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William Butler Yeats' contribution to the Celtic renaissance in Ireland

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WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS' CONTRIBUTION
TO THE
CELTIC RENAISSANCE IN IRELAND

Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
University of Richmond

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By

Marion March Cole

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	vii
CHAPTER	PAGE
I. The Ancient Celt of Fact and Fancy	1
II. Sources and Precursors of the Celtic Renaissance	25
III. William Butler Yeats' Role in the Poetic Awakening in Ireland	52
IV. William Butler Yeats' Contribution to the Irish National Theater Movement	89
CONCLUSION	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY	116
VITA	119

FOREWORD

The story of Ireland's Literary Revival is the story not only of the life and death of the Gaelic language in Ireland and the attempt to revive it as the national medium of speech, but also of the rise, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, of modern Anglo-Irish literature, which gave to Irish letters the right to be judged independently of English literature. The formation of this new medium of national literary expression was the result of the interaction of the work of certain translators and folklorists with that of those writers who sought to restore the Gaelic language.

To William Butler Yeats is given most of the credit for fanning to full flame the faint spark of inspiration toward expression in terms of Irish race and country that began to glow with the publication of certain prose works. It was Yeats' belief that so long as Irish legends and stories, traditions and customs are cherished, so long will the feeling of nationality endure; and it was precisely the desire to rescue these things which gave birth to the Revival.

The position that the literature of the Irish Literary Revival is not national is not tenable. It would be equally unsound to underestimate the importance of the

language movement, coincident with the Revival, in furthering the development of Anglo-Irish literature. The following pages will attempt to vindicate the truth of these claims and to establish beyond question Yeats' influence during the early, critical years of the Revival. That Yeats was mainly responsible for the ultimate development of the Irish National Theatre will also be a point of development.

A further purpose of this study is to make clear the important fact that, according to the true ideal of the Literary Revival, there was no real conflict between Gaelic and Anglo-Irish literature; they were complementary, not antagonistic. Therefore, the true Irish writer, fully admitting to the claims of the older language and acknowledging his obligation to it, has through the movement justified the claims of the two for coexistence.

This account of the poetic writings produced in Ireland under the impulse of the movement variously known as the Celtic Renaissance, the Irish Literary Revival, the Celtic Dawn, and the Irish Renaissance will place the major emphasis on the poems and poetic plays of William Butler Yeats, whose name to many is synonymous with the Literary Revival. In order to give full significance to Yeats' role in steering the early course of this nationality-awakening in poetry, it will be necessary to define terms, to investigate the Gaelic period both pagan and Christian, to clarify Ireland's position, philologically speaking, and then to follow the revolt against that

position through the late nineteenth century, spotlighting the man who, though he is not the initiator, is credited with wielding the greatest influence in the new movement.

CHAPTER I

The word Celt is a "name applied in modern times to peoples speaking languages akin to those of the ancient Galli or Gauls, including the Bretons in France, the Cornish, Welsh, Irish, Manx, and Gaelic of the British Isles."¹ Celtic, adi.

¹The Oxford Companion to English Literature (1932), p. 148.

means "of or pertaining to the Celts or their language; n. A group of Indo-European languages closely akin to the Italic, now found only in Brittany, Wales, Ireland, and the Scottish Highlands. It is divided into the Cymric and Goidelic branches, each of which in medieval times possessed a copious literature."²

²Webster's New Coleriate Dictionary (1953), p. 134.

Gael is from the "old Irish Gaidel, Goidel, a Scottish Highlander or Celt. The word in recent times has also been applied to the Irish branch of the Celtic race."³

³The Oxford Companion to English Literature, p. 304.

The old Irish sagas, held by exponents of the Celtic Revival to be the key to the survival of the Irish spirit, treat of life as it was lived before the age of writing. It goes without saying that the early Irish saga with its

evidence of unbroken oral tradition is of historic value. The Irish cling to tradition, enshrining in their memory not only the great happenings of great epochs, but also the trivial events that affected the history of their race. If the poet, the seanachie or storyteller of the ordinary folk, and the bard, who recited the epic poem to the nobility, embellished the narrative, there is still good reason to believe that their recitals were more than fiction. The intrinsic literary significance of early poetic and prose matter rather than the authenticity will form part of the subject of enquiry of this thesis.

The rich store of Celtic language and literary tradition that has survived in Ireland, first oral, then recorded, contrasts sharply with the incomplete archaeological testimony from that island. A recent authority on the Celts sees no reason to believe that there was any addition to the native population before the sixth century B. C., but states that intruders might have appeared within this century.⁴ Until such

⁴ T. G. E. Powell, The Celts, p. 58.

negative observations can be improved upon, the far more interesting conjectural accounts of Irish and other romantic historians deserve to stand. In order to understand a people, one must explore its history. If that history is colored by the imagination of the centuries, it is still a key to the

way a nation thinks and behaves and writes.

The story of the Irish race as told by Seumas MacManus is virtually the same as that which appears in histories without number. According to him, the Irish race is popularly known as the Milesian race, because the Irish (Celtic) people were descended supposedly from Milesius of Spain, whose sons of legend invaded and took possession of Ireland a thousand years before Christ. MacManus cites the inaccuracy of styling the Irish people pure Milesian, since the races that occupied the land when the Milesians came—mainly the Firbolgs and the Tuatha De Dananns—were not exterminated but dominated by the more powerful Milesians. Some, among them Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, deny a De Danann race (People of the goddess Dana, the mother of the gods); others admit it. MacManus scores a point in favor of its validity by arguing that we must not conclude that a race is mythical solely because myths have developed around it.

Popular history has it that the three mentioned races were different Celtic tribes who had separated from the main current ages before and who, centuries later after winding their separate courses from the East across Europe, met turbulently in Ireland and finally merged peacefully to flow on as one Gaelic stream. Legend says that the Firbolgs were the first to colonize Ireland. The Firbolgs, called "men of the bags" because they were forced by the Greeks to haul loam for their hillside gardens, escaped their Mediterranean servitude

in boats they had made from their leathern bags. On the west coast of Ireland today, a little boat covered in bullock's hide, thought to be of the same type, is still in use. The same account relates the story, taken from one handed down in a poetical chronicle, of how the bagmen fought and lost a great battle against the Tuatha De Dananns in County Mayo, near Cory. The recital of how the Firbolgs used every strategy to defer the fatal encounter was to be treated in poetry later by one of the chief precursors of the Celtic Revival, Sir Samuel Ferguson, and by Yeats and Irish writers generally.⁵

⁵Seumas MacManus, The Story of the Irish Race, Chap. I, passim.

Cairns and pillars scattered over a battle plain at Northern Moytura in Sligo commemorate a second great battle of victory for the De Dananns, this time against the Fomorians, who were forced to take up their abode on Tory Island off the coast of Galway. These same cairns and pillars, symbolic of Sligo's mysterious and mythological past, were to cast a hypnotic spell over a sensitive young poet, William Butler Yeats, destined for a place in the sun of the Literary Revival that was to sweep over Ireland. Steeped in antiquity, Irish legends, and Druid lore, "little people" and apparitions were to be whisked from their haunts in the Sligo countryside where Yeats spent much of his boyhood visiting

his grandparents, to be put into lasting verse. The mystic realm into which the later generations of Milesians lifted the people they conquered, making the greatest ones gods and goddesses, was to supply to Yeats, his forerunners, and his contemporaries a fruitful mythology.

To Douglas Hyde (the first president of Free Ireland, May 6, 1938), whose efforts to preserve the Irish tongue and tradition were to crystallize in 1892 in the forming of the Gaelic League under his presidency, the story of the Milesian invasion is cloaked in mystery. As he sees it, the tale may be only a rationalized account of early Irish mythology, in which the Tuatha De Dananns, Firbolgs, and Milesians are only gods of the early Irish euhemerized into men.⁶ Hyde's doubt

⁶Douglas Hyde, The Story of Early Gaelic Literature, p. 25.

as to the authenticity goes hand in hand with his pride of careful recital in writings concerned with the three great classes of national romance or sagas common to the whole nation. These writings will be discussed in their proper place.

Since the books in which Ireland's very early literature was contained have perished almost entirely, the identity of her prehistoric inhabitants may never be established. It is possible, however, from the oldest extant body of Northern literature, preserved in Gaelic, to make conjectures

concerning the types of men who peopled the island.

Miscellaneous annals, genealogical and historical writings, ecclesiastical pieces, romances and tales, and treatises of law, science, and medicine surviving from the year 1100 and after have contributed toward the construction of the uncertain narrative. Manuscripts of importance in this later group are the Leabhar na h-Uidhre and the Book of Leinster, transcribed about 1100 and 1150 respectively, and after them the great parchment books known as the Book of Ballymore, the Leabhar Breac or Speckled Book, and the Book of Lecan. A number of vellum books which came later and which are now preserved in Trinity College, Dublin, the British Museum, and the Bodleian at Oxford are of nearly equal importance.⁷

⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

Much of the surviving literature is still untranslated. The oldest pieces are in a difficult language, largely forgotten until the mid-nineteenth century when Johann Caspar Zeuss, a native of Upper Franconia and an able professor of philology at Munich, published his Grammatica Celtica. By using the Irish glosses, or explanations written by Gaelic teachers in the margins or between the lines of Latin texts as aids for students, he recovered the meanings of numerous words and also the lost grammatical forms, thus becoming the founder of Celtic

philology. Zeuss' work is credited with lifting the study of Irish out of the province of political controversy into the realm of disinterested scholarship.⁸ In Zeuss' hands, the

⁸Blanche Mary Kelly, The Voice of the Irish, p. 177.

glosses established the fact that the Irish, like the Greeks, Teutons and Slavs, spoke a pure, so-called "Aryan language." These glosses gave the oldest known form of the language, called Old Irish to distinguish it from Middle Irish, in which most of the surviving older Irish literature is written.

According to Hyde, authenticity of native Irish poetry attributed to certain early bards should not be rejected simply because the language is too modern for the time in question. Many of the works were modified as words grew obsolete. Unfortunately, the early Irish poetical composition all too often becomes barren in translation since it depends more on interlinear vowel-rhyme, alliteration, and other elegances of framework than on intrinsic thought. Hyde does not attempt to settle the issue of authorship of such writing as the poetical fragment ascribed by some to Finn mac Cool in the third century. He cites the language of the poem, so old as to be in parts unintelligible; and he calls attention to the nature poetry of which the Gaels were known to be fond.

O'Donovan's translation of the poem, said to have been composed by Finn mac Cool after he had eaten of the salmon of knowledge,

reads thus:

May-day, delightful time! How beautiful the colour! The blackbirds sing their full lay. Would that Leighay were here! The cuckoos sing in constant strains. How welcome is ever the noble brilliance of the seasons! On the margin of the branching woods the summer swallows skim the stream. The swift horses seek the pool. The heath spreads out its long hair. The weak fair bog-down grows. Sudden consternation attacks the signs; the planets in their full courses running exert an influence; the sea is lulled to rest; flowers cover the earth.⁹

⁹Hyde, p. 34.

Wholesale destruction of native Irish documents by the Danes and the English as well as the practice of altering the orthography and even the words of old writers make it virtually impossible to know how far native literature was cultivated. Since the key to a people is found in what the language says in its literature as well as in the forms, someone was needed to reveal the people of ancient Ireland to the world.

It has been held that in very early times Erin had a primitive form of writing which made use of letters called oghams. Whether these letters, which consisted of a number of short lines, straight or slanting, drawn through over or under one long line, belong to antiquity is still a matter of dispute.

With characteristic hesitancy in claiming what he cannot substantiate, Hyde presents various hypotheses concerning

the antiquity of the Irish ogham characters. Some believe that except for the form of the letters, the ogham alphabet and the Latin alphabet are the same. Others, however, have asserted that the rude contrivance is only a cryptic, post-Christian scheme for writing the Latin letters. At any rate, this system of incised dots and lines, allegedly invented by the god Oghma, continued in use in inscriptions on pillar and tombstone probably until the end of the Danish invasions. Properly speaking, Ireland became a literary country only with the coming of Patrick. And yet, so soon after Patrick's establishment of churches and monasteries in fifth century Ireland did a flourishing literature of laws, sagas, and poems spread through the island that it is easy to believe that the pre-Christian Irish had reached a high state of culture. Earliest Irish saga literature is pagan in subject and tone, and the abundance of heathen incidents which have been preserved might indicate that the pre-Christian bards had methods other than oral for transmitting their knowledge. Several old Irish romances relating to pagan times and transactions mention ogham writing and important written messages which could not have been conveyed by mere signs.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-6.

It is known that with the establishment of Christianity, Latin literature began to be studied and Latin to be

written to some extent in Ireland, side by side with the native Irish, during a period when native schools and monasteries were crowded with visiting scholars who were attracted as much by the lore of the bards as by ecclesiastical learning. Latin never superseded Irish, however, as a literary or epistolary medium.

Life in organized tribal communities where family relationship was the strongest of all ties is ascribed to the Gael. Allegiance from less to greater characterized a people divided into ranks and classes and marked by tribal warfare and absence of settled conditions as well as by the qualities of nobility and splendor. In such a way of life, there was no opportunity for the idea of state to develop. The public life of the Gaels was carried on in large and small assemblies, such as the Fes or convention at Tara, and the genechs or fairs held in the district every year or so. At these fairs, which doubtless originated in the celebration of funeral games at ancient cemeteries, the Druids are said by some to have made their sacrifices; and in later times, Christians are said to have celebrated their rites. The fair was a clearing house for disputes, the reading and promulgating of laws, marriage transactions between parents of the marriageable parties, and the selling of native wares.¹¹ The institution of the marriage bargain motivates

¹¹ Edward Raymond Turner, Ireland and England, pp. 3-14, passim.

certain Celtic Revival plays.

Before St. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland in 432, the religion of the Gaels included worship of objects of nature or forces such as the sun and the moon, and at a very early stage, animism or polydemonism. By the tenets of animism, indwelling souls were ascribed to all natural objects. Polydemonism held that spirits or demons, controlled by the incantations, magic, or formulas of famous Druids or wizards who participated in the ceremonial rites, animated everything. It would also appear that before the Christian period in Ireland, there developed an anthropomorphic conception of the objects or forces of nature, or the worship of sun, moon, mountains, winds, and streams as gods who were strange and uncanny, but essentially like familiar men and women, or animals. Old Irish tales mention very beings like war goddesses who shrieked over the heads of battle heroes to fill them with fury.

Benevolent as well as fearsome deities figure in the beliefs of pagan Ireland. Since parallels are constantly being drawn between members of the De Danann race or the real gods of the ancient Irish, and the deities of other races, it seems in order to mention here a few of the Gaelic gods or half-gods. First there was Dana herself, from whom the De Dananns derived their name. The Dagda, or great god, was the "Irish Jupiter."¹² His son Aengus, or the Young, was a

¹²Hyde, p. 48.

god of youth and love; his daughter Brigit, the goddess of poetry; while Mannanan was a combination of Proteus and Neptune without their fearsome aspects. Other important deities were Diancecht, the god of healing; Lugh, the sun god whose father was Cian (son of Diancecht and Lugh's mother Ethlin); and Balor of the Evil Eye, the Fomorian king and father of Ethlin.

The Gaels held the De Dananns in awe as a superior people and at the same time looked upon them as a conquered race, condemned to reside thereafter in the interior of the hills. Legendary accounts have endowed the arrival of the Milesians with certainty by linking it with Christian chronology. Telling and retelling of the tale of the De Danann defeat in contests of magical arts and of arms and of the Milesian domination of the island, led to the eventual identification of the De Dananns with the fairies. After the defeated De Dananns were assigned all that lay underground, especially in the interior of the hills, as their half of Ireland; they came to be known as people of the hills or Sidhe (Gaelic for hill, pronounced shee). By a long process of deterioration, they began to be identified with the fairies. The Milesian share in the transaction was the 'half' that lay above ground.¹³ In time the De Dananns, venerated as gods,

¹³Kelly, p. 4.

lost their superhuman stature and took on a size which causes

them to be called "the little people." By way of placating their recognized power and will to work mischief, the Gaels also called them "the good people." Generally invisible, the Irish Sidhe manifested themselves in visible form to certain ones. The widespread belief in lesser beings living in rocks and hills where they had splendid palaces--demons, goblins, ghosts, and fairies--persisted even in Christian Ireland. Persons living in Ireland today claim to have heard the cry of the banshee, a female fairy.

The De Dananns had dwelling places in addition to Ireland and its hills, a plane of existence independent of the earthly and the mortal, "happy countries which are called by various names such as Tir-na-noge (Land of the Young, of Everlasting Youth, of the Ever-Living Ones), Tir-na-mbeo (Land under Wave), and Hy-Brasil (the Land of the Blessed), a dim far country, discernible every seven years shining jewel-like upon the surface of the sea."¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

This happy other world, peopled by a happy race, to which certain ones were carried while still alive, served as inspiration to many an Irish writer. Certainly the writings of Yeats and of other contributors to the Literary Revival can be better understood against this background of Irish

history.

That such beliefs were incorporated in the old Irish religion or culture of Druidism seems fairly likely. The Druid, a shadowy figure from the ancient Celtic world, is many things to many people. His legend for some is reflected in forbidding incantations, ceremonials, and soothsaying. Some see him as steeped in the ritual of human sacrifice. Others like to believe that he is a symbol of the hidden, a dim, mysterious figure of the Irish hills and hollows, bowing before the sun, yet elevating himself in the majesty of the trees and later becoming the custodian of the law and the referee of custom, branching out finally as brehon or judge, file or bard, ollamh or sage.¹⁵ It is generally agreed that

¹⁵ Francis Hackett, The Story of the Irish Nation, p.32.

the bard came to be associated with the allied function of arbitration, deciding and chronicling genealogies, and recording traditions. Sometimes the Druid is mentioned as the judge, the poet, the chronicler in the same breath.

To Lewis Spence, the Druids were "Men of the Oak" or priests of the oak-cult. Spence's thesis is that the oak tree in the forests of Europe was revered by man as a source of sustenance, and that at a later stage of religious development, it was worshiped as a god or as the abode of a

god whose attributes were associated with the weather, the firmament, and the general idea of growth. From the evidence he has found, he concludes that the Druids were a definite priesthood who practiced religious rites and ceremonies closely identified with the cultus of the Divine King, and who employed magic and augury. That the Druids acted as counsellors to the Irish kings is evident from frequent allusions in ancient Irish literature. Classed as Filids or "learned poets," they appear to have instructed the youth of royalty and nobility and to have functioned as prophets or diviners. On occasions the Irish bards, too, acted as diviners, and in a state of ecstasy poured forth a flood of poetry ending in a prophecy. The Druids or Filids, as the higher poetic caste, did employ spells, the art of which, Spence believes, they acquired from their bardic training of studying traditional incantations believed to produce magical results. The bards, who earned the barred cap and the title of ollamh only after a twelve-year period of training, were required to master the intricate, wholly Irish system of prosody as well as the vast store of romances and chronicles, of which little survives. However fragmentary it is, the Irish claim that it is more ancient and more numerous than anything the rest of Europe can show. The education of the Druids, regarded as the basis of the ancient educational system of Ireland, has been set by some as extending twenty years. In

this training Spence includes the recital of genealogies as well as the bardic schooling proper.¹⁶

¹⁶Lewis Spence, The History and Origins of Druidism, pp. 43-47, passim.

According to Blanche Kelly, Druidism seems to have been not a religion but a culture, whose representatives were in the beginning the exclusive members of the learned class, serving in the offices of judge, poet, historian and musician. When the Druids stooped to the level of wizards, their scholarly functions were apportioned among the fili, who thenceforth constituted the learned class and were the hereditary keepers of ancient legend and learning until the fall of the Gaelic order in 1603. It is recorded that the fili were so well thought of that in Erin only three types of persons were allowed to speak in public--a chronicler, a bard, and a brehon or judge.¹⁷ The ancient Gaelic state was governed by

¹⁷Kelly, p. 12.

law, even while it was pagan. "The original Irish jurists were the druids, the origin of the science of jurisprudence having been credited to the druid Amergin."¹⁸

¹⁸Ibid., p. 13.

Subdivided in rank among themselves, the bards swarmed about the countryside, attaching themselves to ruling families to be patronized by them, and enjoying almost as great privileges as their hosts. The chief poet ranked next to the king and was attended by a large staff of retainers, living at the public expense. By his feats of memory, a richly imaginative culture was preserved and enhanced in epics in fine meter and prose. The epic poem recited by the bard or seanaoibí was to take the place that dramatic representation held elsewhere in Europe until the nineteenth century, when Irish political speeches supplanted it. In the recital of the epic, the fine word was of the greatest importance. Its use was governed by the most finished and elaborate technique that mediaeval Europe has to show.¹⁹

¹⁹ Andrew E. Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 6.

In the period of old Gaelic Christianity, Irish culture reached its highest peak. Whether the sainted swineherd, Patrick, introduced into Ireland the Roman alphabet and the use of script is not certain, but it is known that he prompted their use. Born in Britain, then under Roman domination, he knew the Latin language. Taken captive by invading Irish and carried to Ireland when he was about sixteen (401), he mastered the Gaelic. So complete was Ireland's conversion

to Christianity that it came to be known as the "holy island," with every monastery a school and every saint at least a patron of scholarship. Under Patrick's encouragement, copies of the Scriptures and liturgical books were multiplied, scribes were trained, and there was inaugurated "that long and glorious history of Irish manuscript literature in which are combined the arts of letters and illumination, in a fashion which is still in many respects the wonder of the world."²⁰ Irish missionaries were so success-

²⁰ Kelly, p. 33.

ful in Europe that the revival of learning there was attributed in no small degree to Irish effort. Under the stimulus of Christianity, Ireland's civilization might have affected western Europe even more profoundly, had it not been for the series of invasions, misfortunes, and disturbances that, less than three centuries after St. Patrick, arrested the development of this civilization. Before the seventeenth century no work of any size had ever been undertaken in Ireland by any Englishman, with the exception of Spenser's View, Hammer's Chronicle, and Campion's Historie of Ireland.

The seventeenth century itself, so devastating to the Gael, was productive in literature. During the first

half of it at least, the Irish struggled to keep up with the rest of Europe. Many of the great writers used Gaelic exclusively. Others of equal fame wrote in both Gaelic and Latin, as though foreseeing the threat to their native language. There were also, even then, men of English descent but Irish birth who made use of only Latin and English in their writings.

The eighteenth century saw the Gaels deprived by law of education, yet creating a system of education of their own and mastering the rhythm and music of their language in a furtively produced literature and poetry. With the nineteenth century came eclipse. The first half of the century, up to the time of the Great Famine, found the majority of the people Gaelic and produced several poets in Connacht and Munster; the last half saw little or nothing left of the tones of the unmixed "Aryan" language. In the words of Hyde, "Had it not been for Aufgrim, the Boyne and the Penal laws, it would undoubtedly be the language of all Ireland, and would have probably produced a splendid modern literature."²¹ As it was, the language was not spoken in

²¹Hyde, Preface, pp. xviii-xix.

law courts, camps, or colleges after the first half of the seventeenth century. During the eighteenth century, those

who spoke it were not able to develop men of science and learning, because law forbade education. Therefore, the language failed to keep abreast of changing vernacular names in science, politics, banking, engineering, and mathematics. During the Literary Revival, this situation was improved through the power of forming word-combinations.²² The

²²Ibid., Preface, pp. xix-xx.

complex causes which brought about what was virtually the extinction of the Gaelic language throughout most of Ireland may be classed as political, religious, and social.

A brief survey of Ireland's history will reveal more clearly, in part at any rate, why one of the oldest civilizations of Europe with a culture and literature continuing almost without break from pre-Christian times should have remained untouched by that great European cultural movement known as the Renaissance. The story of explanation involves war and pillage, repression and internal division. Before the coming of the Norsemen, the Irish had fought each other; the new invaders merely provided new fighting combinations which eventually became unfavorable to the Norsemen, who were defeated and expelled from any position of control. In 1014 Ireland under her over-king, Brian Boru, was saved from subjection to the Danes at the

battle of Clontarf. For a century and a half after Boru's death on the battlefield until the coming of the Normans under Strongbow, Earl of Pembroke, in 1169, tribal strife and bloodshed flourished along with individual alliance or conflict with the invaders. Consequently, Ireland did not develop along the cultural lines of other European countries. In time came the "Plantations and expropriations of Elizabeth, the sanguinary fanaticism of Cromwell and the tortuous wars of the Stuarts, followed by comparative calm for two centuries. The war at the end of the nineteenth century completed the brief survey of national unrest."²³ During most

²³Malone, p. 3.

of this time, the Irish people were outlaws and helots in their own land and homes by the operation of penal laws against their customs and beliefs.

While the Irish people in general had no wish to submit to their alien conquerors, they were now an enfeebled race with no legal existence. Little better than serfs, some tilled the land of their fathers; others fled to the wild and forbidding parts of the barren Connaught hills in the west where, on their lonely moors, they dreamed of lost glories. The better lands of the east were in the hands of country gentlemen and large holders who often went off to England to live on the rents. Small wonder, with Celtic

Ireland reduced to sorrow and humiliation, that Irishmen began to flee from their own land.

It is important as background to look more closely at the fate of the Gaelic or Celtic language during the years of Ireland's trial by oppression. Gaelic was sometimes adopted by the invader absorbed into Ireland's native population, but to those who came to rule for a time and to those who lived in the greater island, Gaelic seemed an uncouth tongue. In the seventeenth century, it was the tongue of an inferior, subject race. The Irish Celts who spoke it were subject to persecution and disability from which they escaped only by abandoning it. The eighteenth century government in Ireland frowned on Gaelic or Celtic literature; and so the Irishman more and more learned the English language, speaking it with a delightful and peculiar pronunciation of his own and forgetting the speech of his fathers. Eighteenth-century Ireland offered no opportunities to the one who persisted in using his native tongue and in professing the Catholic faith. Under the penalties imposed, Irish schools disappeared, and yet the pure language managed to survive in certain remote parts of Ireland and in the linguistic accomplishments of philologists and scholars. A traveler in 1835 estimated that four millions out of seven still used the mother tongue; by 1901 official figures showed that only 20,953 persons in Ireland spoke only Gaelic.²⁴

²⁴Tanner, pp. 318-319.

A people must retain both its name and its language for a guarantee of liberty and nationality.²⁵ With Gaelic

²⁵Hyde, Preface, p. vii.

Ireland reduced to comparative silence, a guarantee of nationality was lost to the island.

To impute to the Irish peasant an indifference to native education during these years is unjust. Behind the scenes something of the ancient cultural tradition continued to be carried on by means of the Hedge Schools. Of this manifestation of Ireland's effort to preserve her native tongue an Irish exchange student spoke in an interview in the writer's home not very long ago. A native of the Aran Islands in the province of Connaught and a fluent speaker of Gaelic, he recounted the story of how, for a few pence and at the risk of life, the heroic hedge schoolmaster undertook virtually without books to continue the tradition of the bardic and monastic schools. Literally in the lee of a hedge or in a secret cabin, this hedge scholar contrived to teach in Irish, the use of which was tantamount to treason. In like secrecy and with like risk, the "priests of the rocks" continued to preach to their Catholic following

in the hills.²⁶

²⁶From an interview with Pete MacGowan in the writer's home, March 27, 1959.

The plight of the priest as reconstructed by Professor Daniel Corkery reveals the contempt with which Irish culture was looked upon by the Ascendancy and also by some of the Irish, who considered it wise to share that view.

To picture the Gael's way of life in those days is to feel that one has gone away from human lands and wanders in a dream which must presently break. . . . The bells were silenced. The holy wells were deserted, the priests banished, a certain number of them bought by gold. The dead must not be laid with their fathers in the abbey grounds. Mass could be said only in secret rock-clefts, with sentries posted on the hill-tops; if said in some secret garret in a town, then a curtain had better be hung between priest and people, so that the flock might afterwards truthfully swear, if put to it, that they did not know who the celebrant was.²⁷

²⁷Kelly, p. 96.

CHAPTER II

There are those who think of the Irish Renaissance as a movement set in motion by the early political enthusiasms of William Butler Yeats, "laboring at first in verse and in the revival of a moribund language, and later in the creation of a body of dramatic material for the use of a little theater in Dublin."¹ They think of its work as a literary

¹Lloyd R. Morris, The Celtic Dawn, p. 1.

phenomenon characterized by tendencies peculiar in form and substance, the product of an intellectual upper class removed from life and its problems. The true student, however, recognizes the fact that the renaissance in Ireland is the expression of a social synthesis deep rooted in political and social history. He knows, furthermore, that the movement is concerned with intellectual emancipation and economic progress as well as with literary development. The common aim of the renaissance in its literary, dramatic, social, and economic phases was unquestionably the reconstruction of Irish life. Emphasis in these pages will be on the literary aspect.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Ireland had no native theatrical tradition in either the Irish or the English language. Until the beginning of the same century, that part of Ireland in which English was the native language

could claim no distinctly national literature. Since an Irish national theater and an Irish national literature were finally to emerge from the shadow of English tradition, both mixed with political history, it will be necessary to write briefly from time to time of the dramatic as well as the non-dramatic poetic trends.

It is an outstanding paradox that the Irish people with their flair for acting and their absorption in projecting their individual phantasies and dreams did not produce a native theatrical tradition before the late nineteenth century.² It is possible to mention here only a few of the

²William Smith Clark, *The Early Irish Stage*, p. 1.

reasons that have been advanced in explanation of this fact. Certainly, the social and political odds in Ireland did not favor in any regular way the development of the drama as a part of the national culture. Partial explanation lies, perhaps, in the cultural standard that originated and maintained the practice of poetry recitals in the halls and of the diffusion by mouth of stories and news by the hearthstone.

William Smith Clark holds that at bottom, the exclusively rural pattern of Gaelic culture prevented the rise of an indigenous formal drama. Such drama, he points out, is the product of communal living--a town art supported by fixed patronage. Because of the fact that in the original Irish

civilization, the town or city was founded by the Danes, Normans, or English; whatever dramatic entertainment existed developed under immigrant influence. Consequently, the history of the Irish stage is a tale of alien forces slowly shaping the natural dramatic instincts in the Irish genius.³ Not only

³Ibid., p. 2.

did the plays enacted have no connection with the mass of the Irish people; they depicted a civilization that was even hostile to that of Ireland. In the larger towns, the theater was actually something of a special preserve for the resident aristocracy. In other words, the theater was that of an English colony that followed the mode of the London theater rather than any spontaneous outgrowth from the ordinary life of the people.

The eclipse of the Irish language in the nineteenth century was partially compensated by the emergence of an Anglo-Irish literature, the first conscious expression of national feeling since the passing of Gaelic as a literary medium. The term "Anglo-Irish" is reserved most properly in this exposition for literature which, although it is not written in Gaelic, is none the less informed by the spirit of the race.⁴ The process of achieving this Anglo-Irish

⁴Ernest A. Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 8.

literature was a lengthy one, extending beyond the period of Anglicization and of fierce political nationalism to the rise of the Language Movement and the return to Celtic sources. The writers mentioned here are evaluated solely as part of Irish national literature. Their works are considered only in so far as they are found to reflect the racial and artistic qualities which make up the raison d'être of the Celtic Revival in Ireland. Furthermore, the terms of appreciation used are relative to the scope of Anglo-Irish literature.

It seems appropriate, before naming the actual precursors of the Irish Renaissance movement, to establish the fact that the Celtic Revival was not confined to Ireland alone. Before 1750, the year chosen as the early limit of the movement in England, individual historians had already shown considerable interest in the Celts--in their history, language, literature, customs, and the rites of their priests, the Druids. At odd times, extensive treatises had been published on almost every aspect of Gaelic culture. To the archaeologists, one of the most interesting points of dispute was the origin of the numerous megalithic monuments of Britain--whether, in a word, Stonehenge and other similar remains were built by Druids or not. Dictionaries in the various Celtic dialects were compiled by linguists. Histories of the early Britons included at least a few pages on Druidism. Here and there, sporadic traces of Celtic influence are found in English poetry, such as the passing reference

made by Milton in his Lycidas.

Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
 Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?
 For neither were ye playing on the steep
 Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,
 Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
 Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream.⁵

⁵E. D. Snyder, The Celtic Revival in English Literature, p. 3.

Throughout the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth in England, no translations of importance were made by English writers. The Celtic movement, however, was a definite force uniting English men of letters who wished to infuse English poetry with the history, mythology, and literary treasures of the Celts. In the years shortly after the mid-eighteenth century, Thomas Gray's Bard, William Mason's Caractacus, James Macpherson's Ossian, and Evan Evan's Specimens of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh Bards were generally understood and appreciated. The development at this time stemmed from two causes: the awakening of a spirit of Romanticism, one feature of which was to abandon the traditional classical mythology for something more mysterious; and the advent of Lewis Morris, or Llewelyn Ddu o Fon, Welsh antiquary and leading poet who had unearthed certain treasures of Welsh literature.⁶ The

⁶Ibid., pp. 4-7, passim.

Celtic-English poetry, written in English but deriving its inspiration from Celtic sources, was of four types: poems dealing with Druidism and other features of Celtic legend, translations, imitations or pretended translations, and poems written about the famous heroes of Celtic history and tradition.

The Bard, first printed in 1757, is Gray's imaginative reconstruction of the death song of a Welsh bard who, to escape the death ordered by Edward I. for all the bards, flung himself from the top of a great precipice into the River Conway. William Mason's dramatic poem Caractacus, revised by Thomas Gray, is Celtic in subject and setting. Mason's solemn and dignified treatment of the Druid creates a distinctly Celtic atmosphere.

Gaze on the solemn scenes: behold yon oak,
 How stern he frowns, and with his broad brown arms
 Chills the pale plain beneath him: mark yon altar,
 Shirts with unheav'n stone: they awe my soul,
 As if the very genius of the place
 Himself appear'd,

⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

The work which makes Evan Evans important in the history of the Celtic Revival in English literature was published in 1764 under the title Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards. Evans felt the necessity of putting the Welsh bards within the knowledge of the English public.

In 1761, James Macpherson brought out Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem, with Other Poems Composed by Ossian, and two years later Temora, an Epic Poem, both in the manner of ancient Celtic legendry. It seems certain that these cadenced prose fragments, claimed by the author to be translations, were not, for the most part, either translations or paraphrases. The probability is that Macpherson, "with some knowledge of Gaelic and a rather extensive acquaintance among the actual singers of old Gaelic ballads attributed to Ossian, expanded such fragments as he found into loosely connected narratives which he called epics."⁸ Whatever their sources

⁸Odell Shepard and Paul Spencer Wood, editors, English Prose and Poetry, 1660-1800.

and whatever their author did to perfect them, these so-called Ossianic poems were so suited to the growing taste for antiquity that they caused a sensation. Though his connection with Ossian, the third-century Gaelic bard, ended with the publication of the works mentioned, Macpherson had succeeded in proving the "distinction of all nations, not merely of Greece and Rome."⁹ The Celtic Revival in English literature is

⁹Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England, p. 1015.

not the isolated phenomenon that it appears to be in this brief sketch. There is the complex interrelation of politics

and literature as well as the connection between religion and the study of primitive poetry that might be investigated within the limits of the English aspect.¹⁰

¹⁰ Snyder, pp. 191-192.

In Ireland, the agitation attendant on the struggle for national freedom bears pertinently on the sudden outburst of literary enthusiasm which followed a period of bitter political disappointment. Thus it seems necessary to recall briefly the events preceding the downfall of the national hero Charles Stuart Parnell and the ultimate effect of this downfall on the young Ireland of this time. Parnell, as leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster, had won concession after concession in the House of Commons--unprecedented triumphs indicating an end to oppression and a beginning of ultimate success in Ireland's struggle for Home Rule.

In 1882 in the midst of the island's wild rejoicing, Lord Frederick Cavendish, sent from England to act in an official capacity, was assassinated along with a Castle official in Phoenix Park. England retaliated by withdrawing all the concessions she had granted, by enacting additional Coercion Acts, and by imprisoning Parnell on the charge of complicity in the murder. Parnell's vindication and release gave Ireland new heart, only to be followed by his implication in a

divorce suit and by subsequent political ruin. With its mighty fallen, the Irish party split into factions. The chance for emancipation without bloodshed seemed lost forever.

The Irish do not easily accept defeat. Their failure to win freedom in one direction served as a goad to make them seek it in another. At this time when disillusionment threatened the heart of Irish life, Ireland turned from political disappointment to the cultural movements that have left their mark on the country since then. The fact that literary pursuits superseded political activities during the years that followed Parnell's fall and death does not mean, however, that the effects of Ireland's struggle were lost. The ideals inspired by Parnell's efforts took shape in the writings of outstanding poets and dramatists of the new movement in literature.

A backward glance at the course of literature in Ireland during the century immediately preceding the renaissance is of value at this point. The end of the seventeenth century had witnessed the complete disintegration of the powerful bardic order. Verse making in the native tongue was relegated to scattered individuals, chiefly in Munster, and to the majority of the peasantry, who had not then lost command of Gaelic. These sang of their sorrow, their loves, and their

hopes in a body of folk poetry which has only within comparatively recent years become the subject of collection and study. Until the early nineteenth century, that part of Ireland in which English was the native language had no distinctively national literature. The first stirrings of the Irish national spirit in English literature were evident in Thomas Moore's lyrics written for Irish music, and in Maria Edgeworth's novels that expressed an interest in the Irish peasant. Jeremiah Joseph Callanan's essentially Irish meter and strong feeling next prepared the way for greater translators to come.¹¹

¹¹ Morris, p. 3.

From 1830 Trinity College in Dublin was a center of political and literary activity, and in 1883 The Dublin University Magazine was founded. Among its contributors was James Clarence Mangan, who wrote verse paraphrases of Gaelic songs from prose translations supplied by his friends. Mangan, who knew no Gaelic himself, contributed also to The Nation, a newspaper founded by Charles Gavin Duffy and T. O. Davis as the organ of "Young Ireland." The Nation played an important part in the evolution of Anglo-Irish poetry. Poetry from all quarters--obscure peasants, men known in the struggle for political freedom--filled its pages, wielding

a powerful influence on contemporary Irishmen, but, with the exception of James Clarence Mangan, leaving no work of enduring worth, and proving that patriotic revolt is not necessarily a guarantee of good poetry.¹² Actually, the poets

¹²Boyd, p. 17.

of The Nation, for all their proclaiming of patriotism, followed the English rather than the Celtic tradition, and their work bears little upon the development of Irish verse. Mangan's writing, considered the first true expression of Celtic Ireland in the English tongue, owed its stimulus to ancient Gaelic song and legend.

The familiar and essentially patriotic Dark Rosaleen owes its inspiration to Mangan's reading of Roisin Dubh, the work of an unknown Elizabethan bard. Written in three versions, at considerable intervals, the poem departs more and more from the original: At the same time it comes nearer and nearer to the conception of the Gaelic poet and becomes an original creation.¹³ Mangan's own contribution comes in

¹³Ibid., p. 18.

such word groupings as exist in the third and fourth lines quoted here:

Over dews, over sands,
Will I fly for your weal;

Your holy, delicate white hands
 Shall girdle me with steel.
 At home in your emerald bowers,
 From morning's dawn till e'en,
 You'll pray for me, my flower of flowers,
 My Dark Rosaleen!
 My fond Rosaleen!¹⁴

¹⁴George Benjamin Woods, ed., Poetry of the Victorian Period, p. 12.

Yeats was not the first to use the Rose symbolically. In the Romance of the Rose, the Rose symbolized love. "The Virgin Mary had been named "the mystic rose." Here Mangan uses the flower as a symbol of Ireland.¹⁵

¹⁵Ibid., p. 861.

It was only as the interpreter of Ireland's poignant history of former splendor that Mangan deserves mention. Only his works of Gaelic inspiration escaped the commonplace. Unlike Mangan, Sir Samuel Ferguson was a distinguished Gaelic scholar whose studies in archaeological research revealed the treasures of Ireland's ancient history and literature. Because of his antiquarian labors in the whole field of Irish culture, he was appointed Deputy Keeper of the Records, then elected President of the Royal Irish Academy. Realizing that something more substantial than the aggressive offerings of The Nation must constitute the subject matter of Irish art,

Ferguson aspired to lay the foundation of a national literature worthy of Ireland by putting the old legends and stories into circulation. He was the first to make known to Englishmen and Irishmen the cycle of epic legends of the deeds of Cuchulain and the loves of Deirdre. It was his rendering in English verse of the Conorian cycle of the Red Branch history that engaged the attention of Irish poets from this time on.

The Conorian legend is the tragic story, sung by bards since early times, of the House of Usnach (Usna). Its theme is the fatal beauty of Deirdre (daughter of the harper to King Conchobar of Ulster) which brings banishment and death to the sons of Usnach and death to Deirdre by her own hand--all according to Druidic prophecy. Falling naturally into the five acts of classical tragedy and involving the destiny of the entire House of Usnach, the story of Deirdre was, Dr. George Sigerson believed, "the first tragedy, outside of the classic languages, in the literature of Europe."¹⁶ To the Irish world

¹⁶Boyd, pp. 21-22.

this heroic cycle, dealing with the history of the Milesians within a brief but well-defined period, is marked with circumstantiality mixed with the mysterious.¹⁷ Cuchulain, Conor

¹⁷Hyde, p. 68.

mae Nessa, Fergus mae Roy, Naesi and Deirdre, Meve and Conall Ceasnach have about them an air of reality which is wanting in the dim and distorted forms of the mythological cycle.

All the true Irish world knows the story of the Loves of Deirdre and Naesi--the Helen and Paris of Ireland's antiquity--whose lasting fascination was to be exploited later for the good of the Irish Literary Revival by such writers as Lady Isabella Gregory, G. W. Russell, John Millington Synge, and William Butler Yeats. For those unfamiliar with the naturally dramatic quality of the material, Douglas Hyde's summary of the story is included here. The account is Hyde's English version of work which he had written first in Gaelic in order to reproduce the original language of the tale:

the story of Deirdre, which gave rise to the great war--how Conor, King of Ulster, obeying a prophecy, reared her in a solitary path apart from all human beings, designing to make her his own wife when of age; how the maiden became enamoured of Naesi, who fled with her to Alba, along with his two brothers; how Conor lured them back again by Fergus mae Roy, who pledged them his word that no harm was intended for them; how the king, having craftily separated Fergus from them, slew them, and the son of Fergus with them; and how Fergus, in bitter indignation at his pledged word being broken, attacked and burned Conor's capital, Emania, and finally retired into Connacht, whence he kept up incessant incursions upon Ulster, with the aid of the Connacht warriors, for nearly ten years. The slaughter of the sons of Ugnach and the melancholy death of Deirdre is one of the most pathetic tales of this cycle.¹⁸

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 69-70.

Taking The Battle of Moyra, Ferguson next divested that bardic romance of some of its extravagances and remade it into a beautiful and homogeneous narrative modeled after the great epic poems. Not satisfied with his first attempt, Congal, published in 1872, he recast the material and concentrated his attention upon Congal, the principal personage in the Gaelic text, keeping the Battle of Moyra as the culminating incident. The theme possesses significance, unity, and continuity of action in the struggle between the forces of Congal and Domnal. The battle of Moyra marks the last stand between bardic and pagan Ireland and the forces of Christianity and clericalism.¹⁹ Ferguson

¹⁹Boyd, p. 23.

peoples his account of Prince Congal's expedition against Domnal, Erin's king, with dread, gigantic figures common to Celtic mythology. The great sea-god of Irish antiquity, Mananan, strides through the narrative with giant tread; and the ghastly banshee, Washer of the Ford, is vividly pictured.

Ferguson's work, representative of a clear-cut stage in the development of Anglo-Irish literature, must be estimated by its relative merits. His zeal to reconstruct the Gaelic past interfered with his care for perfection of finish. Along with his vigor and freshness, there is a roughness of composition resulting from metrical weaknesses, andward

caesuras, and clashing consonants. It must be remembered that Ferguson's task was both new and strange. All pioneer work is difficult, but he had the added problem of finding suitable equivalents for old Gaelic names and of dealing with the redundant fluency of the old language. Orgies of descriptive epithet mark the following:

The deep-clear-watered, foamy crested, terribly
 resounding,
 lofty leaping, prone-descending, ocean-calf
 abounding,
 fishy fruitful, salmon-teeming, many-colored,
 sunny beaming,
 heady-eddied, horrid thund'ring, ocean-prodigy-
 engend'ring,
 billow-raging, battle waging, neyman-haunted,
 poet-vaunted,
 Royal, patrimonial, old torrent of Bas-Roc.²⁰

²⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

Ferguson won immediate recognition from such contemporaries as Aubrey de Vere and William Allingham, who were to help set the stage for a poetic revival. William Butler Yeats, whose first book, Rosada, was published in 1886, the year of Ferguson's death, considered Ferguson to be the most Celtic of poets, the only man of his time who wrote heroic poetry.²¹

²¹ Ibid., p. 25.

While Mangan and Ferguson may be called the precursors of the Literary Revival, because they substituted a sense of nationality for aggressive nationalism, Standish James O'Grady did work actually necessary as preliminary to a cultural awakening. O'Grady's accidental contact at Dublin University in 1872 with O'Halloran's History of Ireland in three volumes led to the publication in 1878 of his own History of Ireland: Heroic Period. This remarkable and eloquent prose work of the stories of the ancient Gael is regarded as the starting point of the Celtic Revival.²² The

²²Ibid., p. 27.

work has all the characteristics of the epic poem in which history and legend mingle. O'Grady reduced to its artistic element by imaginative processes the heroic period of Ireland's history as it is pictured in bardic literature.²³

²³Malone, p. 31.

By the term "Literary Revival" is not meant a continuation of the Anglicised Irish literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The movement refers rather to the beginning of a national literature in the English language. The growth of this literature has necessarily departed, however, from the normal process of evolution.

Since Ireland already had the literary forms perfected and handed down by English and Gaelic writers, "it was merely a question of renewing the substance which was to be poured into the existing molds."²⁴ Therefore, O'Grady's brilliant

²⁴Boyd, p. 28.

prose in two volumes became the point of departure for a rich poetic expression in the language that had replaced Ireland's own tongue. It did not matter that O'Grady placed little importance on the point at which legend and history merged. It has been said that he so immersed himself in the past and so identified himself with his heroes and heroines--Maev, Fergus, and Ferdia; Conchobar, Laeg, and Cuchulain; and, of course, Deirdre--that they ceased to be legendary and came to be human beings like himself, traversing the same daily rounds, walking the same earth--his ancestors as they were the ancestors of all Irishmen.²⁵

²⁵Ibid., p. 30.

From the splendor of O'Grady's prose, inspiration naturally came in time to those writers who were to bear the torch of the new movement in literature. Yeats, Synge, and Russell were to be attracted by Deirdre; Edward Martyn by Maeve; and Lady Gregory and George Moore by Grania, the

daughter of King Cormac, from the legends relating to the Irish hero Finn. The dramatization of the heroic legends was to end there for all except Yeats.²⁶ The passage below

26

Malone, p. 32.

gives some idea of the manner in which O'Grady's imagination ran riot.

But all around, in surging, tumultuous motion, come and go the gorgeous, unearthly beings that long ago emanated from the bardic minds, a most weird and mocking world. Faces rush out of the darkness, and as swiftly retreat again. Heroes expand into giants and dwindle into goblins, or fling aside the heroic form and gambol as buffoons; gorgeous palaces are blown asunder like smoke wreaths; kings with wands of silver and ard-roth of gold, move with all their state from century to century; puissant heroes, whose fame reverberates through battles, are shifted from place to place . . . buried monarchs reappear. . . . The explorer visits an enchanted land where he is mocked and deluded. Everything is blown loose from its fastenings. All that should be most stable is whirled round and borne away like foam or dead leaves in a storm.²⁷

27Doyle, p. 31.

O'Grady, admitting that his mode of writing history was open to many obvious objections, formulated his intention in words prophetic of his success:

I desire to make this heroic period once again a portion of the imagination of the country, and its chief characters as familiar in the minds of our people as they once were. . . .

If I can awake an interest in the career of even a single ancient Irish king, I shall establish a train of thoughts, which will advance easily from thence to the state of society in which he lived, and the kings and heroes who surrounded, preceded or followed him. Attention and interest once fully aroused, concerning even one feature of this landscape of ancient history, could be easily widened and extended in its scope.²⁸

²⁸Ibid., p. 40.

Sharing honors with O'Grady as doyen of the Revival was George Sigerson, president of the Irish National Literary Society in Dublin and translator of the folk songs of old Gaelic poetry. Sigerson's work served as one more transitional link between the efforts of Mangan and Ferguson and those of the actual initiators of the Revival. His Poets and Poetry of Munster was a contribution to the work that was to go forward under the leadership of Douglas Hyde, whose idea was to restore the Gaelic language. Sigerson's second book, Bards of the Gael and Gail, 1897, was to be edited by Gavin Duffy, president of the Irish Literary Society in London. Out of the two organizations mentioned eventually emerged the National Theater.²⁹

²⁹Curtis Canfield, ed., Plays of the Irish Renaissance, p. 16.

It is upon Sigerson's achievement as a translator of the old Gaelic poets that his distinction rests. Credited

with keeping the music of the original text as well as the spirit, Sigerson reproduced the popular heptasyllabic measure of Gaelic poetry--alien to the nature of English which falls more readily into lines of eight syllables--whenever the text required.³⁰ The translation of the first

³⁰Doyd, p. 60.

poem in Sigerson's anthology, supposedly the ancient incarnation of the Druid-poet Amergin, brings out the rhyme of the poem which supports the translator's claim that rhyming verse existed in Ireland at a time when such forms were unthought of in other countries. Hyde rationalizes concerning the authenticity of Amergin as a person and concerning all of his three poems as being the first verses to be made in Ireland. Taking a neutral position, as he so often does, Hyde writes, "No faith can be placed in the alleged date or genuineness of Amergin's verses. They are, however, of interest; and it may very well be that they actually do present the oldest surviving lines in any vernacular tongue in Europe except Greek."³¹ Though the curious,

³¹Hyde, pp. 28-29.

pantheistic strain to be found in Amergin's chant runs through the lines of Celtic poetry to the present day, it

is also suggestive of Eastern poetry.

I am the wind that breathes upon the sea
 I am the wave of the ocean,
 I am the murmur of the billows,
 I am the ox of the seven combats
 I am the vulture upon the rocks,
 I am the beam of the sun,
 I am the fairest of plants
 I am a wild bear in valour,
 I am a salmon in the water,
 I am a lake in the plain,
 I am a word of science,
 I am the point of the lance of battle
 I am the God who creates in the head (i. e. of
 man) the fire (i. e. the thought).
 Who is it who throws light into the meeting on
 the mountain?
 Who announces the ages of the moon (If not I)?
 Who teaches the place where couches the sun (If
 not I)?³²

32E. A. Sharp and J. Matthey, eds., Lyra Celtica,
 p. 3.

Sigerson is said to have found the reason for the note of Celtic sadness, of which so much has been written, in the dirges of Oisín mourning the death of the Fianna. Oisín, last of the great pagans, laments the departure of his companions and all they stood for--result of the rise of Christianity. The dialogues of Oisín and Patrick are symbolic of the eternal conflict between the heroic and the Christian ideal--a theme that was to capture the imagination of other Irish poets, among them William Butler Yeats. The mind of Yeats especially was to dwell on the altered destiny of the race as he advocated a return to the path that

would lead again to national and spiritual greatness.

The subject matter of Sigerson's poems ranges from writings about the earliest Milesian invaders to eighteenth-century folk songs. It extends over a period of two thousand years, representing an almost unparalleled poetic lineage that strengthened the growing sense of Irish nationality in literature.

A new interest in Gaelic sprang from the formation of the Gaelic League in 1893, by a small group of which Dr. Douglas Hyde, Father Eugene O'Growney, Eoin MacNeill, and T. O'Neill Russell were prominent members. Not only was Irish intellectual life attracted to the group as a means of rescuing the Irish language as a medium for literature, but all classes supported it in order to learn Irish from O'Growney's textbooks and where possible, with the assistance of a native speaker as teacher.

W. G. Fay credits the existence of the two literary societies mentioned to the initiative and energy of W. B. Yeats and points to the inevitable influence of these organizations on the writers of plays.³³ The inaugural lecture

³³W. G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, The Fays of the Abbey Theater, p. 110.

that Stopford Brooke delivered to the London Society in 1893 contained what amounted to a manifesto of what came to be known as the Irish Literary Revival.³⁴ In this lecture

³⁴Malone, p. 29.

Brooke pointed out that the use of English would not necessarily hamper the expression of the Celtic spirit or interfere with the continuing of the Gaelic tradition, if the writers used the material left them by their Gaelic ancestor. The Society in London is credited with the translating and publishing of the early Irish texts, the compiling and publishing of anthologies of poems translated from the Gaelic, the treating of heroic tales by poets and dramatists, and the systematic collection of folk tales and folk songs.

Douglas Hyde, folklorist, editor, translator, and writer of original poetry in Gaelic, was influential in creating the new Anglo-Irish idiom that was to figure later in the Irish drama. His Love Songs of Connaught, published in 1893, marked the beginning of the use of the Irish idiom in literary English. His Literary History of Ireland, the most original of his works in English, did much to advance the claims of Irish letters to be judged independently of English literature.³⁵ Peasant dialect as a medium of artis-

³⁵Baugh, p. 1502.

tic expression was to be used later by one of the greatest dramatists of Ireland and of the Revival, John Millington Synge.

Hyde's desire for accuracy prompted him to reproduce, along with the original language of the Gaelic folk tales, parallel translations in English. His Connaught songs or poems are especially significant for the student of contemporary Anglo-Irish literature. In them is to be found the source of what is considered the chief discovery and the most characteristic quality of the drama of the Literary Revival, the effective use of the Anglo-Irish idiom. Passages like the following, employing the English of the country people in which the old Gaelic influence is predominant, reveal the new medium which Hyde gave to Irish literature.

If I were to be on the brow of Nefin and my
hundred loves by my side, it is pleasantly
we would sleep together like the little bird
upon the bough. It is your melodious wordy
little mouth that increased my pain and a quiet
sleep I cannot get until I shall die, alas!

If you were to see the star of knowledge
and she coming at a distance from you who
would disperse fog and enchantment. (Love
Songs of Connaught)³⁶

³⁶Boyd, p.77.

Such translated passages are the obvious forerunners of the eloquent, rhythmic phrasing that is now identified with the style of J. M. Synge. Once Hyde had demonstrated the strength and flexibility of the Anglo-Irish medium, other writers, among them Lady Gregory, used it to

Ireland's glory. Hyde's verse from the Songs of Rafferty might easily be taken for one of Synge's amorous speeches from The Playboy of the Western World.

If you were to see the sky-woman and she prepared and dressed
 Of a fine sunny day in the street, and She walking,
 And a light kindled out of her shining bosom
 That would give sight to the man without an eye.
 There is the love of hundreds in the forehead
 of her face,
 Her appearance is as it were the Star of Monday,
 And if she had been in being in the time of the
 gods
 It is not to Venus the apple would have been
 delivered up.³⁷

³⁷Ibid.

The fact that peasant speech has come to be an accepted convention of the Irish theater is the result of the prestige brought upon its plays by Synge.

The sense of unity that had brought about the organizing of the Literary Societies began to bear fruit in a concerted effort of the younger generation to give new meaning to Irish poetry. While The Dublin University Review was publishing work of a distinctive kind, notably that of W. B. Yeats, Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland came out in 1888 as the first offering of the Literary Revival. Associated with Yeats in this pioneer volume were such personages as Sigerson, Hyde, T. W. Rolleston, Katharine Tynan, Rose Kavanagh, and John Todhunter. Although

the verses represent a high level of workmanship according to the critics, Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland is counted as a historical document chiefly because its authors were exponents of the new tradition in Irish poetry, namely, the substitution of legends, fairy tales, and superstition of the Irish countryside for political history. By this substitution, they indicated clearly the lines upon which poetry was to develop,³⁸

³⁸ Ibid., p. 96.

CHAPTER III

The Irish Renaissance broke upon the world in the 1890's in the form of a slender, little book Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland. Here in this first historical offering of the Revival are associated as collaborators "the names of those who have established the claim of Ireland to be adequately expressed in the English language."¹

¹Boyd, p. 95.

George Sigerson, as the representative of the pioneers, contributed one poem. The younger writers—Douglas Hyde, T. W. Rolleston, W. B. Yeats, Katherine Tynan, Rose Kavanagh, and John Todhunter—contributed the other works. Although John Todhunter was a contemporary of Sigerson, he is regarded as a newcomer to Irish poetry because his earlier work derived no inspiration from national sources. The slim little volume in its white buckram cover was enthusiastically received, not so much for its high level of workmanship as for its freshness and promise along the lines that were to set a new tradition in Irish poetry. There were crudities of rhyme, especially in the works of minor contributors. There was also a maturity of talent remarkable in the poems of comparative beginners. More important still, there was a new kind of patriotism, drawing its inspiration from the tradition and history and folk-legend of Ireland rather than from the heat

of Irish politics.

The poetry of William Butler Yeats gave force to the poetic awakening. One has only to compare the four poems he contributed to Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland with those of his collaborators to realize his superiority over his young contemporaries and the older writers who were represented. These poems, which will be mentioned individually, show a delicacy and skill of craftsmanship unusual in a young man of twenty-two. Their themes, derived from legend, fairy lore, and the mysterious spiritism of the countryside, clearly indicate the goal set by Yeats and by kindred poets in the new movement--a return to the origins of nationality and of national literature. Yeats' influence upon his contemporaries and, consequently, upon the course of the Revival is undeniable. By the example of his own writing, Yeats not only exposed the inadequacy of "politico-literary idols," but at the same time attracted attention to the new spirit at work.

Yeats deserves attention as poet, dramatist, storyteller, and essayist; but he elicits the highest praise as a poet. In order to be able to justify or refute T. S. Eliot's estimate of Yeats in 1940 as "the greatest poet in our time--certainly the greatest in this language, and so far as I am able to judge, in any language,"² it would be

²T. S. Eliot, "The Poetry of W. B. Yeats," in The Permanence of Yeats, ed: James Hall and Martin Steinmann, p. 331.

necessary to examine the entire body of Yeats' poetry here. Because of limits set by the subject chosen, Yeats' early poems--not always his best--will be the main subject of consideration. By his early poems he came to be known as the leading exponent of the Celtic Revival. "Early poems" refers, not to the first, uncertain efforts made while the poet was still searching for the direction in which his talent lay, but to the surer ones that followed the realization that Ireland was to be his source of inspiration.

The poems of any writer can best be understood against the background of his life and time. William Butler Yeats (1865-1905) was born near Dublin of Anglo-Irish stock, the son of John Butler Yeats, a portrait painter with Pre-Raphaelite leanings and an adherent to the Irish Nationalist cause. In his youth, on visits to his grandparents, the future poet absorbed the lore and superstition of the Sligo countryside. This same lore he was later to put into verse in such a way as to make him the subject of controversy among critics. From his schoolday reading of transcendental philosophy, he developed a love of secrecy and mystification, shared later by G. W. Russell (A. E), whom he came to know at the Dublin Art School, and by others united with them in

the movement which was both patriotic and mystical. In his early Dublin days as a member of the Hermetic Society, Yeats together with Russell and others, who came to be known as "the Dublin mystics,"³ read papers and wrote poetry in a

³Kelly, p. 209.

mystic vein. Their "mysticism" set out to encourage a revival of the pagan beliefs and way of life that had been overthrown by St. Patrick in the fifth century. It voiced belief in the reality of the old gods and the fairies and in their visible manifestations. Yeats later became interested in the Theosophic movement and, with other Theosophists, was one of a group of 'Christian' Cabbalists called the "Society of the Golden Dawn."⁴ Yeats made experiments in the practice

⁴Ibid.

of spiritualism, which became the subject of the treatise A Vision.

Yeats became aware of nationalist issues as they had influenced literature from his acquaintance with the old Fenian John O'Leary while O'Leary was president of the Young Ireland Society. As a result of the association, Yeats "did come to have a certain degree of imaginative sympathy for the Gaels as a race, especially certain picturesque aspects of

race, above all its legendry and superstition."⁵

⁵Ibid., p. 210.

Yeats was active in founding in 1892 the National Literary Society of Dublin, of which Dr. Hyde was the first president, and before which at the end of the first year Hyde delivered his address on the De-Anglicization of Ireland.⁵ This address resulted in the organization of the Gaelic League. Obligated by circumstances to spend part of each year in London, Yeats was instrumental in organizing a similar society of Irish authors and journalists then residing in the British capital. This organization, the Irish Literary Society of London, was the force chiefly responsible for calling attention to the new Irish literary movement.

Publication in 1889 of his first collection of verse, The Wanderings of Oisín, marked the beginning of Yeats' career as a distinctly Irish writer and revealed the poetical possibilities of the new Irish literature. The title poem revealed an orientation towards national poetry instead of the romances of Arcady and Spain which the poet had first written. Removed from the preoccupation with symbolism and the "Secret Rose" which dominated the poet's writings at various stages of his career, the spell-like cadences of Oisín and the subject were both "startlingly

new and mysteriously ancient" to the English reader to whom Yeats chiefly wrote.⁶

⁶ Ibid., p. 211.

'An Irish romantic movement," Yeats wrote, 'should make Ireland, as Ireland and all other lands were in ancient times, a holy land to its own people.'⁷ Practicality and

⁷ Woods, p. 1071.

sentiment led Yeats to intensify his art by limiting it to Irish legends and places interwoven with his life. It would be easier to 'call the Muses home' than to try to make a name for himself by competing with the Victorians Browning, Swinburne, Tennyson, Rossetti, and Morris. At the same time, though his verse had no reference to Ireland until he was twenty, Yeats did have a sincere attachment for the familiar scenes and characters and customs he wrote of.

In 1889 Yeats' interest in steering the new literature away from nationalist propaganda to a purer art led him also into drama. He with Edward Martyn, George Moore, and Lady Isabella Augusta Gregory established the Irish Literary Theater, which became in 1894 the Abbey Theater, and from which Ireland's national drama derived.

Yeats' poetic output falls naturally into three clear-cut types: (1) poems cast in the Celtic dream-world of the

Imagination, where aesthetic sensations are enjoyed as ends in themselves; (2) poems that, though they still give precedence to the splendor of the imagination, begin to focus on the inexorable limits of reality; (3) poems whose themes are no longer transposed into romantic convention but are drawn from the events of his own life.⁸

⁸Hall and Steinmann, pp. 15-24, passim.

In spite of the fact that Yeats aspired to become known as an Irish poet and to influence other writers to follow in his footsteps, his work is so strongly individualized that it has remained difficult to imitate. To describe it as magical or occult is to overlook the bearing that an age which lacks a stable background can have on the subject matter and technique of literature. Self-consciousness about symbols and about tradition on which symbols depend is to be found more and more among European poets from the last part of the nineteenth century onward.⁹ Yeats' poetic career,

⁹Ibid., p. 118.

which began in the 1880's and ended in the latter part of the 1930's, coincides with the development of that disintegration of religious belief brought on by the extravagant claims of science. More than any of his contemporaries, Yeats was aware

of the lack of a compensating tradition as well as an adequate system of poetic communication. His effort to solve the problem of the lack of a tenable religious tradition sent him to romantic literature, and then in turn to mysticism of various forms, folklore, theosophy, spiritualism, Neo-Platonism, and finally a symbolic system of his own that was able to give pattern to his thought.

In occultism, and in mysticism generally, Yeats found a point of view at variance with accepted beliefs in reason and logic. In his search for proof that an ideal world existed and that an important human faculty, the imagination, was being ignored, he looked where symbols had always been the mode of expression. Yeats believed that all great literature is created out of symbols. In his early essay on the symbolism of Shelley, he asserted

There is for every man some one scene, some one adventure, some one picture, that is the image of his secret life, for wisdom first speaks in images and . . . this one image, if he would but brood over it his whole life long, would lead his soul, disentangled from unmeaning circumstance and the ebb and flow of the world, into that far household, where the undying gods await all whose souls have become simple as flame, whose bodies have become quiet as an agate lamp. . . . observations and statistics mean nothing; works of art which depend upon them can have no enduring value. . . . There is something of an old wives tale in fine literature. The makers of it are like an old peasant telling stories of the great famine or the hangings of 1898 or from his own memories. He has felt something in the depth of his own mind and he wants to make it as visible and powerful to our senses

as possible. He will use the most extravagant words or illustrations if they will suit his purpose. Or he will invent a wild parable, and the more his mind is on fire or the more creative it is, the less will he look at the outer world or value it for its own sake. It gives him metaphors and examples, and that is all.¹⁰

¹⁰Ibid., p. 26.

Whatever symbolism Yeats brought to Ireland, he endowed with new resources, giving it an accent so special that readers are led to consider his poetry from the point of view of its national qualities rather than from the point of view of its relation to other European literature. In Irish mythology, unfamiliar to the majority of Irish readers, and in itself somewhat dim and faraway, the poet had a storehouse of symbols ready to be translated by his art and for his new interests. Yeats had thus a very special advantage over the French poets whose symbols were accidental images, which, by an association of ideas, have come to represent certain emotions of the poets. The Danaan children, Fergus and his brazen cars, and the Shadowy Horses--those magical and mysterious beings that loom so large in Yeats' verse--have more objective reality than the images of the French Symbolists. While the Irish figures are the "elements and the moods of Yeats' complex sensibility," they constitute a world "where one can at least find one's way about."¹¹

¹¹Ibid., p. 27.

In 1889 Yeats gave some advice to an unnamed poet. He wrote to her: "You will find it a good thing to make verses on Irish legends and places and so forth. It helps originality--and makes one's verses sincere, and gives one less numerous competitors--Besides one should love best what is nearest and most interwoven with one's life."¹²

¹²Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 12.

Sligo, on the western shore of Ireland, together with Drumcliff's bay and mountains, where the peasantry lived on intimate terms with the supernatural, was home to Yeats. It was as if its legends and Druid lore "had been melted down and dissolved forever in his blood. Cut him anywhere, and he bled Sligo."¹³ Symbolized in the familiar

¹³Virginia Moore, The Unicorn, p. 42.

woods, mountains, and waters was the greatness of Ireland's history. "Our legends are always associated with places, and not merely every mountain and valley, but every strange stone and little coppice has its legend, preserved in written or unwritten tradition," Yeats wrote.¹⁴

 1¹Dorothy M. Hoare, The Works of Morris and of Yeats,
 p. 90.

Yeats' letters of 1890 reveal how seriously he took the attitude that freshness lay in familiar scenes and that poetry should have a local habitation whenever possible. He would make poems on the landscapes that he knew and loved, not the far-off ones he wondered at. It is important to understand what the word "landscape" meant to Yeats.

By landscape Yeats meant more than a collection of inanimate natural objects. As soon as locality became important to him, he sought out all the imaginative connections with places he could find. Local customs, local characters, local songs and stories, local expressions gave the landscape its 'look' more than sun or moon did. If he wrote about Howth, Wicklow, or Sligo, he would write about Howth's crazy woman, Moll Magee, about the old Wicklow peasant who told him, 'The fret (doom) lies on me,' or expand the three lines of a local song about 'the salley (willow) gardens' which an old woman at Ballisodare near Sligo sang to him. He made a number of ballads to embody this kind of material, for, like many modern artists, he assumed that the more primitive a person or an expression, the more certain to be universal. Beyond adhering to this law of fructifying barbarism, he had a further motive. Through the ballad he hoped, as Scott, Wordsworth, and Coleridge had hoped a century earlier, to rescue himself from current poetic diction as from current poetic subjects. For that diction, like Arcadian scenery, lacked personal ties, and without these he could not take full possession of his subjects. He wanted a personal, specialized, local language to go with his local setting.¹⁵

¹⁵Hillmann, pp. 14-15.

The practical value to the Celtic Revival of Yeats' use of traditional Irish material--literary, historical, mythical, and popular--cannot be overestimated. By reflecting his country in his work, Yeats set the example needed to destroy the veil placed by the English between the Irish people and their own literature and culture. At the same time, it was Ireland that rescued the poet from the ineffectual, imitative romanticism of his teens. In the folklore of Sligo he found a subject matter effective for his purpose. In the peasant speech of the Irish country people, he found a poetic diction and rhythm which was vigorous and fresh. Concentration on local folklore that combined imagination with homely realism--stories of ghosts, goblins, local spirits, fairies--was an important step in Yeats' development as an individual poet. An even more important impetus came from his Irish background. Yeats explained its inspiration himself:

I think it was a Young Ireland Society that set my mind running on "popular poetry." We used to discuss everything that was known to us about Ireland, and especially Irish literature and Irish history. We had no Gaelic, but paid great honour to the Irish poets who wrote in English, and quoted them in our speeches. . . . I knew in my heart that most of them wrote badly, and yet such romance clung about them, such a desire for Irish poetry was in our minds, that I kept on saying, not only to others but to myself, that most of them wrote well. I had read Shelley and Spenser and had tried to mix their styles together in a pastoral play which I have not come

to dislike much (The Island of Statues), and yet I do not think Shelley or Spenser ever moved me as did these poets. I thought one day--I can remember the very day when I thought it--"If somebody could make a style which would not be an English style and yet would be musical and full of colour, many others would catch fire from him, and we would have a really great school of ballad poetry in Ireland. If these poets, who have never ceased to fill the newspapers and the ballad books with their verses, had a good tradition they would write beautifully and move everybody as they move me." Then a little later on I thought, "If they had something else to write about besides political opinions, if more of them would write about the beliefs of the people like Allingham, or about old legends like Ferguson, they would find it easier to get a style." Then, with a deliberateness that still surprises me, for in my heart of hearts I have never been quite certain that one should never be more than an artist, I set to work to find a style and things to write about that the ballad writers might be the better.¹⁶

¹⁶Hall and Steinmann, p. 125.

Yeats' early poetry presents the fascination of fairyland with its eternal laughter and love-making by contrasting it with the unsatisfactory sadness of the real world. His heroes--Oisín, Red Hanrahan, the Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland--are frequently deserting the real world for the unseen world of the Sidhe, or fairies. In "The Stolen Child," one of Yeats' four contributions to Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland, the fairies warn the child they are stealing away:

Where dips the rocky highland

Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
 There lies a leafy island
 Where flapping herons wake
 The drowsy water rats;
 There we've hid our faery vats,
 Full of berries,
 And of reddest stolen cherries.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping
than you can understand.¹⁷

¹⁷"The Stolen Child," in Early Poems and Stories,
 p. 80.

One of the central facts about Yeats' development as a poet and as a leader in the development of Anglo-Irish poetry was his expressed, conscious effort to create a system, to build a body of Irish tradition in terms of which his symbols would be significant. In his early poems, antithetical effects are part of Yeats' pattern. In "The Stolen Child," human activity is opposed to fairy activity as the troubled world sleeps anxiously while the small folk "chase the frothy bubbles."¹⁸ Again in the last part of the poem

¹⁸Early Poems and Stories, pp. 22-23.

the device of contrasting reality with the land of faery is effective.

Away with us he's going,
 The solemn-eyed;
 He'll hear no more the lowing
 Of the calves on the warm hillside

Or the kettle on the hob
 Sing peace into his breast,
 Or see the brown mice bob
 Round and round the oatmeal-chest.
For he comes, the human child,
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
From a world more full of weeping
than he can understand.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid., II, 40.

Reflected in Yeats' choice of realistic details is the homespun atmosphere of the Irish countryside. The other-worldliness of his fairyland had its origin in the Irish folk tales which he edited from actual Irish folklore. The Irish fairies of Yeats are a different order of beings altogether from the fairies of the ordinary fairy story, who are merely smaller human beings like ourselves, possessed of special powers. The Sidhe, symbolic to Yeats of the imagination, were special creations of the Irish mind. Their world was "something infinitely delightful, infinitely seductive, something to which one becomes addicted, with which one becomes delirious and drunken. . . . incompatible with and fatal to the good life of that actual world which is so full of weeping and from which it is so sweet to withdraw." The Sidhe in themselves are not sinister. Non-moral and free of mortal cares, time for them does not exist and their point of view defies human understanding. Mortals who have lived among the Sidhe, however, and lost their sense of human laws

in their world may pay the consequences. They have escaped the responsibilities of the human life and must forfeit its satisfactions. In what is considered one of the most beautiful of Yeats' early poems, "The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland," the man is distracted from his human passions and needs by hints of this realm outside the real world; and even when he is dead, he finds no comfort in the grave.

He stood among a crowd at Drumahair;
 His heart hung all upon a silken dress,
 And he had known at last some tenderness,
 Before Earth made of him her sleepy care;
 But when a man poured fish into a pile,
 It seemed they raised their little silver heads,
 And sang how day a Druid twilight sheds
 Upon a dim, green, well-beloved isle,
 Whieree people love beside star-laden seas;
 How time may never mar their faery vows
 Under the woven roofs of quicken boughs:
 The singing shook him out of his new ease.

He wandered by the sands of Lisadill;
 His mind ran all on money cares and fears,
 And he had known at last some prudent years
 Before they heaped his grave under the hill;
 But while he passed before a plashy place,
 A lug-worm with its gray and muddy mouth
 Sang how somewhere to north or west or south,
 There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race;
 And how beneath those three times blessed skies
 A Danean fruitage makes a shower of moons,
 And as it falls awakens leafy tunes: 20
 And at that singing he was no more wise.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 123.

In the words of David Daiches the "contrasts wind through the subsequent stanzas, becoming at once more complicated and more clear, until the climax, where the man's

restless and unwanted desire for supernatural truth reaches its culmination: he is dead and would have slept in peace"²¹

²¹Hall and Steinmann, p. 131.

Did not the worms that spired about his bones
 Proclaim with that unwearied, reedy cry
 That God has laid His fingers on the sky,
 That from those fingers glittering summer runs
 Upon the dancer by the dreamless wave.
 Why should those lovers that no lovers miss
 Dream, until God burn Nature with a kiss? ²²
 The man has found no comfort in the grave.

²²"The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland," II, 124.

Here Yeats displays his characteristic ability to create a myth whose meaning exists in its form or pattern rather than in its connotation alone. The fact that connotations of the myth expressed in "The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland" and in many of Yeats's later poems and plays are numerous would indicate a conscious effort to create a system.

As has been mentioned, the early Yeats tends to build a pattern in terms of a simple pair of contrasts, such as the familiar as opposed to the remote and strange, the transient as opposed to the permanent, the natural as opposed to the supernatural. In "The Madness of King Goll," from Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland, there is mystery and reality

intermingled in the spirit of true Celtic mysticism. The old, mad king who hears the voices of superhuman presences in the crying wind and rolling waters, reflects all the mystery of nature as sensed by the Celt. Only by quoting a complete unit of the poem can the skill and verbal felicity of Yeats be appreciated:

And now I wander in the woods
 When summer gluts the golden bees,
 Or in autumnal solitudes
 Arise the leopard-colored trees;
 Or when along the wintry strands
 The cormorants shiver on their rocks;
 I wander on, and wave my hands,
 And sing, and shake my heavy locks.
 The grey wolf knows me; by one ear
 I lead along the woodland deer;
 The hares run by me growing bold.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round
me, the beech leaves old.²³

²³The Collected Poems, p. 17.

No less subtle than the refrain in the unit just quoted and that in "The Stolen Child" are lines from "An Isle in the Water" with its deft transition from the warmth and light of everyday reality to the imaginative "isle" so expressive of the Celtic spirit:

Shy one, shy one,
 Shy one of my heart,
 She moves in the firelight
 Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes
 And lays them in a row.
 To an isle in the water
 With her I would go.

She carries in the candles
 And lights the curtained room
 Shy in the doorway
 And shy in the gloom.²⁴

²⁴Ibid., p. 20.

Because of his complex method of treating his Irish background and subject matter, Yeats is looked upon by some critics as a mystical poet. Others believe that his mysticism, so called, was literary rather than spiritual--an artistic refuge. It has been pointed out that the beginning of Yeats' poetic career coincided with that disintegration of belief that so influenced both the subject matter and the technique of literature. It has also been mentioned that the phases of his poetic writing appear to be successive efforts of the poet to make up for that loss of belief. Yeats' own words tell of the early substitutes:

I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians.²⁵

²⁵Hall and Steinmann, p. 118.

With the religion of his youth gone, Yeats turned

to mysticism not in search of new insights but to master a system and to discover a new way of ordering experience. By attempting to supply a nationality-conscious background of belief for the reader and an ordered frame on which to weave his patterns, Yeats, in some of his later poems especially, achieves obscure effects that tend to alienate the reader. There are poems that succeed because of Yeats' power of organization and brilliant phrasing, "the first communicating the relation of the symbols to each other, the second evoking sufficient suggestion of their meaning to combine with the suggestion of their relation to each other and produce a significant whole,"²⁶ Others give only the impression of an esoteric

²⁶ Ibid., p. 120.

imagination. By the employment of Irish symbols, however, the emotional quality of Yeats' work was such that other writers were moved to create in the same vein.

The true mystic is defined as "one who seeks to escape from an age of overformulation by repudiating the orthodox categories and seeking identities and correspondences not recognized by more rational speculation."²⁷ Yeats

²⁷ Ibid.

sought to establish formulas, not to escape them. He wished

to find a substitute for orthodox religion, not to get away from it. He worked to impose order, not, as the mystic does, to destroy and get beyond a too well ordered system. Yeats sought system, order, ritual--not for their own sake, but because he needed them in order to achieve adequate poetic expression. To this end Yeats planned a mystical order

whose philosophy would find its manuals of devotions in all imaginative literature and set before Irishmen for special manual an Irish literature which, though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind and turn our places of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols. I did not think this philosophy would be altogether pagan, for it was plain that its symbols must be selected from all those things that moved men most during many, mainly Christian centuries.²⁸

²⁸ Ibid., p. 122.

The reader cannot hope to understand Yeats' poems unless he realizes that the poet's search for an eclectic symbolic system was linked in a complex manner with his desire to utilize Irish material. Once such a system was established, it would be invulnerable to scientific or historical probing. In a nineteenth-century world of industry, machinery, and banal morality, William Morris had turned to the French romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and to the Norse sagas of love and war; Rossetti to the Italian poets and "art for art's sake"; and Swinburne

to the brutalities of pagan Rome. Yeats chose the Celtic world modified by his imagination.

Yeats looked among Irish sources for new myths and a "living speech" that could be used in poetry, and he waited for "a lull in politics to make Ireland serve his purpose." In 1890 he wrote, significantly: "We are preparing likely enough for a new Irish literary movement--like that of '48--that will show itself in the first lull in politics." As long as the Irish Revival remained chiefly a political movement, Yeats derived little from it and gave little to it. That lull for which he was waiting followed Parnell's defeat and death, and with the lull came the "sudden certainty that Ireland was to be like soft wax for "years to come." It was for Yeats to insure that he should mold that wax to serve both literature and himself.²⁹

²⁹Ibid., pp. 127-129, passim.

Before his literary plans for Ireland or for himself had crystallized, Yeats had fraternized with artists, neo-Platonists, vegetarians, hypnotists, mystics--all unorthodox thinkers. Now he began to make use of the neo-Platonic ideas to give meaning and pattern to the Irish heroic themes that came more and more into his poetry. The neo-Platonic ideas were based on Platonism or the central conception as the "existence of a world of ideas, divine types or forms of

material objects, which ideas are alone real and permanent, while individual material things are but their ephemeral and imperfect imitations."³⁰

³⁰The Oxford Companion to English Literature,
p. 148.

An example of Yeats' symbolization of Platonic ideas by the use of figures from Irish mythology and early history is found in a collection of poems entitled The Rose (1893). Yeats conceived of the rose as a symbol of the idea of beauty. Admittedly influenced by the Platonism of Spenser and Shelley in this conception, Yeats cited this difference: "I notice upon reading these poems for the first time for several years that the quality symbolized as the Rose differs from the Intellectual Beauty of Shelley and Spenser, in that I have imagined it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar."³¹ The opening poem

³¹The Collected Poems, p. 417.

of this group indicates the relation of "the Rose" to the Irish figures:

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways!
Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide;
The Druid, grey, wood nurtured, quiet-eyed,
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;
And thine own sadness, whereof stars, grown old
In dancing silver-sandalled on the sea,

Sing in their high and lonely melody.
 Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,
 I find under the boughs of love and hate,
 In all poor things that live a day,
 Eternal beauty wandering on her way.

Come near, I would, before my time to go,
 Sing of old Bire and the ancient ways:
 Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.³²

³² Ibid., p. 31.

The concluding lines declare Yeats' intention to use the Ireland of legend as his subject for interpretation through his neo-Platonic system.

The discipline in language and control over form that were to make Yeats' later poems outstanding are noticeable in "The Rose of the World" in the same group. The following lines are artistic and restrained and carry more power than the earlier poems:

Who dreamed that beauty passed like a dream?
 For those red lips, with all their mournful pride,
 Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
 Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam
 And Usna's children died.³³

³³ Woods, p. 861.

To Yeats a woman's beauty was suggestive of all the beautiful ideas and things in the world. It was the beauty of Helen that caused the Trojan War and the burning of Troy. Usna's three sons died because of their love of Deirdre, as the Irish epic tales of Cuchulain tell. Here classical and

Irish names effectively illustrate and climax the neo-Platonic theme..

Standish O'Grady's books and Sir Samuel Ferguson's verse had proved only that ancient Irish literature was malleable. However, they encouraged Yeats to make a prolonged test of the Celtic materials. In The Wanderings of Oisín, first spelled "Usheen," Yeats went beyond his predecessors in developing a way of handling a tale of great antiquity. Taken by many as the real point of departure for poets of the Literary Revival, the early poem with its Gaelic theme becomes more interesting if the author's intentions and method are recognized.

In an article which he published September 2, 1888, Yeats made it evident that the ultimate purpose of his use of nationality in his poems was, paradoxically, to make it possible for him to transcend it.

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; the hailstone is a journeyman of God; the grass blade carries the universe upon its point. 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 within 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. 34

³⁴Ellmann, pp. 15-16.

The poet, Yeats declares, works with a series of concentric circles, beginning with his home, his village, and his nation, and ending with the universe. Every detail in one circle has its correspondence in the next. By utilizing his native landscape, Yeats has at hand symbols to which he feels related by his own experience and, because of historical and legendary associations, by the experience of his race. "In choosing a glove as his metaphor, Yeats suggests both that the group of associations has to be consciously assembled, and that the universe cannot be approached without the clothing of familiar symbols."³⁵ When he approached an old Irish tale, Yeats' method

³⁵Ibid., p. 16.

was to assume that "its shape" reflected a hidden scheme, every detail of which was like the blade of grass. The poet's task was to uncover the concentric circles of significance in order to make the myth apply to his time as well as to the past, for the basic wisdom of the race which it contained must be applicable forever. The poet should go to the old ballads and poems for inspiration, but should at the same time make their new versions independent. By identifying himself with all men, or with Ireland, or with some

traditional person, the correspondence of modern life with old legend could be established and a dead mythology could come to life.

The Wanderings of Oisín was a drastic modification of Michael Comyn's poem, The Lay of Oisín in Tir na nÓg, in which Oisín's journey to the "country of the young" appeared to Yeats to be symbolic of the rise and fall of all life. In order to relate the myth to himself, to his nation, and to the world, Yeats turned the country of the young into three islands: islands of dancing, of victory, and of forgetfulness. On the personal level, they represent Yeats' boyhood at Sligo, "his subsequent fights with the English boys in West Kensington because he was Irish," and his adolescence on Howth. These stages had wider implications, paralleling the ages of childhood, aggressive maturity, and senility in the lives of men. "Conceptually, they stood for three intermingled aspects of life which Yeats isolated for separate portrayal, 'vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose.'"

Yeats connected the myth with the nation by giving the chained lady liberated by Oisín in the second island a strong resemblance to Ireland in English chains and by letting Oisín's "battles never done" suggest the unending Irish struggle for independence. Minor tableaux reinforce certain aspects of the myth. Comyn's hound following a hornless deer and his phantom boy following a girl with an

apple were interpreted by Yeats as symbols of "eternal pursuit" and eternal unfulfilment. Yeats added two symbolic statues, one regarding the stars and the other the waves, and in sending Oisín between them suggested that he must seek his way between the ideal and the actual worlds. Yeats gave every natural detail its appropriate mental correspondence. In the first island nature is idyllic, self-sufficient, "the dew-drops there listening only to the sound of their own dropping"; in the second the rocks and stormy surf suggest the struggles to be undergone; in the third the still trees and pouring dew harmonize with the quiescence of this phase of life."

Yeats was not yet sure-handed in manipulating a "continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" in Oisín. The poem took old elements and reworked them into a design of symbols and narrative which belonged to Yeats as well as to tradition. With a singular imaginative power, lacking in the painstaking scholars who preceded him, Yeats captured and exploited the region of Celtic legend and romance by eliminating from his style qualities that were un-Irish and unsuited to his purpose. If Oisín's nostalgia for the life he left behind him is inconsistent, and if the contrast Yeats draws between Oisín and Patrick, as representative of pagan and Christian Ireland, is irrelevant to the timeless portrait of life in the three islands," the wanderings

cannot be considered random. They were rather a "pre-arranged tour of a rich and fairly well governed symbolical land."³⁶

³⁶Ibid., pp. 18-21, passim.

It is interesting to compare the earlier and later editions of passages from Oisín, and to notice the transformation from unconvincing images and similes to more mature and elevated forms. The 1889 edition describes Oisín's meeting with Niamh thus:

And Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair
 Were lolling their tongues, and the silken hair
 Of our strong steeds was dark with sweat,
 When ambling down the vale we met
 A maiden on a slender steed
 Whose careful pastern pressed the sod
 As though he held an earthly nead
 Scarce worthy of a hoof gold-shod,
 For gold his hoofs and silk his rein,
 And 'tween his ears and above his mane
 And pearly white his well-groomed hair.
 His mistress was more mild and fair
 Than doves that moaned round Bran's hall.

Strength and weakness mark the earlier edition. The revised version of 1895 retains its essential coloring by a more natural application of adjectives such as "pearl-pale" and "dove-gray."

Caelte, and Conan, and Finn were there,
 When we followed a deer with our baying hounds,
 With Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair,
 And passing the Firbolgs' burial mounds,

Come to the calm-heaped grassy hill
 Where passionate Maeve is stony still;
 And found on the dove-gray edge of the sea
 A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
 On a horse with a bridle of findrinny;
 And like a sunset were her lips;
 A stormy sunset on doomed ships;
 A citron colour gloomed in her hair,
 But down to her feet white vesture flowed
 And with the glimmering crimson glowed
 Of many a figured embroidery.³⁷

³⁷Boyd, pp. 130-131.

By the revision, in which the irrelevant was rejected, Yeats achieved an elevated form which heightened the Celtic note. The result was a national song in poetry of a kind unknown in Ireland. "If somebody could make a style," the poet had written, "which would not be an English style, and yet would be musical and full of color, many others would catch fire from him."³⁸

³⁸Ibid., p. 128.

It seems likely that Yeats himself did not fully understand the spirit that moved him, even while he was collecting and recording the folk material contained in the prose sketches for The Celtic Twilight. The tales and beliefs of Drumcliff and Rosses were raw material out of which to build poems. Yet they were not simply that. In recording the sketches, Yeats intended to achieve the same goal that he sought to achieve in his poetry. He

wrote in his Introduction:

I have desired, like every artist, to create a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant, and significant things of this marred and clumsy world, and to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland to any of my people who would look where I bid them. I have therefore written down accurately and candidly much that I have seen and heard, and except by way of commentary, nothing that I merely imagined.³⁹

³⁹Hall and Steinmann, p. 132.

It has been pointed out that Yeats' preoccupation with folklore and with the attitude of the Irish toward what we call "the supernatural" was not for Ireland alone. In satisfying his personal need as a poet by exploiting Irish material, he, at the same time, felt that he was contributing to his country by preserving the Celtic literature that still lived in the memory of the people. His sketches indicate how intimate is the relation between the seen and unseen world in the peasant mind with its faculty for believing and seeing. For the Irish peasant today, hill and forest are filled with unseen presences who may at any moment reveal themselves--superhuman beings with the most friendly relations with people. "Second sight" or the seeing of leprechauns, water horses, sylphs, salamanders, good and fallen angels, and disembodied beings is still widely claimed in Christian Ireland.

Yeats wrote of the relationship that existed between

human beings and spirits in an essay in which he remonstrated with Scotsmen for having soured the dispositions of their supernatural beings. Drumcliff and Rosses, noted for their attenuated or bodiless visitors, 'were, are, and ever shall be, please Heaven! places of unearthly resort. . . chokeful of ghosts. By bog, road, rath, hill-side, sea-border, they gather in all shapes.'⁴⁰ Because Sligo's

⁴⁰ Moore, p. 43.

legend claimed that Maeve, Queen of Connaught, lay buried under the huge cairn of stones on Knockmarea, but that she could be seen by the natives as she rode the lucent air, Yeats, too, came under her spell. She granted him a kind of interview once, he said. When he wrote, "We exchange civilities with the world beyond,"⁴¹ he inadvertently put

⁴¹ Boyd, p. 170.

his finger on the characteristic--a sense of fellowship with nature--that has molded the development of Irish literature.

Yeats' treatment of the fairy host that rides by from Knockmarea is said to be that of one who seeks to "perpetuate a style and role which have been handed down through the generations."⁴² The host rushes slowly enough for its

⁴² Allmann, p. 22.

individual members to be distinguished. As a rule, Yeats achieves his tapestry-like representations by grouping the details in each poem around one image, such as an old woman, a beautiful woman, fairies on horseback. Frequent use of the conjunction 'and' ties phrases and clauses together and tightens the framework. Like the work of the Pre-Raphaelites in this respect, Yeats poetry is differentiated by its symbolism, which is steady and highly organized. In "The Hosting of the Sidhe," the figures of Caoilte and Niamh are recognizable but only half revealed. Here as in so many of Yeats' poems is a deliberate exploitation of Celtic proper names and a carefully established difference between the fairy folk and humanity--features of poetic structure that are central in the poet's art.

The host is riding from Knockmarea
 And over the grave of Clooth-na-Bare;
 Caoilte tossing his burning hair,
 And Niamh calling Away, come away: 42
Empty your heart of its mortal dream.

42

Hall and Steinmann, p. 138.

The Druid is a familiar figure in Yeats' early lyrics and in "The Wanderings of Oisín," in which the Druidic doctrine of magic and reincarnation appears as a part of Celtic belief. Such lines as "A Druid dream of the end of days," and "He fell into a Druid swoon," appear frequently.⁴³ In

⁴³The Collected Poems, p. 357-359, passim.

the poem "Fergus and the Druid," Yeats supplies the theme of Druidic magic with the element of beauty characteristic of his work from now on.

Druid. Take, if you must, this little bag of dreams;
Unloose the cord, and they will wrap you round.

Fergus. I see my life go drifting like a river
From change to change; I have been many things--
A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,
A king sitting upon a chair of gold--
And all these things are wonderful and great;
But now I have grown nothing, knowing all.
Ah! Druid, Druid, how great webs of sorrow ⁴⁴
Lay hidden in the small slate-coloured thing.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 32-33.

In "Cuchulain's Flight with the Sea," the High King of Ireland is "Ranking his Druids round him ten by ten" that taking them "to their mystery," they might lay a spell upon the sea. Here Yeats preserves the idea of the king's seeking advice and help of the Druid, at the same time launching the 'red wind of the Druids' against all materialism. ⁴⁵

⁴⁵Moore, pp. 44-47, passim.

More and more Yeats is choosing words for their sensuous appeal, to charm the ear and please the imagination. Thus his

mysticism, so-called, becomes literary rather than spiritual--an artistic refuge. Of the symbolism of Ireland there is plenty; of genuine mysticism, little.

Yeats' early symbols are drawn from the natural world and are simple enough. The moon is a symbol of weariness; water of the transience of beauty; and the rose, again and again, of the idea of eternal beauty. The life of joyous reverie, remote from the world, is indicated by the image of the veil. The Sidhe, as has been mentioned, are the imagination set against the naturalistic world of science, sometimes symbolized by Yeats in allusions that are hostile to Huxley or Tyndall.⁴⁶

⁴⁶

Baugh, p. 1510.

The Wind Among the Reeds (1889) fails to yield any intelligent statement of Yeats' mysticism any more than the prose work The Secret Rose. Still the work of the artist rather than that of the true intellectual, the writings deserve to be read for their beauty. If Yeats failed to provide his readers with keys to the esoteric systems on which much of his poetry and drama is based, it was because he felt precise knowledge to be unnecessary. Symbolism needed only the proper instinct for its understanding, he believed. There was an emotional value in the names alone of the old Irish heroes because of the nature of the stories in which they

appeared, Yeats decided, and no theory was necessary to explain it. The symbolic-mystic poems of The Wind Among the Reeds were followed by a return to the themes of Irish legend in In the Seven Woods and a transition to a new style.

It has been said that Yeats never lost sight of the dangers of living for beauty, of giving free rein to the imagination, of enjoying aesthetic sensations as supreme ends in themselves. The penalty for being thrown out of key with reality was something to think about. It was this conflict between Yeats' early preference for the climate of the immortal and his dread of the consequences of his preference that led him into a second phase. With In the Seven Woods, these consequences became more real. Although the folk strain continued to run through the poems, it began to evolve in simple, realistic pictures he remembered having seen--still the peasant or loved spot, but shorn of its esoteric impulses.

Though it was the trend away from that of the early writings which brought him closer to his full stature as a poet, it was in the early phase that Yeats influenced most the development of contemporary Irish poetry along national lines. The poet's intent to be the one to mold the clay of Ireland's receptivity during an opportune lull in politics is a matter of record. In the concluding poem of The Rose, "To Ireland in the Coming Times," he wrote:

Know that I would accounted be
True brother of a company

That sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
 Ballad and story, rann and song;
 Nor be I any less of them,
 Because the red-rose-bordered hem
 Of her, whose history began
 Before God made the angelic clan
 Trails all about the written page. 47

The Collected Poems, p. 49.

Continuing his declaration of purpose, Yeats claimed kinship with the more political of Ireland's writers, in spite of the difference in objectives.

Nor may I less be counted one
 With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
 Because, to him who ponders well
 My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
 Of things discovered in the deep,
 Where only body's laid asleep.
 For the elemental creatures go
 About my table to and fro,
 That hurry from unmeasured mind
 To rant and rage in flood and wind;
 Yet he who treads in measured ways
 May surely barter gaze for gaze.
 Man ever journeys on with them
 After the red-rose-bordered hem.
 Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,
 A Druid land, a Druid tune! 50

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 50.

CHAPTER IV

It is not enough to write of Yeats as the poet of the Celtic Revival; from him also came the primary impulse toward establishing a theater of art in Dublin as part of the Irish dramatic movement that was to be identified with the Literary Revival.

Yeats' interest in drama did not come to him as a later development. His first two published works The Island of Statues: An Arcadian Faery Tale in Two Acts; and "Nosada, a Dramatic Poem," published in 1885 and 1886 respectively, indicated a definite leaning toward the dramatic form of writing. Although neither of these works was written to be produced on the stage, and was not motivated by the Revival, both indicated some command of the technique of the theater. The first of Yeats' plays to be performed was The Land of Heart's Desire, produced in London as early as 1894. The Countess Cathleen was written in 1892, seven years before the Irish Theater was founded. The development of Yeats as a dramatist, however, is directly connected with the development of the Irish National Theater, with the dramatic element usually subordinate to the poetic.

During the late eighties and early nineties of the nineteenth century, a more serious attitude toward the drama became apparent in England. Forces that contributed toward

this new interest were the translations of Ibsen's plays and the foundation of the Independent Theater. Ibsen's plays were the first to set literary men thinking of the drama as a "social force embodying a philosophic reaction to life in terms of social criticism, and as such an almost new literary form in which to express themselves."¹

¹Morris, p. 88.

Not only did the theater offer a wider appeal than the printed page; it was democratic and direct in its appeal.

At the time of the Irish Literary Renaissance when the new Anglo-Irish idiom was beginning to be used in literary English, Ibsen's influence was coming to the notice of the world in Free Theaters, Independent Theaters, and Little Theaters in the various capitals of Europe. George Bernard Shaw carried the campaign against the older drama to London and unceasingly waged war against the theater of commerce. Chief supporters of the Independent Theater in London were Irishmen; and the theater produced the first plays of Shaw, Yeats, and George Moore. It is generally conceded that to Yeats first came the idea that Ireland ought to have a national drama.

As Shaw put it, "What we might have learned from Ibsen was that our fashionable dramatic material was worn

out . . . that what really interests people on the stage is not what we call action . . . but stories of lives, discussions of conduct, unveiling of motives, conflict of characters in talk, laying bare of souls, discovery of pitfalls--in short, illumination of life.²

²Malone, p. 23.

The first sign of revolt against the organized theater had come with the founding of the Théâtre Libre in 1887 by André Antoine. In 1889 Antoine's example was followed in Berlin by Otto Brahm, who founded the Free Stage Society. In 1891 London was to follow with the founding by J. T. Grein of the Independent Theater, in which both Yeats and George Moore were interested. This Independent Theater in its first season had produced both Yeats' Land of Heart's Desire and Moore's Strike at Arlingford--the first plays of authors who were to become world famous in the development of the Irish National Theater.

Many and varied are the accounts of the beginnings of the Irish Literary Theater. Yeats begins his recital thus:

When Lady Gregory, Mr. Edward Martyn and myself planned the Irish Literary Theater, we decided that it should be carried on in the form projected for three years. We thought that three years would show whether the country desired to

take up the project and make it a part of the national life. . . . 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.³

³Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 3.

Lady Gregory wrote the following in her diary:

Yeats and Sir Alfred Lyall to tea; Yeats stayed on. He is very full of playwriting. . . . He with the aid of Miss Florence Farr, an actress who thinks more of a romantic than a paying play, is keen about taking or building a little theater 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 Henrik Ibsen, and romance will have its turn.⁴

⁴Lady Gregory, Our Irish Theater, p. 2.

Later in the same year, 1898, Lady Gregory talked further with Yeats on the subject:

I said it was a pity we had no Irish theater where such plays could be given. Mr. Yeats said that had always been a dream of his. . . . He went on talking about it, and things seemed to grow more possible as we talked, and before the end of the afternoon, we had made our plan. We said we would collect money, or rather ask to have a certain sum of money guaranteed. We would then take a Dublin theater and give a performance of Mr. Martyn's, The Heather Field, and one of Mr. Yeats', The Countess Cathleen.⁵

⁵Ibid., pp. 6-7.

The plan of the venture is contained in the following lines from Lady Gregory's diary:

Our statement--it seems now a little pompous--began: 'We propose to have performed in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays which, whatever be their degree of excellence, will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience, trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom of experiment which is not found in theaters 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.'⁶

⁶ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

It is fairly plain from the nature of the circumstances which brought the founders together that they were not preoccupied with folk drama at the beginning. Rather they were united in a revolt against the existing theatrical conditions in London which made impossible the production of plays whose nature did not promise prompt commercial success. They admit in their writings to inspiration from the Théâtre Libre and its German analogue. Yet they certainly contemplated the creation of a national theater--especially Keats, who was openly anxious

that this dramatic association distinguish itself from its kin in London by using national legend as the material of poetic drama. Just as there was no continuity of ideas between the originators of the dramatic movement, neither was there very much conflict at first. Martyn, admirer of the Scandinavian dramatists, and Moore were more cosmopolitan, more interested in psychological and social drama than Yeats whose artistic ideal, calling for a return to the primitive emotions and to the music of words, struck a responsive chord in Lady Gregory. In this confusion as to the aims of the theater and the theory of the drama as an art, the Irish dramatic movement was conceived.

Since Edward Martyn had no wish that Ireland think of herself to the exclusion of European culture and ideas, his predilection was for the "drama of ideas," and the majority of his characters were landlords and middle-class people. George Moore, who was said to be "more English and French than Irish,"⁷ was one of the strongest champions

⁷John Gassner, Masters of the Drama, p. 545.

of the new drama of the 1890's. Never so deeply committed to it as were the other three, but desirous of having a place in the furor incidental to the creating of a new

literature, Moore took over the important job of rounding up the company and rehearsing the plays in London. Yeats had a staunch supporter in Lady Gregory, whose interest in his verse plays won her to the dramatic movement. So deeply interested was she in the peasantry of Galway County, where she spent much of her life, and in the expression of the folk mind that she learned the peasant language in order to converse with them on a basis of equality.

It is a striking observation that the four founders of the Irish Literary Theater and of the national drama which derived from the theater were closely associated by birth or family ties with the province of Connaught.⁸

⁸Malone, p. 54.

Lady Gregory's near-neighbor was Edward Martyn, who lived at Tillyra Castle. A little more distant at Moore Hill in the County Mayo, George Moore lived. Connaught, awesome in the wild grandeur of its mountains and stony plains, its rivers, lakes, and castles, is also haunting in its poverty. Still the most Gaelic and primitive of the four provinces in thought and speech, it is a delight to poet, painter, and fisherman. "The life of the people about them presented a strangeness that was irresistibly attractive, and the four founders of the Irish Literary Theater had all lived with

and understood the strange attraction. They sympathized with it and it became a part of themselves."⁹ Lady

⁹Ibid., p. 55,

Gregory's idea--in accord with Yeats'--was of a theater that would be located in Ireland, would stage plays Irish in life and character, and would be, in the broadest sense of the word, a folk theater.

Inherent from the beginning were the possibilities of disintegration because of the divergence in ideals of the theater founders, and the Irish Literary Theater ended its three-year experiment by letting Moore and Martyn go their separate ways. During each spring season an English company, rehearsed in London, had presented plays in Dublin. In the hope of building up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature, plays written by Yeats and Martyn, Alice Milligan, George Moore, and Dr. Douglas Hyde had been given. Individual plays that were presented will be mentioned later.

In the second phase of the movement to achieve a national theater, William G. Fay and his brother Frank Fay, who had a natural genius for acting, associated themselves with Yeats and Lady Gregory and brought together the company of actors which grew into the Irish National Theater. Under the direction of the Fays, the organization known first

as the Irish National Dramatic Company, then as the Irish National Theater Society, gave two London performances which led Miss A. E. F. Horniman to purchase the Abbey Theater building in Dublin, reconstruct it and endow it for a six-year period. Yeats' play On Baile's Strand marked the opening of the Abbey Theater, December 27, 1904. In 1905 the name of the company was changed again, this time to the National Theater Society, Ltd.--the official title of the world-famous players.¹⁰

¹⁰ Morris, Chapter IV, passim.

To Yeats' delight, the Fays' objective was set toward purely national drama, with Irish players, and interpreted in the native tradition. The patent granted the Abbey provided for the production of plays either written by Irishmen or upon Irish subjects, or foreign masterpieces--not English. The original players of the Abbey were recruited chiefly from the artisans of Dublin. Unpaid, they donated their services from a purely artistic motive.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., p. 93.

On April 2, 1902, a performance of George Russell's play Deirdre and Yeats' Kathleen ni Houlihan marked, in the words of W. G. Fay, "the beginning of a movement that not

only created a native drama in Ireland, but afterwards stimulated both Scotland and Wales to follow our example. It gave to the Gael that which had never before existed in the history of the race—a means of expressing the national consciousness through the medium of the drama."¹² Malone

¹²Fay and Carswell, p. 121.

formally records the occasions:

Thus it came about that on the second of April, 1902, the Irish National Dramatic Company presented these two plays at the Saint Teresa's Hall, Clarendon Street, Dublin. This performance marks the real beginning of the Irish National Theater; for the first time, the plays were written by Irish playwrights, acted by an Irish company, and staged by an Irish producer.¹³

¹³Malone, pp 39-40.

It is not possible to analyze separately all of the plays of the dramatists of the Celtic Renaissance, nor even all of Yeats'. Discussion of certain representative ones will serve to inform the reader of the nature of the subject matter and of the qualities of Yeats' plays that establish their identity with the national movement.

The first three plays that Yeats wrote for the theater are marked by the same qualities that are predominant in his lyric verses: beauty of atmosphere, language,

and poetry symbolical of a spiritual life transcending the common life of daily experience."¹⁴

¹⁴ Morris, p. 96.

The plot of The Countess Cathleen (1892-1899), which shocked its Dublin audience into riotous behavior, is based on an old legend about starving country people who, during a famine, are tempted by demons dressed like merchants to sell their souls to save their bodies from dying. The Countess sells her own soul to redeem the starving, then dies. In a final scene Cathleen is carried to heaven because

the Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed.¹⁵

¹⁵ The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats, p. 284.

Here Yeats has taken a simple folk tale familiar in all the literatures of the world, laid the scene in Ireland, and endowed it with that element of symbolism that transcends the everyday actions of men. The theme, lacking in strength, is presented in language of great beauty. The otherworldly mood is set by the line, "The great castle in malevolent woods."¹⁶

¹⁶ Cornelius Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 40.

The mood continues in Maire's denouncement of the two demons and in her prophecy to them:

You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang
Hailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.¹⁷

¹⁷Dramatic Poems, p. 34.

In the haunting lines of Cathleen, dying, appear the Gaelic names and the familiar pattern of contrasts between the known nest under the eave and the unknown, the near and the far away, life and death:

Bend down your faces Oona and Aiceel
I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes
Upon the nest under the eave, before
She wander the loud waters;¹⁸

¹⁸Ibid., p. 121.

One would have to look far to come again upon lines so truly great as these last lines from the same play. Their symbolism, borrowed from the simple countryside, defies forgetting.

The years like great black oxen tread the world,
And God the hardman goads them on behind
And I am broken by their passing feet.¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid., p. 127.

There is probably no greater lyric poetry to be found anywhere in Yeats' writing than that in The Land of

Heart's Desire (1894). Into this fairy play he puts the vague desire for an impossible life and the dramatic conflict that exists between sentimental feeling for home and kin, and the bewildering, maddening light from the old world of the Síche. It is a tale from folklore about a fairy child who lures away the soul of a newly married bride on May-Eve. At the bride's death the soul passes to the "Land of Heart's Desire"---

Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
 Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
 Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue,
 And where kind tongues bring no captivity.²⁰

²⁰ Dramatic Poems, p. 138.

So far away from life, as life actually is, does Yeats set his play, and so far back in time, that whatever happens in it seems possible and inevitable. There is a lilt to the lines that the boding and tragedy in the struggle between priest and fairy for Maire Bruin's soul cannot overcome.

Play after play of Yeats dealt with the spirit. The Shadowy Waters, which according to Yeats, grew out of his visionary experiences,²¹ linked Ireland with his deepest

²¹ Moore, p. 82.

thoughts and purposes, though it is not a reshaping of any

one of the old Irish legends. Steeped in dream, the play comes close to expressing Yeats' credo.

All would be well
 Could we but give us wholly to the dreams,
 And get into their world that to the sense
 Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly
 Among substantial things; for it is dreams
 That lift us to the flowing, changing world
 That the heart longs for. What is love itself,
 Even though it be the lightest of light love,
 But dreams that hurry from beyond the world,
 To make low laughter more than meat and drink,
 Though it but set us sighing.²²

²² Weygandt, p. 53.

Yeats' best prose play Cathleen ni Houlihan (1902) must be mentioned here because of its national theme, which has made it in Ireland the most popular of his works. The play is the legend of an old woman—Ireland—for whom men die gladly, and who, although she has lost her four fair green fields, never grows old. The character of Cathleen is thought to have been suggested by the old peasant woman Peg Inerny, whose dual existence as a peasant by day and a queen of the Sidhe by night is told by Edward Martyn in Maevu.²³ Here Yeats' symbolism is used to advantage; the

²³ Morris, p. 102.

voice of Ireland in the wizened old woman's appeal to Michael on his wedding eve elicits the young man's instant

surrender. He forsakes home and all dear to him in the "tragedy which underlies and ennobles all patriotism."²⁴

²⁴Boyd, p. 151.

This play was the first of the folk-dramas with which the Irish National Theater has become identified. Its national idealism, thought to have been inspired by the death of Parnell, made of Yeats a literary nationalist for the time, though national idealism was to him only one facet of an idealism more abstract. In October, following the production of George Russell's play Deirdre, and Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan, the Fays' Irish National Theater was formally recognized as the legitimate successor to the Irish Literary Theater.

Though the political interest of Yeats is intense in Cathleen ni Houlihan, actually it is also narrow; form and expression are completely matched with the feeling. Doubtless because of the simplicity of the folk speech and because the thought of political independence was linked for the early Yeats with the shimmering waters and quiet woods of Ireland's countryside, the effect is one of perfect finish. "The song 'I Am Come to Cry with You Woman' achieves by Yeats' particular rhythmic manner and poetic feeling just that effect which neither Moore nor Martyn

for all their patriotism, nor Lady Gregory for all her knowledge and observation of the peasantry, could achieve.²⁵

²⁵Hoare, p. 88.

The play might be said to represent a tour de force, which is not repeated. Yeats' interest in the past as evidenced by his use of legend and folklore led him more often than not in his early writings away from reality to fantasy.

"Those who live in close contact with the peopled places of the past," he wrote, "are the keepers of an old and beautiful tradition. The peasant remembers the legends of the past more perfectly because . . . his dream has never been entangled with reality. . . ." ²⁶

²⁶Ibid., pp. 90-91.

Yeats' fundamental attitude toward the peasantry is made evident in his only farce The Pot of Broth, written in collaboration with Lady Gregory in order to supply the newly inaugurated National Theater with one more folk play. In the popular tale, as retold by Yeats, one of the characters says: "Do you think is he a man that has friends among the Sidhe? In the answer: "Your mind is always running on the Sidhe since the time they made John Molloy . . ."

find buried gold on the bridge of Imerick," is a hint of Yeats' own acceptance of the common peasant belief as a matter of fact. The simple story relates how a crafty tramp obtained from a miserly housewife the ingredients for a pot of broth, which he had undertaken to provide out of the magic properties of a stone. Yeats heard the tale from an old woman named "Cracked Mary," who wanders about the plain of Affane and who sometimes sees unearthly riders coming through the stony fields to her hovel door in the nighttime.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 91.

In the one-act blank verse tragedy On Ballo's Strand, Yeats gives the Irish version of the epic hero Cuchulain, one of the principal heroes of the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology and nephew or ward of Conchubar, king of Ulster. Cuchulain, not knowing his adversary's identity, engages his own son in single combat and deals him a mortal blow. The story is essentially moving, the verse dramatic with such speeches as the one in which Cuchulain describes Aoife, who is to be revealed as the mother of his unknown and unrecognized son Finnol:

Ah! Conchubar, had you seen her
With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers
Thrown backward, and the bowstring at her ear,

Full of good counsel as it were with wine,
 Or when love ran through all the lineaments
 Of her wild body.²⁸

²⁸ Dramatic Poems, pp. 275-276.

Yeats' greatest contribution to the modern poetic drama, and one that is wholly in accord with the spirit of the Celtic movement, was Deirdre (1906). Deirdre is the daughter of Fedlimid, harper to King Conchobar of Ulster. Her beauty, according to the prophecy of the Druid Cathbad, will bring banishment and death to some of Ireland's heroes. Brought up in solitude by Conchobar to be his wife, Deirdre sees and falls in love with Naisi, the son of Usnach. Naisi with his brothers carries her off to Scotland. Lured back by Conchubar, all are treacherously slain except Deirdre, who takes her own life. The legend, considered to be the most famous and the most beautiful in Celtic folklore, has been adapted by Irish writers from Sir Samuel Ferguson to Synge and Russell and Yeats. Yeats, adjusting it to his own purposes, treats the meeting of Conchubar, Naisi, and Deirdre on the return of the lovers from Ireland as his focal point. By clothing the content of his play with a potent and wistful lyricism, Yeats has justified his theory of the theater. Yeats' early plays picture the life sought to be that of the spirit or dream world. In Deirdre he brings his characters into the realm of real experience and tragedy on the highest

plane, still holding fast to the frame of legend to lift the play above the common life. Deirdre herself compels men's love and brings Ireland to war through the magic of her beauty.

There are some critics who look upon the Yeatsian drama as a failure, but there is also the existence of the National Theater to refute the critical qualification and establish the debt owed to Yeats as a poetic dramatist whose dominant motive was the attainment of artistic perfection of language.

The dramatic method of Yeats was not the least of his contributions to the theater to come out of the Celtic Revival. Yeats' method is based upon definite conceptions, the most important of which are his theories of comedy and tragedy, his concept of the speaking of dramatic verse, and his principle of stage direction. In Yeats' opinion, the art of tragedy makes no individual distinction between man and man. It is concerned with universal and lasting emotions, and it moves us by what it gives us of our ideals, visions, and dreams. Comedy, on the other hand, has its foundation in humor--the predominating characteristic in the individual temperament by which its owner is distinguished from other men. The tragedy and the drama of poetry lift us out of self and daily life into an abstract world of perfection that is ideal; our pleasure in comedy is dependent

upon a subtle discrimination in the values of our daily life, the real world, finding its expression in character."²⁹

²⁹Morris, p. 96.

Yeats desired a new art of stage decoration in which the illusive play of light on a conventionalized background emphasized the mood of the spoken line through suggestion rather than a photographic reproduction of reality. He was able to achieve this correspondence between the dramatic poem and its physical background with the aid of Gordon Craig, with whom he had many ideas in common, and who has since been acclaimed the father of the modern movement in scenic decoration. Together they worked out a scheme in which the decoration, though suggestive of the dramatic mood, was subordinated to the action and spoken line, serving only as background to them and never distracting the attention of the audience from the play itself.³⁰ The movements of the actors were reduced

³⁰Ibid., p. 98.

to a minimum. Everything that could distract from the music of the words was thrust aside.

A later member of the Abbey Players, now Mrs. Elizabeth Apperly of Richmond, Virginia, threw interesting light on the Irish theater and on Yeats under whose direction she acted as

"Ann Coppinger." "Yeats was in love with words," she said, "Speaking words with a musical emphasis and knowledge of sound was a rite with him. He believed that there was no poem so great that a fine speaker could not make it greater."³¹

³¹Marian Marsh Sale, "An Evening with Yeats"---
Bess Apperly Will Give Program," Richmond Times-Dispatch,
Dec. 3, 1958, p. 20.

By the use of an instrument kin to both the psaltory and the lyre, to whose accompaniment his actors recited their verses, Yeats inaugurated a new method of elocution that had a telling effect upon the diction of the Abbey Players in their production of poetic drama. In accordance with this new method that proved rich in rhythm and cadence and susceptible of an infinite nuance of expression, the speaking of verse became in the Abbey "so fluent and liquid, so veritably dramatic that it makes much of the recitation of even great actors seem paltry and theatrical."³²

³²Morris, pp. 100-101.

Of Yeats' contribution to the poetic drama T. S. Eliot said,

I do not know where our debt to him as a dramatist ends--and in time, it will not end until that drama itself ends. In his occasional writings on dramatic topics, he has asserted certain principles to which we must hold fast: such as the primacy of

the poet over the actor, and of the actor over the scene-painter; and the principle that the theater, while it need not be concerned only with the people . . . must be for the people. . . . Born into a world in which the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' was generally accepted, and living on into one in which art has been asked to be instrumental to social purposes, he held firmly to the right view which is between these, though not in any way a compromise between them, and showed that an artist, by serving his art with integrity, is at the same time rendering the greatest service he can to his nation and to the whole world.³³

³³Hall and Steinmann, pp. 342-343.

CONCLUSION

The body of poetry that derived from the Celtic Renaissance movement followed certain well defined tendencies. The elder generation of poets dealt in symbolism and mysticism, the exploration of legend, and the search for a refuge from actuality. The revolt of the younger poets led in the direction of realism on the one hand and an interest in nature on the other. With the rise of the native drama, poetry was relegated to a secondary place in the attention of the Irish writer.

Common to writers of poetry and prose, however, was the definite awakening of race consciousness in Ireland and a dedication to the aspiration of nationality, which produced an Anglo-Irish literature bearing the imprint of Ireland rather than England. This national ideal, fundamental though it was with the exponents of the movement, received many interpretations and varied expressions. With Yeats and Russell, it was identified with a concept of spiritual life and spiritual beauty, clothed in symbols from the heroic legends of the past and from the Irish soil. Poets fired with revolt against what they saw as a nebulous ideal seeking refuge in ages gone, expressed their thoughts in works critical of Irish life. Synge with his Playboy of

The Western World and Padraic Colum with his Broken Soil became concerned with the realities of existence and began to reconstruct Irish life as they saw it. Strictly speaking, Colum was the first of the peasant dramatists, or the first to dramatize the realities of Ireland's rural life. Synge also revealed the beauty and the ugliness of Irish life, but he did it with an imagination that enabled the reader or audience to see beyond the limitations of time and place.

Art, according to Yeats' concept of the drama, was not concerned with the expression of ideas to be defended by argument. What Yeats did desire to accomplish was to build a school of Irish dramatists whose work would reveal either a vision of life or a criticism of it, both to be presented in beautiful language. It was his dream that Ireland's consciousness of nationality would evolve in the work of a theater of art, and that it would become the focus of an intellectual and emotional tradition. As for the permanence of Yeats, Eliot has this to say: "We can begin to see now that even the imperfect early attempts he made are probably more permanent literature than the plays of Ibsen or Shaw, and that his dramatic work as a whole may prove a stronger defense against the successful urban Shaftesbury Avenue--vulgarity which he opposed as stoutly as they did."¹

¹Hall and Steinmann, p. 342.

It has been said that the chief characteristic of the folklore of primitive peoples, as with that of the Celts, is its inherent love of magic.² In his acceptance of magic

²Morris, p. 111.

Yeats was true to the psychology of legend. The Yeats of the Celtic Revival rejected science as an interpretation of experience. By taking the reader in poem and play to a world beyond time and space where all is possible, he endows his fables with the quality of inevitability because the potency of their magic has no other explanation. The reader of Dairdre experiences, as does Yeats, the same

wild thought
 Fed on extravagant poetry and lit
 By such a dazzle of old fabulous tales
 That common things are lost, and all that's strange
 Is true because 'twere pity if it were not.³

³Dramatic Poems, pp. 418-419.

Yeats' original idea of the theater as a medium for furthering beautiful speech, folk drama, and the poetic play founded upon Irish lore was destined to compromise with a realism that was concerned with the elemental nature of the peasant. In spite of the shift in emphasis, the paths of Ireland's writers remained firmly set in native Irish soil and life. Yeats himself was to move out of that pale, dim,

shadowy dream-drenched world of the Celtic Twilight into a stern reckoning with the reality he had always fled. Before he left it, however, he had already fulfilled his part in the new literary movement. The poetic standard he had borne so high in the cause of Anglo-Irish literature had called forth followers enough to insure the development of poetry along national lines. This is not to make the claim that all our modern poetry comes from Yeats, rather that his own work not only exposed the foibles of the popular models, but also attracted serious attention to the poetic awakening in Ireland. Yeats own plays found no imitators, but the material of legend was to continue to be revived in the theater. The impulse of the Revival which Yeats strove to encourage there was to meet with the response of genius in J. M. Synge, who saw in the Aran Islands what he termed "the last stronghold of the Gael," but whose "sole concern was for the spirit and tradition behind its inhabitants."⁴ Under his sure pen, Deirdre

⁴Boyd, p. 334.

steps out of her heroic frame, no longer a symbol or shadow but an amorous woman in love with happiness and beauty, and marked for high tragedy. To Synge, Anglo-Irish was a medium that offered absolute freedom.

The later Yeats was to become more conscious of his art and the cunning secrets of craftsmanship. A note of actuality was to replace the vagueness and the mystery of the earlier poems. The line was to be purged of excess ornament, and the image sharpened until each poem reached its right and final form. One can still look, however to the Yeats of Innesfree and Oisín for proof of the poetic art that exercised such influence upon Irish literature.

Because the Irish people were at that point in their history when stirring events goaded the imagination to seek poetic and dramatic expression, the idea of Irish nationality became revitalized in that literature which, though written in English, was distinctly Gaelic in spirit. Because of the poet Yeats, who cared as much for the rise of the Language Movement and the return to Celtic sources as he did for his own fame or achievement, the Celtic Renaissance--initiated long before his time--gained lasting momentum.

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VITA

Marian Marsh Sale was born on August 23, 1904, in Dovesville, South Carolina. The daughter of a Baptist minister, she lived during her early years in Rock Hill, South Carolina; Jacksonville, Florida; Nashville, Tennessee; and Richmond and Clifton Forge in Virginia. With her family--mother, father, brother, and sister--she began a second residence in Richmond in 1918, when her father Dr. Robert Thornton Marsh became financial secretary of the University of Richmond in a campaign to raise \$1,000,000 for college expansion and improvement.

When she was graduated from John Marshall High School in Richmond in 1922, she was awarded a four-year academic scholarship at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia. She refused this award and enrolled at Westhampton College of the University of Richmond, where she majored in English and French, graded freshman themes and conducted coach classes during her junior and senior years, and received her B. A. degree in June, 1926.

After being graduated from that institution, she taught English and French in Richmond's Dinford Junior High School until her marriage to Frederick Sale in April, 1929, when she moved to Mobile, Alabama. Returning to Richmond a year later, she resumed teaching in a public junior high school as a board substitute. Later she taught English to

professional, business, and industrial women in evening classes at the Y. W. C. A.

Her son Frederick Sale, Jr., was born in August, 1939.

During the years that followed, poems written by her were included in three poetry anthologies of national distribution, in a youth publication, and in a volume of poems written by Americans on the theme of Japan and published in Tokyo.

In the fall of 1957, she entered the graduate division of the University of Richmond to begin work on a Master's Degree in English. In October of the same year, she began writing feature articles for the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

She is currently a vice-president of the Virginia Writer's Club. She is also a member of the National Press Women's Association, the Poetry Society of Virginia, the Tuckahoe Woman's Club, and The Woman's Club of Richmond, Virginia.