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron wrote "plays," they had no great players with whom they could join forces to give the poetic dramas the semblance of true plays. Perhaps the greatest difficulty was that these plays were based on models of the past, being written from no experience of the theatre. Diluted Elizabethan language and structure revealed no awareness of the modern playhouse, as a physical unit, nor of judicious principles of production. Poetic drama was, for the most part, rhetorical five-act spectacles which hoped to re-capture the golden age of poetic drama in England through scenery and costume and immitative language, forgetting that the golden age used little scenery and costumes, and that its stage-verse was peculiarly its own. They neglected the problem of finding "a new form of verse which shall be as satisfactory a vehicle for us as blank verse was for the Elizabenths," as T. S. Eliot has so often admonished.

Among the poets of the nineteenth century who made attempts at drama, Yeats alone came to terms with the theatre, primarily by work-
ing in it, by revising his plays to make them more suited to the stage, and by realizing that poetic drama must combine the maximum effect that can be achieved from both drama and poetry. In his revisions of later plays, Yeats pruned poetic passages, inserting dramatically effective speeches, in order to maintain balance and harmony between the poetic and dramatic elements of the play, allowing neither to predominate. He had his own ideas and would not tolerate commercial producers who tried to tell him what to do. He refused to imitate past techniques either in composition or in presentation, refusing to serve what he did not believe in. "It was not that Yeats was opposed to the theatre; a dramatist could hardly be that; but he believed the first condition of significant achievement to be the restoration of the 'ancient sovereignty' of words, and that required a theatre in which language should not be subordinated, as throughout the Victorian theatre it had been, to spectacle or the visual elements of acting." The theories of composition and production were a unit, were in harmony. In Yeats were combined the talents of a great poet and the knowledge of a theatre manager and stage director. As Ernest Reynolds says, "the tyranny of neo-Shakespeareanism was shaken off and a new form of dramatic art was born. While the London critics were lauding Stephen Phillips as the modern Sophocles, Yeats was developing his ideas in Dublin, and laying the foundations of the Irish Dramatic Movement...." The fact that the new drama in Dublin did not immediately become famous had its advantages, for as Yeats wrote:

Our obscurity made it possible to create a new kind of acting, for it gave us time to prepare and experiment. If our players had been stage-struck young men and women of the
usual kind, they would have developed much more quickly; but their art would have been the ordinary stage art of their time. 58

For one who wanted to experiment rather than imitate this period was important.

As indicated above, Yeats admired Ibsen and the Scandinavian movement, yet disliked the new prose problem plays which dealt with only the surface of life. Yeats wanted a drama that would present the underlying realities that would take one beyond daily life into the realm of ideal perfection, and for such revelations one needed the language of poetry, a living language with no taint of literary usage. "Let us get back in everything to the spoken word," Yeats was constantly saying. Further than similar statements about the virtues of speech and language in Ireland, Yeats gives no hints about his ideas on dialogue. He does not write about his dealing with and solution of the problems of dramatic verse. Only a consideration of the plays themselves will reveal his growth as a dramatic poet. Yeats would probably have agreed with Eliot who defined a verse play as follows:

A verse play is not a play done into verse, but a different kind of play: in a way more realistic than 'naturalistic drama,' because, instead of clothing nature in poetry, it should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance. It may allow the characters to behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency. It may use any device to show their real feelings and volitions, instead of just what, in actual life, they would normally profess to be conscious of; it must reveal, underneath the vacillating or infirm character, the indomitable unconscious will, and underneath the resolute purpose of the planning animal, the victim of circumstances, and the doomed or sanctified being. So the poet with ambitions of the theatre, must discover the laws, both of another kind of verse and of another kind of drama. The difficulty of the author is also the difficulty of the audience. Both have to be trained.... 60
When Yeats seriously assumed the tasks of a dramatist, at the age of 34 years, he made no decisive break in his writing to mark his assumption of the new role or of a new set of theories. He does indicate his departure from the Pre-Raphaelite ideas of language, the conventional literary language of which Yeats was weary because it separated his imagination from life. Ellmann points out that Yeats became aware that his work was changing:

This was accentuated by his having to write plays for a popular audience at the newly founded Abbey theatre. In the preface of his 1906 volume of Poems, he remarked:

To me drama...has been the search for more of manful energy, more of cheerful acceptance of whatever arises out of those outlines of lyric poetry that are blurred with desire and vague regret.

He shows an awareness, gained through revisions of early plays and through study of the stage, of the limitations dramatic structure places on poetry. "Deirdre and Baile's Strand, unified after I had torn up many manuscripts, are more profound than the sentimental Land of Heart's Desire, than the tapestry-like Countess Cathleen, finished scene by scene...." He stopped writing miracle plays and took up heroic themes. His enthusiasm for the heroic cycles and tradition was probably inspired by Lady Gregory's translations of the sagas in Cuchulain of Muirthemne (1902) and Gods and Fighting Men (1903).

The King's Threshold may be considered a transition piece, for it contains qualities of both the miracle plays and of the heroic
plays. Other playwrights were writing better plays about the peasants than Yeats, and he consequently turned to kings, queens, and great Irish heroes. The play is based on an incident in the *Immheacht na Trom-daimhe*, a "middle-Irish story of the demands of the poets at the Court of King Guaire of Gort..." In the saga this satire on poets is a minor incident brought in to show the demanding and overbearing attitude of the bards.

Seanchan, the chief bard, having demanded a feast, is annoyed by the behavior of the feasters, and swears that he will not eat or drink until the nobles of Connaught have been dismissed. The king generously sends various choice foods to tempt him, but he remains firm and refuses them all. Yet he is represented as condescending to eat the leavings of the servant-girl; but is forstalled in his meal by mice. So incensed is he that he satirises both mice and cats, because the cats have not suppressed the mice as they should. Iru-san, the chief cat, hears of the satire and comes to attack Seanchan, who changes his tone and becomes humble and flattering.

Yeats, as he says in a note, "twisted it about and revised its moral that the poet might have the best of it." He made of the satirical story a dramatization of the supremacy of the poet, of dreams and imagination, over the rhetoricians and the public men. In the play Seanchan, being denied his rightful place at the high table of the king, resorts to boycott, a favorite Irish custom, and lies down on the king's threshold. Refusing all food, he is sure to die and thereby will bring disgrace upon the king who refused to give him the honor due a poet. Weygangt throws light on the subject by equating, to some extent, the king and Ireland, since the king, like an Irishman, is supposed to be able to do no wrong. The play is Yeats's way of telling Ireland that her poetry is as necessary as her political orations, and that poetry must be admired and read for its own sake, not for its patriotic con-
tent. The poet should be, as in the old days, as important to a king and his people as a man of action. The king in the play has forgotten this and invites a series of people to plead with the poet to give up the hunger strike: the poet's pupils, an old family servant, the mayor of the town, the palace chamberlain, a soldier, the poet's beloved. These having failed, the king himself comes to the poet, but he too fails. Seanchan has no fear of death, for in death he would not only vindicate poets, but would find the beginning of spiritual life. One might compare the voyage of Forgael toward death and therefore toward spiritual life in The Shadowy Waters. The contrasts between Forgael and the materialistic crew-members and the rational Aibric are paralleled by Seanchan's arguments here. Each of the king's ambassadors is a different yard-stick against which one can measure the value of poetry, the king, like Aibric, being afraid of the poetic imagination and of what it will lead to, and Seanchan, like Forgael, declaring the absolute value of poetry and the imagination or intuition. There are two endings for the play, and both are triumphs for poetry. In both the king takes Seanchan's pupils as hostages, threatening to kill them if the poet does not relent. The pupils urge Seanchan to die, and to proclaim to the end the rights of poets. In the "happy" ending the king sees his error and concedes to Seanchan. By having the king remove his crown and give it to the poet, proclaiming Seanchan king, Yeats dramatized the poet's rightful place in the world; and by having Seanchan place the crown on the king's head, Yeats dramatized the poet's power to make kings. In the "tragic" ending, Seanchan dies. It is a superior ending for the play, consistent with the action as developed. Seanchan triumphs through death, having learned the secret of the
dead, having learned why "dead faces laugh," thus carrying to its conclusion his belief and assertion that release from the body is to be welcomed. His pupils beg for death, but the king refuses their requests. The play ends with the poets bearing their master's body in lamentations, and in proclamations of the greatness of poetry. By affirming the poet's greatness, the funeral march becomes a triumphant parade when the youngest poet says:

Yet make triumphant music; sing aloud
For coming times will bless what he has blessed
And curse what he has cursed.

(Oldest Pupil:) No, no, be still,
Or pluck a solemn music from the strings.
You wrong his greatness speaking so of triumph.

(Youngest Pupil:) O silver trumpets, be you lifted up
And cry to the great race that is to come.
Long throated swans upon the waves of time,
Sing loudly for beyond the wall of the world
That race may hear our music and awake.

(Oldest Pupil:) Not what it leaves behind it in the light
But what it carries with it to the dark
Exalts the soul; nor song nor trumpet blast
Can call up races from the worsening world
To mend the wrong and mar the solitude
Of the great shade we follow to the tomb. 69

The language of these last speeches is entirely fitting for the occasion and for the poets who speak it; but it shows traces of the decoration, the elaboration which is lyric rather than dramatic. Yeats had not yet stripped his style sufficiently for the theatre's purposes. And though he had taken a subject from the heroic days, he was still dealing with problems which are predominant in the miracle plays of the earlier period. The King's Threshold, then, is not typical of the Abbey plays. More representative is On Baile's Strand, also completed in 1903, the first of his plays on Cuchulain and the play with which his second phase truly begins.
With this play Yeats had left his peasant-folk....Kings and their contenders, their lovers and their poets, became his heroic figures; and such figures in his plays have the remoteness of powers passionately warring on the peaks of human isolation. Their tragic splendors are more in harmony with the aristocratic dignity of his speech, and that speech is heard in mounting triumph throughout this cycle of heroic plays—in *On Baile's Strand*, in *Deirdre*, and in *The Green Helmet*. In these plays spirit and intellect are clinched in utterances of power, wisdom and nobility. Here the union of verse and action is also an excellent welding. There is nothing unwieldy. Solid poetry—direct as prose—is nimble to the players' mouths and movements.

The play follows closely the version in Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, but enlarges the simple theme of father against son to include the conflict of the poetic man against the practical man, a familiar theme in Yeats's plays. The practical Conchubar decides to subject the undisciplined Cuchulain to an oath of allegiance. He will use Cuchulain, a great warrior, in a practical way by making war upon the wild Scottish queen Aiofe who years ago had been conquered and wooed by Cuchulain. Cuchulain had, since that time, refused to settle down and marry one of the local queens, since none of them measured up to the wild woman of the north. Conchubar sees Aiofe as merely a threat to his land, but Cuchulain sees the strife she is causing the king as testimony of greater love. The fierce queen hates Cuchulain for having deserted her, and will not rest until she has ruined the land.

Cuchulain, taunted by having no son, decides that his immortality does not depend on children but on the greatness of his deeds, about which poets will sing forever. Secretly, however, he wants a son, and is haunted by the thought in his dreams. Having taken the oath, he is forced to fight a young man from Aiofe's land even though he had instinctively seen something of himself in the young man and had offered friendship. Conchubar, taunting the poetic man for his intuition and
emotion, says that Cuchulain has bewitched the boy, and gradually friendship is turned to suspicion and fury. The practical world triumphs over the world of private relationships and heroic feeling when Cuchulain slays the boy, only then learning that he was his son. Cuchulain becomes mad and fights with the sea in his grief.

This main action is enveloped by the commentary of the chorus-like Blind Man, who is crafty but helpless, and Fool, who is trusting but a fool. The conversations of these two give the audience full knowledge of identities and of future actions and of what is significant in the actions. They are parallel figures, speaking in prose, for the heroic characters, speaking in blank verse. They are used to describe off-stage action, especially Cuchulain's fight with the sea, as well as to set the passionate moments in a wider context. Their homely talk sets off the heroic actions, putting the intense emotions at arm's length, or in perspective. In the midst of the Fool's reporting Cuchulain's tragic frenzy, the Blind Man makes plans, and the play ends with his saying: "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." This ending seems a typical expression of a peculiar kind of Irish wit, a sardonic, bitter laughter. The tragic tone of the play is heightened by this ironic comment of the comic characters on the tragic action: while a hero fights in a magnificent insane rage, the peasants conspire to take advantage of the opportunity to steal bread from the king's kitchen. This may seem inappropriate, but it is similar to the drunken babble and laughter following the tragic action in O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock, and to much of the fierce wit in Synge, as well as to Swift's, Shaw's, or Joyce's use of laughter to cloak or to set off
tragic significance.

The play is skillfully constructed. Of those who produced and acted in it at the Abbey, Lennox Robinson says that it is "perhaps his most perfect verse-play," and W. G. Fay said that "as an actor and producer, I venture to say [it] is the most brilliant achievement in theatrical blank verse of our time." Yeats's deftness in handling the story becomes apparent when the play is compared with his poem on the same subject, "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea." In the poem Emer, in her jealousy, sends her son to kill his father Cuchulain, though he does not know that the man is the great warrior whose fame he admires.

The boy, following his mother's instructions, camps near the Red Branch camp, and when he is challenged by Red Branch men he refuses to give his name except "At the sword-point, and waits till we have found/Some feasting man that the same oath has bound." Cuchulain is of course that man, and they fight "in the leafy shade." The action is brief, and in his dying breath the boy reveals his identity. While the father mourns, Conchubar realizes the Cuchulain will arise from his grief in rage, and orders the Druids to delude him to make him fight sea-horses instead of men. After three days Cuchulain

Stared on the horses of the sea, and heard
The cars of battle and his own name cried;
And fought with the invulnerable tide.

This simple story is altered in the play to focus the action and to provide motives and significance, thereby building up intensity and suspense, qualities not found in the earlier plays. The play is not motivated by a wife's jealousy, but by the conflict between two types of men and by the oath. The chorus of Blind Man and Fool fills in details of the story which the audience might not know, and forecast the tragic
action. Instead of camping outside, the Young Man rushes into the Red Branch hall, sword drawn. The action is slowed by Yeats's development of a further facet of the Conchubar–Cuchulain conflict, this time by showing their opposing attitudes toward the Young Man instead of toward the oath. Three women describe the battle outside, after which the Fool and Blind Man enter again, arguing as Conchubar and Cuchulain had argued, though on a lower level. One of the women who watches the combat between Cuchulain and his son says:

Life drifts between a fool and a blind man
To the end, and nobody can know his end. 75

In a note to a later play Yeats says he made the Fool and the Blind Man shadows of Cuchulain and Conchubar. They are "those combatants who turn the wheel of life." Cuchulain, who sees and feels the situation but is foolish in letting the king convince him that his heart has been bewitched, is like the Fool; and Conchubar, who is clever, crafty, but blind to mysteries of emotion and intuition and poetry, is the Blind Man. Cuchulain returns from combat, and in conversation with the two men slowly realizes what he has done, trembling and striking at Conchubar's empty throne, then rushing out to do heroic combat with the king. But as the Fool explains, "He is going up to King Conchubar....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....he is fighting the waves," to which the Blind Man adds: "He sees King Conchubar's crown on every one of them." Cuchulain, like the other noble characters in Yeats's plays, never forgot his rank. Instead of crying out, as in the saga, he says nothing, trembles with grief, and does heroic battle. This classic restraint, such as one would find in Greek rather than in Elizabethan
tragedy, is also found in Yeats’s most famous play about lovers, Deirdre.

Deirdre corresponds to Yeats’s theories of tragedy. In it an epic is compressed into a one-act play in which only a few characters appear to develop the intensity and universality of passions Yeats found in the original story. The plot is the familiar triangle found in other famous love stories, such as Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet, or Pelleas and Mélisande, which embody the love myth. As in Greek drama, only the last hour of a tragic situation is recorded, the climax of seven years action. The whole complex relationship is focused in the meeting of Conchubar, Naisi and Deirdre in the guest house after the lovers have returned to Ireland. The tragic end of Naisi and Deirdre is foreshadowed by the fact that this house was the one in which Redstripe and his wife had played chess while awaiting death. The chess-board is still there, and reminds everyone that the earlier inhabitants had been victims of treachery, of broken promises. The parallels in the stories give greater depth to Yeats’s play, and greater dramatic intensity, especially when Deirdre and Naisi themselves play chess. There is an heroic attitude in the whole proceeding, the lovers maintaining dignity in the face of destruction, assuming a pose while waiting for the king to have his vengeance upon them as Deirdre fears he will. All the characters assume the tragic mask, or “keep up appearances” in the midst of their passions.

As in On Baile’s Strand, a chorus, this time of musicians and Fergus, gives the audience full knowledge of the situation and of events about which some or all the characters are ignorant. Into their speeches is compressed the narrative on which Synge and “AE” expended two acts in their versions of the story.
But the period was not wholly taken up with tragedy. In 1908 Yeats wrote a farce on an incident in the Cuchulain saga, *The Golden Helmet*, and in 1910 rewrote it in ballad meter, renaming it *The Green Helmet*. The play is Yeats's attempt to adapt his heroic form to the purposes of comedy, as well as to celebrate his hero, Cuchulain, who is the central character for a series of plays, and to remind audiences of the days of heroism when a man could offer his life in the cause of honor. The story is, briefly, about fear of a Red Man who has won a wager for one of the kings to give up his head when the Red Man shall return for it. Cuchulain offers to meet with the mysterious man, and the characters begin to quarrel about the relative merit and courage of the kings. When the Red Man appears, Cuchulain kneels before him, offering his head, and at that moment the Red Man reveals his true identity: he is the Rector of the Land, and in this fashion chooses the man most fit for its championship. Cuchulain receives the green helmet, emblem of his position among warriors. His heroic gesture has set him above other men.

Yeats's other comedy, *The Pot of Broth*, and the slight, though much anthologized, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, are written in a west Ireland dialect, and neither is representative of Yeats's work as a playwright. Both owe a great deal of their success to Lady Gregory who helped Yeats with the dialogue. He said in a preface to the 1934 edition of the plays, that "she had generally some part wherever there is dialect, and often where there is not." In an open letter to Lady Gregory, 1903, used as a note for *Cathleen ni Houlihan* he writes: "We turned my dream into the little play...and when we gave it to the little theatre in Dublin and found that the working people liked it, you helped me to put my other dramatic fables into speech;" and of *The Pot of Broth*, in another note:
I hardly know how much of the play is my own work, for Lady Gregory helped me as she has helped in every play of mine where there is dialect, and sometimes where there is not. In those first years of the Theatre we all helped one another with plots, ideas, and dialogue, but certainly I was the most indebted as I had no mastery of speech that purported to be of real life. This play may be more Lady Gregory's than mine, for I remember once urging her to include it in her own work, and her refusing to do so. 79

Similarly, he tried to persuade her to sign The Unicorn from the Stars, 80 "her share in it is so great."

The usual classification of Cathleen ni Houlihan as a political and patriotic play was objected to by Yeats in notes already quoted. There is, one finds, a deep feeling for the land and its past, rather than mere political expediency, in the play. It reflects a change in Yeats's thought from The Land of Heart's Desire in which the girl left this world in pursuit of fairy land, because in the later play there is pursuit of freedom for the nation, of service for the country. This is but another indication that Yeats had been profoundly affected by the discovery of nationality, while at the same time it indicates his combining concern for nation with continued concern for the spirit, since Cathleen also represents spiritual freedom. He wrote in 1902 that the play "is the perpetual struggle of the cause of Ireland and every other ideal cause against private hopes and dreams, against all that we mean when we say the world." There is also a use of myth, Yeats transferring the ancient ritual of renewal through sacrifice to the Ireland of 1798. The scene is Killala, near which, in that year, Humbert landed an expedition from France to aid the great rebellion of '98. This is close to his earlier practice in the miracle plays, as is The Pot of Broth, a trivial comedy on a tramp who persuades a woman that he can make broth by putting a philosopher's stone in water. He, having once been refused food
by her, manages to trick her and get most of the food in the house. The plot, taken from the lore of Irish peasants, makes a good little comedy, helping to fill the repertory which was weak in comedy. With this play, Yeats began to reveal his sense of humor, at the same time revealing his limitations as a writer of comedy. This farce is dangerously close to the facile theatre fare of London, and Yeats had higher ideals for his Dublin theatre.

Among the plays of higher motive was The Hour-Glass, a modern morality play using the salvation motif, like Everyman. The play is based on the story "The Priest's Soul" which Yeats found in Lady Wilde's Ancient Legends of Ireland (1887). From this simple tale of a wise man saved from damnation by the faith of a child Yeats created a framework in which he could demonstrate his ideas on the struggle between religion and rationalism. Traditional personification is used: the Wise Man being science; the Fool, intuition; the Pupils, the common herd, slaves to formulae. The story is of a wise man who had spent years of learning and research in a denial of the invisible world. In contradiction to reason, however, his spirit has revealed to him premonitions of the phenomena he denies. When his students bring him a passage to elucidate (their chance selection of this passage having opened the play), he is troubled because the passage is similar to a dream he has twice had: "There are two living countries, one visible and one invisible, and when it is summer there, it is winter here, and when it is November with us, it is lambing-time there." Yeats wrote in A Vision, concerning this "text" which he took for the play:

I thought I discovered this antithesis of the seasons when some countryman told me that he heard the lambs of Faery bleating in November, and, read in some heroic tale of supernatural
Henn, when he says that the play deserves more attention than it has received, bases part of his argument on Yeats's use of this concept of two living countries. This is the "groundwork, as it were, for part of the philosophy of the later poems, and in particular of 'Supernatural Songs'." And further, that "this is the thought of the 'irrational force' of 'The Second coming', the dance of agony and frenzy that is the background to 'Byzantium'."

The Wise Man's Reason is losing its power, and he is losing his positive assurance which had given weight to his negation of spirit. An Angel comes to him, telling him that he will die when the sands of the hour-glass have fallen through, and since "You have denied there is a Purgatory,/ Therefore that gate is closed; you have denied/ There is a Heaven, and so that gate is closed." To escape Hell and to be at peace forever, the Wise Man is given the chance of finding one person who still believes within the hour left him in life. He pleads with his students, but has taught them too well: they think he is testing them. He implores his wife to believe, but in vain. Only Teigue the Fool has escaped his teachings of scientific rationalism, and the Wise Man kneels at his feet to beg for belief; but the Fool is intent on trivial things, and not until the Wise Man is dead is he willing to confess his faith. In his last moments the Wise Man, like Doctor Faustus, realizes the futility of his quest: the better course is submission to God, for therein lies true wisdom.

Two versions of the play are printed in *Plays in Prose and Verse*, the 1907 prose and 1912 verse texts. An earlier (1903) version had
ended with the Fool granting the Wise Man's request, and thereby saving him, as Peer Gynt was saved by a fool, but Yeats said that the later end is "closer to my own thought as well as more effective theatrically."

This brief examination of plays Yeats wrote for the Abbey demonstrates his new form: the dramatic representation of an heroic person at the peak of emotional intensity, usually tragic, borne with classic restraint by assuming the mask. He is no longer dwelling in another world, no longer presenting persons in reverie or dreams, but is concentrating on heroes of great personal energy. Most of the esoteric symbols have been excluded, and his vocabulary now includes the talk of plain men who set off the tragic action by contrasting with it. He escaped the flatness and mediocrity of contemporary drama by refusing to concentrate on the surface of life, finding his image for the deeper life in mythology. He said in a letter to Sturge Moore that "all my theories depend upon just this—rooting of mythology in the earth." These plays, in one respect, may be classified as "problem plays," but unlike Ibsen's plays, they are concerned with spiritual problems rather than social problems. On the other hand, they are like Ibsen's plays, once one sees beyond the immediate social problem, and like all great plays, in that the central concern is with a character's ability to meet a crisis, his personal ability to solve the problem of personal and public responsibility. Like Cuchulain fighting the waves, this implies a trial of the soul, and a triumph of value.

Cuchulain, Naisi, Seanchan, Deirdre—indeed all of Yeats' tragic heroes—are noble persons who live in terms of guiding passions that are too large for a limited temporal structure. Because of his excessive passion the hero is in continual conflict with some external person, perhaps with some motive within himself. When that conflict reaches a climax, the hero then asserts his force of being with an extravagant gesture:
Seanchan’s hunger strike, Deirdre’s suicide, Cuchulain’s fight with the waves. The gesture is meaningless except as an expression of the hero’s passionate nature. 90

These plays are, for all the theory, not far removed from the great tradition of drama, for in their heroic and tragic gestures, the heroes move out of the world of conflict and confusion, and give us a revelation of our own possibilities. Yeats wrote in his autobiography:

I know now that revelation is from the self, but from that age-long memoried self, that shapes the elaborate shell of our mollusc and the child in the womb, that teaches the birds to make their nest; and that genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind. 91

This, as well as his practice, seems to contradict his theories, for though pure tragedy may be pure passion, the work of genius is the relating of the *anima mundi*, which was Yeats’s term for what Jung called the collective memory of the world, with the *anima hominis*, or mundane shell of our daily life, thus producing a Unity of Being.

At the core he remained certain that passion was the only proper subject for poetry, but he now conceded the importance of the claim that passion should grow from circumstances and that a large part of the poet’s job is to dramatize the relation between limited circumstances and boundless passion. Therefore, if Yeats’ great poetic achievement was in his later poetry to unify symbolism and naturalism, to render the universal symbol natural and the concrete image symbolic, then his initial and essential step toward that unification was his writing of plays for the Abbey. 92

The passion was guided and restrained, sometimes through the dramatic device of a chorus’ ironic commentary on the passionate action.

Other dramatic devices made their way into his dramaturgy in his search for a form in which he could best express his ideas in verse. There are formal visual elements of symbolic settings, and conventions of chorus, and of dramatic metaphor. In *On Baile’s Strand* he succeeded in realizing several levels of action and significance within a controlled
structure, using prose for the Blind Man and Fool, a four stress line for the song of the women, and for the main action a blank verse which is Yeats's own and which is, unlike blank verse of other nineteenth century poets, suitable for the stage. Yeats, by having had drama thrust upon him, was making himself a considerable playwright.
Chapter V

Formation of a Private Theatre

1. Withdrawal from the Abbey
2. Discovery of the Noh
3. Myth and Philosophy

"I wanted an audience of fifty or a hundred, and if there are more, I beg them not to shuffle their feet or talk when the actors are speaking."
—Yeats, The Death of Cuchulain

"...and fit audience find, though few."
—Milton, Paradise Lost
I do not mean to imply by my title that Yeats withdrew entirely from the public theatre. He was still a share-holder and manager of the Abbey and was active in making policies for the Abbey; but he no longer had to write plays to fill the repertory of the theatre, and he began to develop, intensify, and extend some of his ideas. Marriage, raising a family, discovery of a fulfillment of the philosophical system toward which he was working, revision of his technique and style, his age, coupled with heart attacks and nervous breakdowns, and many other factors contributed to his withdrawal from active participation in the Abbey productions. He took up residence with his wife in a tower at Baylee. After The Green Helmet (1910), he began to put off the embroidered coat of mythology:

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. 1

He was caught up by "the fascination of what's difficult" and in the same poem placed his 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. 2

His endeavors to create a great popular art had failed, and in 1913 he questioned: "Thereon I ask myself if my conception of my own art is altering, if there, too, I praised what I once derided." 3

In his open letter to Lady Gregory (1919), Yeats publicly admitted the failure of the Abbey to take the way he had hoped for. "...I address to you this letter," he wrote, "wherein I shall explain, half for your ears, half for other ears, certain thoughts that have made me believe that the Abbey Theatre can never do all we had hoped." 4 After the rapid and often excited writing contained in the issues of Samhain, this letter comes as a quiet, dispassionate appendix. Its beauty is at once apparent, for it is the prose of a defeated man who sees in his defeat a measure of success. Though the Abbey had not become a poetic theatre, it was none the less a solid achievement, a good theatre of another kind. Instead of bitterness, there is a calm search for a new theatre, a new mode. Though he sees that the peasant plays are good, he says: "Yet we did not set out to create this sort of theatre, and its success has been to me a discouragement and a defeat." 5 He said that

You and I and Synge, not understanding the clock, set out to bring again the Theatre of Shakespeare or rather perhaps of Sophocles...We thought we could bring the old folk-life to Dublin, patriotic feeling to aid us, and with the folk-life all the life of the heart, understanding heart, according to Dante's definition, as the most interior being; but the modern world is more powerful than any Propaganda or even than any special circumstance, and our success has been that we have made a theatre of the head, and persuaded Dublin playgoers to think about their own trade or profession or class and their life within it, so long as the stage curtain is up, in relation to Ireland as a whole. 6

Thus, he came to his new intent: "I want to create for myself an unpopu-
lar theatre and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour and never to many."

In his note to *At the Hawk's Well*, he chronicles his withdrawal from the public theatre. "A couple of years ago," he writes, "I was sitting in my stall at the Court Theatre in London watching one of my own plays, *The King's Threshold.*" He found himself sitting behind an audience which showed boredom, mild interest, and fascination. He was struck, however, by the bored people, knowing that the poetry-lovers were few and that the bulk of audiences were unappreciative, or were watching the play for wrong reasons. He concluded that "being sensitive, and not knowing how to escape the chance of sitting behind the wrong people, I have begun to shrink from sending my muses where they are but half-welcomed; and even in Dublin, where the pit has an ear for verse, I have no longer the appetite to carry me through the daily rehearsals." Though he was tired, weary of the routine and riots of the public theatre, he was nonetheless a dramatist:

Yet I need a theatre; I believe myself to be a dramatist; I desire to show events and not merely tell of them; ...and I seem to myself most alive at the moment when a room full of people share the one lofty emotion. 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. Certainly those who care for my kind of poetry must be numerous enough, if I can bring them together, to pay half-a-dozen players who can bring all their properties in a cab and perform in their leisure moments.

As suggested in passages from earlier essays, already quoted, Yeats was interested in returning to the ancient roots of drama. His aim was a theatre of poetry, of ritual, of imagination in which, like the Greek and Elizabethan, imagination, stimulated by the words of the poet, supplied most of the scenery. He now returned to a more primitive, or more
sophisticated, physical theatre, closer to oriental conventions or to the simple theatre on which miracle and mystery plays were acted, no more than a church-door or platform.

This comes as no new development, but rather as an extension and purification of earlier ideas. He has said as early as 1899 that "we must make a theatre for ourselves and our friends, and for a few simple people who understand from sheer simplicity what we understand from scholarship and thought. We have planned the Irish Literary Theatre with this hospitable emotion...." This implies a certain privacy in his conception of theatre, but the Literary Theatre, like the National Theatre which followed it, did not conform to Yeats's plans. Of the National Theatre he said in *Dramatis Personae*: "The Abbey Theatre will fail to do its full work because there is no authority to explain why the more difficult pleasure is the nobler pleasure." The audiences preferred what is easy and vulgar, and Yeats was forced to return to the religious rituals of ancient drama. Frank O'Connor, who was once a director of the Abbey Theatre, suggests:

The "Playboy" riots were a greater crisis in his life than his biographers have yet understood. They came in 1907, after years of personal frustration with Maud Gonne; her marriage, her subsequent separation from her husband and repeated refusal to share his life. Because of them, he conceived a hatred of Ireland and of the theatre. The quarrel with Ireland was made up after the Easter Rising of 1916 when so many of the men he had looked down on sacrificed their lives.

His quarrel with the theatre was never made up. Within a year of the riots he had established Lennox Robinson in the Abbey Theatre against the wishes of Lady Gregory, and never again assumed full responsibility for its direction.

In his withdrawal from the theatre, Yeats compared himself to the withdrawal of artists from public projects. "We must recognize the
change as the painters did when, finding no longer palaces and churches to decorate, they made framed pictures to hang upon the wall. Whatever we lose in mass and in power we should recover in elegance and in subtlety." It was toward such a recovery that Yeats dedicated his later years as a dramatist, not in an attempt to recreate the irrecoverable past, the popular theatre of Sophocles and Shakespeare.

I gave up the fight, began writing little dance plays, founded upon a Japanese model, that need no scenery, no properties, and can be performed in studio or drawingroom, thinking that some group of students might make a little money playing them and gradually elaborate a technique that would respect literature and music alike. Yet he knew the limitations he placed on himself by relying on this new dramatic form:

In writing these little plays I knew that I was creating something which could only fully succeed in a civilization very unlike ours. I think they should be written for some country where all classes share in half-mythological, half-philosophical folk-belief which the writer and his small audience lift into a new subtlety. All my life I have longed for such a country....

For the most part Yeats was correct in his diagnosis: his dance plays based on Japanese conventions have never become popular works of art, nor have the later plays in which he modified the form considerably. Yet, some of these later plays were performed by the Abbey's new ballet school, with which Ninette de Valois at the time was connected before she went to England to begin her work which culminated in the great revival of dance in England in the form of the Sadler's Wells Ballet Company. Kavanaugh says of the later plays:

These plays were exactly the kind of strong purgative needed for an audience which was coming to believe that the plays
of Shiels were the highest kind of drama. They were produced at the Abbey rather than at the Peacock. Many were so sickened by the first dose that they made certain not to get another, and they carefully avoided in future all plays by Yeats. Up to the time of his death, Yeats continued to bring periodically before the Abbey audience these new, obscure plays, half dance and half music. They at least had the effect of reminding the public that the Abbey was a poet's theatre, even though it might have fallen on lean years.

Yeats's new theory of drama is based not on a new form, for as I have shown elements of the form were in the early works, only now being carried to their fullest extension; nor is the new theory based on a new concept of performance, for Yeats's whole reform of the theatre was grounded in a return to simplicity, this later phase being the fullest application of his theories. After having dwelt for many years on creating a national theatre, he rejected his work and sought a more specialized audience who would appreciate verse plays. He later wrote poetic plays for the Abbey, but they seem more reminders of what Yeats had wanted, reminders for the audience of what the theatre had been intended for, rather than serious attempts to establish verse on the stage any more. These plays which follow the dance plays do, however, represent a synthesis, a compromise after the trend toward simplicity and privacy had culminated in the Plays for Dancers.

The human element was almost entirely negated in the acting of these dance plays. He gives hints of the kind of movement and gesture he desired in the preface to *Four Plays for Dancers* when he says that "the players must move a little stiffly and gravely like marionettes and, I think, to the accompaniment of drum taps." One is reminded of D. H. Lawrence's reactions and excitement when he saw the puppets of Palermo:

*Andiamo!* Again the word is yelled out, and they set off. At
first one is all engaged watching the figures: their brilli-
ance, their blank, martial stare, their sudden angular
gestures. There is something extremely suggestive in them.
How much better they fit the old legend-tales than living
people would do. Nay, if we are going to have human beings
on the stage, they should be masked and disguised. For in-
fact drama is enacted by symbolic creatures formed out of
human consciousness: puppets if you like: but not human
individuals. Our stage is all wrong, so boring in its per-
sonality.

This is astonishingly close to Yeats's ideas, but instead of going to
the Italian puppets for inspiration, Yeats took as point of departure
the Noh plays of Japan.

Though Yeats was, as he admitted, "rather tired of the theatre,
he did not stop writing plays. He was not entirely sure what he want-
ed, but he was sure that experiment was necessary since the existing
forms of movement and stage-production were not satisfactory for the
new mode of drama toward which his ideas were leading him. The diffi-
culty of getting actors to speak verse and to act with the necessary
passion had tired him. The Abbey players usually succeeded, but there
was often a predominance of the prosaic style in acting. Synge once
quipped that an actress, using the prosaic style of acting needed for
such playwrights as Pinero, "had turned Yeats' Deirdre into The Second
Mrs. Conchubar." Yeats, unlike Pinero, Jones, and the rest, was
aiming at reserve, self-control, subtlety, all of which were necessary
if the acting was not to overpower the verse. His ideas for a poetic
theatre and a new mode of drama took form during the winter of 1912-
1913, when Ezra Pound was acting as his secretary and nurse, Yeats at
the time suffering from a digestive disorder and defective eye-sight. He said later that "with the help of Japanese plays 'translated by Ernest Fenollosa and finished by Ezra Pound,' I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect, and symbolic, and having no need of mob or press to pay its way—an aristocratic form." The key statement is that "I have invented a new form of drama," which serves to remind us that these plays are not merely imitations from the Japanese, but are the catalyst whose presence led to the fruition of Yeats's ideas. The basic structure was already present in the earlier plays, though not so formally and ritualistically presented. As Parkinson points out:

In _Deirdre_ (1907), for instance, the scene opens with songs by two musicians; a subsidiary character then enters and talks, chiefly to himself with occasional asides to and from the musicians. He then meets the two main characters, who engage in dialogue; the supernatural then intervenes, the play reaches its climax, the singers conclude with a choral comment. The general pattern of the action is similar to that of many Noh plays, and it was a pattern toward which Yeats was by temperament inclined, allowing for a brief intense action dramatized mainly in dialogue, accompanied by song.... The Noh drama provided a form allowing for the natural development of certain tendencies in Yeats' early plays; it encouraged and strengthened, it did not shape and change.

Parkinson's valuable article continues by countering the belief, which has become axiomatic, that Ezra Pound played a major part in the creation of Yeats's later style and poetry, and concludes by saying: "But Yeats—not Pound—made Yeats a major poet." A similar case of a poet-playwright coming under the "influence" of the Noh is Paul Claudel, He served as ambassador for the French government to Japan in 1921-1926, and in 1923 wrote an article on the Noh. His plays show similarities with the Noh, but the symbols and effects were already present in earlier
plays, the Japanese plays merely intensifying and helping to realize
26 the potentialities of the earlier techniques.

The Noh, which means "accomplishment" or "talent," probably inter-
terested Yeats partly because of its religious origins, since Yeats
believed drama to be primarily derived from religious ceremonies, and
since it was to this ritualistic origin that Yeats wished to return.

The immediate parent of the Noh was "the Kaugura, a pantomimic dance,
which is performed at this day to the sound of fife and drum at Shinto
festivals, on a platform provided for that purpose." This dance was
supplemented by spoken dialogue probably in the fourteenth century, and
the Noh as a form began to evolve. "By the middle of the fourteenth
century, the Nō had assumed much of its present shape; that is, it was
a combination of singing, dancing and music, differing from earlier
dramatic forms chiefly in that it had plots which unified the three
28 elements." In the Yedo period the Shoguns began to give attention
to the Noh which had previously been purely religious performances,
29 having been composed by a school of Buddhist monks. From this period
on, writes Yeats,

...the Shogun and his court were as busy with dramatic poetry
as the Mikado and his with lyric. When for the first time
*Hamlet* was being played in London Noh was made a necessary
part of official ceremonies at Kiots, and young nobles and
princes, forbidden to attend the popular theatre, in Japan
as elsewhere a place of mimicry and naturalism, were en-
couraged to witness and to perform in spectacles where
speech, music, song, and dance created an image of nobility
and strange beauty. 30

A class or caste grew up which acted the plays, passing their tradition
of acting from generation to generation. They acted to small, select
audiences, since "to the vulgar the Nō are completely unintelligible." 31

Yeats also wanted a select audience, having tired of the theatre of

...
mobs and riots. He sought an audience to whom his poetry would be in-
telligible rather than seeking a poetry that would be intelligible to
the mob.

Though it is not a popular drama, the Noh has certain resemblances
to Greek drama, especially in the use of chorus, mask, religion, poetry,
and the use of farces to relieve tragic emotions, probably like the use
of Greek satyr plays. The characteristics of the Noh, and the use Yeats
made of them, are:

(1) a combination of text, music, and dance: Yeats seized
upon this combination as the culmination of the form toward which he had
been working. At The Hawk's Well, first of the plays for dancers, com-
bines poetic drama with dance (which had already been used as part of
the dramatic action in The Land of Heart's Desire), and songs (which
had appeared in The Countess Cathleen, Deirdre, On Baile's Strand, and
many other plays). In the plays for dancers and later plays, however,
these elements are given a greater dramatic unity and significance: in-
stead of appearing as incidental song or as developments of the plot,
the lyrics in later plays introduce the main images and symbols which
give the key to the action to follow; and instead of being merely part
of the action, the dance in the plays for dancers is the climax of the
play, that part of the action or emotion which cannot be expressed in
words but must be shown by movement and music. Yeats said:

At the climax instead of the disordered passion of nature
there is a dance, a series of positions and movements which
may represent a battle, a marriage, or the pain of a ghost....
The interest is not in the human form but in the rhythm to
which it moves, and the triumph of their art is to express
the rhythm in its intensity. 32

(2) use of chorus: Yeats followed the Noh rather than the
Greek tradition in this device. In the Noh the chorus never takes part in the action, but confines itself to recitations for the actors when they are dancing. Yeats combined the tasks of the musicians and the chorus, expanding those characters' function and economizing on the number of players needed. In *A Full Moon in March*, for instance, Yeats has the musician-chorus speak all the minor parts, as well as comment on the action and giving the opening and closing songs, and in *The Cat and the Moon* one of the musicians speaks the part of a saint.

(3) use of masks: Yeats followed the practice of the Noh, in which only principal characters, but especially persons playing women's roles, wore masks, although in *The Dreaming of the Bones* Yeats has the contemporary Young Man perform without a mask to contrast him with the other characters. The usual practice was to mask the characters, since Yeats compressed his action so that it could be revealed without minor characters, and to have the faces of the musicians made up to resemble masks. Yeats, aiming at a total artifice, said that "the face of the speaker should be as much a work of art as the lines that he speaks or the costume that he wears, that all may be as artificial as possible." His remark that *The Only Jealousy of Emer* was written "to find what dramatic effect one could get out of a mask, changed while the player remains upon the stage to suggest a change of personality," leads one to extend the mask metaphor and connect it with his theory of the mask, outlined in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* which was the first sketch of what would evolve into the elaborate system, which also uses the concept of mask, in *A Vision*. Such a comparison should not be pushed too far, however, since the mask in the
plays is more a dramatic device than an indication of personality.

The legendary characters about whom he was to write were themselves best presented as half-human, and in masks their faces would gain a dignity and power beyond the look of a human face which can never aspire to heroic proportions. He wrote:

A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some common-place player, or for that face repainted to suit his own fancy, the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice. A mask never seems but a dirty face, and no matter how close you go is yet a work of art; nor shall we lose by stilling the movement of the whole body. 35

(4) use of ghosts or spirits: as in Greek drama in which gods take part in the action, through deus ex machina, the plot of the Noh is often solved by entrance of a spirit at the climax, straightening or explaining the action. Yeats did not use this element of the Noh, though he did use a cast of ghosts in The Dreaming of the Bones, and spirits appear in Purgatory. The Sidhe in At the Hawk’s Well may be Yeats’s equivalent of the Noh spirit who enters at the climactic moment, but the concept is transferred to Irish lore and to Irish personages, a sidhe, which is Gaelic for wind, being fairies.

(5) use of little scenery, often merely impressionistic sketching of a background: Yeats designates only a screen, which is used for the actors to hide behind more than it is for scenery. Otherwise the stage can be “any bare space before a wall against which stands a patterned screen.” Yeats’s theatre had become any room, and like the Noh theatre, the audience sat on three sides of the action. There was no need for elaborate lighting systems since “we found it better to play by the light of a large chandelier. Indeed, I think...that the most effective lighting is the lighting we are most accustomed to in our
rooms." The speeches of the musician-chorus would set the scene by their dialogue and song much better than a scenery-painter could.

There will be no scenery, for three musicians, whose seeming sunburned faces will, I hope, suggest that they have wandered from village to village in some country of our dreams, can describe place and weather, and at moments action, and accompany it all by drum and gong or flute and dulcimer. Instead of the players working themselves into a violence of passion indecorous in our sitting-room, the music, the beauty of form and voice all come to climax in pantomimic dance. 38

This is similar to the Noh practice of playing a flute at important moments in the play.

(6) use of stylized movement: Yeats, as already stated, wanted movement somewhat like the movement of puppets. Through these movements as through the dialogue, they would enact a story familiar to the audience, and often with familiar language since plagiarism is not recognized as an offence in Japan. Yeats used the familiar Cuchulain legend for a series of plays, and Christian stories in Calvary and The Resurrection.

(7) use of a serious, often tragic, tone and very formal poetry; lines of seven and five syllables alternate, and heights of language are attained through short, sharp lines suggestive of vivid and precise images: Yeats wondered whether or not he was "fanciful in discovering in the plays...a playing upon a single metaphor...." Pound confirms Yeats's discovery when he writes that "...the Noh has its unity in emotion. It has also what we may call Unity of Image. At least the better plays are all built into the intensification of a single Image...." The opening lyric of Yeats's plays contains the key images or symbols to be used in the play, and the closing lyric repeats them, either as reinforcement of the meaning or as an
extension of their meaning. The action between the lyrics at times may almost be taken as an illustrative incident for the songs, as an exemplum of the meaning of the songs.

All these things contribute to the excellence of the Noh which, Ezra Pound says, lies "in emotion, not in action or externals"; and Yeats's use of them in the creation of his new form of drama helped him lift the action and meaning out of nature. With actors and scene which no longer pretended to be something else, the stylized plays developed ritualistically, a quality present in less degree in earlier plays.

3.

Yeats, who had earlier insisted on the ritualistic origins of the theatre, wrote to Sturge Moore in 1929, while rehearsing The Fighting of the Waves, a prose version of The Only Jealousy of Emer: "I always feel that my work is not drama but the ritual of a lost faith." Ellman comments that "Yeats had sporadically toyed with fertility ritual in his play The Green Helmet, and elsewhere; but he now cultivated this feature of his art with assiduity." The ancient basis of art has become a preoccupation of the twentieth century, spurred by the work of Frazer, Jung, Freud, and others, who revealed primitive sources and the connections of these rites and myths with modern life. There has been a reaction from the refinement of the nineteenth century, a return to "archaic" forms. In painting, Picasso studied and wrought a style from Negro masks and African sculpture; Rouault took his style from medieval stained glass windows; Braque shows the influence of perspectives used in Byzantine mosaics. In architecture, especially
apparent in the work of van de Rohe, new emphasis has been placed on
the complicated simplicity of Greek temples and Euclidian forms. In
music, Stravinsky's famous "primitive" *Le Sacre du Printemps* and the
use by the French moderns of "le jazz hot" show a return to unsophisti-
cated sources for sophisticated art. In literature, Yeats, Eliot, and
Joyce pioneered the use of myth and ritual as structural devices.

Eliot wrote in his well known review of *Ulysses*:

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel
> between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pur-
> suing a method which others must pursue after him... It
> is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a
> shape and a significance to the immense panorama of fu-
> tility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is
> a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need
> of which I believe Mr. Yeats to have been the first con-
> temporary to be conscious. 46

A myth is more than merely a legend involving superhuman and super-
natural personages, for it is also a body of belief, a repository of
symbols to which men attach significance. The myth gives a sense of
order, of pattern. Whereas science provides authority for the ra-
tional in man, the myth provides authority and order in other areas,
thereby supplementing our experience in the phenomenal world. As
Susanne K. Langer points out, myth is a function of man's ability to
symbolize, an ability which, as Ernest Cassirer shows in the open-
ing chapters of *An Essay on Man*, is peculiar to man. Symbol, rit-
ual, and myth are intricately connected. This relationship is much
too complex to examine at length here, but it may suffice to realize,
as Langer demonstrates in *Philosophy in a New Key*, that ritual is the
"formalization of overt behavior in the presence of the sacred ob-
jects," the objects being symbols, and that myth is an extension
and concretion of rituals in story or legend. Thus, just as the
reason in logos guides certain of our actions and ideas, the mystery in mythos gives us a design by which we may understand and order our inner or imaginative experience.

Drama, having begun in religious service, whether in the ritual of symbolic celebration of Dionysus or of the risen Christ, is ritualistic and mythic. The religious, and therefore symbolic and ritualistic, origins of Greek and of English drama are well known; yet it is probable that the early playwrights in Greece "owed a considerable debt, both for the content and the form of their plays, to priestly performers of sacred drama in ancient Egypt...." The Egyptian plays were, like the English miracle and morality plays, outgrowths of liturgy. And it was some form of drama allied to this origin that Yeats wished to create to replace the modern prose drama in which accidents of the scene replaces the essence. Eliot has used the mythic technique in his later plays, drawing from Greek plays his plots. As Douglas Bush says: "Beautiful simply as tales, the myths have constituted for modern poets a kind of poetic shorthand of infinite imaginative and emotional value." Similarly, Toynbee has used the myth of hero-quest, of withdrawal and return (fully examined as the chief action of myths of all parts of the world by Joseph Campbell) as part of the scheme on which he reconstructs the history of man; and the use of myth made by psychologists such as Freud and Jung is well known.

To emphasize the ritualistic nature of drama necessitates a revision of basic assumptions about the nature and purpose of drama, since one must suspend the theory of imitation and realize that while art and drama use imitation of nature as a means of communication they do not rise out of it. Art and drama translate ritual to a broader context
through the agency of the myth, producing actions with universal rather than particular meanings. This tradition appears to have been constant from the Greek dramatists to the time of Shakespeare, but from Shakespeare to Yeats there was a rupture in the tradition. After 1660 drama and ritual ceased to be connected, and reason and naturalism simplified the conflicts of drama into plots of love versus honor. After the death of drama in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, realism and naturalism became the prime tools of the dramatist in the revival of drama in the late nineteenth century and continuing into our own day. The Jacobean interest in realism and psychological drama was assumed to be the main tradition by critics. Yeats found himself living in a materialistic age, an age in which the love-myth had been reduced to sexual desire, in which biology and psychology had been substituted for passion and insight. Wishing to revive the ancient tradition, Yeats would not accept the realists' methods. Nor was he alone:

...like other poets of our day, he was without a coherent body of traditional beliefs from which he could draw support for his poetic statements. The life of the myth, in a poor and weakened state since the seventeenth century, had been fast ebbing away since Darwin and Huxley. Early contemporaries of Yeats, like Lionel Johnson, retired to a world of private symbols, to a last ditch position of romanticism. Later contemporaries, like MacLeish and Spender, sought their myth in the public world and occupied forward positions along with the rhetoricians.

Yeats is not to be identified with either of these. His concern, like Eliot's, was for the revival of the old tradition. 55

One method by which Yeats found continuity with the past and a form by which he could interpret the present was his philosophical system in A Vision, published privately in 1925, revised and republished in 1937. The book is a culmination of his previous thought, a combination and synthesis of ideas. There are remnants of Golden Dawn symbol-
ism and theory, combined with full development of concepts, sketched in his essay *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917), such as moon phases, personality as mask, tinctures, oscillations between opposites, cyclic history, reincarnation, and others. From 1914 to the first publication of *A Vision* in 1925 Yeats spent his time in study of philosophy and world literature, verifying his theories in other men's works; and in searching the records of the past for corroboration, he gave himself a liberal education. His scope widened from an Irish outlook to an international point of view, though he still used Irish themes and stories in much of his work. He gained a broader range of reference and therefore of significance. As Tindall says, through his "acquaintance with the European tradition from Homer to Jung...he could fill his poems with common images and references to familiar knowledge.

Through his private system he became a public poet." Yeats became at home in the world, having surveyed its history and its thought, and realized, as he said in his "September 1913," that

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Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.
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The system, based on the interpretation of geometrical symbols and figures which give an explanation of both the human mind and of history, was long held in disrepute; but recently critics have begun to see it in a different light, considering it not so much a philosophical system, in the manner of Hegel, but as similar to the work of Plato or of Jung in which myth is used to help explain what cannot be logically stated. A reviewer for *The Times* Literary Supplement wrote, very perceptively:

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Twenty or thirty years ago even very subtle perceptive critics, like Mr. Eliot and Dr. Richards, were profoundly embarrassed
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when they had to discuss the way in which Yeats's acknowledged greatness as a poet was related to his "ideas." In the fifteen years or so, however, since Yeats's death a number of critics, Mr. Ellmann is one of the most notable, have been moving towards a more flexible grasp of the problems this great poet raises. Yeats's doctrines are being more and more generally seen to-day as a surprisingly coherent pattern of symbols which, however little they may tell us about the ultimate nature of the universe, do tell us a very great deal about the deeper workings of the poetic mind, throwing light on why the human mind has recurrently to make myths and create symbols. 58

The general assumption was, before this insight into the true nature of Yeats's system, that though it was nonsense it gave Yeats metaphors for his poetry. This function was served, but man's tendency to make myths has deeper roots. This aspect is treated by Jaques Maritain in Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry which is quoted at length in Appendix A.

Principal symbols of A Vision are gyres and phases of the moon. By means of these metaphors Yeats constructs a cyclic history of man with the growth of culture in the new moon (phases one to eight), maturity at the full of the moon (phase fifteen), and decline in the waning moon resulting in the dark of the moon from which springs a new culture (phases sixteen to twenty-eight). These cycles last about two thousand years, and since our present civilization is in about phase twenty-six (this being the 1955th year of the Christian era), a change in our culture is at hand. Yeats made this the subject of his poem "The Second Coming." The change wrought by Christ's resurrection is chronicled in the Greek's speech as the close of his play The Resurrection, when the irrational Christian culture took the place of what had been before. Classification of personality follows much the same scheme, varying in the mixture of objectivity (the dark of the moon at phase one is complete objectivity) and subjectivity (the full moon at phase fifteen is complete subjectivity). Man cannot exist in either of these extremes,
leaving twenty-six possible types of personality. The psychology is based on the conflict of opposites determined by the phase in which the man lives or in which he should live since a man may be "out of phase." The Will (desire) is in opposition with the Mask (the thing desired) and the Creative Mind (conscious mind) is in opposition with the Body of Fate (physical and mental environment). In addition to these faculties, the Daimon, or the subconscious, plays a part, and all this grows more complicated, as complicated as the human personalities it is trying to explain, when the possibility of true and false Masks and Creative Minds is considered. Each phase is carefully defined, each progression from phase to phase described, and further, the Four Faculties listed above are matched by the Four Principles: the Husk, Passionate Body, Spirit, and Celestial Body.

The third part of the book is concerned with life after death, or "The Soul in Judgement." The soul goes through cycles in which it re-lives its earthly life, finally being freed from good and evil and reaching a state of beatitude. This concept is used as the basis for the plays Purgatory and The Dreaming of the Bones. In the fifth part of A Vision, called "Dove or Swan," Yeats gives a panoramic summary of his ideas on history and man, freed from the complexities of the diagrams and classifications. This section, I believe, contains some of the most beautiful prose of our century, though few people manage to work their way through the rest of the book to it.

This system is not, let me emphasize, Yeats's final word on the world and man. He modified and changed his ideas, and before his death repudiated certain ideas in the system. But he had achieved a unified view of the world, and had found means by which he could express his
concepts in concrete symbols. "The system...allows Yeats to see the world as a great drama, predictable in its larger aspects (so that the poet is not lost in a welter of confusion), but in a pattern which allows for the complexity of experience and the apparent contradictions of experience (so that the poet is not tempted to oversimplify)."

This new-found order and pattern gave Yeats greater facility in his use of symbols and myths; his increased knowledge and his increasing craftsmanship gave Yeats the vocabulary of a major poet. The next section of this thesis will examine the new theory of drama and the plays written after Yeats's withdrawal from the public theatre, relating these things, whenever possible, to his new theories of man and history, of art and drama.
Chapter VI

Dramatic Theory and Practice, 1912-1939

1. The Theory Extended
2. Plays

"I have aimed at tragic ecstasy and here and there in my own work and in the work of my friends I have seen it greatly played. What does it matter that it belongs to a dead art and to a time when a man spoke of experience and a culture that were not of his time alone, but held his time, as it were, at arms length, that he might be a spectator of the ages."

—Yeats, "On the Boiler"
1.

As T. S. Eliot attests, Yeats's plays for dancers were crucial in the formation of Yeats's reputation. He was well known, but as Eliot says, "Yeats did not appear, until after 1917, to be anything but a minor survivor of the '90s." Only after the first performance of *At the Hawk's Well* in that year did the younger poets and critics begin to see Yeats "rather as a more eminent contemporary than an elder from whom one could learn." Pound was advising editors of little magazines that they could make good "copy" from *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*, for which Yeats wrote the preface, since "there'll be a good deal to say soon, as Yeats is making a new start on the foundation of these Noh dramas."

Much of the theory, which is rather an extension of earlier practice than a wholly new start, implied in these plays has been stated in the preceding chapter in which I suggested that Yeats wanted to return to the ceremonious and mythic origins of drama. In the modern, materialistic, and rational world there would be of necessity a small audience for drama, since modern men want entertainment instead of poetry, passion, and subtlety. With the help of the Noh plays of Japan he was able to extend his form, shunning the realism that was created for common people "and was always their peculiar delight," since their minds, which
are "educated alone by schoolmasters and newspapers, are without memory of beauty and emotional subtlety." Only in the studio and drawing room would modern poets be able to found a true theatre of beauty.

Yeats set no store by the theory of progress, especially not in literature. "In literature also we have had the illusion of progress, the art of Shakespeare passing into that of Dryden, and so into the prose of drama...." There was, to the contrary, no progress in setting up painted scenery or in abolishing soliloquies or in refusing to use choruses, and Yeats went to the oriental stage for conventions by which he could eliminate the naturalistic methods of the modern stage and once again restore the spirit of drama to his plays. Preoccupied with maintaining the remoteness and aesthetic distance of imaginative art, Yeats wrote in 1916:

Our unimaginative arts are content to set a piece of the world as we know it in a place by itself, to put their photographs as it were in a plush or plain frame, but the arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation.

Ten years earlier he had said in The Arrow that he wished the Abbey to produce"...plays which require a convention for their performance; their speech, whether it be verse or prose, being so heightened as to transcend that of any form of real life." But after searching for players to speak these plays he finally "gave up the fight...," and began to write his plays for dancers. When the Abbey founded its experimental branch in the Peacock Theatre, Yeats had some of his plays produced there: The Fighting of the Waves (a prose version of The Only Jealousy of Emer), The Resurrection, The Cat and the Moon, and The Dreaming of the Bones. He had learned the value and effect of
non-verbal arts in the theatre, so that his interest was not now solely on restoring words to their ancient sovereignty on the stage. Poetic drama, Yeats realized, is also a matter of movement and sound and sight: every element contributes to a total effect, and some states of spiritual or emotional crisis can best be shown in color and dance. Of course he had realized the importance of each of these elements in earlier plays, but only with the new form were all the factors brought into harmony and into full cooperation. At the same time he opened up the drama, making it more flexible and expressive, by restoring choruses, soliloquies, ritualistic actions, and plots from myths and folklore. He returned to medieval conventions and theatres, writing *On Baile's Strand* for performance "on a large platform... and no proscenium or curtain...." This was only one method for establishing connection and relationship with the past, with the tradition.

He had written *At the Hawk's Well* for private performance, but it was performed by Mr. Ito, the Japanese dancer who created the dance of the hawk, in a theatre without Yeats' permission. He had not intended it for such performance, but could not refuse Mr. Ito the privilege of performing it whenever he wanted, and Yeats must have felt relieved not to have had to conduct rehearsals. He had found, despite his hopes, that rehearsing a play for drawing-room as much trouble as for the Abbey. When his health grew worse he finally stopped trying to produce his plays, though he continued to write them. Once outside the theatre he began to write in several forms: some dance plays, other plays in a form modified from the dance play form, and others in more conventional forms. He seems to be freed from theories now, writing in whatever form best suited his subject and in whatever style. Thus in the final
years there are plays which scarcely seem written by the same man, ranging in style and technique from the realistic *The Words Upon the Window-Pane* to the intense and brief *Purgatory*, from the philosophical *The Resurrection* to the ribald farce in *The Herne's Egg*. He developed a genuinely dramatic prose, and refined his verse into a flexible and theatrical style. By having sought the tradition all his life, he at last wrote plays which should become part of that tradition.

2.

Albert Schweitzer wrote in his critical biography of Bach: "Art in itself is neither painting nor poetry nor music, but an act of creation in which all three cooperate." The first of Yeats's plays for dancers, in which there was such a cooperation to produce drama, was *At the Hawk's Well* which is written in a terse, vivid diction; the verse is spare and the images precise. Ellmann quite rightly points out that "...the conclusion which we have observed in his earlier dramas between humanity and pattern no longer occurs" because now "the actors wear masks,...speak a highly specialized language,...a chorus announces that all is set within the mind's eye, and...the climax is a symbolic dance." The play concerns immortality, but its theme is skillfully stated in images and symbols. There is nothing abstract. The story, not found in the sagas, concerns the young Cuchulain and his search for wisdom. At the well of the hawk, the well of immortality, he finds an old man who typifies reason. The old man has waited fifty years to drink the waters of the well, which bubble up only at rare intervals, but has been frustrated by a hawk-obsessed (logic-obsessed) woman who is the guardian of the
well. Cuchulain comes to the well and waits with the old man. The guardian of the well throws off her cloak and dances so beautifully that she puts the old man to sleep and lures Cuchulain away. In the interval the waters of the well have bubbled up and dried, and both men have been frustrated. At the end Cuchulain rushes off to battle Aoife and the fierce women of the northern hills.

The play's construction is typical of the plays of this period. Three musicians enter, their faces made up to resemble masks, to unfold and fold a black cloth (representing the opening of a curtain or, perhaps, symbolizing the opening and closing of the tinctures which in Yeats's system represent the passing from one series of phases to another: the cloth-tincture opens and closes to reveal a phase of history and life, and at the play's end the action will be repeated to symbolize the completion of the phase represented in the play) and singing a lyric, which begins:

I call to the eye of the mind
A well long choked up and dry
And boughs long stripped by the wind...

Everything is to be seen in the mind's eye as it is described by the musician-chorus. The first musician sets the scene:

Night falls;
The mountain-side grows dark;
The withered leaves of the hazel
Half choke the dry bed of the well;
The guardian of the well is sitting
Upon the old grey stone...

And the second musician adds, dramatically: "I am afraid of this place."

The old man enters, his appearance and actions, stylized to suggest a marionette, being described by the musicians:

That old man climbs up hither,
Who has been watching by his well
These fifty years.
He has made a little heap of leaves;
He lays the dry sticks on the leaves
And, shivering with cold, he has taken up
The fire-stick and socket... 17

He then speaks to the guardian of the well, creating suspense and mystery:

...Why do you stare like that?
You had that glassy look about the eyes
Last time it happened. Do you know anything?
It is enough to drive an old man crazy... 18

Whereupon Cuchulain enters through the audience and converses with the
old man. The young man's identity and purpose are related in the next
speeches; but when he asks about

...a well wherein
Three hazels drop their nuts and withered leaves,
And where a solitary girl keeps watch
Among grey boulders. He who drinks, they say,
Of that miraculous water lives for ever. 19

the old man explains about the well and about why the water is not there.
He rails upon the dancers who lead him away when the water comes, and ad¬
vises Cuchulain not to leave the place,

...for it belongs
To all that's old and withered. 20

Cuchulain refuses to leave, whereupon the guardian of the well gives the
cry of a hawk. The old man explains that the Woman of the Sidhe her¬
self guards the well, and that

There falls a curse
On all who have gazed in her unmoistened eyes;
So get you gone while you have that proud step
And confident voice.... 21

Cuchulain stays, and takes watch over the well while the old man sleeps.
The guardian of the well casts off her cloak, revealing herself to be the
hawk, the Woman of the Sidhe, and begins the dance; but Cuchulain
is not afraid. The terror of the situation is announced by the music¬
ians who break in here saying:

O God, protect me
From a horrible deathless body
Sliding through the veins of a sudden.
First Musician: The madness has laid hold upon him now,
For he grows pale and staggers to his feet. 22

After the water has risen and dried up, the musicians sing:

He has lost what may not be found
Till men heap his burial-mound
And all the history ends.
He might have lived at his ease,
An old dog’s head on his knees,
Among his children and friends. 23

The old man wakens to find the water gone, and Cuchulain is lured away again by the clash of arms: he goes heroically to fight Aoife. As he leaves the stage, the musicians rise, unfold and fold the black cloth again, singing another set of lyrics which have as theme the bitterness of life which the seeker of wisdom must endure:

O lamentable shadows,
Obscurity of strife!
I choose a pleasant life
Among indolent meadows;
Wisdom must live a bitter life. 24

The first draft of the play ended with these words: "Accursed the life of man—between passion and emptiness what he longs for never comes. All his days are in preparation for what never comes." 25

There is a strong autobiographical element in the play: the fifty year old man (Yeats’s age when he wrote the play), representing intellect, and the young man representing the instinctive self as Cuchulain does in all the plays. Yeats had not been able to gain wisdom, knowledge of reality, or any of the other problems he took. The hawk, logic and abstraction, had led him into blind adventures. He had said much the same thing in 1914, in the conclusion to the first volume of his autobiography:
For some months now I have lived with my own youth and childhood, not always writing indeed but thinking of it almost every day, and I am sorrowful and disturbed...all life weighed in the scales of my own life seems to me a preparation for something that never happens. 27

The play is full of images of defeat: sticks, dry well, stones, steep hills, the cry of birds of prey, paleness, shadows, withered trees. There are affinities with the other Quest legends of the world, giving a broad context to this Irish version.

In his retelling of the Cuchulain Saga, this play is followed by the incidents in the earlier plays The Green Helmet and On Baile's Strand. After Cuchulain battles the waves on Baile's Strand, his body is dragged from the waves and nursed back to life by his wife Emer: this is the subject for the second of the plays for dancers, The Only Jealousy of Emer. This play is not as lucid and straight-forward as At the Hawk's Well since Yeats, as he said in a note to the play, "so rejoiced in my freedom from the stupidity of an ordinary audience that I have filled The Only Jealousy of Emer with convictions about the nature and history of a woman's beauty..." all derived from his philosophical system which took the phases of the moon as its central metaphor. Though the content is subjective and complex, the language is richly dramatic:

_Eithne Inguba:_ How pale he looks!
_Emer:_ He is not dead.
_Eithne Inguba:_ You have not kissed his lips
_Nor laid his head upon your breast._
_Emer:_ It may be
An image has been put into his place.
A sea-borne log bewitched into his likeness,
Or some stark horseman grown too old to ride
Among the troops of Manannan, Son of the Sea,
Now that his joints are stiff. 29

External facts are unimportant in this play, for Yeats is dramatizing an imaginative psychic interlude. The idea that
All that are taken from our sight, they say,
Loiter amid the scenery of their lives
For certain hours or days...

which is briefly touched on in this play is used later as the theme of Yeats's dramatic masterpiece, *Purgatory*. Dramatic effect of the masks is heightened by having Cuchulain change his mask to represent changes in his personality in the struggle to reject the supernatural beauty of the Woman of the Sidhe (who reappears in this play) and thus to regain life, and it is once again her dance (with the ghost of Cuchulain this time) which furnishes the climax of the play. The last of this series on Cuchulain, *The Death of Cuchulain*, will be dealt with later.

The third play for dancers, *The Dreaming of the Bones*, is in some ways similar to *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, with which it was published in 1919. The play dramatizes Yeats's early speculation about the immortality of the soul since he says in the note to the play that he wrote it before the "Robartes papers," his fictional source for the ideas in the first version of *A Vision*, came into his possession. Rather, "the conception of the play is derived from the world-wide belief that the dead dream back, for certain time, through the more personal thoughts and deeds of life." By this device Yeats combines modern politics (the 1916 rising) and past (a betrayal of Ireland in the thirteenth century).

The musicians unfold and fold the cloth before a screen on which is a pattern of mountain and sky, singing:

Why does my heart beat so?
Did not a shadow pass?
It passed but a moment ago.
Who can have trod in the grass?

After their song a young man enters and is met by a stranger and a young
girl wearing heroic masks and in costume of a past time. The young man
tells them that he has fought in Dublin, at the Post Office, and now
must hide or be shot. The stranger offers to take him to a safe place,
and they make the journey by walking three times around the stage as
the first musician describes their journey up the mountain:

    They are among the stones above the ash
    Above the briar and thorn and the scarce grass;
    Hidden amid the shadow far below them
    The cat-headed bird is crying out. 33

As they pause on the mountain side the young girl tells the young man
about Dermot and Dervorgilla who seven centuries before had betrayed
Ireland to the Normans, and about their penance: the ghosts must re-
live their traitorous passion until one of their countrymen releases
them from the curse of Ireland. Most of the play is taken up with this
narrative, static and abstract; but when they reach the mountain top
the young man has a fine speech describing Ireland which he can see
from that height:

    So here we're on the summit. I can see
    The Aran Islands, Connemara Hills,
    And Galway in the breaking light; there too
    The enemy has toppled roof and gable;
    And torn the panelling from ancient rooms;
    What generations of old men had known
    Like their own hands, and children wondered at,
    Has boiled a trooper's porridge. That town had lain,
    But for the pair that you would have me pardon,
    Amid its gables and its battlements
    Like any old admired Italian town;
    For though we have neither coal, nor iron ore,
    To make us wealthy and corrupt the air,
    Our country, if that crime were uncommitted,
    Had been most beautiful. Why do you dance?
    Why do you gaze, and with so passionate eyes,
    One on the other; and then turn away,
    Covering your eyes, and weave it in a dance?
    Who are you? what are you? you are not natural?
    Young Girl: Seven hundred years our lips have never met. 34

The young man feels sorrow for the lovers who have led him to this place
but does not forgive them: "I had almost yielded and forgiven it all——,' but the crime was too horrible. The play is too strong politically and philosophically to make good drama though it contains good speeches. The passage quoted above is similar to a speech in _Purgatory_, but in the later play the speech is more closely related to the personal actions in the play and is therefore not, as here, an obvious contrast to the Ireland of today, not a lesson for the politicians.

_Calvary_, unlike the other plays for dancers, uses Christian rather than Irish myth. The time is Good Friday, "the day whereon Christ dreams His passion through." The action is not narrative, but the subjective analysis of Christ's emotions as he relives the Passion. The action consists of a dialogue between Lazarus and Christ, a description by the musicians of the appearance of the Marys, a dialogue between Judas and Christ, and a scene with three Roman Soldiers and Christ. The musicians fulfill their usual functions at beginning and end. The opening lyric is one of Yeats's most brilliant:

> Motionless under the moon-beam,  
> Up to his feathers in the stream;  
> Although fish leap, the white heron  
> Shivers in a dumbfounded dream.

_God has not died for the white heron._

> Although half famished he'll not dare  
> Dip or do anything but stare  
> Upon the glittering image of a heron,  
> That now is lost and now is there.

_God has not died for the white heron._

> But that the full is shortly gone  
> And after that is crescent moon,  
> It's certain that the moon-crazed heron  
> Would be but fishes' diet soon.

_God has not died for the white heron._
The lyric isolated from its context, in which bird symbols and moon images are often used, is puzzling, but as Yeats said: "A reader can always solve the mystery and learn the secret by turning to a note, which need not be as long as those Dante put to several of the odes in the Convivio." He uses birds as symbols of subjective life, and further:

I have used my bird-symbolism in these songs to increase the objective loneliness of Christ by contrasting it with a loneliness, opposite in kind, that unlike His can be, whether joyous or sorrowful, sufficient in 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.

The other birds in the play are eagle, swan, gull, all classified as lonely birds and therefore natural symbols of subjectivity, like the moon-struck crane in The King's Threshold which symbolized the lonely and subjective condition of the artist. The heron is especially suitable because of its hunch-back appearance, a lonely, deformed creature contemplating its image and the image of the moon in the water or flux of existence. This closely resembles the state of a man in phase twenty-six in A Vision. The old crane of Gort, fishing in a stream was used in the early poem "The Three Beggars" in much the same way:

'Though to my feathers in the wet,
I have stood here from break of day,
I have not found a thing to eat,
For only rubbish comes my way.

Though to my feathers in the wet,
I've stood as I were made of stone
And seen the rubbish run about,
It's certain there are trout somewhere
And maybe I shall take a trout....

The rubbish in the stream is history, which clouds the flux of existence, but the image of the bird staring into the water is not as fully
developed as in *Calvary*, in which the symbolism is enriched with the moon metaphor.

Henn, in his chapter on Yeats' s use of images from paintings and mosaics, says that he does "not think it can be accidental that the image of the white heron occurs as a dominant symbol in *Calvary*. In Mantegna's 'Agony' two white herons are fishing in the stream that winds at the foot of the Mount. They are dispassionate, objective, apart...."

After this lyric the musicians retire to the sides of the acting area, and one recites lines announcing the Passion of Christ in the meter of the dialogues, thus effecting a transition from the idiom of the songs to the idiom of the play's action. There follows the dialogue with Lazarus who represents a type of intellectual despair beyond His sympathy. They speak of Lazarus' resurrection, and in magnificent speeches Lazarus denies the goodness of the act:

...death is what I ask.
Alive I never could escape your love,
And when I sickened towards my death I thought
I'll to the desert, or chuckle in a corner
Mere ghost, a solitary thing. I died

...•••••••••••••
You dragged me to the light as boys drag out
A rabbit when they have dug its hole away;
And now with all the shouting at your heels
You travel towards the death I am denied,
And that is why I have hurried to this road;
And that is why I claim your death. 41

As he leaves Christ on the road to Calvary, Lazarus says that he must go search

Among the desert places where there is nothing
But howling wind and solitary birds. 42

After the interlude of the Marys, Judas enters, another figure of intellectual despair, announcing himself: "I am Judas/That sold you for the
thirty pieces of silver." He says that he never doubted Christ's divinity, but had to betray because "you seemed all-powerful," since he thought that "whatever man betrays Him will be free." He takes pride in his action, and it is he, the Roman soldiers say, who has been chosen to hold up the cross. The soldiers are symbolic of objectivity beyond His help, and they tell Him that they will gamble for His garment after His death. They take the attitude that "whatever happens is the best," and proceed to dance the dance of the dice-throwers around the cross. While they dance Christ cries out: "My Father, why hast Thou forsaken Me," and the musicians again unfold and fold the curtain, singing:

But where have last year's cygnets gone?  
The lake is empty; why do they fling  
White wing out beside white wing?  
What can a swan need but a swan?  

God has not appeared to the birds.  

Christ's tragedy in the play is that the three types (Lazarus, the philosophic pessimist; Judas, the ironist who considers his treachery a crime gratuit; and the soldiers who are happy pagans who have no desire to be "saved") are beyond His help, and beyond the need of divine mercy. Yeats had written, in A Vision:

We say of Him because His sacrifice was voluntary that He was love itself, and yet that part of Him which made Christendom was not love but pity, and not pity for intellectual despair, though the man in Him...knew it in the Garden, but primary pity, that for the common lot, man's death, seeing that He raised Lazarus, sickness, seeing that he healed many, sin, seeing that He died.  

Though he pitied the common lot who are in misery, he had no pity of intellectual despair, and that was His limitation. "God has not died for the white Heron," and "God has not appeared to the birds." The
heron, like the other birds, is full of itself, subjective, and epitomizes the failure of the Passion.

Yeats's other play on Christian themes, The Resurrection, published in an early version in 1927 and in its final form in 1931, shows later modification of the plays-for-dancers form. It is written in prose and was, evidently, intended for the public stage. Before he finished it, Yeats realized "that its subject-matter might make it unsuited for the public stage in England or in Ireland. "I had begun it with an ordinary stage in the mind's eye," but "I now changed the stage directions and wrote songs...that it might be played in a studio or a drawing-room like my dance plays...." This would indicate a new position for Yeats, a willingness to write for a regular theatre audience; the fact he now resorted to the drawing-room only when he could not get his subject matter past the censors.

The time is the first Easter Sunday, the place is an anteroom to that in which the eleven Apostles are gathered, the persons are a Greek, a Hebrew, and a Syrian. Outside there is popular fury against the Christians: an attack is expected. The Syrian has been sent to gather news while the other two stand guard. Through curtains (in the set to be used on a regular stage) they see the Apostles, and through a window they see Calvary, the street, and the mob who are followers of Dionysus. Not even the Roman authorities can restrain the frenzy of the worshipers as their annual rite comes to its climax: they sing and copulate in the street, and foretell the death and resurrection of their God. Parallel to this action is that of another violent mob hunting and killing Christians in the city. The lament of the Dionysians is paralleled by the lament of the Apostles for the death of their teacher, since they do not
yet know they can also sing of His resurrection. The Greek, a gnostic and prototype of all gnostics and agnostics, points to the crosses on Calvary and says:

I am laughing because they thought they were nailing the hands of a living man upon the Cross, and all the time there was nothing there but a phantom... We Greeks understand these things. No god has ever been buried; no god has ever suffered. Christ only seemed to be born, only seemed to eat, seemed to sleep, seemed to walk, seemed to die. 51

To which the Hebrew replies:

It is you who do not understand. It is I and those men in there perhaps who begin to understand at last. He was nothing more than a man, the best man who ever lived. Nobody before him had so pitied human misery. 52

Each perceives part of the truth: the Greek who divorces value and actuality, the supernatural and the natural, and whose religion is a Mystery; the Hebrew for whom religion is a moral energy, something not in ourselves which makes for righteousness. Each of them perceives aspects of the dead Christ which the other does not. Their dialogue is interrupted by songs of the Dionysians, sung by the musicians, and the Greek objects to that form of worship. Then the Syrian returns, announcing the resurrection. The paradox breaks upon their minds, they argue, and finally the Syrian laughs as he says: "What if the irrational return? What if the circle begin again?"

The dance outside subsides after celebration for the risen God, and Christ enters the room. The Hebrew backs away in terror, but the Greek is unperturbed, examining the figure and finding it real: "The heart of a phantom is beating!" and the irrational has returned. As Christ reveals Himself in the next room the Greek announces the doom of the civilized world:

O Athens, Alexandria, Rome, something has come to destroy you!
The heart of a phantom is beating! Man has begun to die.
Your words are clear at last, O Heraclitus. God and man
must die each other's life, live each other's death. 55

and the play closes with the musicians' song. The lyrics were written
for the play in 1926, but with a new stanza added at the end in 1931
they were published separately as "Two Songs from a Play" in The Tower,
and have since been the cause of much explication. Two of the best may
be found in The Identity of Yeats and in Understanding Poetry. The
poem and play are accorded praise, and Peter Allt has even said that
"if nothing else of Yeats survived, this work alone would prove his
genius." 59

Between the publication of Calvary (1920) and The Resurrection
(1931) Yeats wrote two plays, the final form of The Player Queen (1922)
and The Cat and the Moon. The former is, according to Hone, "one of
the least known of Yeats's plays, yet one of his best...." His father
had written as early as 1903, when Yeats must have begun the play, that
"if the Player Queen is up to its title it will be a great play." It
was begun as a tragedy, and at the suggestion of Ezra Pound turned into
a comedy and written in prose instead of verse. It is based primarily
on the doctrine of the mask, of the self seeking its opposite in the
anti-self. Also implicit in the theme and action are death and resur-
rection myths (in the sacrifice of the old and instillation of the new),
and rituals of royal succession, as well as the old conflict between the
poetical and the practical, this time resolved in marriage and the suc-
cessful wearing of the mask. William Becker, who assisted Eric Bentley to
revive the play in Dublin, has written a thorough and illuminating art-
icle from his experience with the play in the theatre. He concludes
that The Player Queen is the one Yeats play which could be the possession
of the theatre of the present, since the later plays demand another kind of theatre, and the earlier plays are dead.

The plot concerns a country ruled by a Prime Minister who must, since the people believe in hereditary kingship, rule through the Queen. She, though of royal blood, is not of queenly nature, and so had hidden herself from her people; she is awkward, timid, religious to the extent of constantly praying and desiring to be like her patroness, St. Octema. The people come to believe she is a witch, and threaten rebellion. The Prime Minister plans to quell the mob by presenting a popular play, Noah, at the palace and at that time to announce his marriage to the queen, hoping that this gesture will stop the rumors. The leading lady of the acting troop disappears, however, delaying the performance; but the mob is satisfied with the announcement of marriage and the rebellion is under control. Meanwhile the leading lady has met the shy Queen and she has assumed the royal robes, having always wanted to play a queen. When the mob sees her, with all her stately appearance, they accept her. The marriage plans are maintained by the Prime Minister who banishes the rest of the acting company, since they are the only other people who know that a change of personnel has taken place.

This plot is worthy of Pirandello. The sub-plot is typical Yeats, however, and concerns an aristocratic and unpopular poet, Septimus, who is the leading lady's husband. After a great deal of talk and intrigue hinging on jealousy, he leaves the leading lady and takes another player for wife. The plots dovetail into a well-constructed farce, free from esoteric symbols, and considerably more "realistic" than Yeats's typical plays in verse.

The Cat and the Moon is in the plays-for-dancers form, though the
dialogue is in prose rather than verse and the folding and unfolding of
the cloth is dispensed with. There remain the musicians and their songs,
the masked actors, and a dance. It is, as Hone says, "a play of occult
character which incidentally satirised the friendship between George
Moore and Edward Martyn." A Blind man, symbolic of the body, and a
Lame man, symbolic of the soul, go to St. Colman's well to be blessed.
When they arrive a Saint (played by one of the musicians) asks what they
wish: The Blind man chooses sight rather than blessedness, but the Lame
man chooses blessedness rather than strong legs. The Blind man, having
regained his sight, beats the Lame man, and then leaves. The Saint
climbs on the Lame man's back and tells him to dance, whereupon a mir¬
acle happens and the Lame man can dance. Yeats explains the ending by
saying that when the Lame man took the Saint upon his back, the normal
man had become one with his opposite, the self and anti-self were
combined and Yeats had produced one of his most esoteric miracles. The
play is punctuated by a song about a cat which contemplates the moon
(its opposite) until the pupils of the eyes reflect the phases of the
moon and the opposites have been reconciled. The fable of the beggars
dramatizes the important element of choice in Yeats's system which is
not, contrary to popular belief, deterministic. The Blind man chooses
to return to the circle, and to renew the phases of the moon (thus
choosing his false mask), whereas the Lame man chooses to break away
and to destroy his part in the phases (thus choosing his true mask).
The cycles of phases can be broken, as explained in the last few pages
of A Vision.

The play about Swift, on the mystery of Stella and Vanessa, is a
tour de force in dramatic construction. The opening scene of The Words
Upon the Window-Pane is effective, all initial explanations coming naturally in conversation; then building up tension, suspense and intensity during the seance. The setting is an eighteenth-century house with which Swift and Stella were associated. On one of the window-panes is a poem written by Stella to Swift. John Corbet, a Cambridge student writing a thesis on Swift and Stella, has come with others to try to establish contact with their spirits. The seance amounts to a play within the play: Swift and Vanessa speak through Mrs. Henderson who not only acts their parts but must maintain her role as medium and also of control. The tension of the seance-play mounts as the tension of the Swift-play increases, giving a dazzling dramatic effect as each play buttresses the other in what is probably the most original use of the technique since Pirandello. After the seance Corbet questions Mrs. Henderson, who assures him she knows nothing of Swift. Only after they have left, as she is preparing tea, does she speak, as though still in a trance, in the voice of Swift, ending with the anguished cry: "Perish the day on which I was born!" The play reveals Yeats's skill in conventional dramatic forms, and his ability to write realistic plays if he believed the material could best be presented in that mode.

In the same year, 1934, Yeats wrote The King of the Great Clock Tower, which he later simplified and rewrote as A Full Moon in March. Both plays have the same Salome-like theme: a stranger comes to the court of a Queen and is slain, whereupon his severed head sings. The later play compresses, omitting entirely the character of the King. The theme is the victory of a man over a woman when he seems to be fighting a losing battle, and through his death the woman is brought to self-fulfillment. A splendid use of non-verbal arts heightens the
effect in ways less formal than in the plays for dancers, since it was written for the regular stage. *A Full Moon in March* is introduced by a lyric which establishes the theme of love, associated with the crown and the dung:

Every loutish lad in love
Thinks his wisdom great enough,
What cares love for this and that?
To make all his parish stare
As though Pythagoras wandered there.
*Crown of gold or dung of swine.* 67

and so forth for two stanzas. The main body of the dialogue is in blank verse, of which Yeats was a master. A swineherd (dung of swine) visits the Queen (crown of gold) not in an attempt to win a kingdom for himself, like the other men who come to court her, but in an attempt to introduce her to love (the dung of swine). The basis for the contest the Queen wages is, of course, found in folklore: if the suitor's song please he is given rewards, if not he must suffer prescribed consequences. It is at least as old as the Atalanta story; but Yeats's variation is new. When the Queen rejects the swineherd, ordering his head cut off, she admits his victory by a gesture: she drops her veil, despite her avowed intention. The second part of the play is the dance with the severed head. The attendants speak for the Queen and for the head during the dance, indicating in their songs that the swineherd has triumphed, for she dances in adoration and at the climax of the dance kisses the lips of the head. At the conclusion of the dance the curtains are closed and the attendants indicate what has happened and why, when the second attendant speaks of the haughty Queen and all like her (even if they be saints in niches):

Why must those hold, haughty feet descend
From emblematic niches, and what hand
Ran that delicate raddle through their white?
My heart is broken, yet must understand.
What do they seek for? Why must they descend?

to which the first attendant answers:

For desecration and the lover's night. 68

Eric Bentley said of the end, and of the play as a whole:

...Yeats' dramatic situation is not used to define individual character, or as the starting point of a plot, but as a gateway to what he called the 'deeps of the soul-life.' But, at the end, we are not left holding a mere Maeterlinckian mood; we are given a theme, namely, that, if we are to live, our wintry and saintly virginity must descend into the dung of passion. 69

The last three plays Yeats wrote are treated, by Donald R. Pearce, as a trilogy of protest against the desecration by vulgar hands of something (in this case Ireland) held sacred or noble, which of course omits much but gives a valid approach to the plays. First among these is The Herne's Egg, a play so ribald that Yeats was relieved when the Abbey decided not to produce it, saying in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley, December, 1939: "I am no longer fit for riots, and I thought a bad riot almost certain." He had earlier written her, in July of 1936 that upon completing the play he was triumphant: "...believe I have written a masterpiece." The six scenes are written in sprung rhythm, a verse Yeats disliked once he had used it because "now that I am close to it I dislike the constant uncertainty as to where the accent falls; it seems to make the verse vague and weak. I like a strong driving force." The episodic plot begins with Congal, King of Connaught, and Aedh, King of Tara, having finished their fiftieth battle, a draw like all the rest. To celebrate the occasion they negotiate a truce, and set out to steal some Herne's eggs for a feast. Congal goes with a donkey to gather the eggs.
Attracta, priestess of the Herne and owner of the hatchery, at first refuses to let them have the eggs, since

Only the women of these rocks,
Betrothed or married to the Herne,
The god or ancestor of hernes,
Can eat, handle, or look upon those eggs. 74

Congal advises her to put aside all this fantasy about the Great Herne and to cure herself by sleeping with seven men; but she is obsessed with the idea of lying with the Herne. She would, like Leda, mate with a bird since when that union was accomplished she would "know what may be known." One is reminded of the other union with a bird:

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop? 75

She curses Congal, prophesying his death at a fool's hand.

At the feast in Tara, the Great Herne hovers near, and Attracta substitutes a hen's egg for the Herne's egg on Congal's plate. He accuses Aedh of the act and of insulting him; Congal challenges his old enemy to battle, and kills him with the leg of the table. When they see Attracta carrying the Herne's egg and realize what has happened, Congal decides that it is time she be freed from her devotion to the Great Herne. He and six other men

...in the name of the law
Must handle, penetrate, and possess her,
And do her a great good by that action,
Melting out the virgin snow.... 76

They are afraid, but the court's law must be obeyed. The scene ends with the men throwing their caps at a peg to determine which shall rape her first, while Attracta sings in a trance before them. As in classical Greek tragedy, the violence takes place off-stage.
But Attracta is not cured: she believes that she has lain with the Great Herne. Each man swears he has lain with her until there is thunder, at the sound of which they deny their acts. Attracta explains that they were deluded since

You were under the curse, in all
You did, in all you seemed to do. 77

The Herne has his revenge by frightening Congal into asking for death: the place is set on the top of a mountain at the full of the moon. In the last scene Congal meets a Fool who has been advised in a vision that he will get pennies for killing the king. Congal muses on his fate: he and the Herne have had three bouts, "he won the first, I won the second," because he and six men had possessed the Herne's wife. Now the third is won by the Herne in the fulfillment of the curse, though Congal has one last glimmer of hope for success by making himself the Fool, by killing himself. Attracta and Corney enter as Congal dies, and Attracta tells Corney to lie with her before Congal's body cools. He, however, is terrified of the thunder, and finally it is too late. Two donkeys have coupled upon the mountain-side, and King Congal must be reborn as a donkey; and the play ends with final tragic laughter as Corney says:

I have heard that a donkey carries its young
Longer than any other beast,
Thirteen months it must carry it.
All that trouble and nothing to show for it,
Nothing but just another donkey. 79

Henn notes that "Giraldus Cambrensis describes the intercourse of the chief of an Ulster clan with a white donkey, as part of the ceremony of installation. The chief afterwards drinks soup made from this donkey, which is the incarnation of the mother-goddess." Henn further
suggests that the Herne symbolizes a pagan, pre-Christian deity analogous with the white heron as a symbol of the lonely subjective man. This would make the fable an Irish equivalent of the Leda legend. He suggests other readings for the play, but must admit that "the whole remains obscure." In the two last plays the symbolism and fable are not obscure as in this fantastic mock-heroic. The incidents and characters seem to get away from Yeats and cloud the moral problem which lies beneath: ritual combat with God. "The war on God," writes Ellmann, "is the ultimate heroism, and like all heroism in Yeats ends in defeat." Even though he knows he will be defeated in his bouts with the Great Herne, Congal, like the old men in "The Black Tower," fights till the last: "All that is known fights with all that is unknown; God is Himself man's opponent, and the final struggle is with Him, whether He keep His own shape or take that of death or destiny." An explanation in this manner seems more plausible than Pearse's idea that Congall represents a way of life that is vulgar and destructive (modern Ireland). The juxtaposition of fleshly humor and supernatural wonder is as daring as Donne ever composed, and one remembers Yeats's "The Spur:"

You think it horrible that lust and rage
Should dance attention upon my old age;
They were not such a plague when I was young;
What else have I to spur me into song? 87

Purgatory presents far fewer problems. Though the fable comes from a ghost story, the theme comes from A Vision. Other plays have dealt with the "dreaming back" of the soul to relive its passions (Calvary) and its transgressions (The Dreaming of the Bones). In Purgatory the concept is put in more human context in its application to a family and to a great house. There are no ceremonials as in the plays influenced
by oriental conventions. The dialogue is direct, hard, brilliant, and eloquent. There is nothing to detract from the central dramatic situation, no unnecessary speech, image or action. The brief action achieves an intensity seldom equaled. Symbols grow naturally out of the action, functioning in the context. Unlike Calvary, no notes are necessary to explain the imagery which develops as the old man recalls the past to his son, living the present, and being haunted by the future.

The play opens simply, with the two characters before a ruined house and a bare tree. The boy describes what he sees, and the old man describes what he remembers, and what he senses:

There's somebody there.
Boy: The floor is gone, the windows gone,
And where there should be roof there's sky,
And here's a bit of an egg-shell thrown
Out of a jackdaw's nest.
Old Man: But there are some
That do not care what's gone, what's left:
The souls in Purgatory that come back
To habitations and familiar spots.
Boy: Your wits are out again.
Old Man: Re-live
Their transgressions, and that not once
But many times....

The idea is close to that expressed by Robert Bridges in "Low Barometer:"

Unbodied presences, the pack'd
Pollution and Remorse of time,
Slipped from oblivion reenact
The horrors of unhoused crime.

He makes the boy sit and listen to the tale of the boy's grandparents, and then of the house:

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. 90

Of course the house symbolizes aristocratic Ireland, the great Anglo-Irish tradition which the new Ireland was destroying with its vulgar politics and its censorship laws; but what might have been closer in Yeats's mind was the fact that Coole, Lady Gregory's home, had been sold by the De Valera Government to a Galway builder for £500 and was torn down for scrap, despite the fact that great men had lived and died there, and that a literary movement had been born and fostered there, and that the house should have been preserved as a national monument.

As the old man is telling of his hatred for his father, and of how he murdered him and set fire to the house, the past begins to relive itself. Hoof-beats announce the reenactment of her crime by his mother. To free her from the cycles of return and remorse, the old man kills the boy, for he believes this will end the consequences of her crime:

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 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.... 92

But this was not sufficient; the hoof-beats return and

...she must animate that dead night
Not once but many times!
The last lines invoke the god (probably Christian) of the thirteenth cone, the escape from the cycles of retribution and the achievement of the perfect state. This would indicate a certain failure to see beyond mere orthodoxy in T. S. Eliot's reading of the play, since he objected to the naming of the play "because I cannot accept a purgatory in which there is no hint, or at least no emphasis upon Purgation." In Yeats's system there is no mere passing from one incarnation to another; there is the possibility of purgation and of escape into "heaven," even though there is reliving of the acts of the past, of the most passionate moments of life.

The structure of the play, which superficially resembles a dramatic monologue for an old man, is closer to the play within a play technique: the action of the past paralleled and intensified by the action of the present, and vice versa. The double action is kept in strict control so that neither is separable from the other, each hurtling to its inevitable end.

When this great play was presented at the Abbey it was received with the respect due its author. The Catholic implications of the title, however, caused trouble, and a critic for The Irish Times commented: "It was a small container for such a large message; rather like pouring a vat of philosophy into a half-pint bottle of time."

The Jesuits took offense at the play, and a mild intellectual row developed. Like the riots which greeted Synge's plays, these objections did not prevent the play from being recognized as a masterpiece of
Yeats's last play, The Death of Cuchulain, is something of a personal testament. It was written during his last illness, with corrections being dictated to Mrs. Yeats shortly before he passed into his final coma. The old man's speech which opens the play is Yeats's last statement on the theatre. He announces this as the last of a series of plays on the life of Cuchulain, a hero with whom Yeats had identified himself. He speaks ironically of Talma who is so old his acquaintances and friends still read Virgil and Homer. He asks for an audience of intelligent, well-read people of a number not to exceed that which first heard Comus performed, and makes constant reference to the mythological and antiquated material he will present. After his impassioned speech the simple plot is unfolded. Eithne Inguba comes to Cuchulain as an emissary from Emer to tell him that Maeve and the ruffians from Connacht are destroying the country.

No matter what's the odds, no matter though
Your death may come of it, ride out and fight.
The scene is set and you must out and fight. 96

Cuchulain discovers a letter from Emer telling him not to come, for he is outnumbered and would ride to death instead of to battle. They quarrel, and Cuchulain leaves for the inevitable. The stage darkens, and when the lights come up again Cuchulain is seen wounded, trying to fasten himself to a pillar-stone with his belt that he might die on his feet as he bleeds from six mortal wounds. Aoife, the fierce woman of the North, his ancient enemy, the woman at the Hawk's Well and mother of his son, enters. She would kill him, but she is an old woman without the strength and must hide when the Blind Man from On Baile's Strand enters. Queen Maeve has promised him
twelve pennies if he would bring her Cuchulain's head. Again the stage
darkens, as the Blind Man gropes for Cuchulain's throat. The next scene
reveals Morrigu, goddess of war, holding a black parallelogram, repre-
senting a man's head, and six other parallelograms around the backcloth,
representing the heads of the men who inflicted the six mortal wounds.
Emer enters and dances among the heads with fury, and then turns to
the head of Cuchulain with adoration and triumph. She is interrupted
by a sound, she listens, and hears a few faint bird notes: symbolic of
the immortal soul in its flight, similar to the birds in the Byzantium
poems; And in the poem "Cuchulain Comforted" we find

They sang, but had nor human tunes nor words,
Though all was done in common as before;
They had changed their throats and had the throats of birds.

Again the stage darkens; three musicians in rags are revealed. They
are modern Street-Singers recalling the heroic figures, a bitter song
about the death of the heroic age and of heroic thoughts. The play
dramatizes the defeat and triumph of a great hero, and the dissolution
of the myth in modern times. His thought, to the last, was controlled
by legend and myth to prevent its becoming abstract.
Conclusion

Yeats's development into the arch-poet of the twentieth century is one of the wonders of contemporary English literature. There are rival theories to explain the apparent changed in his thought, style, and language. Recently, however, new emphasis has been placed on the consistency of his development, a point of view taken in this thesis. I have tried to indicate elements in the early plays which evolved into the techniques of the later plays. With perspective lengthening in the study of Yeats, it is becoming apparent that there were no sudden changes in his verse or drama: everything is implied in what preceded it. The miracle is that he was able to realize his many possibilities. As Lawrence Durrell says in regard to the last poems:

It was not that he adopted a new style of writing, but all at once the philosophic preoccupations which obsessed him sank to the bottom of his verse, and he began to write with a poignance and lucidity such as is given to few poets to achieve. He married art to emotion with complete success and more than fulfilled the promise of his Tennysonian youth. 1

In many ways Yeats's career resembles Milton's, not merely in the fact that Yeats was almost blind in his old age, nor that both were profoundly religious poets (though Yeats was not orthodox Christian), nor that both served in the government and other public causes, but the similarity lies in the fact that each wrote verse unsurpassed in
his own day, converting to the purposes of his poetry all the expe-
riences of his life, even those which might seem irrelevant to the
purposes of art.

The young Yeats began his dramatic career by writing closet dramas
full of pastoral episodes, melodramatic action, and lonely suffering.
The magic of dreams gradually changed into the magic of Theosophy, and
the vocabulary changed from that of a Pre-Raphaelite into the sensuous,
ceremonial vocabulary of symbolism. Somewhat later he discovered
Ireland as a source of inspiration and as a source of language. He
stripped his style of reverie and elaboration, taking in its place the
vocabulary of an active man. With the creation of the Irish dramatic
movement he became involved in the world, making himself a man of public
affairs instead of a lonely dreamer.

The abilities of organization are generally attributed to the
most intelligent men of affairs. I have seen such men at
work; I have seen Yeats at work in the same capacity, and
indeed Yeats, without much ado, equals the best of those with
ideas for organization. Yeats, however, beats the best in
organizing his own life and purpose. The discipline he imposed
on himself or the enthusiasm he awakened was expected and
encouraged in others.

With limited resources of money and materials, he created a great
theatre. With little except his determination to make himself a
dramatic poet, he created a lasting body of plays. He had come to
drama partly because of his interest in the revival of Irish litera-
ture, but more because of his need for a theatre. He felt he could not
fully develop his talents without a theatre, and linked with this
enthusiasm lay a conviction about the reform of the theatre. By
simplifying the physical aspects of stage-production, one could escape
much that was bad about the theatre, and by using symbolism and a
nationalistic bias, one could escape the flatness and mediocrity of modern naturalistic drama.

As symbolism, politics, and a desire for a public voice grew, the poetry and plays of mood became poetry and plays of dramatic passion: fancy was transformed into imagination. He began with an ambition to restore to words their ancient sovereignty, and through beautiful speech to restore dignity and vitality to drama. The theatre was to become a national institution, the nation giving dramatists subjects through folklore and myths and language through the unspoiled talk of the peasantry; the theatre in turn would give the nation a culture, intellectual excitement, and a glimpse of values. He ended by having created a new form of drama, extending the scope of the play in his attempt to revive the traditions of myth and ritual in poetic drama. His plays are symbolical, and as Austin Warren points out: "If mathematical and chemical formulas are recipes for the control of matter, images and liturgy have power over minds; they reach farther and deeper than do abstractions. Men become what they contemplate." Symbolism was for Yeats a way to restore unity, what Eliot calls "unified sensibility" and what Yeats called "unity of being." Symbolism for Yeats, writes Richard Ellmann, "would pull the external world back into the mind by establishing the correspondence of nature and mental states. It would make the connections among the personal, national, and natural worlds." Working in a theatre over which he had full control, Yeats was able to modify his symbolism to fit the needs of stagecraft, and to revise his early plays to make them actable. This made a great change in his technique:

With the turn of the century, and the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, we find Yeats thinking out his plays in a theatrical
Yeats, needing a theatre for the fulfillment of his talents, learned the craft of the theatre, learned that it is more than spoken words, learned that he must leave much to the stage design and to the actors, as in the scene in The Only Jealousy of Emer about which Frank O'Connor says:

Then you can turn to the wonderful scene in "The Only Jealousy of Emer" where Cuchulain's wife cries:

If but the dead will set him free
That I may speak with him at whiles
By the hearthstone, I am content—
Content that he shall turn on me
Eyes that the cold moon or the vague sea,
Or what I know not's made indifferent.

I beg your pardon! You can't. Not in this edition. For those lines, written by the mature dramatist, were struck out by the still maturer dramatist in his old age and replaced by one bare line, "I renounce: Cuchulain's love." That is why Yeats is our greatest theatrical poet, for the line can chill your blood like some line of Shakespeare.

He learned to use non-verbal arts to advantage, as symbols. He broke with the narrowness of theme adopted by the naturalists, and made a drama which took as its theme human dignity and deeper levels of personality to which our great literature has always given expression.

For a poet working in an age in which there is no great popular audience, Yeats's development as a playwright is even more remarkable. He had thought Dublin would furnish an audience, but found that he had been mistaken. Rather than court the mob he withdrew from the public theatre. His desire for remoteness had made it difficult for audiences trained in the naturalistic methods of contemporary drama to accept his plays. As Ronald Peacock points out:
It is largely the discarding of the logical plan and characterization, the twin supports of conventional playwriting, that makes Yeats's dramas so elusive to traditional expectations of form, and provokes criticism that they are undramatic. It is not only the apparently new form, but the requirements of the actors which give difficulty for modern audiences:

I opened the parcel containing the new and complete edition of Yeats' plays...on my way to a rehearsal of "The Only Jealousy of Emer" in an American university, and smiled to think of all the eminent men of letters who had declared from time to time that Yeats was not a man of the theatre. The plays are always produced under difficulties because they require a special type of player, who concentrates primarily not on acting but on beauty of tone and sensitiveness of rhythm.

Some of his plays present even further problems, especially the plays for dancers. Yet, when one realizes Yeats's intentions to restore ritual and ceremony rather than to dramatize personalities, their success becomes apparent. The technique exploits the virtues of convention and formality, pointing up the expressiveness of design in speech, music, stage-setting, and movement. The form is always appropriate for the content, no single form being forced on all the plays. "It is doubtless easy to dismiss them as 'unreal,'" writes Raymond Williams,

but this is perhaps to surrender to naturalistic preconceptions which have blunted our capacity for this kind of experience. At least in view of the ancestry of the form (which is not only the Noh plays of Japan but also the dramatic methods of early Greek plays and of many of our pre-Elizabethan and even Elizabethan works) it is to be hoped that no one will press the charge that they lack the "dramatic virtues."

Yeats's plays do not fall in the Aristotelian category of tragedy. He made tragedy a matter of passion, rather than of hubris, since his major concern was with concepts and with the spirit (essence) and not with personalities (accidents). On the other hand, his plays are similar to the Greek tragedies in that they are based on familiar stories and in that suspense is a matter of revealing what is half-forseen rather than
a matter of surprise. Peacock observes that instead of treating a plot that illumines human relations in their moral aspect, Yeats makes action into another signature of "emotion." It is not an end in itself, flowing from and dependent on what we call "character," but it evokes instead the intricacies, ecstasies and anguish of the soul-life. In these subtle plays relations between men matter less than the submission of a soul to the all-enveloping spiritual mystery.

Though his dramatic work is not bulky, there is considerable variety, contrasts of subject and method becoming apparent by comparing the early plays of Celtic twilight with the later plays for dancers and the final plays. They range from the self-conscious The Shadowy Waters to the unpretentious farce of The Green Helmet, from the twilight reverie of The Land of Heart's Desire to the brilliant insight of Purgatory, or to the formal beauty of At the Hawk's Well; from plays which depend entirely on words to those which gain part of their effect from choreography and music and to those which blend all the elements of the theatre—color, music, dance, songs, dialogue, soliloquy—in harmony toward a total effect. Even in a single period of his career, as Hone says, "no greater contrast could be imagined than that between the techniques of The Player Queen and the Four Plays for Dancers, for the first is all abandon, and the second are all reserve." Though Yeats planned to develop a tragedy of passion, his plays are full of ironic and tragic joy. Ussher comments: "'Tragic joy'—or, more simply, a the habit of treating tragedies as farce—is a rather typical Irish attitude." Yeats wrote to Dorothy Wellesley, probably referring to such heroic tragedies as On Baile's Strand which end in laughter, "'bitter and gay,' that is the heroic mood."

Since Yeats wrote good dramas, whether in special forms like The Only
Jealousy of Emer, or in more traditional forms like On Baile's Strand, Deirdre, or The Words on the Window-Pane, one wonders why his plays have not been taken into the tradition of English drama. Perhaps this is because they are in one-act form, or perhaps because some are in verse (though Yeats developed a dramatic prose style in several of the plays), or perhaps because they are not conventionally sensational, or perhaps because of the degree to which many of them are removed from life (though an equal number of his best plays are not burdened with this reservation). Whatever the cause for actor's and producer's procrastination, the work remains: a solid achievement.
APPENDIX A

Jaques Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry

The need to create new myths, on which contemporary critics rightly lay stress, but to which they ascribe central importance, arises in reality from the above-mentioned experience of the void, which is the fundamental fact. The need for new myths is a secondary phenomenon, a sort of process of compensation. And it deals essentially, like the spiritual experience itself in which it originates, with the inner universe of the poet as a man, with the intellectual and moral foundations of his life, with his anguish and his crucial choices.

The fact of a poet laboring and straining to find new myths for the sake of his art, or considering the invention of new myths a direct requirement and a proper task of poetry itself, involves in my opinion a double and profound illusion.

For, in the first place, the myths in question—the myths which are to ensure both the fundamental perspectives of a poet and his definite sphere of communication with men (be it exclusively self-centered, as in Joyce)—are not simply that symbolic approach of imaginative thought which characterizes for instance Platonic myths and which can never fail poetry, since it is a part of its nature. (This kind of myth, say the poetic myths, poets ceaselessly renew.) The myths under discussion...are the organic signs and symbols of some faith actually lived, be it by the primitive man; they are forms (either properly mythological or genuinely religious) through which a conviction of the entire soul nourishes and quickens from within the very power of creative imagination. Such myths have no force except through the faith man has in them. It is essential to them to be believed in. The effort of a poet to create new metaphysical myths of his own invention, for the sake of his work as a poet, is self-contradictory, since, having invented them, he cannot believe in them. A man lost in the night might as well invent an imaginary moon because he needs to have his way lighted. The only way for a poet to be inspired by a new metaphysical myth is his faith as a man; it is not to 'invent a new myth,' it is either to be the Mohammed of a new religious creed which has been revealed to him, or to adhere, soul and body, to some of the new religious creeds, however asinine, which the mysticism of
sex, so dear to D. H. Lawrence, or the occultist disciplines so dear to Yeats, or the state-totalitarianism so dear to Ezra Pound, or the black magic so dear to Surrealists, offer to modern man—or to adhere, soul and body, to some one of the ancient religious creeds (including the true one, the revelation of God through His own uncreated and incarnate Word) which becomes new to him—an always new 'myth', an always new truth—in proportion as he believes in it with renewed and deeper faith. In any case it is not from the poet that the man has received a new myth, it is from the man that the poet has received a new vital belief....Metaphysical myths are needed by poetry, but they cannot be provided by poetry.

In the second place, it is only indirectly, and so to speak extrinsically, that poetry depends on, and needs, the metaphysical myth (the symbols of vital beliefs quickening blood and imagination) which are present in the mind of the poet. These beliefs and metaphysical myths matter directly to him, not for his poetry, but for his human self, his own metaphysical destiny. Those poets who have rejected faith in Transcendence, and entered into the spiritual experience of the void, are bound—as men—to turn toward a substitute for what they have rejected: a new god of their own, or a system of revolt against and hatred for the celestial Intruder, as Lautréamont put it, to that 'Profundum, physical thunder, dimensions in which We believe without belief, beyond belief' of which Wallace Stevens spoke—all this sought for in the place of God from whom they had parted. Hence their nostalgia for 'new myths.' This nostalgia has directly to do, not with their poetic work, but with their humanity, with those sub-structures and preconditions on which poetry depends indirectly, in the order of 'material' or 'subjective' causality.
Yeats was a very unorthodox translator, for when he began to put Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus* into form for the Irish players in 1926-1927, he "put readers and scholars out of... mind and wrote to be sung and spoken." The one thing he took as a rule was "that a word unfitted for living speech, out of its natural order, or unnecessary to our modern technique, would check emotion and tire attention." Yeats wrote to Mrs. Shakespeare: "I think my shaping of the speech will prove powerful on the stage, for I have made it hard, bare and natural like a saga, and that it will be well, though not greatly acted ---it is all too new to our people."

These were Yeats's second translations, for in 1921 he had made an attempt but had set it aside as unsuited for the stage. The 1926-1927 versions were an entirely new piece of work, for which he did not refer to his earlier versions. He did consult all translations he could find, including Gilbert Murray's. He finally settled on a dramatic prose style, and "turned Jebb into speakable English with rough unrhymed verse for Chorus." With this fine adaptation, Yeats brought the plays out of the classroom, and also out of Gilbert Murray's flaccid pre-Raphaelite
verse which, according to T.S. Eliot, interposes between the modern reader or audience and the Greek plays "a barrier more impenetrable than the Greek language." Yeats's versions are closer to adaptations than to translations, though Yeats did not "make it new" to the extent that Ezra Pound has in his translations of Greek plays. As Henn writes: "Much is omitted, foreshortened, selected as for a ritual. By all accounts it was effective on the stage. The dialogue is in a clear, terse prose; the Choruses are in a meter that suggests Elizabethan origins." And further: "There is a sense of exhilaration in the rhythm, a declamatory beat, with a realization that the evocative names mean little to an audience now." Much of the language is far from the Greek, but is close to present-day audiences, and is direct and vivid in substitutions for concretions for the names of gods and places. Though they may not satisfy the academicians as translations, the plays, as acting versions for modern actors and audiences, are unsurpassed.
APPENDIX C

Publication Dates of Yeats's Plays

The Countess Cathleen 1892 (revised 1912)
The Land of Heart's Desire 1894 (revised 1903, 1904, 1912)
The Shadowy Waters 1900 (revised 1904, 1910, 1911)
Cathleen ni Houlihan 1902
Where There is Nothing 1902
(The Revised by Lady Gregory and Yeats, and published as
The Unicorn From the Stars in 1908.)
The Hour Glass 1903 (revised 1907; verse 1914)
The Pot of Broth 1904
The King's Threshold 1904
On Baile's Strand 1904 (revised 1907)
Deirdre 1907 (revised 1911)
The Golden Helmet: an Heroic Farce 1908
(<Revised by Yeats and put into ballad measure, and published
as The Green Helmet in 1910>)
At the Hawk's Well 1917
The Only Jealousy of Emer 1919
The Dreaming of the Bones 1919
Calvary 1920
The Player Queen 1922 (final version)
The Cat and the Moon 1924
Sophocles' Oedipus Rex 1926
Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus 1927
The Resurrection 1927 (revised 1931)
The Fighting of the Waves 1934 (prose libretto, taken from
The Only Jealousy of Emer, which was performed in 1929
by the Abbey's experimental division.)
The Words Upon the Window-Pane 1934
The King of the Great Clock Tower 1934
(The Revised and published as A Full Moon in Marbh in 1935)
The Herne's Egg 1938
Purgatory 1939
The Death of Cuchulain 1939
A Preface to the Notes

The footnote form given in the MLA Style Sheet has been followed except for the abbreviations listed below.

For works by Yeats, no author is given and the following short titles stand alone:


**Essays** for the 1924 New York collection which includes *Ideas of Good and Evil, The Cutting of an Agate, and Per Amica Silentia Lunae.*

**Great Clock** for *The King of the Great Clock Tower.*


**P&C** for *Plays and Controversies.*

**Plays** for *The Collected Plays, 1953.*

**Poems** for *The Collected Poems, 1951.*

**PPV** for *Plays in Prose and Verse, Written for an Irish Theatre and Generally with the Help of a Friend.*

**A Vision** for the 1937 commercial edition.

**Wheels** for *Wheels and Butterflies.*

And for Richard Ellmann's two books on Yeats, the following short titles appear after his name:

**Identity** for *The Identity of Yeats.*

**Y:M&M** for *Yeats: the Man and the Masks.*
NOTES

INTRODUCTION


3 Parkinson, p.54.

4 Parkinson, p.181.


10 Morgan, p.146.


CHAPTER I

1 Ernest Barker, Ireland in the Last Fifty Years: 1866-1918 (Oxford, 1919), pp.11-12.

2 Barker, p.12.


4 Poems, p.262.

5 Poems, p.106.

6 Eglinton, p.33.

7 Poems, p.178.

8 Poems, p.337.


10 Autobiography, p.212.


12 Poems, p.196.

13 Jeffares, pp.34-35.

14 Barker, p.12.


16 Hayden and Moonan, pp.514-516.

17 Hayden and Moonan, p.518.

18 Hayden and Moonan, pp.520-521.
19 Hayden and Moonan, p.523.
20 Hayden and Moonan, pp.525-526.
21 Hayden and Moonan, pp.536-538.
22 Mansergh, p.189.
26 Hayden and Moonan, p.548.
27 Barker, p.25.
28 Gwynn, p.288.
29 Mansergh, p.217.
30 Mansergh, p.218.
32 *Autobiography*, p.120.
33 Gwynn, p.169.
36 Gwynn, p.288.
38 *Essays*, p.253.
39 See John Eglinton, "Bards and Saints" (Dublin, 1906).
41 Among the few Anglo-Irish playwrights before 1900 were Goldsmith, Sheridan, Wilde, and Shaw.
The stage-Irishman appears in many forms. Shakespeare used him in *Henry V* (iii,2) for the creation of Captain Mac Morris; Jonson used him in *The Irish Masque* and *New Inn*; Dekker, in *Old Fortunatus*; Ford, in *Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck*; Sheridan in *The Rivals* (Sir Lucius O'Trigger); and Shaw, in *John Bull's Other Island* (Tim Haffigan). In addition, the stage-Irishman is a common figure in music-hall routines, in cartoons, and in popular Pat and Paddy jokes.


The colloquy between Oisin and St. Patrick has been published in the *Transactions of the Ossianic Society* (Dublin, 1854-1861), Vol.IV.


Maurice Bourgeois, *John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre* (London, 1913), p.101. The *seanchuidhe* were poets; the *seanchuidhe* were historians.

Bourgeois, p.105. In William S. Clark's *The Early Irish Stage* (Oxford, 1955), which arrived too late to be used in this thesis, there is more information on early Irish skits and church plays, and further evidence of internal turmoil having been one of the main reasons Ireland did not develop a national drama before 1900.

Stockwell, p.xv.

Stockwell, p.1.


Nason, p.104.

Nason, pp.313-314.

Stockwell, p.1.


58 Chandler, p.65.


60 Chandler, p.69.


65 Mario Borsa, *The English Stage of To-day* (New York, 1908), p.100.

66 Borsa, p.100.


68 Borsa, p.102.

69 Chandler, p.87.

70 Ernest A. Boyd, *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland* (Dublin, 1918), p.5.

71 Boyd, p.5.


73 Boyd, p.7.

CHAPTER II

1 Mosada was reprinted in book form from the Dublin University Review in 1886; it appeared in The Wanderings of Disin in 1889; and was reprinted in 1943 by the Cuala Press in a limited edition using corrections made by Yeats in his copy of the 1889 edition. The Island of Statues has appeared in its complete form only in the Dublin University Review, April-July, 1885. The rest of the early plays remain in manuscript in Mrs. Yeats's possession.


3 Letters, p.25.


7 Ellmann, Y:M&M, p.33.

8 From a manuscript published for the first time in Ellmann, Y:M&M, pp.33-34.

9 Ellmann, Y:M&M, p.34.

10 Ellmann, Y:M&M, pp.34-35.


12 Ellmann, Y:M&M, p.35.

13 Letters, pp.117-118.

14 Ellmann, Y:M&M, p.35.

15 Ellmann, Y:M&M, p.35.

16 Autobiography, p.45.

17 Ellmann, Y:M&M, pp.35-36.


20 Hone, p.58.

21 Hone, p.58.

22 Letters, p.63.

23 Thomas Parkinson makes a thorough study of Yeats's development by analysing his revisions of his early verse and his years of writing for the theatre in W.B.Yeats: Self-Critic (Berkeley, 1951).

24 Ellmann, Y:MiM, p.36.

25 Ellmann, Y:MiM, p.36.

26 Letters, pp.87-88.

27 Hone, p.47.

28 Jeffares, p.28.

29 Jeffares, p.28.

30 Jeffares, p.29.

31 Jeffares, p.29.

32 Autobiography, p.29.

33 Autobiography, p.39.

34 Autobiography, p.39.


37 Letters, p.88.

38 Autobiography, p.53.

39 A full treatment of this search for reality may be found in Virginia Moore's The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats' Search for Reality (New York, 1954).

40 Ellmann, Y:MiM, p.41, quoting from an essay of Yeats, "If I Were Four-and-Twenty," published posthumously by the Cuala Press.

42 *Letters*, p.104.


44 *Autobiography*, p.57.

45 *Autobiography*, p.117.

46 *Autobiography*, p.119.


50 Maud Gonne, "Yeats and Ireland," *Scattering Branches*, p.20.


52 *Autobiography*, p.54.


54 *Essays*, p.79.


56 O'Faolain, pp.43-44.

57 *Letters*, pp.56-57, footnote 2.


59 Hone, p.74.


61 Hone, p.75.

62 See the chapters on The Golden Dawn in Moore, *The Unicorn*.

63 The Essay on Magic is included in *Essays*, pp.33-63.

64 Ellmann, *Y:MeM*, pp.46-47.
65 Letters, p.106.
66 Ellmann, Y:M&M, pp.50-51.
67 Autobiography, p.70.
68 Jeffares, p.129.
69 Letters, p.122.
70 Jeffares, p.130.
71 Ellmann, Y:M&M, p.128.
72 Moore, p.82.
73 Moore, p.82.
74 Moore, p.82.
75 Letters, p.280.
77 Hone, p.100.
78 Plays, p.31.
80 Autobiography, p.284.
81 Ellmann, Y:M&M, p.137.
82 P&C, p.vi.
83 Hone, pp.77-78.
84 Letters, p.129.
86 Autobiography, p.252; compare P&C, p.89.
87 Ellmann, Identity, p.21.
88 Autobiography, p.252.
89 Ellmann, Identity, p.21.
90 Ellmann, Identity, p. 22.
92 Jeffares, p. 67.
93 Letters, p. 236.
97 Autobiography, p. 324.
98 Parkinson, pp. 60-61.
99 Ellmann, Identity, p. 81.
100 Ellmann, Identity, p. 80.
101 Ellmann, Identity, p. 81.
103 Hone, p. 463.
104 Hone, p. 112.
105 Tindall, p. 252. As A.M. Killen points out, in "Some French Influences in the Works of W.B. Yeats at the end of the Nineteenth Century," Comp. Lit. Studies, VIII (1942), 2: "It seems to us that side by side with direct influence there is very often a meeting of kindred minds, a similarity of tastes and outlook, a strengthening of tendencies which already existed." Yeats, knowing little French at this time, received most of his knowledge about the Symbolists second-hand, from Arthur Symons, and it would appear that this knowledge verified Yeats's own discoveries rather than presenting him with a new point of view.
106 Tindall, p. 250.

110 Plays, p.98; Poems, p.410.

111 Ellmann, Identity, pp.81-82.

112 Poems, p.448, the note on Hounds and deer in poems on page 59.


114 Poems, p.243.

115 Nicoll, World Drama, p.730.

CHAPTER III

1 Autobiography, p.121.

2 Autobiography, p.240.


5 Robinson, pp.1-2.


7 P&C, p.3.

8 Autobiography, p.250.

9 Robinson, pp.8-9.

10 Autobiography, p.250.


13 P&C, p.16.

14 Kavanaugh, pp.17-18.

Dione Bouicault wrote The Coleen Bawn and The Shaughraun. The younger generation flouted the characters as "stage-Irishmen." Dawson Byrne writes that "it is a strange fact of theatre tradition that the play-bills of the first performance...contain a statement that his plays and characters were 'a protest against the stage Irishman.' Evidently he did not think the stage Irishman of his day was true to type any more than the Press of Dublin did his own plays before the coming of the Irish National Theatre Society." Byrne, p.29.
Kavanaugh, p.41. The Fays became associated with the movement when rehearsing Hyde's Gaelic play. About the same time Fay read in the Morning Leader, August 18, 1900, an article by William Archer on the new drama in Scandinavia. See Bourgeois p.123.

Robinson, p.36.

Kavanaugh, p.43.

Kavanaugh, p.39.


Kavanaugh, p.64.

Fay and Caswell, pp.228-230.

Kavanaugh, p.65.

Robinson, pp.86-87.

O'Connor, p.261.

Kavanaugh chronicles Yeats's last attempt to found a poetic theatre on pages 82ff.

Kavanaugh, p.90.

P&C, p.9.

P&C, p.45.

P&C, p.9.

P&C, p.9.

Ernest A. Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland (Dublin, 1918) p.10.

Boyd, Drama, p.11.

P&C, p.47.

P&C, p.31.


P&C, pp.32-33.


63 P&C, p.41.
64 P&C, p.73.
65 P&C, pp.56-57.
67 P&C, p.89.
68 P&C, p.117.
69 P&C, p.118.
70 P&C, p.45.
71 P&C, p.47.
72 P&C, p.47.
74 P&C, p.132.
75 P&C, p.20.
76 Hone, p.182.
77 Hone, p.269.
80 P&C, p.137.
81 P&C, p.35.
82 P&C, p.10.
83 Essays, p.122.
84 P&C, p.49.
85 P&C, p.20.
86 P&C, p.47; see also pp.126-129.
87 P&C, p.127.
88 P&C, p.47.
CHAPTER IV

1 P&C, p.206.


3 Zweig, p.88.

4 P&C, p.32.


6 Joyce said further in "The Day of Rabblement," quoted from Gorman, pp.72-73:

The Irish Literary Theatre gave out that it was the champion of progress, and proclaimed war against commercialism and vulgarity. It had partly made good its word and was expelling the old devil, when after the first encounter it surrendered to the popular will. Now, your popular devil is more dangerous than your vulgar devil. ... The official organ of the movement spoke of producing European masterpieces, but the matter went no further. Such a project was absolutely necessary. The censorship in Dublin is powerless, and the directors could have produced 'Ghosts' or 'The Dominion of Darkness' if they chose....But, of course, the directors are shy of presenting Ibsen, Tolstoy or Hauptmann, where even 'Countess Cathleen' is pronounced vicious and damnable....Earnest dramatists of the second rank, Sudermann, Bjornson and Giacosa, can write very much better plays than the Irish Literary Theatre has staged. But, of course, the directors would not like to present such improper writers to the uncultivated, much less to the cultivated, rabblement. Accordingly, the rabblement, placid and intensely moral, is enthroned in boxes and galleries amid the hum of approval....

7 Ellmann, Identity, p.87.

8 P&C, pp.119-120.

9 P&C, p.123.

10 P&C, p.46.


12 P&C, p.155.


14 P&C, p.158.
15 P&C, p.80.
16 P&C, p.186.
17 J.M. Synge, "Preface," The Tinker's Wedding... (Dublin, 1911), pp.ix-x.
20 P&C, pp.11-12.
21 P&C, p.190.
22 Essays, p.339.
26 Essays, p.342.
27 Essays, pp.206-207.
28 Essays, p.208.
29 Essays, p.209.
30 Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (London, 1952), p.28.
31 P&C, p.46.
32 Essays, p.296.
33 Essays, p.298.
34 Ellmann, Identity, p.7.
35 John Jones, "Shakespeare and Mr. Wilson Knight," The Listener, LII, 1345 (December 9, 1954), pp.1011-1012.
38 Williams, p.18.
39 Essays, p.133.
40 Ellmann, Y:MaM, p.185.
41 Essays, p.124.
42 P&C, p.45.
43 Essays, p.295.
44 Essays, pp.296-297.
45 Autobiography, p.286.
46 Autobiography, p.286.
47 Essays, p.300.
49 From "The Poet and the Actress," an essay published for the first time by Ellmann, Identity, p.105.
51 Essays, p.205.
52 Essays, p.205.
55 Eliot, p.44.
56 Williams, p.209.
59 P&C, p.31; see also pp.119-120.
60 T.S.Eliot, preface to S.L.Bethell, Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (Durhan, North Carolina, 1944), pp.ix-x.
61 Essays, p.370.
62 Ellmann, Identity, p.90.
63 Autobiography, p.265.
64 This can be found in Transactions of the Ossianic Society for 1860, V, 1.
65 PPV, p.425.
66 Dorothy M. Hoare, The Works of Morris and of Yeats in Relation to Early Saga Literature (Cambridge, 1937), p.120.
67 PPV, pp.425-426.
68 Cornelius Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights (Boston and New York, 1913), pp.60-61.
69 Plays, p.94.
71 Plays, p.182.
73 Fay and Caswell, p.165.
74 Poems, pp.33-36.
75 Plays, p.178.
76 Wheels, p.103.
77 Plays, p.v.
78 PPV, p.427.
79 PPV, p.429.
80 Plays, p.v.
81 Quoted by Ellmann, Identity, p.132.
82 Robert Dunlop, Ireland: from the earliest times to the present day (London, 1922), pp.157-158.
83 PPV, p.426.
84 Plays, p.197.
86 Henn, p.264.
88 PPV, p.430.
90 Parkinson, p.83.
91 Autobiography, p.164.
92 Parkinson, p.85.

CHAPTER V

1 Poems, p.125.
2 Poems, p.91.
3 Essays, p.431.
4 P&C, p.199.
5 P&C, p.206.
7 P&C, p.212.
8 P&C, p.417.
9 P&C, p.418.
10 P&C, p.418.
11 Essays, p.204.
12 Autobiography, p.298.
14 P&C, p.421.
15 Great Clock, p.20.
16 P&C, p.440.
17 P&C, p.441.
18 Kavanaugh, pp.152-153.
19 P&C, p.334.
21 P&C, p.333.
22 Hone, p.290.
23 Essays, p.274.
25 Parkinson, "Yeats and Pound...," p.264.
29 Aston, pp.200-201.
30 Essays, p.283.
31 Aston, p.200.
33 P&C, p.334.
34 P&C, p.334.
35 Essays, pp.279-280.
38 Essays, pp.273-274.
39 Essays, p.284.
40 Essays, p.289.
42 Fenollosa and Pound, p.47.
43 Essays, p.209.
CHAPTER VI


4 Essays, p. 280.
5 Essays, p. 279.
6 Essays, p. 278.
7 P&C, p. 189.
8 Great Clock, p. 20.
9 PPV, p. v.
10 Letters, p. 652.
11 Letters, p. 609, and p. 611.
14 Plays, p. 136.
15 Plays, p. 137.
16 Plays, p. 137.
17 Plays, p. 138.
18 Plays, p. 139.
19 Plays, p. 139.
20 Plays, p. 141.
21 Plays, p. 141.
22 Plays, p. 143.
23 Plays, p. 143.
24 Plays, p. 144.
25 Moore, Unicorn, p. 246.

26 Yeats says in a note (Poems, p. 455.): "I suppose that I must have put hawks into the fourth stanza because I have a ring with a hawk and a butterfly upon it, to symbolize the straight road of logic, and so of mechanism, and the crooked road of intuition: 'For wisdom is a butterfly and not a gloomy bird of prey.'"
27 Autobiography, p.65.
29 Plays, p.186.
30 Plays, p.187.
31 P&C, p.467.
32 Plays, p.276.
33 Plays, pp.279-280.
34 Plays, p.283.
35 Plays, p.284.
35a Plays, p.289.
36 Plays, pp.288-289.
37 P&C, p.471.
40 Henn, p.195.
41 Plays, p.290.
42 Plays, p.290.
43 Plays, p.291.
44 Plays, p.291.
45 Plays, p.292.
46 Plays, p.293.
47 Plays, p.293.
48 Plays, pp.293-294.
49 A Vision, p.275.
50 Wheels, p.111.
51 Plays, p.366.
52 Plays, pp.366-367.
53 Plays, p. 371.
54 Plays, p. 372.
55 Plays, pp. 373-374.
56 Poems, pp. 210-211.
57 Ellmann, Identity, pp. 260-262.
60 Hone, p. 270.
62 Ellmann, YE&M, p. 212.
64 Hone, p. 385.
65 Wheels, p. 138.
65a Wheels, p. 138.
66 Plays, p. 388.
67 Plays, p. 390.
68 Plays, p. 396.
70 Donald R. Pearce, "Yeats' Last Plays: an Interpretation," ELH, XVII (March 1951), 87.
71 Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley (New York, 1940), p. 121.
72 Letters on Poetry..., p. 76.
73 Letters on Poetry..., p. 48.
74 Plays, p. 408.
75 Poems, p. 212;
75 Plays, p.418.
76 Plays, p.422.
77 Plays, p.424.
78 Plays, p.428.
79 Henn, p.274, footnote 1.
80 Henn, p.275.
81 Henn, p.276.
82 Ellmann, Y:MM, p.284.
83 Poems, pp.340-341.
84 Poems, pp.340-341.
85 Ellmann, Y:MM, p.284.
86 Pearce, "Yeats' Last Plays...", pp.70-71.
87 Poems, p.309.
88 Plays, p.431.
90 Plays, pp.431-432.
91 O'Connor, Leinster, Munster and Connaught, p.236.
92 Plays, p.435.
93 Plays, p.436.
95 Kavanaugh, p.174.
96 Plays, p.439.

CONCLUSION


7 Ronald Peacock, The Poet in the Theatre (New York, 1946), p.120.


10 Peacock, p.120.

11 Hone, p.363.

12 Arland Ussher, Three Great Irishmen (London, 1952), p.105, note 1

13 Letters, p.837.

APPENDIX A


APPENDIX B

1 W.B.Yeats, Sophocles' King Oedipus (New York, 1928), p.v.

2 Hone, pp.413-414.

3 Hone, p.274.


5 Henn, p.266.

6 Henn, p.267.
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