PREFACE

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Contents

Introduction

It cannot be said that Yeats has much of a reputation as a playwright. Literary critics speak of his plays at best as something that helped him to write poems. Theatre people outside Dublin have never heard of him. Even in Dublin his plays were never the favourites, and by now most of them have disappeared from the Abbey Theatre's repertoire.[1]

Some critics appreciate the early plays of W.B. Yeats for their lyric beauties and ignore or deprecate the later, more dramatic works because in them dramatic values have replaced the lyric element to a large extent. Others suggest that the plays are not dramatic enough. T. R. Henn, for instance, is of the opinion that the last plays "must be considered as dramatic poems."[2] The general tendency has been to ignore Yeats as a dramatist while extolling his genius as a poet.

Yet Yeats' achievements as a dramatist are by no means negligible. They have of course been recognized, notably by Lennox Robinson, Thomas Parkinson, Una Ellis-Fermor, T.S. Eliot, Eric Bentley, and Ronald Peacock.[3] In the main, however, these critics have restricted their comments to an analysis of a few plays or to a general statement regarding Yeats' merits as a dramatist. Many books and articles have been written on the subject of Yeats' poetry, but

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[1] Eric Bentley, In Search of Theatre (New York, 1954), p. 296.

[2] T.R. Henn, The Lonely Tower (London, 1950), p. 258.

[3] See especially: Lennox Robinson, "The Man and the Dramatist", Scattering Branches: Tributes to the Memory of W.B. Yeats, ed. Stephen Gwynn (London, 1940), pp. 55-114.
Thomas Parkinson, "W.B. Yeats: A Poet's Stagecraft, 1899-1911," ELH, XVII (June, 1950), 136-161.
Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, 2nd ed. (London, 1954), pp. 91-117.
T.S. Eliot, "The Poetry of W.B. Yeats," The Southern Review, VII, No. 3, Winter (1941), 442-454.
Eric Bentley, pp. 296-206
Ronald Peacock, The Poet in The Theatre (New York, 1946) pp. 117-128.

comparatively few have appeared which deal exclusively with his dramatic writings. For the most part criticism of Yeats' plays is limited to articles or to chapters in books which are concerned with modern drama, or with the Irish dramatic movement, or with Yeats' life and accomplishments as a poet.

Yeats continued to be deeply interested in the drama as an art form throughout his long career as a writer of verse and prose. From the 1880's when he first experimented with dramatic poems until his death in 1939 he wrote, published and saw produced a series of plays too numerous to be considered as simply the by-products of his poetic genius. The long years of exhausting work devoted to the Abbey Theatre indicate a more than passing interest in drama for its own sake, not merely as a vehicle for verse-speaking from the stage. The number of essays which he wrote dealing with dramatic and theatrical theories and criticisms are proof of his abiding enthusiasm for the drama, although not always for the theatre. On the other hand, the fact that Yeats was a poet before he was a playwright cannot be ignored. It was precisely his love of poetry and his wish to hear it spoken which brought him into the theatre in the first place, but once there he began to develop independently as a dramatist, learning from the conditions of actual production and gradually evolving a dramatic theory that is at once unique and universal.

Much has been written about the striking and continuous maturation of Yeats' poetic art, from the misty, romantic and rather monotonous lyricism characteristic of English poetry of the '90's to the hard, truly "modern" poetry of his final period. Some have explained the changed nature of his poetry of the period beginning in 1910 as a result of a series of disillusionments - by the Abbey, by Maud Gonne's marraige, and by the affair of the Lane

bequest[4] The great poetry of the '20's and '30's has been attributed to the revelation of the System of A Vision.[5]

Rather less attention has been paid to the development of Yeats' dramatic genius, both as theoretician and as practising playwright. Yet startling changes, amounting at times to complete reversal of opinion, are evident in his pronouncements on the subject of dramatic art and in the plays which exemplify these. For example, as a poet in the theatre Yeats insisted on the pre-eminence of the words over every other aspect of theatrical production. Yet later he advocated a composite art form, and even went so far as to revise one play so that it could be performed as a ballet.

The purpose of this thesis is therefore two-fold. The development of Yeats' dramatic theories will be traced from their inception in the early days of the Abbey and its predecessors — the Irish Literary Theatre and the National Theatre Society, in conjunction with Yeats' developing philosophy where relevant, through the adoption and adaptation of the form of the Japanese Noh play, and the final esoteric form of the late plays. Secondly, an attempt will be made to evaluate the plays themselves, in terms of their dramatic effectiveness, and also in relation to the theory which governed their construction, including a consideration of Yeats' success or failure in carrying out his theories and of whether or not the theories themselves produce results which are truly dramatic when properly executed.

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[4]See T.R. Henn, pp. 87ff; and Richard Ellmann, Yeats, The Man and the Masks (London, 1949), pp. 179ff.

[5]See Randall Jarrell, "The Development of Yeats' Sense of Reality," The Southern Review, VII, No. 3, Winter (1941), 665-666; and Peter Ure, Towards a Mythology (London, 1946), pp. 54-76.

Thus the first chapter deals with Yeats' early dramatic theory and practice. The most important influences on his early ideals are discussed in terms of the resulting theory. These include the so-called "Irish Renaissance," the Abbey Theatre, the Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist movements, occultism, and Irish cultural and political nationalism. The early plays are discussed in terms of these influences as well as in relation to Yeats' fledgling dramatic and theatrical theory.

The second chapter includes a consideration of the emerging philosophical ideas of anima hominis and anima mundi, self and anti-self, face and mask, and of the more complex dramatic theory which was shaped by these. The most important developments in Yeats' dramatic theory of this period were the ideas of "absence of character" and"generalized passion," which stemmed from the concept of the anima mundi. Furthermore, the basic conflict of the plays of this time and of the early plays, that between the world of reality and the world of imagination, is best understood in the light of the seeming duality of Yeats' own nature, which he expressed philosophically as "self" and "anti-self" or "face" and "mask". Six plays, written between the years 1904 and 1914, all of which exemplify these theories in some way, are discussed in the second half of the chapter.

Chapter Three considers Yeats' adoption of the Japanese Noh drama as a form particularly suited to both his talents and his theories. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the Noh form in the light of Yeats' earlier development as a dramatist, and to show that his experiments with that form represent a logical stage in the evolution of his dramatic art. The influence of Gordon Craig on Yeats' theatrical ideas is also discussed in this chapter, not because it was strongest at the time when Yeats was involved with the Noh plays, but rather because Craig's theories about staging and the substitution of marionnettes for actors resemble in a number of ways the conventions of Noh

which most attracted Yeats. The Four Plays for Dancers, avowedly based on the Noh form, are considered in this chapter, as is The Player Queen which, although entirely different from the Noh plays in technique, form and effect, is equally consistent with Yeats' thought. The material of all the plays discussed in this chapter, with the exception of At the Hawk's Well, is drawn, at least in part from A Vision. I have made no attempt to discuss the elaborate system which Yeats constructed in this work, because for the most part its complexities are irrelevant to the structure or the meaning of the plays. The importance of A Vision to Yeats' dramatic writings lies (a) in the symbols which he drew from it; (b) in the theories of the after-life which form the basis of several of the plays; (c) in the personality types representing certain phases of the Great Wheel; and (d) in the concept of the continuing conflict between the Four Faculties. In the best of the plays the material from A Vision is fully comprehensible within the framework of the plays themselves, and requires no reference to A Vision. Occasionally it supplies an extra level of symbolic meaning, without which the play can nevertheless stand on its own terms. Where necessary, an explanation of this material has been included, but it has been possible to accomplish this without a lengthy discussion of the implications of that work.

There are no major changes in Yeats' theory requiring analysis in Chapter Four. Eight plays are discussed, some of which reflect the Noh influence and some of which are even more esoteric in form. In The Words Upon the Window-Pane Yeats departed completely from the stylization which was characteristic of all but his early plays, and produced a play which approaches realism in many of its aspects. It is my contention that all these plays represent not the haphazard experiments of a poet playing with the theatrical medium, but the

mature creations of a dramatist.

Not all of Yeats' plays are considered in the thesis. Yeats was so dissatisfied with Where There is Nothing that he did not allow it to be produced, and the revised form, The Unicorn From the Stars, although a better play, is not considered because it owes more to Lady Gregory than to Yeats. Diarmuid and Grania was written in collaboration with George Moore, who was responsible for the structure while Yeats was concerned with the words. For this reason it is really outside the line of Yeats' development as a playwright. Similarly the translations of Sophocles' King Oedipus and Oedipus At Colonus, though works of art in their own right, cannot be considered as original products of Yeats' dramatic genius.

Chapter I - The Early Period

Of the influences on Yeats' early dramatic theory and practice, two of the most important were the Irish cultural revival and the Abbey Theatre. It is not possible to separate these two for purposes of discussion, because they are interdependent. The Abbey came into being partly as a result of the larger movement, but the Theatre implemented and popularized the revival of interest in native Irish traditions. Similarly Yeats contributed to the national and international recognition of the Irish cultural heritage, which in turn supplied him with material for his plays and poems. Again, Yeats was a guiding force at the Abbey for many years, he supplied the theatre with several plays, and, more important, was a strong voice in decisions of policy; reciprocally, the theatre itself and the actors were important factors in the shaping of Yeats' early plays.

Other influences - Pre-Raphaelitism, symbolism, and mysticism - were perhaps equally important, but these were filtered through the nationalist interest in Ireland's past, and modified by the physical limitations imposed by writing for an actual theatre.

Much has been written about the history and development of Dublin's Abbey Theatre and the dramatic movement which originated there.[1] It is not necessary to tell the full story again, but only to repeat the ideals of the founders, of whom Yeats was one, and to show how these were embodied in his

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[1] See especially Lady Gregory, Our Irish Theatre (New York and London, 1914), and Lennox Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre (London, 1951).

early plays.

The Irish Literary Theatre, founded in 1899 by Edward Martyn, George Moore and Yeats, with the ever present help of Lady Gregory, was the precursor to the Abbey. The formation of this group was in part an off-shoot of the general dramatic reform which was taking place all over Europe, and in part a branch of the growing national cultural movement which has come to be known as the Irish Renaissance.

The Irish Literary Theatre arose as part of the general revolt against "Sardoodledom"[2] and an enthusiasm for the works of Ibsen and the Russian dramatists which resulted in the birth of such experimental theatres as the Théatre Libre, the Freie Buehne, and the "Independent Theatre". Edward Martyn and George Moore were particularly influenced by the "Ibsenite movement", although Yeats had never any affection for the plays of social criticism. He was far more interested in the presentation of poetic dramas, based in the traditions and myths which were brought to light by the rediscovery of the Irish cultural heritage.

The Irish intellectual awakening really began in 1880 with the appearance of Standish O'Grady's epic history of Ireland.[3] Gradually it acquired the characteristics of a movement whose purpose "... was to retell

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[2]The name given by George Bernard Shaw to the type of "well-made" play whose form was developed by Augustin Eugene Scribe and perfected by Victorien Sardou, the plot of which hinged on misdirected letters and telegrams and misplaced glasses of poison, and which was invariably characterized by a happy ending.

[3]Ernest A. Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland (Dublin and London, 1918), p.2.

in English the old Irish legends and the still current Irish folk-songs, and to catch and preserve the moods of Irish men and women of to-day, especially those moods which came to them out of their brooding over Ireland, its history, its landscape, the temper of its people."[4]

Yeats was profoundly influenced by this revival of interest in the heroic legends and folklore of his country. It had supplied much of the material of his lyric poetry, as well as its images, and, to a certain extent, its rhythms. His Wanderings of Oisin (1899) made an important contribution to the Celtic Renaissance. He looked upon the Irish Literary Theatre as a medium by which the culture of early Ireland could be perpetuated. The conflicting aims of Yeats and his fellow-founders were revealed in Beltaine, the organ of "The Irish Literary Theatre":

... the dominant note of Beltaine is cosmopolitan rather than national. While Yeats was pleading for dramas of Irish legend and classical history, his collaborators were arguing from the example of the dramatic innovations of Continental Europe.[5]

In the first number of Beltaine, Yeats outlined the aims of the group as he saw them:

The Irish Literary Theatre will attempt to do in Dublin something of what has been done in London and Paris; and, if it have even a small welcome, it will produce, somewhere about the old festival of Beltaine, at the beginning of every spring, a play founded upon an Irish subject. The plays will differ from those produced by associations of men of letters in London and in Paris, because times have changed, and because the intellect of Ireland is romantic and spiritual rather than scientific and analytical, but they will have as little of a commercial ambition. Their writers will appeal to that limited public which gives understanding, and not to that unlimited public which gives wealth; and if they interest those among their audience who keep in their

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[4]Cornelius Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights (Boston and New York, 1913), p.2.

[5]Boyd, p.11.

memories the songs of Callanan and Walsh, or old Irish legends, or who love the good books of any country, they will not mind greatly if others are bored.[6]

Yeats' romantic conception of the Irish peasantry and his enthusiasm for the heroic mythological figures stemmed in large measure from the early influence of pre-Raphaelitism. His father, J.B. Yeats, had been a Pre-Raphaelite painter, and his work, and that of his contemporaries, had deeply impressed the poet. Furthermore, as a young man in London, Yeats came into contact with William Morris, whose romantic mediaevalism had appealed to Yeats' own disposition.

This interest in producing romantic, spiritual plays which would deal with material drawn from Ireland's past, was restricted almost entirely to Yeats; the others were interested in a theatre of ideas, of social problems. All were reacting against the commercial theatre.

In three years The Irish Literary Theatre presented six plays in English and one in Gaelic. With the exception of the latter, all were played by actors who were brought from England. Then an important change took place. The "Irish National Dramatic Company", an amateur group which was organized by the brothers William and Frank Fay was re-formed as the "Irish National Theatre Society", later known as the "National Theatre Society". Yeats had seen a production of Red Hugh presented by the troupe, of which he wrote, "I came away with my head on fire. I wanted to hear my own unfinished On Baile's Strand, to hear Greek tragedy, spoken with a Dublin accent."[7] In Samhain he designated the "Irish National Theatre Society" as the successor to the Literary Theatre. Eventually this group, through the generosity of

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[6]W.B. Yeats, "Plans and Methods," Beltaine: The Organ of the Irish Literary Theatre, No. 1 (May, 1899), pp. 6-7.

[7]W.B. Yeats, "Dramatis Personae", Autobiographies (London, 1955), p. 449.

Miss Horniman, became the company of the Abbey Theatre.

The new company supplied actors who contributed a knowledge of Irish history and traditions, a sensitivity to the emotions of the people, an inherent mastery of the speech rhythms and idiom which had confounded the English players, and an exceptionally effective acting technique. Furthermore, the actors were infused with a strong nationalist spirit. Lennox Robinson recalls, "It seems clear that there were two dominant factors in the Society, first the Fays' delight in drama and then an intense patriotic feeling on the part of the players. Sinn Fein was beginning to stir."[8]

Another important aspect of the change was the transition from an art theatre, which the Literary Theatre was intended to be, to an actors' theatre. W.G. Fay states positively that "... here now is my great point that can never be sufficiently emphasised. The Abbey Theatre was first and foremost a theatrical, not a literary movement. It was the creation not of men of letters but of actors."[9] Perhaps Mr. Fay exaggerates somewhat: certainly the plays of J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey are not the least of the contributions made by the Abbey. However, it is certainly true that the transition brought the theatre into the general stream of the Irish cultural renaissance. As Boyd points out:

> ... the Irish Dramatic Movement was turned into a channel which flowed directly along the lines of national tradition, when its most vital forces converged upon the point of W.G. Fay's departure. It found through him the maximum intensity of expression, in that his art was precisely such as to stimulate the dramatisation of the most characteristic elements of Irish life, and to provide the dramatists with an almost ideal vehicle of artistic realization.[10]

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[8]Lennox Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, p.30.

[9]William G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, The Fays of The Abbey Theatre (New York, 1935), p.106

[10]Boyd, p.44.

The direction which the Abbey Theatre was to take was not that which Yeats expected. Lady Gregory quotes from an entry in her diary of 1898: "He believes there will be a reaction after the realism of Ibsen, and romance will have its turn."[11] But the romantic poetic tragedies and the folk-plays gave way to the realism of Synge, who stressed the "wild, primitive, elemental nature of the peasants", and did not present them, as Yeats did, "in terms of spirituality and mystical belief and living wholly in a world of dreams".[12] Eventually Yeats stopped writing for the public theatre entirely, and the realists, Lennox Robinson, and T.C. Murray, took over the Abbey Stage. Their plays are definitely Irish, but the Ireland they present is not the romantic land of Yeats' imagination. They criticized that which he idealized.

Although the nationalist spirit affected the other Abbey playwrights in a different way, it combined with Yeats' early romanticism to provide a determining factor in all of his earlier plays. Una Ellis-Fermor points out that this nationalism was enlightened and cosmopolitan, not parochial.[13] Lady Gregory, acknowledging their debt to the Gaelic League founded by Douglas Hyde, shows how the Abbey Theatre movement was directly influenced by the spirit of nationalism:

> It was a movement for keeping the Irish language a spoken one, with, as a chief end, the preserving of our own nationality. That does not sound like the beginning of a revolution, yet it was one. It was the discovery, the disclosure of the folk-learning, the folk-poetry, the folk-tradition. Our Theatre was caught into that current, and it is that current, as I believe, that has brought it on its triumphant way. It is chiefly known now as a folk-theatre. It has not only the great mass of primitive material and legend to draw on, but it has

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[11]Lady Gregory, Our Irish Theatre, p.3.
[12]Lloyd R. Morris, The Celtic Dawn (New York, 1917), p.168.
[13]Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement (London, 1954), pp. 14-15.

been made a living thing by the excitement of that discovery. All our writers, Mr. Yeats himself, were influenced by it.[14]

The French symbolist movement was another early influence on Yeats: his friendship with Arthur Symons and others increased his belief in the necessity of symbolic representation, because, as he said in 1898, "All Art that is not mere story-telling, or mere portraiture, is symbolic ... it entangles, in complex colours and forms, a part of the Divine Essence."[15] Symbols, he thought, were the only things free enough from all bonds to speak of perfection.[16]

The vast area of Irish mythology, folk-lore, and traditions supplied him with a reservoir of symbols which were neither hackneyed by over-use, nor too esoteric for the understanding of a Dublin audience. Indeed, the material was ideal for his purposes:

> The drama he contemplated would apply itself to the reintegration of the folk-memory among men, as well of authentic symbolism, drawing from which the poets and artists would form an almost priestly order.[17]

In 1898 Yeats gave the following definition of the function, as he then conceived it, of symbolism as opposed to allegory, attributing the definition to a German painter:

> ... Symbolism said things which could not be said so perfectly in any other way, and needed but a right instinct for its understanding; while Allegory said things which could be said as well, or better, in another way, and needed a right knowledge for its understanding.[18]

One year later, in the first issue of Beltaine, he explained, indirectly, how

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[14]Lady Gregory, Our Irish Theatre, p.76

[15]W.B. Yeats, "Symbolism in Painting," Ideas of Good and Evil, Essays (London, 1924), p. 183.

[16]Yeats, "Symbolism in Painting," p. 184.

[17]John Eglinton, Irish Literary Portraits (London, 1935), p.28.

[18]Yeats, "Symbolism in Painting," p. 181.

the symbols, which require a "right instinct" for their appreciation would be understood by the audience to which the Irish National Theatre was directing its efforts.

> We must make a theatre for ourselves and our friends, and for a few simple people who understand from sheer simplicity what we understand from scholarship and thought.[19]

There was no room for middle-class art or philosophy in Yeats' conception. Indeed, it was his wish to ignore the existence of middle-class civilization and return to myth, saga, and primitive life. That is not to say that he wished to wipe away the aristocracy as well, for these, he felt, contributed to both art and life, as did the peasant. Material of the plays was to be drawn from either the lives of the peasants or the ideals of the ruling class of ancient Ireland. Frank O'Connor explains Yeats' position thus:

> Moore quarrels with Yeats's statement that the middle classes have produced no art; but what concerns Yeats is that it is the middle classes who have produced most of the muddle and fuss. In the simplicity of the world there was only the lord and the peasant; in the theatre the two are interchangeable; it is the middle classes who will not blend ... It is the middle class which stands as a barrier between the poor man and the aristocrat; they ignore it in their work.[20]

Throughout his life, Yeats was deeply interested in all aspects of mysticism, spiritualism, occultism, and magic. As a young man he visited numerous séances, came under the influence of many practioners of the occult arts, some sincere and some fraudulent, and joined several mystical societies. Indeed, his enthusiasm became so all pervasive that one critic suggested that it had almost ruined his poetic genius.

> There was a time when love of the occult threatened his art, but from that the theatre has saved him, if it has taken him from the writing of lyrics, in

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[19] W.B. Yeats, Beltaine, No. 1, p.20.

[20] Frank O'Connor, "Synge," The Irish Theatre, ed. Lennox Robinson (London, 1939), p. 39.

which his powers are at their highest. To old Irish legend, Mr. Yeats has, however, been true from the start, and from the start, too, there has never been a time that he has not been preoccupied with dream.[21]

In the "second sight" of certain Irish peasants, in the general belief in the "faeries" and in the wealth of stories surrounding these, Yeats found an aspect of Irish life which held a strong appeal for his own sense of the supernatural, and through which he could express this sense dramatically. He went back to " ... those old stories of the folk who believed so much in the soul, and so little in anything else, that they were never entirely certain that the earth was solid under the foot-sole."[22]

In 1896 he became involved in the organization of the ritual for a society whose "... doctrines would be the same as those of Theosophy and the Golden Dawn (occult societies), but associated here specifically with Ireland."[23] This society never passed the planning stage.

Thus romanticism, symbolism, and spiritualism were all associated with and modified by the cultural nationalism. Political nationalism there was also; Yeats went about the country with Maud Gonne, making political speeches.[24] Later he recalled the political motivations of the theatre group:

The Young Ireland poets created a mass of obvious images that filled the minds of the young - Wolfe Tone, King Brian, Emmet, Owen Roe, Sarsfield, the Fisher-

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[21] Weygandt, p. 58

[22] W.B. Yeats, Samhain, No. 4, 1904, quoted by Una Ellis-Fermor, p.95. See also, Yeats, "The Irish Dramatic Movement," Plays and Controversies (London, 1923), p.123.

[23] Richard Ellmann, Yeats, The Man and The Masks (London, 1949) p.124.

[24] An interesting sidelight on Yeats' political nationalism is provided by Sir William Rothenstein - "Yeats as a Painter Saw Him," Scattering Branches, ed. Stephen Gwynn (London, 1940), p.43 - in the following anecdote: "Yeats was to preside at a complimentary dinner to Craig, but his disinclination to propose the King's health stood in the way, and I had to take his place in the chair."

man of Kinsale - answered traditional slanders of Irish character and entered so into the affections that it followed men on to the scaffold. The ethical ideas implied were of necessity very simple, needing neither study nor unusual gifts for their understanding. Our own movement thought to do the same thing in a more profound and therefore more enduring way.[25]

All of these facets of Ireland, as Yeats saw them, combined to form the basis of almost all of his early lyric and dramatic writing.

The soul of Ireland, it seemed to Yeats, was to be found in its tradition, in its history, in its folk-legends, the consciousness of which has had its psychological influences in two qualities that he deems peculiar to the Irish people, the tense ardor of patriotism manifested in their protracted struggle for political independence, and the half pagan, half Christian in the reality of an unseen world which had made possible the coexistence of both faery realm and Catholic theology.[26]

Yeats wished to articulate this "soul of Ireland", the racial consciousness of the Irish people, by means of the theatre, and he hoped it would be the center of an intellectual and emotional tradition.[27] In a letter to possible guarantors for The Irish Literary Theatre, Lady Gregory and Yeats had defined their aim as being " ... to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland ..." and to show "... that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism."[28] Later, in a document entitled, "Advice to Playwrights who are Sending Plays To The Abbey, Dublin", they repeat the educational aim of the theatre, and warn playwrights against submitting "commercial" or "propagandist" plays, or those which "serve some obvious moral purpose." The committee is interested in plays which "contain some criticism of life, founded on the experience or personal observation of the writer, or

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[25]W.B. Yeats, Estrangement: Being Some Fifty Thoughts From a Diary Kept By William Butler Yeats in the Year Nineteen Hundred and Nine (Dublin, 1926) p.37.
[26]Morris, p.10-11.
[27]Morris, p.94.
[28]Lady Gregory, p. 9.

some vision of life, Irish life by preference...."[29] In "The Trembling of The Veil", Yeats explains that he thought to find the unity of Ireland in mythology, through the "applied arts of literature", music, speech, and the dance, and through "political passion".[30]

It is most important to bear in mind that Yeats was primarily a poet and secondly a dramatist. His earliest dramas, "Time and the Witch Vivien", and the "Island of Statues", written, as he said, for his cousin Laura Armstrong to act,[31] were not really plays at all, they were dreamy, frail poems, more lyric than dramatic. The Countess Kathleen was the first real play which Yeats wrote, and that was revised many times before it could be called truly dramatic. Yeats learned his dramatic technique by working with actors in the theatre. Never afraid of revision, he would attend rehearsals and performances over and over, and then return to the play, rewriting to make it more dramatically effective. Many deplored the fact that he was devoting more time to dramatic poetry and less to the development of his lyric genius. In the preface to a volume of poems which appeared in 1906, he explained why he had not been content to restrict himself to lyric writing:

> "... to me drama ... has been the search for more of manful energy, more of cheerful acceptance of whatever rises out of the logic of events, and for clear outline, instead of those outlines of lyric poetry that are blurred with desire and vague regret.[32]

However those who feared that Yeats was wasting his genius need not have

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[29] Lady Gregory, pp. 100-101.

[30] W.B. Yeats, The Trembling of the Veil, Autobiographies, op.cit.(above, note 7), p.190.

[31] W.B. Yeats, "Letter to K. Tynan," March 21, 1899, The Letters of W.B.Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (London, 1954), p. 118. Hereafter this book will be cited as Letters.

[32] W.B. Yeats, Poems: 1899-1905, p.xii, quoted by Boyd, p.86, and by Thomas Parkinson, "W.B.Yeats: A Poet's Stagecraft, 1899-1911," ELH, XVII (June,1950), 138.

worried. As one contemporary critic pointed out: "For all his preoccupation with the drama, Yeats has since found time for the expression of whatever lyric emotion has come to him."[33] Some of his best lyric poems continued to appear in little books published by Dun Emer and Cuala Press. Indeed, his experiments in dramatic poetry led him away from the shimmering, elaborate, inconclusive Pre-Raphaelite style, to a harder, more concrete, and more powerful poetry.

> Very quickly Yeats himself grew weary of the ceremonial style that seemed more concerned with cadence than content, of things imaged as it were through water; and away from that poetry of ornamental illumination, rather than flash, he hardened himself, subduing the lavish painting and toning down the rich sounds. He sought to rid himself of elaboration, of redundancy....[34]

He tried to accomplish this by writing ballads and by making prose draughts of the poems on which he was working, but his experience in writing for the theatre was an important factor in the development of a harder, less diffuse poetry. Higgins suggests that Yeats "... succeeded mainly in his later work by the introduction and tenacious adherence to a stern theme and structure."[35] These two qualities are precisely those which are necessary to effective drama, and would best be acquired by working in the theatrical medium. Indeed, Higgins points out that Yeats' poetry of mood gave way to a new poetry of dramatic passion.

Besides the changes which are evident in expression and form, another result of Yeats' activities as a dramatist has been noted.[36] The demands of the theatre made Yeats clarify the conflict which underlay his earlier poems. A major subject of the plays written for the Abbey was the

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[33]Boyd, pp. 85-86.

[34]F.R. Higgins, "Yeats and Poetic Drama in Ireland," The Irish Theatre, ed. Lennox Robinson, op. cit. (above, note 20), p.71.

[35]Higgins, p.71

[36]Thomas Parkinson, "W.B.Yeats: A Poet's Stagecraft,1899-1911," ELH, XVII (June, 1950), 138.

conflict between the world of human affairs and the world of passion, that is, between the institutional world and the personal world. The conception of this conflict reappears in a great deal of Yeats' work, for, as we shall see, it was an idea basic to his personal philosophy.

Although Yeats' experience in writing for the stage changed and mo ified his lyric style, nevertheless he remained foremost a poet, and as such was particularly concerned with words and their sounds. He was anxious to hear his poetry spoken from the stage. In 1896 he wrote:

> Some day the few among us, who care for poetry more than any temporal thing, and who believe that its delights cannot be perfect when we read it alone in our rooms and long for one to share its delights, but that they might be perfect in the theatre, when we share them friend with friend, lover with beloved, will persuade a few idealists to seek out the lost art of speaking...[37]

Verse should be spoken, he thought, "with a musical emphasis,"[38] and in the early years he wished to hear his dramatic verse spoken with the half-chant with which he believed men spoke poetry in the old days.[39] It was not easy to find actors who could speak verse to Yeats' satisfaction, but he did meet Miss Florence Farr whose musical delivery suited his requirements. They planned to form a company which would perform verse plays on the outskirts of London. This experiment collapsed, but together they evolved a technique of speaking verse to the Psaltery which pleased Yeats, who was, indidentally, tone deaf. Miss Farr taught this peculiar method of verse-speaking to the Abbey players, who, as a result spoke in a fluid, liquid way which was, according to one critic, "very dramatic, rich, and delicate."[40]

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[37] W.B. Yeats, "The Return of Ulysses," Ideas of Good and Evil, Essays, p.245

[38] W.B. Yeats, Beltaine, No. 1, p.22.

[39] Yeats, Beltaine, No. 1, p.7.

[40] Morris, p.100.

The native Irish actors were naturally suited to speaking the language which Yeats wanted brought to the Irish stage. In peasant dialect he saw the wealth of poetry which was to be so effectively exploited by Synge and Lady Gregory. He was convinced that the living imagination had to be conveyed in language which was uncontaminated by the cheap press, and he found this language in the West of Ireland where the people were bilingual, speaking English as a second language which was a direct translation of native syntax and imagery.[41]

As well as having the ability to speak this Irish-English naturally and effectively, with soft, rhythmic, delicate intonation, the Fay company supplied Yeats with an acting technique which was identical with his own ideal.

There is some confusion as to the source of the Fays' technique, which was in sharp contrast to contemporary English practice. Eric Bentley quotes a French resident of Dublin in the early days of the Abbey:

"One of the principal Irish reforms was suggested by the acting of Tartuffe by Coqueline aîné at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. Messrs. Fay had noticed how in the first scene all the actors stood in a line parallel to the footlights and how those who had nothing to say kept their eyes fixed on those who were speaking."[42]

Yeats believed, in 1902, that the Fays had taken as their model a production of Phèdre in which were Sara Bernhardt and De Max.[43] He mentioned this in an essay, to which he later appended this note:

An illusion, as he himself Mr. Fay explained to me. He had never seen Phèdre. The players were quiet and natural, because they did not know what else to do. They had not learned to go wrong.[44]

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[41]Boyd, p.40.

[42]Quoted by Eric Bentley, In Search of Theatre (New York, 1954), p.312.

[43]Yeats, "The Irish Dramatic Movement," Plays and Controversies, p.20.

[44]Yeats, "The Irish Dramatic Movement," p.20, note 1.

Whatever the model, the company's acting technique precisely suited Yeats' requirements. Rather than continually occupying themselves with stage "business", these actors dispensed with extraneous movements and virtually effaced themselves so that attention was concentrated on the speaker. They had no use for the "star" system, and considered the minor roles to be as important as leading parts. They stressed elocution and delivered lines of verse in such a way that the intrinsic poetic beauties were not lost to the audience.

In 1902, Yeats expressed his opinion of the "realistic" school of acting as follows:

> Modern acting and recitation have taught us to fix our attention on the gross effects till we have come to think gesture, and the intonation that copies the accidental surface of life, more important than the rhythm; and yet we understand theoretically that it is precisely this rhythm that separates good writing from bad, that is the glimmer, the fragrance, the spirit of all intense literature.[45]

Two years later, while in America, he repeated his condemnation of this type of acting: "'To the amateur I say: "Be as different as possible from the professional actor."'"[46] In the Abbey players he found precisely the type of acting which he felt was necessary to the presentation of the poetic plays which he envisioned. After a 1902 production of Deirdre by the Irish National Theatre Society, he wrote:

> ... the actors kept still enough to give poetical writing its full effect upon the stage. I had imagined such acting, though I had not seen it, and

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[45] W.B. Yeats, "Speaking to the Psaltery," Ideas of Good and Evil, Essays, p.22

[46] Quoted by James O'Donnell Bennett, "Mr. Yeats as Missionary," The Record-Herald, Chicago, Jan. 29, 1904 (Pagination not available.)

had once asked a dramatic company to let me rehearse them in barrels that they might forget gesture, and have their minds free to think of speech for a while. The barrels, I thought, might be on castors, so that I could shove them about with a pole when the action required it.[47]

Although pleased with the technical style of the company's acting, Yeats believed that experience in acting in poetic dramas and folk-plays would increase their range and depth. He wrote:

In time, I think, we can make the poetical play a living dramatic form again, and the training our actors will get from plays of country life, with its unchanging outline, its abundant speech, its extravagance of thought, will help to establish a school of imaginative acting. The play of society, on the other hand would but train up realistic actors who would do badly, for the most part, what English actors do well.[48]

If, on the other hand, they concerned themselves with poetry and the peasants, they might recover a lost art.

Yeats was concerned with other aspects of theatrical production than acting. At rehearsals he was attentive to scenery, dress, and lighting, as well as movement, emotion, and speaking of verse.[49] He maintained that the words were the most important aspect of any drama, and he judged the value of settings or costumes in terms of whether they pointed up or detracted from the words of the playwright.

In speech, gesture and setting he would have simplification of everything that might detract from or interfere with the verse or prose cadences of the words and the intensity of the emotion; speech accompanying the words without being their rival, gesture in the same way accompanying speech, and

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[47] W.B. Yeats, Samhain, Oct. 1902, p.4. It may be noted that although Yeats never rehearsed his actors in barrels to keep them still, Lady Gregory did rehearse them with plates on their heads. See Frank O'Connor, p.38.

[48] W.B. Yeats, Samhain, Oct. 1902, p.10.

[49] Lennox Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," Scattering Branches, op.cit. (above, note 24), p.75.

setting, simple in form and colour, deferring to both.[50]

Yeats placed the art of the playwright above the other arts of the theatre, the art of the actor was secondary, and subordinate to both of these was the art of the producer.[51] Because poetry was the important element, anything that might make poetry difficult to accept by the audience must be eliminated. Yeats therefore advocated simple settings which would decorate the stage and suggest a scene, but which would not attempt the elaborate realism which, he thought, an easel painting could do better;[52] because, as he said:

> Even if poetry were spoken as poetry, it would still seem out of place in many of its highest moments upon a stage, where the superficial appearances of nature are so clearly copied; for poetry is founded upon convention, and becomes incredible the moment painting or gesture reminds us that people do not speak verse when they meet upon the highway.[53]

He objected to "the solid-built houses and flat trees that shake with every breath of air" and wished to replace them with "great masses of colour in the back cloth and such severe or decorative forms of hills and trees and houses as would not overwhelm ... the idealistic art of the poet."[54] Naturalistic scene-painting, he held, was not an art but a trade, but the decorative scene-painting which he envisioned would be "... as inseparable from the movements as from the robes of the players and from the falling of the light; and being in itself a grave and quiet thing it would mingle with

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[50] Ellis-Fermor, p.70

[51] Morris, p.99

[52] W.B. Yeats, "The Bounty of Sweden," Autobiographies, p.538

[53] W.B. Yeats, Beltaine, No. 1, p.23.

[54] W.B. Yeats, "At Stratford-On-Avon," Ideas of Good and Evil, Essays, p.122.

the tones of the voices and with the sentiment of the play, without overwhelming them under an alien interest. It would be a new and legitimate art..."[55] In this he was in complete agreement with the scenic designer, Gordon Craig, who was to design the screens for some of the Abbey productions. Craig wrote that "It is idle to talk about the distraction of scenery, because the question here is not how to create some distracting scenery, but rather how to create a place which harmonizes with the thoughts of the poet."[56]

The simple sets for the plays of peasant life, the interior of a cottage, or a village street were to be no more obtrusive than the background of a portrait. Costumes, or robes as Yeats called them, would be simple, in colours which would contrast with the back cloth to make the "picture" he wanted. While on a tour of the United States, Yeats presented his theatrical views in a series of lectures. A critic who was present at one of these, in a markedly hostile review, summed up the ideals for stage production which Yeats advocated:

> A kind of artistic monasticism was what he pleaded for. Abandon the existing playhouse to its own devices. Leave the marvelously equipped stages ... to glittering extravaganzas and crude melodramas. Seek out bare, humble places to set up the honour of an ancient art, and there light anew the fires. Shakespeare played in an inn yard would be, according to Mr. Yeats, more truly Shakespeare than is Shakespeare played on a modern stage, with every resource of picture, light and illusion at easy command.[57]

In his views of the proper nature of the functions of the theatre, Yeats was still very much under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

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[55] W.B. Yeats, "At Stratford-On-Avon," pp. 122-123.

[56] Gordon Craig, On The Art of The Theatre (London, 1912), p.22.

[57] James O'Donnell Bennett.

In Beltaine he presented his theatrical credo:

> The theatre of Art, when it comes to exist, must therefore discover grave and decorative gestures, such as delighted Rossetti and Madox Brown, and grave and decorative scenery, that will be forgotten the moment an actor has said "It is dawn," or "It is raining," or "The wind is shaking the trees"; and dresses of so little irrelevant magnificence that the mortal actors and actresses may change without much labour into the immortal people of romance. The theatre began in ritual, and it cannot come to its greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovreignty.[58]

In his later works Yeats was to come much closer to ritual than he did in the plays which he was writing at this time.

Yeats was the chief propagandist for the Abbey Theatre, and as such he wrote many articles and gave several lectures on theatrical reform in general, and the aims of his group in particular. With regard to drama, he frequently spoke for himself alone, for, as we have seen, as a playwright " ... Yeats is an isolated figure in the repertory of the Abbey Theatre. While the speaking of verse and the plastic beauty of dramatic art have interested him personally, the Theatre has become associated almost exclusively with realistic folk drama, and prose fantasies in the manner of Lord Dunsany."[59]

However, Yeats spoke for the whole group when he advocated the theatrical reforms and acting technique which made the Abbey productions famous. The ideals of the "Irish National Theatre Society" were presented by Yeats in a lecture on "The Reform of the Theatre", delivered on the evening of the opening of his play The Hour Glass, produced by the society in 1903. Lennox Robinson, in Ireland's Abbey Theatre, reports Yeats' address:

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[58] W.B. Yeats, reprinted in Ideas of Good and Evil, Essays, p. 209.

[59] Boyd, p.85.

> They were endeavouring to restore the theatre as an intellectual institution. . . . As for technical things, they must restore to the stage beautiful speech. Great plays were written for actors capable of speaking great things greatly. In Elizabethan times plays were spoken in a solemn, rhythmical delivery, and it was known that Racine had taught his favourite actress by some sort of regulative musical notation. To restore good speech they must simplify acting. Modern actors slurred over the solemnest passages, and strove constantly to attract attention to their bodily movements. According to English ideas of what was known as "business" an actor when not speaking must always be moving his hands or feet or jigging about somewhere in a corner, and so attention was constantly drawn away from the central character. Gesture should be treated rather as a part of decorative art, and the more remote a play was from daily life, the more grave and solemn should the gesture be. As for scenery it should be inexacting to the eye, so that the great attention might be paid by the ear. For instance, his play had been staged with a monotonous green background, and the chief actor wore a purple garment. . . . His own dream had always been to treat the old legends so as to put on the stage types of heroic manhood.[60]

Elsewhere Yeats stated and restated these principles, which make up the theoretical basis for the work of the Abbey players. In his own writing for the public stage he abided by them, and in later years his more esoteric plays extended some of them far beyond their early implications.

The early influences on Yeats' work, Pre-Raphaelitism and symbolism, and his abiding interest in spiritualism and in Irish mythology and folklore, as well as his predominantly poetic approach to drama, are important factors which must be considered with regard to his early work. Equally important is the fact that he wrote for a specific theatre, whose peculiar characteristics had been shaped by himself as much as by anyone.

His early plays were written for a troupe of Irish players who shared his enthusiasm for their cultural heritage and who were able to perform his plays sympathetically and well. His theatre, although unable to avoid frequent clashes with one political faction or another, was genuinely a part of the general nationalist movement which was intellectual and artistic as

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[60] Lennox Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, pp. 32-33

well as political in nature. The specific theatrical reforms which he advocated were agreed upon by the other members of the company, whose enthusiasm and integrity provided Yeats with the ideal outlet for his talent as a dramatist. Because of the simplicity of production which was a basic artistic aim, the limited finances of the theatre proved less of a problem than it might otherwise have been. As a playwright Yeats had many advantages.

It is necessary to examine his early plays in light of the above, to see just how they reflect these influences, how they were modified by the limitations imposed by actual production, and how closely they conform to Yeats' theories. Because the four plays which come under this chapter have been discussed at great length, by many critics, their treatment here will be brief.

The Countess Cathleen was the longest and most important of Yeats' early plays. Under Dowden's urging,[61] he resolved to treat the theme, which he found in a translation of Les Matinées de Timothé Trimm in an Irish newspaper,[62] as a poetic drama, and took great pains to ensure that it would be suitable for production on the stage. In a letter to John O'Leary he wrote: "It is in all things Celtic and Irish. The style is perfectly simple and I have taken great care with the construction, made two complete prose versions before writing a line of verse."[63] This version of the play was published in 1892 with Various Legends and Essays,[64] but was revised twice before it first appeared on stage, on May 8, 1899.[65]

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[61] W.B. Yeats, "Letter to John O'Leary," Feb.1, 1899, Letters, p.108

[62] W.B. Yeats, The Poetical Works of William Butler Yeats, (London, 1919), II, 489. Hereafter this work will be cited as Poetical Works.

[63] W.B. Yeats, "Letter to John O'Leary," May 7, 1899, Letters, p.125

[64] Joseph Hone, W.B. Yeats (New York, 1943), p.97

[65] W.B. Yeats, Poetical Works, II, 489.

Yeats appears to have had three main reasons for writing the play as he did. He wished to treat the story which had captured his imagination and which he presented as "... in all things Celtic and Irish." Furthermore he was inspired by Maud Gonne, in whose situation he saw parallels to the Cathleen legend.

> Stories of how Maud Gonne had appeared as a sort of miracle worker among the poor in Donegal associated themselves in the poet's thought with the legend, and made the play a symbolical song of his pity. Maud Gonne had given of her substance to the evicted tenants: exhausted by the effort, she had been told by her French doctor that she was threatened with severe illness...."[66]

Hone tells how Yeats read the unpublished version of The Countess Cathleen to Miss Gonne, telling her that he "had come to interpret the life of a woman who sells her soul as a symbol of all souls that lose their peace, their fineness, in politics, serving but change."[67] Whatever Yeats' intentions with regard to Miss Gonne, the nationalist influence is obvious in the play. It is possible even that it is an elaborate allegory in which the devil stands for England.

The Countess Cathleen was written also as part of Yeats' desire to see poetic drama on the stage again, in the position it had once occupied. He thought that Shelley's Cenci and Tennyson's Becket were deliberately oratorical, perhaps because the poets thought of the theatre as outside the general movement of literature. In The Countess Cathleen he endeavoured to avoid every oratorical phrase and cadence.[68] Nevertheless, the original version was a lyrical drama in which the poetic content outweighted the dramatic significance.

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[66] Hone, pp. 100-101.
[67] Hone, p.92.
[68] See Hone, pp. 77-78.

The supernatural, which so fascinated Yeats, is at the center of the play. In a letter to John O'Leary he wrote:

If I had not made magic my constant study I could not have written a single word of my Blake Books, nor would The Countess Cathleen have ever come to exist. The mystical life is the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write.[69]

In this play, Christian symbols were introduced, and, as Hone points out, " ... his mysticism could no longer be regarded merely as a private affair, poetic licence, when theology mixed with it...."[70] Thus the first production of The Countess Cathleen by the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899 awoke a storm of protest; the play was accused of being blasphemous because of the language of the demons and because certain characters spoke irreverently of sacred objects. Yeats explained, "In using what I considered traditional symbols I forgot that in Ireland they are not symbols but realities."[71] The play was also thought to be unpatriotic by some on the grounds that no Irish woman would sell her soul to the devil, although Yeats stated specifically in Beltaine that the play is symbolic, having little to do with time and place.[72]

The costumes and setting were chosen to preserve the indefinite symbolic nature of the play,[73] which was staged in keeping with the ideal of simplicity which Yeats advocated. The directions for the first act read as follows: "A room with lighted fire, and a door into the open air, through

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[69]Quoted by Hone, p.90.
[70]Hone, p.105.
[71]W.B. Yeats, Dramatis Personae (London, 1936), p.34.
[72]Yeats, Beltaine, No. 1, p.8.
[73]Yeats, Beltaine, No. 1, p.8.

which one sees, perhaps, the trees of a wood, and these trees should be painted in flat colour upon a gold or diapered sky. The walls are of one colour. The scene should have the effect of missal painting."[74] Elsewhere Yeats suggested that the room at Rua's house be indicated by a large grey curtain which the lights would transform with rich tints.[75]

The scenery contributed to the atmosphere of ominous beauty which has been called Maeterlinckian: "The great castle in malevolent woods and the country about it is very like the part of fairyland that M.Maeterlinck refound...."[76] The series of strange and significant incidents which are referred to in the first page of dialogue - the fluttering hen, the man whose ears flapped like a bat's wings, the encounter with the other whose face was a wall of solid flesh - help to build " ... that atmosphere of suggestion and anguish in which the typical drama of symbolism evolves."[77] But the characters are precise, the motives definite, and the scenes easily identified, unlike the plays of Maeterlinck which are shadowy, vaporous, or frequently puzzling.[78] It might be said that the impulses of the vagueness of symbolism and the "pure" poetic beauty of Pre-Raphaelitism were modified by Yeats' actual experience in writing for the theatre.

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[74] The Countess Cathleen, The Collected Plays of W.B.Yeats (London, 1953),p.3 Subsequent references to Yeats' plays will be to this edition unless otherwise specified.

[75] Yeats, Poetical Works, II,490.

[76] Weygandt, p.48

[77] Boyd, p.57

[78] See Lennox Robinson, "The Man and the Dramatist", Scattering Branches, p.88

In all, the play was revised four times, each revision making the play clearer and more dramatic, the final version having a new ending which was written to suit the specific requirements of the Abbey stage, which being shallow made the vision of angels on the mountainside impossible. On the other hand, at the Abbey a stage platform could be brought out in front of the proscenium, with a flight of steps at one side up which the angel could come.[79] A further adjustment was made in the acting version, which eliminated many references to Irish mythology of which the audience was ignorant. Yeats wrote of the final version:

> ... now at last I have made a complete revision to make it suitable for performance at the Abbey Theatre. The first two scenes are almost wholly new, and throughout the play I have added or left out such passages as a stage experience of some years showed me encumbered the action,...[80]

In the twenty years between 1892 and the final version of 1912, Yeats had profited enormously from his experience working in the theatre; the acting version of The Countess Cathleen is of almost faultless construction,[81] and it achieves great dramatic intensity without sacrificing the beauty of the language and poetry. It retains also the beauty of atmosphere, the supernatural aura which is remote from everyday life. Lennox Robinson says of it: " ... the man who can read it and say Yeats is not a dramatist, is a fool."[82]

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[79] Yeats, Poetical Works, II, 489-90.

[80] Yeats, Poetical Works, II, 489.

[81] For a detailed discussion of the structure of The Countess Cathleen see Lennox Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," pp. 79-87.

[82] Lennox Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," p. 87.

The Land of Heart's Desire was the first of Yeats' plays to be performed. Shorter than The Countess Cathleen (it is only one act long) it deals in quite a different way with the struggle for possession of a soul. It has been performed more frequently than any other of Yeats' plays, and is a great favourite with amateur groups. It was first produced in London, at the Avenue Theatre, on March 29, 1894, as a curtain-raiser for Todhunter's Comedy of Sighs and Shaw's Arms and the Man. Dorothy Paget made her first stage appearance as the fairy child.[83]

The theme was drawn from an Irish folk-belief that on Midsummer Eve the faeries sometimes steal away beautiful mortals to be their brides. About this theme, Yeats wove a beautiful but tenuous little play, in which the dream-laden mood and musical verse far outweigh its dramatic qualities. The conflict, one critic suggests,

> ... had its roots in the fundamentals of the Irish mind, in that strange war between Paganism and Christianity with its astonishingly frequent armistices and tactical parleys, the war that has obsessed a considerable portion of Irish thought since Oisin argued with Patrick.[84]

But there is more to the theme of The Land of Heart's Desire than the conflicting loyalties to the supernatural of the Irish mind. There is the wish to rebel against the tediousness of human life, and the longing for the land of enchantment, the magic world of the mind, which is characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Wilson explains that Yeats' fairyland became a symbol for the imagination itself, delightful, seductive, and incompatible with and fatal to

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[83] Hone, p.114.

[84] Michael MacLiammoir, "Problem Plays", The Irish Theatre, ed. Robinson, p.207.

the good life of the actual world. The Sidhe themselves are not evil, but the mortal who has lived among fairies suffers terrible consequences, because, having preferred something else to reality, he must fail of all human satisfactions.[85] Yeats' fairyland was one of the imaginary domains of the fin-de-siècle mind.[86] Yeats was aware of the conflict between the world of the imagination and of reality, and eventually moved away from fairyland, but he continued to champion the imagination of the individual against the institutions of society.

The outstanding quality of the play was the beautiful, musical verse, of the lush Pre-Raphaelite type. Yeats became dissatisfied with it, and wrote to AE: "In my Land of Heart's Desire, and in some of my lyric verse of that time there is an exaggeration of sentiment which I have come to think unworthy."[87] Yeats revised the play in 1912, pruning the verse and increasing the dramatic effectiveness. He attended numerous rehearsals and performances, and revised in the light of what he learned from these. The acting edition of the play has sections of poetry, which are either difficult to speak or which indicate stage effects which might constitute problems for amateurs, bracketed off, and these may be omitted without detracting from the general effect of the play. After revising it, Yeats wrote of The Land of Heart's Desire: "Till lately it was not part of the repertory of the Abbey Theatre, for I had grown to dislike it without knowing what I disliked in it.

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[85] Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York, 1948), p.30

[86] Wilson, p.33.

[87] W.B. Yeats, "Letter to AE?" undated, 1904 (Hone Papers), quoted by T.R.Henn, The Lonely Tower (London, 1950), p.108

This winter, however, I have made many revisions, and now it plays well enough to give me pleasure."[88] Nevertheless, and in spite of its many productions, the play is difficult to perform successfully. W.G. Fay, whose experience in producing Yeats' plays was extensive, said of The Land of Heart's Desire that it " ... reads much better than it plays, owing, not to any fault of the author, but to the impossibility of making the fairy child - on whom the whole story depends - appear to the audience as anything but what she is - a very human little girl."[89]

It is interesting to note that even this seemingly inoffensive little play incurred a violent denunciation. In 1904, Mr. F.H. O'Donnell published a booklet entitled, The Stage Irishman of the Pseudo-Celtic Drama, in which he described The Land of Heart's Desire as "'another revolting burlesque of Irish Catholic religion,'"[90] presumably objecting to the removal of the crucifix from its place on the wall. This incident, while necessary to the ensuing action, is dramatically unsound, since the crucifix is removed by the priest who has previously stated that:

> The Cross will keep all evil from the house
> While it hangs there.[91]

The strife between the fairy and the priest is perhaps dramatically effective on the stage, but reading the play one finds it difficult to accept.

Indeed the entire play is unconvincing as drama. Its greatest merits lie in its lyric beauties, especially in the haunting song of the

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[88] W.B. Yeats, Poetical Works, II, 494-495

[89] W.G. Fay, "The Poet and the Actor," Scattering Branches, p.118

[90] Quoted by Boyd, p.62.

[91] The Land of Heart's Desire, p.59

fairy child. It is probably Yeats' most Pre-Raphaelite play; both the mystical and the Irish elements are shaped by that influence.

Cathleen ni Houlihan, Yeats' most political nationalist play was first produced by W.G. Fay's company at St. Theresa's Hall, in April, 1902. Because of its nationalist theme, it became very popular. Yeats, in a Note to the play, addressed to Lady Gregory, related how the idea for the play came to him:

> One night I had a dream, almost as distinct as a vision, of a cottage where there was well-being and firelight and talk of a marriage, and into the midst of that cottage there came an old woman. She was Ireland herself, that Cathleen ni Houlihan, for whom so many songs have been sung and about whom so many stories have been told and for whose sake so many have gone to their death. I thought if I could write this out as a little play I could make others see my dream as I had seen it....[92]

W.G. Fay speaks of a much less mystical motivation. He suggests that Maud Gonne " ... asked Yeats to write a play that would embody the ideals for which Sinn Fein was fighting. In response he wrote his first prose play in one act,and called it Cathleen ni Houlihan...."[93] Of course the two explanations are not incompatible - very likely Miss Gonne made the suggestion, and Yeats, mulling over the problem, received the answer in a dream, a method of communication to which he was very receptive. The result was a dramatic and moving piece, which was first produced with Maud Gonne playing the title role with great effectiveness, the more so because she was herself so passionately involved in the nationalist cause which was allegorized in the play.

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[92] W.B. Yeats, Plays in Prose and Verse (London, 1931), p.419 (Notes).

[93] W.G. Fay, "The Poet and the Actor," Scattering Branches, p.125.

Those who have seen the play claim that it is much more effective in the theatre than it is in the library, where the allegory seems to be rather too obvious. The old woman, Cathleen ni Houlihan, who has "too many strangers in the house", and who has had her "four beautiful green fields" taken from her, is an allegorical figure rather than a symbol, but the allegory was exceedingly moving for those whose knowledge and personal involvement in the nationalist movement qualified them for appreciation, according to Yeats' own definition.[94] P.S. O'Hegarty described the effect which the play had on early audiences, in an article dealing with Yeats and the nationalist movement. He wrote:

> I often wonder what Ireland in the coming times will make of Cathleen Ni Houlihan. It is a play of the captivity and I suppose it will be difficult for them to understand it fully. But to us it was a sort of sacrament and I question whether there has been in our time anything else quite so potent. In it surely the spirit of Ireland spoke to us, and we listened. From the first word to the last that play is a piece of perfection of a sort rarely achieved by any poet.[95]

As well as being the only play which Yeats wrote in which the nationalist political propaganda was the most obvious aspect, Cathleen ni Houlihan was, with the exception of The Pot of Broth, the only folk-play which he attempted. The Countess Cathleen and The Land of Heart's Desire, while they had peasant characters in them, were so remote from actual life that the "folk" elements were negligible. Although Cathleen ni Houlihan is allegorical, nevertheless the atmosphere is not remote and dreamy as in the other two, but is as close to the characteristic life of the peasant as

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[94] See above, p.13.

[95] P.S. O'Hegarty, "W.B.Yeats and Revolutionary Ireland of His Time," The Dublin Magazine, XIV, n.s. no. 3 (1939), 23.

Yeats was ever to come. It was here that his major difficulty in writing the play lay, because, still under the spell of "pure" poetry, he could not tone down his poetic diction to the level of convincing peasant speech. He called on Lady Gregory for help, and between them they produced dialogue which was economical and dramatic, and which was none the less poetic.

As always, Yeats was concerned with the production of his play. With regard to the type of acting which he felt it required he said, "I cannot imagine this play, or any folk play of our school, acted by players with no knowledge of the peasant, and of the awkwardness and stillness of bodies that have followed the plow, or too lacking in humility to copy these things without convention or caricaturing."[96] Cathleen ni Houlihan supplied the Fay company with their first opportunity to present a play in the "folk-manner" for which they were to become famous.[97] They suited Yeats' requirements perfectly, with an acting technique the distinguishing characteristic of which was naturalness. "It is not that their personalities happen to coincide with certain types of Irish character, but that they know so well the types of the folk-plays, and even the characters who are not types that appear in folk-plays, that they are able to portray them to the life."[98]

Cathleen ni Houlihan had great successes before Irish audiences everywhere, but although it is a well-constructed, effective little play, it is too topical for universal appeal.

The Pot of Broth, a folk-comedy, was first presented in 1902,

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[96]Quoted by Boyd, p.67.
[97]See Boyd, p.67.
[98]Weygandt, p.24.

and was published in 1904. A variant of a widespread folk-tale, it was written in collaboration with Lady Gregory who was aware of the details of cottage life with which Yeats was not familiar. Together they wrote the dialogue which, Yeats said, showed that "... neither Lady Gregory nor I could yet distinguish between the swift-moving town dialect ... and the slow-moving country dialect."[99]

The Pot of Broth proved very popular, and gave the troupe training in performing comedy,[100] and its production at the Antient Concert Rooms revealed, for the first time, William Fay's great talent as a comedian. We are told that "... on the stage it is effective, and, with its swiftness and malice of speech, has its own beauty."[101]

These plays were all in some way connected with the folk aspects of the renewal of interest in Irish culture. This facet of Irish life, that of the peasant, was unsuited to Yeats' talents and inclinations. It was treated much more successfully by Lady Gregory and by Synge. Yeats, in the mean while, turned to the stories of the legendary gods and heroes of Ireland, Cuchulain, Conchubar, Deirdre and the others.

Yeats' earliest work, as we have seen, was motivated by a desire to exploit native Irish material in as romantic a way as possible, and to see the return of poetic drama to the stage. In part he was reacting against realism in the theatre, and his dramatic theories were primarily concerned

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[99] W.B. Yeats, Dramatis Personae (London, 1936), p.69.

[100] See W.G. Fay, "The Poet and the Actor," p.129.

[101] R. Ellis Roberts, "W.B. Yeats, Dramatist," The New Statesman and Nation, X (Nov. 2, 1935), 637.

only with bringing romance and mystery, and verbal beauty to the stage. The Countess Cathleen and The Land of Heart's Desire were set in a twilight world far removed from reality. The folk-plays were not true representations of peasant life, but were rather dramatizations of the idealized conception Yeats had of what he thought of as a romantic primitive existence. Menon sums up Yeats' attitude, quoting in part from his writing on the subject:

> Yeats's advocacy of a return to the people did not imply a return to the living people or the real world. A return to the people meant to him a return to the sagas, myths and a primitive life. The real world in his plays "is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty, we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance...."[102]

Although Yeats had at this time many theories about theatrical production, regarding acting, settings and so forth, his dramatic theories were vague extensions of his poetical ideals, which were not specifically concerned with drama at all. His technique as a playwright improved steadily as he worked in the theatre, and he was soon to develop a dramatic theory which was based on and in keeping with the philosophical ideals which he formulated and expressed as his own.

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[102] V.K. Narayana Menon, The Development of William Butler Yeats (Edinburgh, 1942), p.84.

Chapter II - Philosophy and Dramatic Theory

The development of Yeats' dramatic theories occurred in conjunction with his formulation of a set of philosophical ideas, which were, in turn, influenced by his acceptance of mystic, national or artistic currents or schools, which he modified to suit his temperamental affinities or to fit in with his developing theory. It is therefore necessary to examine his philosophic ideas in order to understand the dramatic theories which served as a basis for his plays. In the foregoing chapter we saw that Pre-Raphaelitism and the cult of pure poetry, mysticism, symbolish, and Irish nationalism were all important influences on Yeats. As a result of these, he evolved certain dramatic and theatrical doctrines which included the necessity of making the lives of Irish peasants or heroes the subjects of his plays, which were to be treated in a romantic or spiritual manner; the use of symbolism drawn from Irish folklore which would be readily appreciated by an Irish audience; and the expression of the racial consciousness and cultural heritage of the Irish people. The specifically theatrical ideals which he advocated included the musical speaking of verse, which was to be the most important aspect of any production; the relative immobility of the actors; simplicity of setting and costume, which were to be stylized and "decorative" rather than realistic.

It is necessary at this point to consider certain philosophic-artistic theories - the doctrines of "self" and "anti-self", of anima hominis and anima mundi, the idea of similarities between the artist and and the aristocrat - the dramatic theories which were based on these, and

the plays which resulted. None of these ideas were original with Yeats, they were all derived from one or other of the influences which were considered above, but in his hands they were changed and modified to form a more or less coherent system.

From early manhood Yeats was obsessed by the seeming duality of his own nature. This obsession remained throughout almost his entire life, although the nature of the opposing factors seemed to change from time to time.[1] However, the antithetical aspects of Yeats' personality, as he saw them, remained basically the same, although superficially they appeared to change. On the one hand he was a practical man, a public figure active in the nationalist movement and in the management of a theatre, and later he became a senator. On the other hand he was a poet, a romantic, and a dreamer. Thus he saw the world in terms of this duality: the actual, practical world of institutions, which he designated as anima hominis, and the world of imaginative reality, which he connected with the anima mundi. At the personal level, these divisions took the form of "self" or practical man, and "anti-self" or passionate or creative man; or the "face", the actual man, and the "mask", the consciously adopted pose or style which the artist must assume.

These concepts, though suited to his thought, did not all originate in Yeats' mind. The idea of the anima mundi can be traced to a mystical society of which Yeats was a member.

In May, 1887, Yeats joined a movement, called Theosophy by its

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[1] See R. Ellmann, Yeats, The Man and the Masks, passim.

members, which had been founded by"a strange Russian lady,"[2] named Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who claimed to possess the secret doctrine which was the basis of all religions. The doctrine had been revealed to her by her "Masters", members of "an ancient brotherhood (which) was keeping the secret wisdom high in the mountain fastnesses of Tibet."[3] Although the claims of Madame Blavatsky, who had amazed an English editor in India by mysterious tappings and so forth, were exploded by the investigations of the Society for Psychical Research,[4] Yeats was persuaded by the magnetism of the founder to join the Blavatsky Lodge in London. Although he naturally tended to accept the doctrines of the society, which fortified his own beliefs in supernatural phenomena, Yeats wished to demonstrate, scientifically as it were, the truth of the existence of these phenomena. Consequently, under the aegis of the Society, he organized a committee to undertake a series of occult experiments. No miracles occurred, other members began to have doubts, and Yeats was asked to resign in 1890[5], lest members begin to defect from the organization. Nevertheless, the years which he had spent as a member of the Blavatsky Lodge had had a profound effect on the poet, not only supporting his belief in the supernatural, but providing him with a spiritual system which he was to shape and change to fill his own requirements.[6]

The doctrine of Theosophy had four main principles which formed

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[2]Ellmann, p.58.

[3]Ellmann, p.59.

[4]For a complete discussion of the investigation, see Ellmann, pp. 58-64.

[5]Ellmann, p.69.

[6]See Ellmann, pp. 60-61.

a system of cosmology. Three of these were incorporated into Yeats' philosophic ideas of this time. First, Theosophists believed that there exists an "'Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable Principle on which all speculation is impossible.'"[7] Second, there is a universal law of periodicity, of flux and reflux; the world consists of a conflict of opposites, including Good and Evil, but many others as well. Third, there is a fundamental identity of all souls with the Universal Oversoul, and any soul might, under the proper conditions, partake of the Oversoul's power.[8]

These principles are basic to the ideas of anima hominis and anima mundi, for, as Ellmann points out:

> ... Yeats accepted tacitly most of what the Theosophists believed, though he understandably preferred to attribute the doctrines to Boehme, Swedenborg, and other reputable sources whom he was now inspired to read, rather than to Blavatsky.[9]

The anima hominis, according to Yeats' doctrine, is the plane of individual, everyday man. At this level people have visible, distinctive attributes: religion, nationality, class, and so forth. In extraordinary situations however it is possible for the individual to rise from this plane to the anima mundi or "world soul". Attainment of the anima mundi, which has been called "the common life of passion,"[10] is possible for a person only when he reaches the peak of an emotion, when he loses all individuality and becomes part of the world soul. This theory is in fact a particularization

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[7]Quoted by Ellmann, p.60.
[8]Ellmann, p.61.
[9]Ellmann, p.70.
[10]Parkinson, p.138.

of the third principle of Theosophy, which states that "any soul might under the proper conditions, partake of the Oversoul's power." The "proper condition" which Yeats requires is the transcendence of the limits of the human mind through passionate experience. Austin Warren explains that the doctrine of the anima mundi filled a lack which Yeats felt very strongly.

> Feeling painfully that sense of the self's isolation which Arnold's "Buried Life" commemorates, Yeats turned, with consolation, to the doctrine that beneath our conscious selves there is access to a communal psyche, the Anima Mundi. The sharing of the same dream by two living persons and the invasion of the living's dream by the dead's memories are beliefs interconnected in Yeats's faith; they are parts of the same release from the oppressive uniqueness of the self.[11]

Another aspect of the life beyond reality is described in the essay, "The Tragic Generation":

> When we are dead, according to my belief, we live our lives backward for a certain number of years, trading the paths that we have trodden, growing young again, even childish again, till some attain an innocence that is no longer a mere accident of nature, but the human intellect's crowning achievement.[12]

An interesting sidelight is supplied later in the same essay: " ... a countryman told Lady Gregory and myself that he had heard the crying of new-dropped lambs in November - spring in the world of Faery being November with us."[13]

There appears to be some confusion between the fairyland of Irish folklore and that of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and the Theosophists' Oversoul. Somehow they were welded together in Yeats' thought, sometimes exhibiting the characteristics of one source more strongly than the others. However, the concepts of anima hominis and the more complex anima mundi

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[11] Austin Warren, "Religio Poetae," The Southern Review, VII, Winter (1941), 634.

[12] W.B. Yeats, The Trembling of the Veil, Autobiographies, p. 378.

[13] The Trembling of the Veil, p. 380.

enter largely in Yeats' dramatic theories, in connection with which they will be discussed at greater length below.

The doctrines of the divided self, the wearing of the mask, and the "self" and "anti-self", are intimately related to the above. These concepts remained prominent in Yeats' thought when many others had been discarded.

The idea of the artist's having two opposing selves did not originate with Yeats, but was popular among many writers at the end of the nineteenth century. It was particularly appealing to Yeats however, because of his consciousness of the duality of his own nature, re-enforced perhaps by the second Theosophist principle which stated that the world consists of a conflict of opposites. Wilde, Whistler, and Pater all felt that the artist must be distinct from the man and must be remote from passion at all times.

> The esthetes' conception of the artistic personality is that a man is really two men. There is the insignificant man who is given, whether by God, by society, or simply by birth, there is the significant man who is made by the first.[14]

Yeats differed from the others with regard to the role of passion. He believed that the artist must suspend desire as well as will and intellect in order to reach the anima mundi, but that the hero could only reach that state at the height of emotion. In 1909 he wrote baldly: "Emotion is always justified by time, thought hardly ever."[15] Nevertheless the idea of duality, manifested in such literature as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and The Picture of Dorian Gray, and in the use of pseudonyms by a number of Yeats'

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[14] Ellmann, p.75.

[15] Yeats, Estrangement, p.14.

contemporaries, coupled with his own sense of inner division, influenced Yeats almost continuously throughout his life.

As a youth he saw a performance of Hamlet by Irving and Ellen Terry. Years later he wrote: "For many years Hamlet was an image of heroic self-possession for the poses of youth and childhood to copy, a combatant of the battle within myself...."[16] Writing of his thought between 1887 and 1891 he recalled:

> My mind began drifting vaguely towards that doctrine of "the mask" which has convinced me that every passionate man (I have nothing to do with mechanist, or philanthropist, or man whose eyes have no preference) is, as it were, linked with another age, historical or imaginary, where alone he finds images that rouse his energy.[17]

These "images that rouse energy" are connected to ideals of the use of the symbol in literature as a means of communication, having more value for some than for others; and similarly these images may be remotely connected to those symbolic figures or images which Yeats was accustomed to use to evoke visions. Actually both of these are related - Yeats was convinced of the power of the symbol in many spheres.

The doctrine is further explained in a diary which Yeats kept in 1909. He wrote:

> —I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous or creative life is a rebirth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed.[18]

It is the "other self" or "anti-self" which is the creative part of any artist. Revelation comes from the self, the "age-long memorial self", which is that same self that teaches birds to build nests.[19] Like the hero

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[16] W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.47

[17] Autobiographies, p.152.

[18] Autobiographies, p.503.

[19] Autobiographies, p.272.

in a moment of passion, the artist can reach the anima mundi, but does so through his anti-self. In both cases, individuality, particular characteristics, must be abandoned:

"By suspending the will and intellect, and even desire, Yeats thought he could free his mind from the weight of external and superficial reality, and thus 'immerse it in the general mind'."[20] He described the relation of the "anti-self" to the anima mundi as follows:

> Does not all art come when a nature, that never ceases to judge itself, exhausts personal emotion in action or desire so completely that something impersonal, something that has nothing to do with action or desire, suddenly starts into its place, something which is as unforeseen, as completely organized, even as unique, as the images that pass before the mind between sleeping and waking?[21]

In creating tragedy which, as we shall see, is connected to the anima mundi, the poet becomes part of the world soul:

> A poet creates tragedy from his own soul, that soul which is alike in all men. It has not joy, as we understand that word, but ecstacy, which is from the contemplation of things vaster than the individual and imperfectly seen perhaps by all those that still live.[22]

The "anti-self" is so called because it is the opposite of the "self" of the man, of that aspect which dwells in the anima hominis: "A writer must die every day he lives, be reborn, as it is said in the Burial Service, an incorruptible self, that self opposite of all that he has named 'himself'."[23] Thus, Yeats describes the nature of his own "self" and "anti-self": "It is perhaps because nature made me a gregarious man, going hither and thither looking for conversation, and ready to deny from fear or favour his dearest

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[20] Arnold Stein, "Yeats: A Study in Recklessness," Sewanee Review, LVII (1949), 610.

[21] W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.332.

[22] W.B. Yeats, Estrangement, p.12.

[23] W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.457.

conviction, that I love proud and lonely things."[24] His anti-self", that is, his artistic self, is described as consciously engendered: "... I can only set up a secondary or interior personality created out of the tradition of myself, and this personality (alas only possible to me in my writings) must be always gracious and simple."[25]

There is some confusion as to the nature of the difference between the "mask" and the "anti-self", if such a difference exists. The mask is consciously assumed by the artist, or by others. Love, for instance, creates a mask, and the lover loves the secret self of the beloved.[26] It is not clear, however, whether the anti-self is assumed with equal consciousness or whether it is acquired only through the exertions of passion or genius. It is reasonable to suggest that Yeats felt that both were necessary. The passionate content of his writings would come from the anti-self or poetic genius, style would be a result of conscious effort, or the formation of a mask. Perhaps the anti-self is free to function only when the characteristics of the self are eliminated by the wearing of the mask. The passionate hero achieves the anima mundi at the height of emotion, but at other times life requires the wearing of a mask in order for man to discipline himself.

> If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are and assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one from others. Active virtue as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a current code is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask.[27]

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[24] Autobiographies, p.171

[25] W.B. Yeats, Estrangement, p.3.

[26] Estrangement, p.4.

[27] Estrangement, p.10.

The wearing of a mask is a necessity: "Style, personality - deliberately adopted and therefore a mask - is the only escape from the hot-faced bargainers and the money-changers."[28]

Yeats had always felt that in the aristocracy and the peasantry lay the sources of art, and that middle-class civilization could supply nothing of value. About 1907 however, he developed a fierce hatred of the middle-class which was later to cause him to be branded a Fascist in some quarters. Between 1903 and 1911 he was involved in a series of quarrels, some on behalf of the Abbey when the theatre was faced with riots over Synge's Shadow of the Glen and later over his Playboy of the Western World; another over the founding of a new art gallery. "The issue was in almost every case national art versus nationalist propaganda. Yeats found chauvinism and mob-spirit before him in a dozen shapes...."[29] Embittered by these quarrels, Yeats explained the stupidity and enmity of his foes on the basis of class distinctions, and vented his wrath on the middle classes. He identified democracy with mob rule, and attempted to ally himself with the aristocracy.[30] His reading of Castiglione's Courtier, and visits to Lady Gregory's home at Coole Park increased his affection for the aristocratic way of life, both because he enjoyed gracious and comfortable living, an aspect which he minimized, and because the aristocracy had always encouraged art by patronage. At the same time he retained his sympathy with the peasants, whose belief in the supernatural saved them from the materialism

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[28] W.B. Yeats, Estrangement, p.1.

[29] Ellmann, p. 179.

[30] See Ellmann, p.180.

of the middle-class.

But Yeats was now more concerned with the artist than with the peasant. In 1909 he wrote that all charm of intellect, manners, and literature is inherited by poets or aristocrats. "Neither possesses anything that is not ancient or their own, and both are full of uncertainty about everything but themselves, about everything that can be changed, about all that they merely think."[31] Later in the same work he drew an analogy between the aristocrat and the artist:

"We come from the permanent things and create them, and instead of old blood we have old emotions and we carry in our heads always that form of society aristocracies create now and again for some brief moment at Urbino or Versailles."[32] He praises these two because they are not concerned with the material aspects of life, as is the middle-class:

> A gentleman is a man whose principal ideas are not connected with his personal needs and his personal success. In old days he was a clerk or a noble, that is to say, he had freedom because of inherited wealth and position, or because of a personal renunciation. The names are different to-day, and I would put the artist and the scholar in the category of the clerk...."[33]

The peasant also has this freedom which the aristocrat has by virtue of his security and the poet "because he has found out the littleness of earthly things,"[34] for a different reason. "The peasant holds life little because his share of it has been so poor."[34]

Thus the aristocrats, the artists and the peasants are able to create because they are not afraid. The middle-class, bound by institutions,

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[31] W.B. Yeats, Estrangement, p.2.
[32] Estrangement, p.15.
[33] Estrangement, p.33.
[34] Weygandt, p.70.

cannot rise to the anima mundi, cannot achieve genius nor tragic proportions.

The aristocracy could provide Yeats with the kind of audience who would appreciate his particular art. As Knights points out, "Aristocracy, he thought, was the form in which natural vitality might combine with civilized ease,..."[35] And Yeats thought also that:

> In the drama of suggestion there must be sufficient loosening and slackening for meditation and the seemingly irrelevant, or else a Greek chorus, and neither is possible without rich leisurely minds in the audience, lovers of Father Time, men who understand Faust's last cry to the passing moment.[36]

Although the peasants and the artists might satisfy Yeats' criteria, the former were too uneducated or too uninterested, the latter too few in number to supply a public. Increasingly, as he grew older, Yeats was to direct his efforts as a playwright towards a small, esoteric and aristocratic audience.

Because the peasant, the poet, and the lord are free to reach the anima mundi through creative genius or through exalted emotion, they are suitable for dramatic treatment in tragedy. Yeats had always believed that the source of art lay with these; now he constructed a theory of drama which would embrace that idea, as well as the concepts of anima hominis and anima mundi.

The dualities of "self" and "anti-self", "face" and "mask", anima hominis and anima mundi, are related concepts. "Self" and "face" are on the plane of anima hominis, "anti-self" and "mask" are raised to the

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[35] L.C. Knights, "W.B. Yeats: The Assertion of Values," The Southern Review, VII, Winter (1941), 430.

[36] W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 515

level of anima mundi. The former, Yeats thought, were suitable for dramatic treatment in comedy, the latter for tragic treatment.

At the level of anima hominis the individual is cut off from other souls or from the Oversoul by institutions, by specific qualities, by the activities of daily existence. In the theatre, according to Yeats, the character, having particular attributes by which he may be recognized, such as suitable dialect, clothing, occupation, is at the anima hominis level, and must therefore be a figure of comedy rather than of tragedy.

> Suddenly it strikes us that character is continuously present in comedy alone, and there is much tragedy, that of Corneille, that of Racine, that of Greece and Rome, where its place is taken by passions and motives, one person being jealous, another full of love or remorse or pride or anger.[37]

He defined tragedy, comedy and farce as follows:

> Tragedy is passion alone, and rejecting character, it gets form from motives, from the wandering of passion; while comedy is the clash of character. Eliminate character from comedy and you get farce. Farce is bound together by incident alone.[38]

In tragedy individual characteristics are lost in a great emotional surge which lifts the hero to the anima mundi, for having lost his individuality he becomes part of the world soul. Yeats announced in 1910 that "tragedy must always be a drowning and breaking of the dykes that separate man from man, and ... it is upon these dykes comedy keeps house."[39]

Yeats complained of those critics who maintain that an antithesis exists between character and lyric poetry in poetic drama, and that lyricism encumbers the action. He resolved the antithesis by absenting

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[37] W.B. Yeats, "The Tragic Theatre,"(August,1910), Essays, p. 296.

[38] W.B. Yeats, Estrangement, pp. 11-12.

[39] W.B. Yeats, Essays, p.298.

character from tragedy and substituting lyric emotion.[40] The following rather lengthy passage from the essay, "The Tragic Theatre" explains Yeats' conception of the art of tragedy:

> There is an art of the flood, the art of Titian when his 'Ariosto', and his 'Bacchus and Ariadne', give new images to the dreams of youth, and of Shakespeare when he shows us Hamlet broken away from life by the passionate hesitation of his reverie. And we call this art poetical, because we must bring more to it than our daily mood if we would take our pleasure; and because it takes delight in the moment of exaltation, of excitement, of dreaming .... And there is an art that we call real, because character can only express itself perfectly in a real world, being that world's creature, and because we understand it best through a delicate discrimination of the senses which is but entire wakefulness, the daily mood grown cold and crystalline.
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> We may not find either mood in its purity, but in mainly tragic art one distinguishes devices to exclude or lessen character, to diminish the power of that daily mood, to cheat or blind its too clear perception. If the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance ....[41]

Yeats noted that "we may not find either mood in its purity"; elsewhere in the same essay he refers to tragi-comedy, using Shakespeare as authority once more:

> In writers of tragi-comedy (and Shakespeare is always a writer of tragi-comedy) there is indeed character, but we notice that it is in the moments of comedy that character is defined ... while amid the great moments ... all is lyricism, unmixed passion, 'the integrity of fire'.[42]

Thus lyricism in drama is justified, and the concept of tragi-comedy is not opposed. Yeats' definitions made it almost impossible for the playwright to construct an unmixed tragedy, since he insisted that character and representation of the real world were the province of comedy. Parkinson points out that " ... he had found that pure tragedy was impossible, only tragi-

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[40] W.B. Yeats, Essays, p. 296.

[41] W.B. Yeats, Essays, pp. 300-301.

[42] W.B. Yeats, Essays, p. 297.

comedy, admitting the reality of both anima hominis and anima mundi, could move men to rapture by starting off in the known world: men must be led to ecstasy slowly."[43] Later, as we shall see, Yeats turned to Japan for a dramatic genre which would allow him to write "pure" tragedy according to his own theories.

At this time (1910) however, Yeats, having no knowledge of the esoteric form he was later to develop, attempted to write poetic tragedies of the more familiar variety, but in keeping with his theories of the absence of character at the moment of emotional exaltation. " ... Nor when the tragic reverie is at its height do we say, 'How well that man is realized, I should know him were I to meet him in the street,' for it is always ourselves that we see upon the stage...."[44] We see ourselves upon the stage, for we are raised to the level of the anima mundi, we become part of the world soul at the same moment as the tragic figure is exalted to that level. Yeats explained the process:

> Tragic art, passionate art, the drowner of dykes, the confounder of understanding, moves us by setting us to reverie, by alluring us almost to the intensity of trance. The persons on the stage, let us say, greaten till they are humanity itself. We feel our minds expand convulsively or spread out slowly like some moon-brightened image-crowded sea. That which is before our eyes perpetually vanishes and returns again in the midst of the excitement it creates, and the more enthralling it is, the more do we forget it.[45]

The function of tragedy then, according to Yeats, is to break down the barriers between men, remove them from the individual level of anima hominis and raise them to anima mundi where they are united in the world soul. Charadter, that is, individual characteristics, differentiates man from

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[43] Parkinson, p. 161.

[44] W.B. Yeats, Essays, p. 297

[45] W.B. Yeats, Essays, pp. 302-303.

man, but passion elevates and unites them. In the words of Sir Robert Grierson: "He is less interested in the characters than in the great passions of which they are the mouth-piece."[46] Yeats thought that the two (character and passion) were incompatible. He cited the practice of Balzac who denied character to his great ladies and young lovers so that they would have passion.[47]

This does not mean that character must be eliminated from tragedy entirely, for, as we have seen, Yeats found it necessary to lead his audience from anima hominis to anima mundi by degrees. Nor does it mean that tragedy must present archetypal figures; rather, at the moment of tragic ecstacy the characters resolve into mediums for expressing the major underlying realities of their being.[48] In effect, " ... as the emotional experience deepens and the character explores the profundity or intensity of his passion or thought, he ceases to be a particular man and becomes every man, sinking in from the circumference of being to its center."[49]

Remoteness from actuality, in Yeats' view, was as necessary to tragedy as absence of character. Actuality, the world of society and its institutions is part of the anima hominis and must be abandoned if anima mundi is to be achieved. Yeats strove instead for nearness to imaginative reality, a world which could be revealed by the poet through his anti-self.

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[46]Sir Herbert Grierson, Preface, The Development of William Butler Yeats, by V.K. Narayana Menon (op.cit. p.39 n.102), p. xiii.

[47]W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 502.

[48]Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, p.86

[49]Ellis-Fermor, p. 86.

In the words of Una Ellis-Fermor,

... he led back his age ... to a different reality, the underlying reality that reveals itself in poetic thought, in heroic and in romantic themes and that can open a world hardly explored before by English drama, a world concerned not primarily with daily life, but with things apparently remote from that actual life....[50]

Remoteness from actuality is a necessary concomitant of his theory of tragedy:

... remoteness from the individual variation allows of that universality of experience which may be intimately realized by the greatest number of individual minds; and this, in tragedy, becomes the 'tragic ecstasy' that dissolves character and substitutes for it 'passion defined by motives'."[51]

The duality of life, the conflict between "self" and "anti-self", between actuality and imaginative reality, between anima hominis and anima mundi, was the subject matter of Yeats' plays at this time. This was the theme of The Land of Heart's Desire (1894), in which Yeats' own desire to dwell in the land of dreams was expressed. The fairyland of the play is the land of imagination, of the higher reality of anima mundi. More explicity, in Beltaine No. 2 (1899-1900), he praised a play of one of the Literary Theatre's playwrights because in it he saw the conflict between the mortal world and the immortal: "Miss Milligan's little play delighted me because it has made, in a very simple way and through the vehicle of Gaelic persons, that contrast between immortal beauty and the ignominy and mortality of life, which is the central theme of ancient art."[52]

The pairs of opposites which Yeats felt comprised his own

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[50] Ellis-Fermor, p. 95.

[51] Ellis-Fermor, p.90.

[52] W.B. Yeats, Beltaine, No. 2, p.21.

nature are set at war with one another in the series of plays which deal with this subject. The order which he craved is set in conflict with the forces of war and of love, which in his own life, in his activities as a political nationalist, and his hopeless adoration of Maud Gonne, played such an important role. Stability and security conflict with poetry and mystic revelation. The king and philosophical sceptic, both of whom represent those aspects of Yeats' character manifested in his public activities and in the occult experiments which resulted in his expulsion from the Blavatsky Lodge, are set in opposition to the hero, the warrior, lover, poet, or mystic, all of whom have their counterparts in Yeats' own nature.

> ... the major subject of Yeats' Abbey dramas was the conflict between the fixed palpable world of human affairs (Guaire, Conchubar) and the world of passion and aspiration which is beyond reason, system, or office (Seanchan, Cuchulain). The basic split in the plays is that between the institutional world, limited, tame, calculating, interested in the virtue of fixed character, and the personal world, exuberant, care-free, wild, affirming the values of intense personality.[53]

Dramatic tension is produced by a struggle between the two ways of life and thought, in which Yeats' sympathies are always with the passionate hero, never with the institutions of Church or State.

> ... Yeats' conception of tragedy does not admit the concept of waste or loss, for his sympathies are always with the passionate beings, not with the fixed and, he would say, impermanent structures of the state or church. Thus Coriolanus' pride is "noble" and Cleopatra's sensuality is proof that she had a soul which was "all aflame".... To Yeats tragic flaws are virtues.[54]

In a tragedy based on a belief in antithesis as the law of life, the emphasis is not on conflict or loss, but on "the heroic affirmation."[55] The Yeatsian

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[53] Parkinson, p. 138.

[54] Parkinson, p. 140.

[55] F.O. Matthiessen, "The Crooked Road," The Southern Review, VII, No. 3. Winter (1941), 466.

tragic hero affirms the value of passionate experience by transcending his own individuality and becoming part of the anima mundi.[56] The hero triumphs in defeat through passion which is, in Yeats' view, joyous, not painful.[57] "Tragic figures go beyond the divisions established by the social world and in their moments of passion attain unity of being by overcoming the obstacles presented to them by the temporal world....[58] The attainment of unity of being was for Yeats the ultimate happiness; conscious of the warring elements within himself, he praised always the integral personality in which the basic dualism does not split apart, but unifies the elements.[59] In order to be capable of the attainment of this unity, the hero must have a special moral code, great pride, and an inner sense of purity; he must have a great volume of joyous energy, and never be troubled by regret or remorse.[60] This energy, along with character, will and desire must be lost before the crucial moment of union with anima mundi. Yeats wrote in 1909:

> The masks of tragedy contain neither character nor personal energy. They are allied to decoration and to the abstract figures of Egyptian temples. Before the mind can look out of their eyes the active will perishes, hence their sorrowful calm. Joy is of the will which labours, which overcomes obstacles, which knows triumph. The soul knows its changes of state alone, and I think the motives of tragedy are not related to action but to changes of state.[61]

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[56] Parkinson, p. 140.

[57] Matthiessen, p. 467.

[58] Parkinson, p. 140.

[59] Ure, p. 37.

[60] Walter E. Houghton, "Yeats and Crazy Jane: The Hero in Old Age," Modern Philology, XL (1942-43), 319.

[61] W.B. Yeats, Estrangement, p. 12.

One assumes that the change of state of the soul is from anima hominis to perception of anima mundi.

Although Yeats was primarily interested in the moment of passion in which the hero ceases to be an individual and reaches the anima mundi, he found it necessary to present the anima hominis in his plays, as a basis from which the hero could depart. Though he wished to achieve distance from life, it was necessary also to present the real world. To attain this he did not turn to realism in setting or costume, or to naturalistic dialogue. However he did bring the real world into his plays by mingling prose and poetry, by introducing colloquial diction, and frequently by making the tone of verse conversational.[62]

Thus the world of men was introduced into his plays, but not the familiar world of the prose realists. Yeats' early interest in symbolism continued; throughout his life he felt that only through symbols could truth be expressed. In the plays, Yeats "oriented his material, stripped it of all temporal allusion, and reduced it to the symbolical expression of the great aspirations and high emotions that are constant in a life of changing relations."[63]

The result was not conventional drama. In 1913 Cornelius Weygandt commented:

> As they are, his plays are beautiful in ideas and words, and striking in a lyric and decorative way, if not all of them in a dramatic way, though in some he has in vain sacrificed poetry to attain true dramatic speech .... One values the plays of Mr. Yeats highest when one thinks of them as a new

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[62] See Parkinson, p. 141.

[63] Morris, p. 96.

kind of drama, as a redevelopment of epic and lyric poetry into drama, an epic and lyric poetry illustrated by tableaux against backgrounds out of faery.[64]

There is an echo of regret that Yeats had subordinated the lyric to the dramatic muse; indeed Yeats' plays were becoming less and less dramatic lyric poems, and increasingly more dramatic in style and structure. As Menon points out with regard to Deirdre and On Baile's Strand:

In spite of his continual assertions that in tragedy everything should be subordinated to the development of moods and emotions, we notice the dramatic cohesion, the slow but relentless unfolding of the tragedy, the full plot concentrated to suit the needs of a one-act play.[65]

The plays of this period then, can be expected to have certain characteristics which follow from the dramatic theory which Yeats formulated, as well as some which derived directly from early influences, as described in chapter one above.

The subject matter is Irish and the verse symbolic, the symbols frequently drawn from Irish mythology and folklore. Yeats felt that the artist, the aristocrat, and the peasant, by virtue of their ability to reach the anima mundi, were fit subjects for treatment in tragedy. However, his interest in the peasant as a subject for drama seems to have been exhausted after the early plays. In this period he devoted his theatrical efforts to treating the hero and the artist, the kings and queens and heroic figures of Irish legend.

The doctrines of "self" and "anti-self" and of anima hominis and anima mundi, are expressed indirectly, or directly as in the later play, The Player Queen . The theory of tragedy which was based on these concepts

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[64] Weygandt, pp. 44-45

[65] Menon, p. 79.

demanded remoteness from actuality and absence of character at the highest moments. The emphasis therefore is on passion rather than character, and the staging is stylized and decorative rather than realistic. The connection with the real world is established by the mingling of prose and poetry, by frequently colloquial diction, and by the conversational tone of the verse.

The basic conflict of these plays is between the world of institutions and the world of imaginative reality. Yeats' sympathies lie with the latter; his heroes are passionate beings of great pride and inner purity, who are filled with joyous energy. The tragic emotion is that of joy, not of suffering: the hero reaches the anima mundi through heroic affirmation culminating in emotional exaltation.

The King's Threshold, first produced on October 8, 1903[66] and published in 1904, is a defence of the position of the artist in society, and an explicit statement of Yeats' conception of the importance of the role of the poet. Yeats was involved in the quarrel over Synge's Shadow of the Glen which had roused a great deal of opposition from the political moralists. In his play Yeats asserts the rights of the artist, aviling himself of the opportunity to speak through the mouths of Seanchan and his pupils. Near the beginning of the play, Seanchan asks the oldest pupil why poetry is honoured. In the ensuing dialogue, Yeats' conception of the role of the arts is stated explicitly.

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[66]Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, p. 34.

Oldest Pupil. I said the poets hung
Images of the life that was in Eden
About the child-bed of the world, that it,
Looking upon those images, might bear
Triumphant children. But why must I stand here,
Repeating an old lesson, while you starve?

Seanchan. Tell on, for I begin to know the voice.
What evil thing will come upon the world
If the Arts perish?

Oldest Pupil. If the Arts should perish,
The world that lacked them would be like a woman
That, looking on the cloven lips of a hare,
Brings forth a hare-lipped child.

Seanchan. But that's not all:
For when I asked you how a man should guard
Those images, you had an answer also,
If you're the man that you have claimed to be,
Comparing them to venerable things
God gave to men before He gave them wheat.

Oldest Pupil. I answered - and the word was half your own -
That he should guard them as the Men of Dea
Guard their four treasures, as the Grail King guards
His holy cup, or the pale, righteous horse
The jewel that is underneath his horn,
Pouring out life for it as one pours out
Sweet heady wine....[67]

Throughout the play, the importance of art is repeatedly expressed by Seanchan. The relation of the poet to the anima mundi is stated by the First Cripple who says "Those that make rhymes have a power from beyond the world."[68] It was Yeats' belief that the poets' vision is the soul of the world, it is the illumination of the world beyond the world it is "'The prophet of the Most High God'."[69]

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[67] The King's Threshold, pp. 111-112.

[68] The King's Threshold, p. 115.

[69] Ellis-Fermor, p. 94.

The plot is drawn from a middle-Irish story of the demands of the poets at the court of King Guaire of Gort. The poet Seanchan has been banished from the King's Council, and in protesting the abrogation of the ancient rights of the poet has chosen to die of starvation on the steps of the King's palace, in accordance with the old custom that

> ... if a man
> Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve
> Upon another's threshold till he die
> The common people, for all time to come,
> Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
> Even though it be the King's.[70]

The conflict is between established authority, the King and his courtiers - "Bishops, soldiers, and Makers of the Law"[71] and the poet, the passionate man of "wild thought" and "proud will".[72]

In the words of Ellmann: "... the impudent individualist, with his high, laughing verse, battles with the politic King and his dour practicality."[73] Some of those who come to dissuade Seanchan, base their arguments on those aspects of life against which one half of Yeats battled in the other half of his nature. The King is concerned with the stability of the Crown, the mayor with the security of the town which would be made richer by the King's favour. The monk, representing established religion, refuses to try to make Seanchan take food because: "He is a man that hates

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[70] The King's Threshold, p. 108.
[71] The King's Threshold, p. 108.
[72] The King's Threshold, p. 110.
[73] Ellmann, p. 170.

obedience,/Discipline, and orderliness of life."[74] Fidelm, betrothed to the poet, most nearly convinces him to live, by causing him to forget, briefly, his purpose by her talk of marriage. Here we may note for the first time the appearance of the sexual theme, undisguised by pre-Raphaelitism or occultism. Maud Gonne's marriage in 1903 disillusioned Yeats, who terminated long abstinence in favour of one or two London affairs. The change is reflected in his poetry.[75] Fidelm strives to convince the poet to live: "And are not these white arms and this soft neck/Better than the brown earth?"[76] Earlier Seanchan had mocked the Court Ladies:

> Go to the young men.
> Are not the ruddy flesh and the thin flanks
> And the broad shoulders worthy of desire?[77]

Seanchan refuses all temptations, and, encouraged by his pupils who are to die with him, in an act of heroic affirmation he dies at the foot of the steps. In his death he experiences joy, not suffering:

> Seanchan. x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x
> I need no help.
> He needs no help that joy has lifted up
> Like some miraculous beast out of Ezekial.
> The man that dies has the chief part in the story,
> And I will mock and mock that image yonder,
> x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x
> When I and these are dead
> We should be carried to some windy hill
> To lie there with unconvered face awhile
> That mankind and that leper there may know
> Dead faces laugh.
> King! King! Dead faces laugh.
>
> Oldest Pupil. King, he is dead; some strange triumphant thought
> So filled his heart with joy that it has burst....[78]

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[74] The King's Threshold, p. 128.
[75] See Ellmann, p. 182.
[76] The King's Threshold, p. 138.
[77] The King's Threshold, p. 130.
[78] The King's Threshold, p. 141.

Seanchan is not an individual, he is the personification of the Poet, who speaks for all artists but never for himself alone. But although he has no individual characteristics of his own, he is not an abstraction; he is related to the world of men by his mother and father, by his love for Fidelm, and by his friendship with Brian. His pupils are, in a sense, aspects of himself, and they too have no individuality. The other figures, though lightly sketched, have distinct characteristics. The King is practical and politic, the mayor pompous and silly, the Monk puritanical and hypocritical. Brian is loyal and sensitive, the Ladies of Court flighty, the Princesses "gracious" and so forth.

Distance from life is achieved in the setting - the ancient Court of King Guaire - in a land where "The common sort would tear....into pieces"[79] the soldier if he were to kill the poet. Prose speeches bring an element of reality into the play, as does the conversational tone of much of the verse, and the occasional colloquialisms, as in the following exchange:

Soldier. I will not interfere, and if he starve
For being obstinate and stiff in the neck,
'Tis but good riddance.

Chamberlain. One of us must do it.
It might be, if you'd reason with him, ladies,
He would eat something, for I have a notion
That if he brought misfortune on the King,
Or on the King's house, we'd be as little thought of
As summer linen when the winter's come.

First Girl. But it would be the greater compliment
If Peter'd do it.

Second Girl. Reason with him, Peter.
Persuade him to eat; he's such a bag of bones![80]

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[79] The King's Threshold, p. 126.

[80] The King's Threshold, p. 124.

There is much beautiful verse in the play and one very rhythmical song. Seanchan expresses the point of view of the poet in verse which is in itself an argument for his rights. That Yeats was still much concerned with the manner in which his lines were delivered is evidenced by the dedication to Frank Fay "and his beautiful speaking in the character of Seanchan."[81]

Although the theme of the play is universal rather than specifically Irish, the connection with Ireland is two-fold. The plot is drawn from an Irish story, and many of the references are to figures of Irish myth - Finn, Osgar, Grania, and so forth. Furthermore, Weygandt points out a reaction against Irish nationalist fanaticism: "By the way, he illustrated the fact that the kind of patriotism that assumes the King can do no wrong, - that is, that the Irish people can do no wrong, and that whoever exposes their wrongdoing is no patriot, is a mistaken sort of patriotism."[82]

In three plays of this period, On Baile's Strand, Deirdre, and The Green Helmet, Yeats turned to Irish heroic mythology for subject matter. Deirdre is a dramatization of the oft-told legend of the Irish Helen; On Baile's Strand and The Green Helmet are concerned with events in the life of Cuchulain, the hero of the Red Branch Cycle. The Green Helmet is an "heroic farce", the other two are tragedies. All three are concerned with legendary Irish heroes.

The plot of On Baile's Strand (1904) was drawn from a classic Gaelic legend, which Yeats had treated in 1892 in a poem, The Death of Cuchullin [sic],[83] and which Lady Gregory re-told in Cuchulain of Muirthemne

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[81]Dedication to The King's Threshold, facing p. 107.
[82]Weygandt, pp. 60-61.
[83]Boyd, p. 78.

in 1902. Yeats was fascinated by the figure of Cuchulain, whom he made the subject of many plays, but as Ure points out, he was less interested in the hero of Ulster than in the nature and qualities of heroism[84] which were, for Yeats, typified in that figure.

Cuchulain is impetuous, reckless, passionate; driven by his wild blood, he is a warrior and a lover. The real conflict of the play is not between Cuchulain and his son, but between the hero and the High King, Conchubar, who represents the second part of the dichotomy with which Yeats was concerned. Conchubar is an administrator, an old man with many sons, whose main interest is the security and stability of his kingdom. He is the cause of Cuchulain's death, for he insists that the hero fight the young man whom Cuchulain wishes to befriend. Conchubar is motivated in this by fear for the security of his kingdom, he is worried lest the throne which is to pass to his children be less secure:

Conchubar. He has come hither not in his own name
But in Queen Aoife's, and has challenged us
In challenging the foremost man of us all.

Cuchulain. Well, well, what matter?

Conchubar. You think it does not matter,
And that a fancy lighter than the air,
A whim of the moment, has more matter in it.
For, having none that shall reign after you,
You can not think as I do, who would leave
A throne too high for insult.[85]

As in The King's Threshold, the conflict is between the representatives of the world of institutions and the free, passionate spirit.

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[84] Ure, p. 27.

[85] On Baile's Strand, p. 267

The conflict is paralleled on another level in the persons of the Fool and the Blind Man, who play the same roles as the Warrior and the King in less dignified terms.[86]

Blind Man. What would have happened to you but for me, and you without your wits? If I did not take care of you, what would you do for food and warmth?

Fool. You take care of me? You stay safe, and send me into every kind of danger. You sent me down the cliff for gulls' eggs while you warmed your blind eyes in the sun; and then you ate all that were good for food.[87]

The Fool and the Blind Man speak in prose, which signifies the lower level on which they function, and at the same time establishes a contact with the world of reality. They are foils for the noble characters, throwing heroic gesture into relief.[88] Furthermore, they serve the purpose of a Greek chorus, they describe the situation and the characters, and in a seene in which "dramatic dialogue (is) at its highest pitch,"[89] they reveal to Cuchulain that he has killed his own son. Lennox Robinson complains that, except for this one scene, they are extraneous to the action.[90] However, they are an integral part of the play in that their conflict emphasizes the main conflict by paralleling it, and in that they serve as the "mouthpieces of fate."[91] The last lines are the ironic comment of a comic world on tragic action.[92] While the hero dies fighting the waves in a state

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[86] Parkinson, p. 157.

[87] On Baile's Strand, p. 272.

[88] Ure, p. 101.

[89] Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," p. 100.

[90] Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," p. 91.

[91] Boyd, p. 79.

[92] Parkinson, p. 158.

of tragic exaltation, the Fool and the Blind Man conspire to steal bread from the ovens.

But perhaps the most important function of these two is to put the audience in possession of the terrible information, of which the protagonists are ignorant, that the young stranger is, in fact, Cuchulain's own son. In the struggle between Cuchulain and Conchubar, only the audience realizes how tragic the outcome might be. "We have here ... the piling up of apprehension in a play of excitement and action which grows in intensity from moment to moment - an almost perfect example of Yeats' stage craft."[93]

The death of Cuchulain is in keeping with Yeats' conception of the end of the tragic hero. The great passion which characterized the hero was roused to intensity in the conflict with the High King and finally, heightened past all bearing by Cuchulain's discovery that he has killed his own son, becomes a kind of madness. Cuchulain dies valiantly fighting the waves, at the absolute peak of emotion. "This outcome is tragic in Yeats' sense of the word, for in his death Cuchulain attains mythic status through the very excess of his grief and rage."[94] With the passionate moment of climax, the play reaches the height of lyric intensity. Cuchulain realizes that it is his own son whom he has killed and bursts forth:

Cuchulain. 'Twas they that did it, the pale windy people.
Where? where? where? My sword against the thunder!
But no, for they have always been my friends;
And though they love to blow a smoking coal
Till it's all flame, the wars they blow aflame
Are full of glory, and heart-uplifting pride,

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[93] Robinson, "The Man and the Dramatist," p. 102.

[94] Parkinson, p. 158.

> And not like this. The wars they love awaken
> Old fingers and the sleepy strings of harps.
> Who did it then? Are you afraid? Speak out!
> x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x[95]

Then he rushes down to the sea, and his battle with the waves is described to the Blind Man (and the audience) by the Fool:

> Blind Man. What is he doing now?
>
> Fool. O! He is fighting the waves!
>
> Blind Man. He sees King Conchubar's crown on every one of them.[96]

The climactic moment is more passionate than any moment in his early lyric poems.

> However, this passion was now presented within realistic circumstances, and the circumstances were used both to make the action and speech more credible and to give the hero an obstacle to strain against, which would force him to call up all his passionate resources."[97]

The setting, the characters and the action are far removed from reality, but the supernatural world is presented in a larger, rational framework.[98] Contact with actuality is maintained through prose speeches and colloquial conversation, particularly by the practical discussions which take place between the Fool and The Blind Man.

At the same time poetic distance is also maintained by a number of devices. The masks of the Fool and Blind Man serve to remove them from life even while their conversation establishes contact with it. Furthermore the masks evoke an emotional response, and they indicate that the Fool and the Blind Man constitute a chorus in addition to their individual roles within the action. The song of the three half-human women provides a

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[95] On Baile's Strand, p. 276.

[96] On Baile's Strand, p. 277.

[97] Parkinson, p. 159.

[98] See Peacock, p. 120.

ritualistic element, and, more important, intensifies the emotional atmosphere. At the same time it serves to introduce a mystical note, and to indrease the distance from actuality. To accomplish these things, the song must be delivered in the most effective and unobtrusive possible fashion. Lady Gregory wrote to Yeats after a rehearsal of On Baile's Strand:

> The only real blot at present is the song, and it is very bad. The three women don't go together. One gets nervous listening for the separate ones ... I got Miss Allgood to speak it alone, and that was beautiful, and we thought ... she might speak it, and at the end she and the others might sing or hum some lines of it to a definite tune.[99]

The faces of the three, bent over the flickering firelight added to the mystic, ritualistic atmosphere. The setting, devised in accordance with principles laid down by Gordon Craig, consisted of a monochromatic background lit in colours which would provide atmosphere. The backdrop for the Abbey opening of On Baile's Strand was made of curtains of unpainted jute which, when flooded with amber light, took on the appearance of gold. The doors opened on a background of topaz blue.[100] The decor was then decorative and non-realistic, in keeping with Yeats' ideals, and helped contribute to the other-worldliness" of the play.

Like On Baile's Strand, Deirdre is based on a traditional Irish story, and has its protagonist a noble figure of legend. The theme is more suitable for a three-act play, the method in which Synge treated it in his incomparable Deirdre of the Sorrows. Yeats chose to treat the story in a single act of great compression and dramatic intensity.

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[99] Quoted by Lady Gregory, Our Irish Theatre, p. 79.

[100] W.G. Fay, "The Poet and the Actor" Scattering Branches, p. 133.

In a rapid and concise narrative the chorus sets the scene, supplies the background information, and describes the characters of Deirdre, Conchubar, and Naoise. Fergus appears and further amplifies the story. The chorus of three wandering women musicians, who possess the secrets of the future, evokes a mood of foreboding. Fergus explains that he has persuaded Conchubar to forgive Naoise and Deirdre. The first musician repeats: '"And yet old men are jealous."[101] "We begin the play in a mood of vague apprehension; with every moment, as the treachery unfolds itself, the pace becomes more rapid and more terrible."[102]

As in On Baile's Strand, the conflict is between the passionate beings and the representative of established institutions. The old King, Conchubar, jealous, crafty, patient, lost his young bride to Naoise, "a young man, in the laughing scorn of his youth."[103] Ellmann suggests that the two men represent the halves of Yeats' personality - Naoise having those qualities which Yeats had suppressed in his wooing of Maud Gonne, and Conchubar having those characteristics which he had exalted. Like Deirdre, Maud Gonne was won by a dashing, romantic man, and Yeats thought that he had lost her precisely because he had waited patiently, worshipping her from afar.[104] Lawfully and morally the old King had been sinned against, for Naoise had broken faith with his lord when he ran off with Deirdre. But Yeats' sympathies are with the lawless, passionate ones who guide their own destinies, In the end Conchubar is defeated once more, for although he kills Naoise,

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[101] Deirdre, p. 174.

[102] Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," p. 92.

[103] Deirdre, p. 172.

[104] See Ellmann, p. 170.

Deirdre kills herself on his body, and the two are united "upon the eternal summits."[105] The two are victorious in death; through tragic ecstacy they reach the anima mundi.

Naoise has the qualifications of a Yeatsian hero: he is passionate, free and fearless. When he recognizes the King's treachery, he becomes calm and implacable, and sits down to play chess with Deirdre. She cannot restrain herself in that way, but Naoise, recalling Lugaidh Redstripe, tells her:

> They knew that there was nothing that could save them,
> And so played chess as they had any night
> For years, and waited for the stroke of sword.
> I never heard a death so out of reach
> Of common hearts, a high and comely end.
> What need have I, that gave up all for love,
> To die like an old king out of a fable,
> Fighting and passionate? What need is there
> For all that ostentation at my setting?
> I have loved truly and betrayed no man.
> I need no lightning at the end, no beating
> In a vain fury at the cage's door.[106]

After Naoise's death, Deirdre becomes calm, with a silent passion directed inexorably towards union with her lover in death. Yeats described Deirdre's performance as, "'Red-heat up to Naisi's (sic) death, white-heat after he is dead.'"[107]

The atmosphere of foreboding which is evoked by the women of the chorus is increased in intensity by the appearance of dark-faced men in barbaric dress outside the window, and by the psychological parallelism which Yeats introduced by having the action take place in the house in which

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[105] Deirdre, p. 197.
[106] Deirdre, p. 190.
[107] Quoted by Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," p. 96.

Lughaidh Redstripe and his wife played chess while awaiting death. Their story, which is also one of treachery and a broken promise, gives Deirdre's actions austere terror, and gives the audience a premonition of the final tragedy.[108]

Great dramatic excitement is aroused when the audience knows that Naoise is being killed while Deirdre pleads for his life, and again when Deirdre goes to look for the last time on the body of Naoise. The audience and the musicians know that she has a knife, Conchubar suspects her purpose and Deirdre dares him to have her searched. Conchubar holds back, and she goes into the small room to kill herself.

Poetic distance from life is achieved by the setting, a guest-house in a lonely wood at sunset, by the costumes of the heroic age, and by the presence of the mysterious men who surround the house. "That setting ... quintessentializes ... the romance of the old haunted woods where any adventure is possible...."[109]

There are no prose-speaking peasant characters in Deirdre to supply a link with actuality. There is character, but it is described by others rather than revealed by the persons themselves. Passionate lyricism is maintained at a high level throughout the swift-moving action; the play never descends to the level of the real world. However, as Morris points out: "In 'Deirdre' ... it is actual experience as we know it, that is desired; although the terms in which it is set transcend the common life, they are but its quintessence."[110] The "quintessence of life" is an expression of

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[108]Morris, p. 109.
[109]Weygandt, p. 61.
[110]Morris, p. 110.

that which Yeats was striving to attain in his dramas - the anima mundi.

The Golden Helmet (1908) was rewritten and appeared two years later as The Green Helmet. Styled an "heroic farce", it dealt with the Cuchulain legend. but treated an incident in the life of that hero preceding that which served as the basis of On Baile's Strand. The Green Helmet is based on a story, "The Feast of Bricriu", from Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne,[111] and is written in ballad metre instead of the prose which Yeats had used in the original version.

The setting which Yeats desired for the production of this play is far from realistic. The effect is startling, almost grotesque. The directions for the setting read in part as follows:

> At the Abbey Theatre the house is orange-red and the chairs and tables and flagons black, with a slight purple tinge which is not clearly distinguishable from the black. The rocks are black with a few green touches. The sea is green and luminous, and all the characters except the Red Man and the Black Men are dressed in various shades of green, one or two with touches of purple which look very nearly black. The Black Men all wear dark purple and have eared caps, and at the end their eyes should look green from the reflected light of the sea. The Red Man is altogether in red. He is very tall, and his height is increased by horns on the Green Helmet. The effect is intentionally violent and startling.[112]

Towards the end of the play, three black hands come through the windows and put out the torches. The stage picture which Yeats envisioned is described:

> A light gradually comes into the house from the sea, on which the moon begins to show once more. There is no light within the house, and the great beams of the walls are dark and full of shadows, and the persons of the play dark too against the light. The Red Man is seen standing in the midst of the house. The black cat-headed men crouch and stand about the door. One carries the Helmet, one the great sword.[113]

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[111] Boyd, p. 82.

[112] The Green Helmet, p. 223, s.d.

[113] The Green Helmet, p. 241. s.d.

In a note regarding the production of The Green Helmet, Yeats explained:

"We staged the play with a very pronounced colour-scheme, and I have noticed that the more obviously decorative is the scene and costuming of any play, the more it is lifted out of time and space and the nearer to faery-land we carry it. One gets also more effect out of concentrated movements - above all, if there are many players - when all the clothes are the same colour. No breadth of treatment gives monotony when there is movement and change of lighting. It concentrates attention on every new effect and makes every change of outline or of light and shadow surprising and delightful. Because of this, one can use contrasts of colour, between clothes and the background or in the background itself, the complementary colours for instance, which would be too obvious to keep the attention in a painting. One wishes to keep the movement of the action as important as possible, and the simplicity which gives depth of colour does this, just as, for precisely similar reasons, the lack of colour in a statue fixes the attention on the form."[114]

There are two important things to be noted here. In the first place, Yeats states that his intention is to lift the play "out of time and space" and carry it nearer to "faery-land". This "faery-land," though related to that of the Pre-Raphaelite The Land of Heart's Desire, is neither misty nor vague. It is painted in bold bright colours, and the figures who move in it are satirized rather than romanticized. "The ancient bards conceived these figures as divine or semi-divine beings, whose virtue and nobility set them above humanity."[115] But Yeats attempted "... to divest the heroes of the bardic imagination of their superhuman attributes. Humour is interjected into an atmosphere whose associations are of very different character; and gentle satire is the result...."[115]

Earlier, a more romantic Yeats would never have allowed his heroes and their wives to descend to the level of bickering. The "faery-land" of The Green Helmet is an absence of actuality rather than the Pre-

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[114]Quoted by Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," pp. 76-77.
[115]Boyd, p. 83.

Raphaelite fairyland of the romantic imagination. This "absence from life" is, as we have seen, in keeping with the theories of anima hominis and anima mundi. For although The Green Helmet is a farce in which the heroes of Irish legend are ridiculed, in Yeats' view, "A farce and a tragedy are alike in this, that they are a moment of intense life."[116] In spite of the bickering among the wives and the servants, and among the heroes themselves, two of the figures reach the peak of emotional exaltation which characterizes them as Yeatsian heroes. Emer is exalted by her love for Cuchulain, who tries to relegate her to the leval of anima hominis:

Emer. [putting her arms about him]. It is you, not your fame that I love.

Cochulain. [tries to put her from him]. You are young, you are wise, you can call
Some kinder and comelier man that will sit at home in the house.

Emer. Live and be faithless still.[117]

Emer raises her dagger to stab herself and join her husband who, she believes, is about to die. Cuchulain seizes the dagger, commanding her to "Bear children and sweep the house."[118] Alone in his heroism, he kneels and offers his head to the Red Man, to whom he jestingly refers as "old Radish". The Red Man crowns him with the Green Helmet, because he is a true hero:

Red Man. x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x
And I choose the laughing lip
That shall not turn from laughing, whatever rise or fall;

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[116] W.B. Yeats, "The Irish Dramatic Movement," Plays and Controversies, op. cit. (p.15 n.22), p. 103.

[117] The Green Helmet, p. 242.

[118] The Green Helmet, p. 243.

> The heart that grows no bitterer although betrayed
> by all;
> The hand that loves to scatter; the life like a
> gambler's throw....[119]

Returning to Yeats' note to the play, we notice a change in emphasis. Whereas until this time Yeats had stressed always the importance of words and the necessity of subordinating all movement to them, now he is concerned with movement for its own sake, and makes no mention of verse or speech. It would appear that Yeats was coming to think of drama more as a composite art in which all factors are of equal importance, than as a medium in which the art of the poet stood far above the others. His interest in lighting reflects the influence of Gordon Craig, and the preoccupation with movement points forward to the later Plays for Dancers.

The Shadowy Waters, which Yeats began in 1885, was rewritten in 1894, after Yeats saw a production of Villiers de L'Isle Adam's Axel.[120] "Axel became Yeats' guide and beacon in his theory and practice of a dramatic art where symbol replaces character, events are allegories and words keep more than half their secrets to themselves."[121] Yeats' play was concerned with his relationship with Maud Gonne. He desired her in the flesh but thought that his noble love should have a loftier goal. Villiers de L'Isle Adam had handled a similar problem, which he solved by making the lovers commit suicide rather than spoil a perfect love with its consummation. Yeats hedged,

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[119] The Green Helmet, p. 243.
[120] Ellmann, p. 134.
[121] Hone, p. 112.

and sent Forgael and Dectora off in a ship to uncertainty.[122]

In 1900 he wrote to George Russell, telling him of a new version of the play:

> I think you are wrong about "The Shadowy Waters".... The new form will act much better. Moore does not much like my idea of the proper way of speaking verse; but he is wrong. I want to do a little play which can be acted & half chanted & so help the return of bigger poetical plays to the stage. This is really a magical revolution for the magical word is the chanted word. The new "Shadowy Waters" could be acted on two big tables in a drawing room....[123]

This version (1900) was in the style of his early plays, melancholy, monotonous, and lyric, the diction hazy, and the language obscure. Full of metaphors from The Order of the Golden Dawn (a mystical society), it was difficult for an audience to follow. There was little conflict, because points of view other than Forgael's were not presented with any force. The sailors spoke in the same languid tones that Forgael used.[124]

Yeats revised the play three times more, in 1905, 1906 and in 1911. The 1911 version is condensed for actual presentation on the stage, but the major changes were made in 1905. The theme had obsessed Yeats from boyhood,[125] and his frequent revisions were intended to perfect dramatically a play for which he had great affection. Weygandt wrote, "... he told me, when I asked him once which writing of his he cared most for, 'That I was last working at, and then "The Shadowy Waters".'"[126]

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[122] Ellmann, p. 134.

[123] W.B. Yeats, Letter to AE (1900). "Passages: Letters of W.B. Yeats to A.E.," The Dublin Magazine, XIV, no. 3 (n.s.) (1939), 13.

[124] For criticism of the 1900 version, see Parkinson, pp. 143-149.

[125] Weygandt, p. 57.

[126] Weygandt, p. 57.

The theme, like that of The Land of Heart's Desire, reflects Yeats' own desire to escape from reality: "It is too much to say that it expresses the dream of his life, but it is not too much to say that a dream that has haunted all his life is told here...."[127]

In the programme for the Abbey production of The Shadowy Waters in 1906, Yeats outlined the plot:

"Once upon a time, when herons built their nests in old men's beards, Forgael, a Sea-King of ancient Ireland, was promised by certain human-headed birds love of a supernatural intensity and happiness. These birds were the souls of the dead, and he followed them over seas toward the sunset where their final rest is. By means of a magic harp, he could call them about him when he would and listen to their speech. His friend Aibric, and the sailors of his ship, thought him mad, or that they were being lured to destruction. Presently they captured a ship, and found a beautiful woman upon it, and Forgael subdued her and his own rebellious sailors by the sound of his harp. The sailors fled upon the other ship, and Forgael and the woman drifted on alone following the birds, awaiting death and what comes after, or some mysterious transformation of the flesh, an embodiment of every lover's dream."[128]

The theme reflects Yeats' desire for the perfect love which he had hoped to find with Maud Gonne. His dream was shattered by her marriage in 1903, and his disillusionment is expressed in Forgael's description of earthly love:

Forgael. But he that gets their love after the fashion
Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
The bed of love, that in the imagination
Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,
Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting,
And as soon finished.[129]

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[127] Weygandt, p. 57.

[128] The Arrow, Vol. 1, no.2 (Nov. 24, 1906). No pagination. This publication served as the program for Abbey productions. Quoted by Parkinson, p.144.

[129] The Shadowy Waters, p. 151. All references are to the acting version of 1911.

The Shadowy Waters has all the elements necessary to Yeats' concept of tragic drama. The hero, Forgael, fights against the worldly aspirations of the sailors and the beautiful queen. "The immortals have pressed upon him, he commands magical power, and he longs for that mingling of the natural and supernatural which was one of Yeats' abiding preoccupations."[130] Forgael seeks the region "... of shining women that cast no shadow, having lived before the making of the earth."[131] At the end he resists the temptations of wealth and earthly love, and chooses to follow the troop of birds who will lead him to "!.. a country at the end of the world/Where no child's born but to outlive the moon.'"[132] Dectora too renounces life on earth, and remains with her lover. The two are united in the anima mundi by their belief in perfect love and by their willingness to give up the real world in order to attain it. In a moment of lyric intensity, Forgael achieves immortality.

Dectora. x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x

The mist has covered the heavens, and you and I
Shall be alone for ever. We two - this crown -
I half remember. It has been in my dreams.
Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you with it.
O flower of the branch, O bird among the leaves,
O silver fish that my two hands have taken
Out of the running stream, O morning star,
Trembling in the blue heavens like a white fawn
Upon the misty border of the wood,
Bend lower, that I may cover you with my hair,
For we will gaze upon this world no longer.
[The harp begins to burn as with fire.]

Forgael. [gathering Dectora's hair about him]. Beloved,
having dragged the net about us,
And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;
And that old harp awakens of itself
To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,
That have had dreams for father, live in us.[133]

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[130] Parkinson, p. 144.
[131] The Shadowy Waters, p. 149.
[132] The Shadowy Waters, p. 165.
[133] The Shadowy Waters, p. 167.

The successive revisions of The Shadowy Waters sharpened the conflict between the representatives of the world of reality and Forgael, and made it more suitable for production in the theatre, as Yeats took a surer hold on dramatic techniques. In 1904 he found it necessary to rewrite the play so that the characters would speak to one another. He clarified the motives of Forgael, Dectora and Aibric, pruned the symbolism, and made the dialogue more colloquial and more fitting to the characters. In the 1900 version, the sailors speak in the same lyric tones as Forgael, and think piracy is good for its own sake. In 1905 they are normal, sensual men to whom piracy is a means to women and money. Their speech is closer to common life (in the 1906 edition they speak in rhythmic prose) and the fact that they see the magic birds presents the possibility that these might indeed exist. Forgael's behaviour becomes more human, and his speech becomes less like that of an initiate in an occult society and more like that of a pirate king who is searching for spiritual fulfillment.[134] He is humanly concerned by the fact that he has won Dectora unfairly, by a magic enchantment. He cries out that he has deceived her, and then says:

> ... But I have done so great a wrong against you,
> There is no measure that it would not burst.
> I will confess it all.[135]

Boyd suggests that, "For all the changes The Shadowy Waters has undergone, the drama is essentially symbolical and belongs definitely to

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[134] For discussion of the successive revisions of The Shadowy Waters, see Parkinson, pp. 149-154.

[135] The Shadowy Waters, p. 163.

the period of its first publication."[136] The play belongs to the early period of Yeats' writing in that it reflects a conflict which troubled him then, but which continued to trouble him throughout his life. The early editions of the play were expressed in those terms in which he then saw the conflict, but the changes in The Shadowy Waters kept pace not only with his development as a dramatist, but also with the development of his philosophic ideas, and the formation of the concepts of the anima hominis and anima mundi which replaced the earlier Pre-Raphaelite and occult ideas of a vague, misty, beautiful other world. The changes in the successive revisions indicate that Yeats "... was forced to exploit through a clearer delineation of dramatic structure the basic theme and conflict of his life and art, that between anima hominis and anima mundi."[137]

The Hour-Glass, like The Shadowy Waters was rewritten by Yeats in line with his developing dramatic theory and technique. The play, based on a story in Lady Wilde's Ancient Legends of Ireland, (1887)[138] was first written for Lent, 1903.[139] It was a modern morality play in prose, having, according to one critic, a "... spirit that is as reverent as the spirit of the old religious drama."[140] In the original story, the man was saved by the faith of a child; in Yeats' version he was saved by Teigue, the Fool. Although the play was successful - the actor W.G. Fay said of it:

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[136] Boyd, p. 78.
[137] Robinson, p. 154.
[138] Weygandt, p. 51.
[139] W.G. Fay, "The Poet and The Actor," p. 129.
[140] Weygandt, p. 52.

"The Hour-Glass was the first modern morality play, and for simplicity, dignity and dramatic force it can bear comparison with any of the Chester or Coventry Mysteries,"[141] - Yeats became dissatisfied with it. He explained:

> The early version of the play, which was only too effective, converting a music-hall singer and sending him to Mass for six weeks, made me ashamed, but I did not know till very lately how to remedy it. I had made my Wise Man humble himself to the Fool and receive salvation as a reward, but now I have given it a new end which is closer to my own thought, as well as more effective theatrically.[142]

A second version appeared in 1912, and a third, the "Acting Version" which was mingled prose and poetry, in 1914.

In the later version, Yeats repudiates the moral in favour of artistic purpose.[143] The Wise Man is no longer taught the truth by the Fool, but rather by the logic of circumstance. The Fool refuses to admit that he has seen angels, and then the Wise Man realizes the truth:

> Wise Man. The last hope is gone,
> And now that it's too late I see it all:
> We perish into God and sink away
> Into reality - the rest's a dream.[144]

The theme, like that of so many of Yeats' plays, is concerned with the two levels of reality, the anima hominis and the anima mundi. Boyd summarizes the "idea plot": "The Wise Man has devoted his years of learning to a denial of the invisible world, but, in contradiction of his reason, his spirit has passed on to him premonitions of the phenomena he denies."[145]

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[141] W.G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, p. 129.

[142] Quoted by Lennox Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," p. 102.

[143] Boyd, p. 73.

[144] The Hour-Glass, p. 322. All references are to the version of 1914.

[145] Boyd, p. 73.

The Fool describes the invisible world:

> Fool. To be sure - everybody knows, everybody in the world knows, when it is spring with us, the trees are withering there, when it is summer with us, the snow is falling there, and have I not myself heard the lambs that are there all bleating on a cold November day - to be sure, does not everybody with an intellect know that? And maybe when it's night with us it is day with them, for many a time I have seen the roads lighted before me.[146]

The Wise Man scornfully refutes this idea:

> Wise Man. The Beggar who wrote that on Babylon wall meant that there is a spiritual kingdom that cannot be seen or known till the faculties, whereby we master the kingdom of this world, wither away like green things in winter. A monkish thought, the most mischievous thought that ever passed out of a man's mouth.[147]

His own belief is summed up in his children's reply to his question of whether they believe in Heaven, God or the Soul.

> Both Children. [as if repeating a lesson]. There is nothing we cannot see, nothing we cannot touch.
>
> First Child. Foolish people used to say that there was, but you have taught us better.[148]

This then is the problem which is treated:

In theme it echoes the conflict between rationalism and intuition with which Yeats has been so greatly preoccupied. It illustrates the opposition of the world of experience which can be demonstrated by fact, and the world of belief that is revealed in vision; a polarity that is characteristic in one form or another of all his writing.[149]

Even before he sees the Angel, the Wise Man is disturbed by the question posed by his students, for:

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[146] The Hour-Glass, p. 302. For the source of this idea see above, p.44.

[147] The Hour-Glass, p. 302.

[148] The Hour-Glass, p. 320.

[149] Weygandt, p. 104.

Wise Man. Twice have I dreamed it in a morning dream,
Now nothing serves my pupils but to come
With a like thought. Reason is growing dim;
A moment more and Frenzy will beat his drum
And laugh aloud and scream;
And I must dance in the dream.
x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x[150]

He has an inkling of Yeats' belief that Reason must be eliminated in order for the soul to reach the anima mundi.

At the end, the Wise Man recognizes the futility of his quest and in his last agonizing moment realizes that true wisdom lies in submission to the will of God.[151] In other words, he realizes that intellect and preoccupation with the tangible things of this world must be suspended in order to achieve union with the world soul. He renounces the world of men and gives himself up to the passion which raises him to the anima mundi in a burst of lyric emotion:

Wise Man. Be silent. May God's will prevail on the instant.
Although His will be my eternal pain.
I have no question:
It is enough, I know what fixed the station
Of star and cloud.
And knowing all, I cry
That whatso God has willed
On the instant be fulfilled,
Though that be my damnation.
The stream of the world has changed its course,
And with the stream my thoughts have run
Into some cloudy thunderous spring
That is its mountain source -
Aye, to some frenzy of the mind,
For all that we have don's undone,
Our speculation but as the wind.[152]

In the tradition of mediaeval morality plays, the characters of The Hour-Glass are personifications. The Wise Man is Science, the Fool is Intuition, the

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[150] The Hour-Glass, p. 303.
[151] Boyd, p. 74.
[152] The Hour-Glass, p. 323.

Pupils are the "common herd of small, docile souls enslaved to formulae."[153] As well as being in the morality tradition, the substitution of personifications for individual characteristics is in keeping with Yeats' theories of the absence of character in tragedy. The costumes contributed to the stylization of the dramatis personae. The angel, W.G. Fay tells us, was played by Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh who was dressed "like a Botticelli angel, with a golden halo round her head - quite frankly a picture angel."[154] In a stage direction Yeats suggests that the angel's face may be covered by a beautiful mask.[155] The settings and costumes were designed by Gordon Craig,[156] in keeping with his ideas of non-realistic scenic art.

The claims for Yeats as a dramatist cannot be made on conventional grounds. Character is intentionally almost non-existent, and the sketchy plots were in almost all cases familiar to the audience for whom they were written. The values for which Yeats strove were clarity of ideas, intensity of passion, beauty of poetry, and, in The Green Helmet at least, grace of movement.

> You are rarely held by the intensity of the story; instead you are held spellbound by the intensity of thought and passion and by the consistent loveliness of apt speech, by the poetry. His plays have "poetry hid in thought or passion," as Coleridge says, "not thought or passion disguised in the dress of poetry". The outward sensuousness of his language is consumed by fiery thoughts or passions. Take away these and little is left to enrich the stage - it is as I have said, bare of plot.[157]

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[153] Boyd, p. 73.

[154] W.G. Fay and Cahterine Carswell, p. 130.

[155] The Hour-Glass, p. 307, s.d.

[156] Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," p. 76.

[157] F.R. Higgins, "Yeats and Poetic Drama in Ireland,"(op. cit. p.18 n.34). p.79.

Nevertheless these plays are truly dramatic. They are well constructed and the conflicts are credible and create dramatic excitement. Yeats was successful by his own standards. That is, he accomplished that which he set out to do. He wished to dramatize his philosophic ideas, through the medium of Irish legend in such a way that the audience would be raised with the hero to the world soul through passion. His dramatic theory and practice, integrally related to his philosophic ideals, had a number of particular characteristics which were illustrated by the plays discussed in this chapter. V.K. Narayana Menon, in his study "The Development of William Butler Yeats, effectively summarizes Yeats' dramatic technique of this period:

> Love and beauty he made unearthly so as to exclude character and subordinate it to motives and passions. In order to exalt lyric feeling, he substituted 'the purification that comes with pity and terror to the imagination and intellect' for the nervous tremors of commercial plays. In order to eliminate the unravelling and development of incidents, he usually started off with a discussion of a fait accompli. In order to eliminate the building-up of character, he started off with fully developed characters, sketched to us in a few formal lines of very effective hesitant speech by some subsidiary character, often his favourite Fool. In order to achieve neat outlines and finished beauty, he pruned his plots to the point of being bare.[158]

In spite of their merits, these plays were not very popular. The prevailing taste preferred the plays of the prose realists to Yeats' poetic "other-worldliness," and Yeats' interest in the public theatre declined. Later he discovered in the Japanese Noh drama a form which appealed to his desire to create a drama for a small, discriminating group, and which suited the requirements of his own theories almost perfectly.

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[158] Menon, p. 85.

Chapter III - The Influence of the Japanese Noh Drama

Between 1908 and 1916 Yeats wrote no new plays although he did revise some of the earlier ones. When At the Hawk's Well appeared it was startling in form, and was not intended for presentation at the Abbey, or in any public theatre, but for performance before an intimate group in a drawing room. The form was derived from the Japanese Noh drama which Yeats had seized upon, partly out of disillusionment with the public theatre, and partly because it so nearly conformed to his own dramatic and theatrical theories.

Several reasons have been offered for Yeats' withdrawal from active participation in the affairs of the Abbey. F.R. Higgins suggests simply that with the rise in popularity of the plays of the prose realists, Yeats' interest in the theatre declined.[1] Furthermore, Robinson points out, there was no popular audience in London or Dublin for verse plays.[2] If the public had little use for Yeats' poetic plays, Yeats had less use for the public. His anger over the Playboy controversies and the affair of the Lane bequest had turned into a hatred of the middle-class; the demonstrations and bickering,

> ... did something to Yeats; they changed him, like an inverted St. Paul from an apostle into a frondeur. After these things, no events in the real world could deeply stir him. Abandoning his efforts to educate the people through the Stage, he became content to see the world as a Stage, remaining himself a disgruntled, if half-envious, spectator.... Even his plays were henceforth to be written for drawing rooms.[3]

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[1] Higgins, pp. 82-83

[2] Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," p. 3.

[3] Arland Ussher, Three Great Irishmen: Shaw, Yeats, Joyce (London, 1952), p. 87.

In a letter to Lady Gregory he explained that in writing a series of symbolic plays to be performed before a small select audience,

... I have Ireland especially in mind, for I want to make, or to help some man some day to make, a feeling of exclusiveness, a bond among chosen spirits, a mystery almost for leisured and lettered people. Ireland has suffered more than England from democracy.[4]

John Eglinton suggests that perhaps part of Yeats' disillusionment resulted from the fact that the Abbey was unable to present his plays in their best light. The heroic element seemed crestfallen on the Abbey stage, he writes, because actors who usually played peasants were trying to play heroes.[5]

But if any regret remained with us that we had not done justice to Yeats, it was allayed when we heard that he himself renounced the poetic drama as inherited from the Shakesperians. In a London drawing room this undaunted poet hailed in the Noh play of Japan the long-sought clue to a new art. Light had come once more to him from the East.[6]

The light from the East came to Yeats via Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenellosa. The latter, an American Orientalist, died in 1908, leaving many manuscripts and translations which he had collected during his travels in the Orient. His wife wrote to Pound, asking him to act as her husband's literary executor. Pound edited Fenelossa's notes and produced three books: Cathay (1915), Certain Noble Plays of Japan (1916), and Noh, or Accomplishment (1917).[7] When Pound showed Yeats the texts of the Noh plays, Yeats became enthusiastic over the possibilities of adapting the Japanese form for his own

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[4]W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 215.

[5]John Eglinton, Irish Literary Portraits, p.30.

[6]Eglinton, p. 30.

[7]The Reader's Encyclopedia, ed. William Rose Benet (New York, 1948), II, 375.

dramatic purposes. For whatever the cause of his alienation from the Abbey (probably a combination of those mentioned above) it was not that he was no longer interested in the drama as an artistic form. He explained in 1916:

> Yet I need a theatre; I believe myself to be a dramatist.... My blunder has been that I did not discover in my youth that my theatre must be the ancient theatre that can be made by unrolling a carpet or marking out a place with a stick, or setting a screen against the wall.[8]

And so he wrote Four Plays for Dancers to be performed in the drawing room. Before his discovery of Noh, Yeats had attempted to find "the ancient theatre" in India:

> At one period he studied Sanskrit plays and tried to steep himself in the traditions of the old subtle dramatic art of the Hindus. But the severity and the ceremoniousness of the Noh plays as well as, perhaps, the persuasiveness of Ezra Pound lured him.[9]

The ancient art of the Noh drama, to which Yeats turned, was an aristocratic, delicate, and symbolic form which

> ... gave him a sort of dramatic equivalent for his new verse style: something terse, refined, solid, cryptic, beautiful. They also showed Yeats how to simplify his staging by radical conventions and how to combine music and dance with words without letting the words get swamped. Apart from such general principles, and the formal framework, Yeats's dance plays are as distinct from their Japanese prototypes as from Western drama. The Noh play can become anything you want to make it.[10]

The traditional association of Noh with the Japanese nobility appealed to Yeats' socio-cultural ideals, and the legendary material which was dramatized in the Noh plays was startlingly similar to the Irish myths in which Yeats was interested. That Noh was a symbolic and lyrical art further attracted Yeats to the medium. Furthermore, in the Noh Yeats found

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[8] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 416.

[9] Menon, p. 86.

[10] Bentley, p. 302.

a series of conventions, some of which proved to be refinements or extensions of techniques with which he had been experimenting, and the sum of which resulted in a drama characterized by the two principles which were fundamental to his own theory of drama - aesthetic distance and absence of character. Yeats did not imitate all the conventions of Noh, nor were the plays which resulted from his experiments with this form especially Oriental in tone. T.S. Eliot suggests that indeed these plays were both more Irish and more universal than his earlier works:

> I think that the phase in which he treated Irish legend in the manner of Rossetti or Morris is a phase of confusion. He did not master this legend until he made it a vehicle for his own creation of character - not, really, until he began to write the Plays for Dancers. The point is, that in becoming more Irish, not in subject-matter but in expression, he became at the same time universal.[11]

Yeats adapted and made use of those conventions which best suited his purpose, and evolved a new type of drama which is "'distinguished indirect and symbolic'."[12]

The dramatic ideals which Yeats had formulated during his years of work with the Abbey Theatre were brought to fruition by his contact with the Noh drama. It is therefore necessary to examine "... this model that sets a seal on his searchings."[13]

The Japanese drama, like the Greek, originated in religious festivals, and in its early period was divided into three main branches, Dengaku, Sarugaku, and Sangaku. Dengaku, which means "field-music", was

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[11]Eliot, p. 447

[12]Menon, p. 86.

[13]Peacock, p. 119.

connected with the rice-planting festival, and flourished in the period between 1192 and 1337, and was characterized by humorous antics. Sarugaku was in part a development of Dengaku, and consisted of acrobatics, jugglery, and mimicry. Sangaku originated in India and came to Japan about the year 850 from China. It also developed in connection with religious festivals, and was characterized by fire-eating and acrobatics to music. To these three were added elements of ennen, teikyoku, kôyei, enkyoku, and ko-uta. The more serious elements were refined into nôgaku or Noh drama, while the rustic and humorous elements were combined into kyôgen - a comic interlude introduced to relieve the tension created by the Noh play.[14]

The Noh theatre became very popular at the end of the fourteenth century when it reached the peak of its perfection. Under the patronage of the Shogun, it became a necessary part of the official ceremonies at his court at Kioto.[15] "In its early days, the Noh dance was regarded socially

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[14]Toshiro Shimanouchi, The Noh Drama (Tokyo, 1937), pp. 5ff. There is some disagreement on this subject. Shigetoshi Kawatake, in Development of the Japanese Theatre Art (Tokyo, 1935), pp. 12-13 attributes the origin of Noh to Gigaku, which was introduced into Japan by Koreans, early in the seventh century. Gigaku is thought to be a typical mask dance which started in Central Asia and prevailed in India and China. The traditional performance of Gigaku was combined with Sangaku (or Sarugaku) which also came from China, and in the thirteenth century a new art, the Noh, evolved from Ennen-no-mai, "a kind of variety dance performed in temples." At that time Noh attempted to express a story by dance and music. The Noh dance of Ennen was taken into Dengaku, which had developed from a folk-dance, and became known as Dengaku Noh. Some Sengaku players adhered to this tradition which reached the peak of its perfection at the end of the fourteenth century, encouraged by the third Ashikaga Shōgun, Yoshimitsu.

[15]W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," The Cutting of An Agate, Essays, p. 282.

as of low grade, but once it had been taken to the Court by the Shōgun as a ritual dance, it soon developed into a classic form of art and began to be valued as such under the patronage of the Shōguns."[16]

During the fourteenth century the Nôgakushi (Noh actor) was given the rank of Samurai.[17] At the court, the young nobles and princes who were forbidden to attend the popular theatre were encouraged to perform in and to watch Noh plays.[18] So closely did Noh become associated with the ruling class that it was almost destroyed by the collapse of feudalism when it lost the support and protection of the nobility.[19] However it was revived with the new stability which followed the period of social unrest.[20] Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries it was punishable by law for anyone but the Samurai or warriors to witness the performance of Noh.[21] Adopted and refined by the nobility, Noh has continued to be associated with the aristocracy: "The Noh dance and Kyôgen are still preserved by the upper strata of our society as the classic and symbolic type of stage art."[22]

Menon suggests that one of the factors which attracted Yeats was the fact that "... the Noh plays have a strong feudal flavour and were quite definitely entertainment for the aristocratic and warrior classes."[23]

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[16] Kawatake (op. cit, p.93 n. 14), p. 14.
[17] Shimanouchi, (op. cit. p.93 n.14), p.16.
[18] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 282.
[19] Shimanouchi, p. 17.
[20] Shimanouchi, p. 18.
[21] Faubion Bowers, Japanese Theatre (New York, 1952), p. 22.
[22] Kawatake, p. 12.
[23] Menon, p. 87.

The historical connection of Noh with the Samurai, or noble warrior class, appealed to Yeats' respect and admiration for the aristocracy, which, as we have seen, were engendered partly by his hatred of the middle-class, and which were encouraged by his association with Lady Gregory. Furthermore, the performance of Japanese Noh before members of the dourt corresponded almost exactly to Yeats' own desire to present his plays before a small, select group.

Under the patronage of the Shōgun, two text-writers, Kannami (1333-1384) and his son Séami (1363-1444), brought the Noh form to perfection.[24] The authorship of more than 100 plays, all of which are considered to be masterpieces, is attributed to Séami.[25] These early plays dominate the repertoires of modern Noh "schools".[26]

The claims for the originality of the Noh texts are based not on the material, which is composed of a number of traditional elements, but on the new form of beauty which resulted from the harmonious blending of these elements.[27]

> Very little original writing is found in the texts of the Noh plays, for they are largely composed of fragments borrowed freely from familiar works of literature.... tales from the Manyoshu and numerous legends of Buddhist, Shinto and Chinese origin, which have been woven masterfully into narrative and lyrical passages.[28]

The similarities between the Japanese and Irish legends provided another bond between the Irish poet and the Japanese drama. The Noh scripts fall into five general categories, on the basis of tone and subject-

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[24]Shimanouchi, p. 7.
[25]Shimanouchi, p. 15.
[26]Shimanouchi, p. 7.
[27]Shimanouchi, p. 7.
[28]Shimanouchi, p. 7.

matter, and a formal Noh programme consists of the performance of a play from each category. They are played according to a prescribed order, so that the audience knows what type of play it may expect to see next.

The first of these categories is the Kami-mono, or god-play, in which the chief performer impersonates a divine personage in an awe-inspiring atmosphere.[29] The fifth group, called Kirino-mono includes weird tales of goblins, monsters and demons.[30] It is of plays of these two categories that Yeats wrote:

> The adventure itself is often the meeting with ghost, god, or goddess at some holy place or much-legended tomb; and god, goddess, or ghost reminds me at times of our own Irish legends and beliefs, which once, it may be, differed little from those of the Shinto worshipper.[31]

The second place on the programme is occupied by the Shura-mono or Toko-mono, the battle-play, which deals with the heroism of great warriors.[32] The nature of the hero was a subject which interested Yeats greatly,[33] and doubtless this particular type of Noh play would particularly attract him.[34]

The Onna-mono, which appears in third place on a formal Noh programme, is characterized by great elegance and refinement. The leading character is a woman.[35] Hagoromo, a play with which Yeats was familiar, falls into this category, according to Bowers. The plot is very simple.

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[29] Shimanouchi, p. 15.

[30] Shimanouchi, p. 16.

[31] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 287.

[32] Shimanouchi, p. 15.

[33] See above, p. 67.

[34] Yeats may or may not have had access to a play of this type, for only a very few Japanese plays were available in translation. [See "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 289.]

[35] Shimanouchi, p. 15.

A fisherman finds a beautiful cloak, a robe of feathers, in the pinewoods, and just as he is about to take it home an angel appears and claims its ownership. He refuses to return it and she pleads with him, saying that without it she cannot return to her home in the sky. The fisherman finally consents, but on the condition that she perform a dance for him, which she gladly accepts.[36] Yeats noted the similarity between this story and an Irish folk-tale: "The feather-mantle, for whose lack the moon goddess (or should we call her fairy?) cannot return to the sky, is the red cap whose theft can keep our fairies of the sea upon dry land...."[37]

The fourth category of Noh plays is called Kurui-mono, which includes stories of madness, revenge, mother love, and human compassion.[38] Nishikigi, the story of the ghosts of two lovers who are unable to rest because their love had not been consummated before their deaths, until they are granted peace at last by a friendly priest who performs the marriage service by their tomb, probably belongs to this group. There is a similar legend among the Irish: "... the ghost-lovers in Nishikigi remind me of the Aran boy and girl who in Lady Gregory's story come to the priest after death to be married."[39]

The Noh drama evolved during the period when Zen Buddhism held sway, with its reverence for subtle, suggestive, refined, simple beauty.

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[36] Shimanouchi, p.21.

[37] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 287.

[38] Shimanouchi, p. 15.

[39] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 287.

Under this influence, interest in the tea ceremony and in gardens and the art of flower arrangement developed.[40] Yeats called that period "a great age," and in its "vivid and subtle discrimination of sense"[41] he saw the appreciation of the same values as those of the Pre-Raphaelites and Symbolists whom he most admired. He wrote:

> ... when I remember that curious game which the Japanese called, with a confusion of the senses that had seemed typical of our own age, 'listening to incense,' I know that some among them would have understood the prose of Walter Pater, the painting of Puvis de Chavannes, the poetry of Mallarmé and Verlaine.[42]

The Noh drama acquired its philosophy and final shape from the Zen priests.[43] That contemplative school of Buddhism also influenced the dramatic structure, the atmosphere, and the method of presentation of the Noh plays, which were shaped to conform to the aesthetic standards of Zen.[44] "Like the paintings of the time which were governed by Zen principles, Noh assiduously sought to express itself through the subtle, as opposed to the obvious, suggestion, as opposed to the statement, and restraint, as opposed to freedom."[45]

The subtlety of Noh as well as its nobility appealed to Yeats. He wrote:

> In fact, with the help of Japanese plays 'translated by Ernest Fenollosa [sic] and finished by Ezra Pound,' I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect, symbolic, and having no need of mob or press to pay its way - an aristocratic form.[46]

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[40] Shimanouchi, p. 7.
[41] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 291
[42] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 292
[43] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 282
[44] Shimanouchi, p. 7.
[45] Shimanouchi, p. 8.
[46] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 274.

Thus the Noh provided the vehicle for which Yeats, as a symbolist, had been searching.

> Yeats was a symbolist in the technical sense of a man using sounds and word-associations to express moods, and also in the more usual sense of one who employs images to represent ideas: the first is the process of dream, the second that of metaphor....[47]

In his early plays the first method was frequently unsuccessful, conveying only a vague sense of unreality, as in The Shadowy Waters, particularly in some of the early versions; the second resulting sometimes in misunderstanding or obscurity, as the reference (now a classic example of Yeatsian obscurity) to a "Deer with no Horns" and a "Flying Fawn," which he had finally to explain in a note to the reader.[48] His intention had been to draw the symbols for his plays from the vast area of Irish folklore, so that it would be easily grasped by his audience. However, as he developed a more esoteric symbolism, which after the writing of A Vision was frequently intelligible only to those who had read that work, he sought a small group of initiates who could comprehend his symbols. In other words, he required the same type of audience as that which enjoyed the Noh plays in Japan, and for the same reason. He said:

> 'Accomplishment' the word Noh means, and it is their accomplishment and that of a few cultivated people who understand the literary and mythological allusions and the ancient lyrics quoted in speech or chorus, their discipline, a part of their breeding.[49]

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[47] Ussher, p. 75.

[48] "'The Deer with no Horns' and the 'Flying Fawn' are certainly Irish symbols of the desire of the man which is for the woman, and the desire of the woman which is for the desire of the man...." - W.B. Yeats, The Poetical Works of William Butler Yeats, (London, 1919), II, 480.

[49] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 283.

The Noh drama provided Yeats with a form in which symbolism could function to its greatest advantage, since it enhanced rather than marred the larger design, and the small audience allowed him to use symbols which might not be meaningful for a larger group. As a result, "Four Plays for Dancers, written between 1916 and 1921, marks the beginning of the most important phase of Yeats' career as symbolic dramatist."[50]

The Japanese Noh play included the recitation of old lyric poetry.[51] This lyrical element was particularly suited to Yeats' talent. His adoption of the Noh form allowed him to introduce the lyricism which, in the earlier plays of conventional Western form, had been branded as "undramatic" by many, in spite of Yeats' reconciliation of the lyric and the dramatic.[52]

> His main difficulty at first was that while gifted with a real "stage sense" his craft was that of the lyric poet. In his earlier verse plays he overcame this handicap (as it then seemed) by loosening his texture into blank verse: traditional device of the poet who is willing to sacrifice something of his music to obtain a larger measure of dramatic freedom. Yet so great was his power of synthesis that after years of experiment he succeeded in fusing two modes of expression hitherto only defined as contrasts: lyrical and dramatic verse. In his Four Plays for Dancers this novel union is at once evident; inspired by the traditional limitations and conventions of the Eastern drama he set out to achieve his dramatic effects through a lyric medium sublimating his action to the plane of the imagination.[53]

The Noh stage has been described as similar to the Greek[54] by some, and to the Elizabethan[55] by others. The conventions employed are reminiscent

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[50] Audrey Lee Elise Strabel, "Yeats' Development of a Symbolic Drama," unpublished thesis (University of Wisconsin, 1953), p. 194.

[51] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 282.

[52] See above, pp. 52-53.

[53] Hone, p. 362.

[54] Shimanouchi, p. 5.

[55] Kawatake, p. 12.

of both. The use of masks and the presence of a chorus suggest the Greek drama, while the music, songs, dances, and brilliant costumes recall the Elizabethan masque.

Japanese Noh plays originally were performed out-of-doors, on stages of unpainted Japanese cypress, built to exact specifications. Now the plays are presented indoors, but a roof over the stage recalls the outside origin. Three pine trees, which also symbolize the out-of-doors, stand alongside a narrow extension to the left of the stage from which the actors enter and exit.[56] The stage platform is surrounded by the audience on three sides.[57] At the rear of the stage is the Kagami-ita (literally "mirror-board") with a painting of an old pine tree, recalling the Shōgun's booth in the Noh treatre. Very few props are used, and there are no scenic effects - scenes must be imagined by the audience, from the descriptions supplied by the chorus.[58] The fact that no "naturalistic effects" are sought was another factor that appealed to Yeats. He had insisted, even in the early days of the Abbey, that naturalistic scene-painting was not an art, and wished to replace it with decorative scenery that would not overwhelm the art of the poet or the actor.[59] Now in 1916 he wrote:

> "Realism is created for the common people and was always their peculiar delight, and it is the delight to-day of all those whose minds, educated alone by schoolmasters and newspapers, are without the memory of beauty and emotional subtlety." [60]

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[56] Shimanouchi, pp. 8-9.

[57] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan", pp. 284.

[58] Shimanouchi, p. 9.

[59] See above, p. 23.

[60] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 280.

He suggested that the lapses into realism of the Elizabethan dramas were intended as a sop to the common people, while the great speeches were written for the wealthy patrons in the gallery.[61] The commercial theatre, he thought, should continue along the path of realism, but, "In the studio and in the drawing room we can found a true theatre of beauty."[62] Yeats had thus united his artistic theories about realism and his social theory of the cultural supremacy of the aristocracy. In the Noh he found a form which embraced both of these ideas.

The stylization and lack of realism in staging are repeated in other aspects of Noh. The costumes are elaborate, "gorgeous and dazzling" heirlooms which are handed down from generation to generation.[63] All actors wear white socks, except the comic characters who wear yellow socks.[64] Yeats had specified that costumes be simple, in colours which would contrast with the background to make a "picture."[65] Although the traditional Noh costumes were not at all simple, being brilliantly embroidered and brocaded with silver and gold,[66] they were beautiful in themselves and when seen together on stage gave the decorative pictorial effect which Yeats wished.

With these elaborate costumes the Noh players wore masks of carved cypress. Early masks are considered "immortal works of Japanese art."[67] Toshiro Shimanouchi describes them thus:

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[61] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 281.
[62] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 281.
[63] Shimanouchi, p. 9.
[64] Bowers, p. 21
[65] See above, p. 24.
[66] Bowers, p. 21.
[67] Shimanouchi, p. 10.

> ... the female masks of the Ashikaga period are of matchless excellence. They even defy reproduction. This is because the great sculptors carved what might be called a neutral expression on them; in other words, an expression allowed a wide latitude of change, from joy to sadness, depending on the angle from which they are viewed and, even more important, according to the degree of skill with which the actor performs. Thus, it is such an effective medium of expression that when the acting is perfect, the conscientious audience, it is often said, does not see the mask, but a living, human face.[68]

The masks which Yeats was to use were not designed to convey character or to lead the audience to believe that they were really seeing human faces. He appreciated the convention of the mask because:

> A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player, or for that face repainted to suit his own vulgar fancy, the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice. A mask never seems but a dirty face, and no matter how close you go is yet a work of art; nor shall we lose by stilling the movement of the features, for deep feeling is expressed by a movement of the whole body.[69]

In poetic painting, and in sculpture, he continues, the face is nobler because it lacks vitality. In the theatre, the figures gain in dignity and power from the immobility of the mask.[70] The formal, artistic, impersonal mask is a theatrical device which would help Yeats to carry out one of his major dramatic principles - that of absenting character from tragedy. This device had been considered by Yeats before he encountered the Japanese convention. The Fool and the Blind Man in On Baile's Strand wore masks which were "grotesque and extravagant".[71] The Black Men of The Green Helmet and the Dark-faced Men of Deirdre pointed forward in this direction. Ideas

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[68] Shimanouchi, p. 10.

[69] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," pp. 279-280.

[70] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 280.

[71] On Baile's Strand, p. 247, s.d.

about masks and marionettes were being discussed by literary people during the nineties.[72] Gordon Craig, who, as we shall see, influenced Yeats' theatrical ideas,[73] repeatedly advocated the use of "über-marionettes" in place of actors. Thus Yeats discovered in the Noh masks another factor which he had been considering and which exactly suited his dramatic theory.

Other conventions govern the appearances of the Japanese Noh players. Not all the actors are masked. Those that are wear no make-up on their ears and necks, but sometimes they wear wigs. Others wear no make-up at all. Only male actors are permitted to play Noh, and emperors and high personages are played by young boys.[74] Yeats did not observe all of these conventions. Female players took part in those of his plays which were based on the Noh, and the coloured socks were disregarded.

The Japanese Noh also makes use of the convention of the chorus, called the _ji_ who sit on a protruding section at the right of the stage. The functions of the chorus are to describe the scene, to inform the audience of the transpiration of events, to explain the feelings of the leading characters, and to interpret the lyrical passages as they are being danced.[75] The chorus' lyrical description of the scene allowed the Japanese poets to convey the sense of awe, the sanctity or romance of certain places.[76]

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[72] Wilfrid W. Werry, The Theories of Gordon Craig and their Relation to the Contemporary Theatre, unpublished thesis, (McGill University, 1932) pp. 27-28. Werry points out that Oscar Wilde, in 1892, first suggested that puppets replace actors on stage.

[73] See below, pp. 113 - 120.

[74] Bowers, p. 20.

[75] Shimanouchi, p. 13.

[76] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," pp. 287-288.

Yeats had wished to do this, but found it impossible within the frame-work of Western drama:

> I could lay the scene of a play on Baile' Strand, but I found no pause in the hurried action for descriptions of strand or sea or the great yew tree that once stood there; and I could not in The King's Threshold find room, before I began the ancient story, to call up the shallow river and the few trees and rocky fields of modern Gort.[77]

The convention of the chorus would allow him to describe the scene in all its beauty and with all the associations which would make the picture complete. The chorus never becomes part of the action as it did in Greek drama. Yeats had made use of the chorus before - the Fool and the Blind Man of On Baile's Strand and the women musicians of Deirdre - but had incorporated it into the action, not always too successfully.[78] The Noh form allowed him to make use of the chorus in a purely conventional way, without having to introduce them into the action. However Yeats adapted the Noh convention somewhat. Whereas the Japanese dramatists employed musicians as well as a chorus, Yeats used only musicians who both functioned as a chorus and accompanied the action with music where required.

The Japanese players pass on their traditional acting technique from father to son.[79] Their movements, according to Yeats, were copied from fourteenth century marionette shows.[80] To acquire this puppet-like motion, actors must undergo rigid training, for all movements and intonations are prescribed, and the young actors learn by imitating their teachers.[81] Each

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[77] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 288.

[78] See above, p. 68.

[79] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 282.

[80] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 279.

[81] Shimanouchi, p. 11.

gesture has a symbolic meaning which is comprehensible to the admirers of Noh who comprise the audiences. "A step can mean a complete journey; the lifting of the hand, weeping; the merest turn of the head, negation. Noh abounds in understatement."[82] This acting requires a high degree of concentration, and to help effect this the actors' masks are designed with eye-holes that are too small for clear vision.[83] The actors make no attempt to imitate reality.[84] In this the Noh tradition is in complete agreement with Yeats' ideals with regard to acting, as he had expressed them as early as 1902.[85] Of course the style of acting employed by Yeats' players was not quite the same. Mr. Ito, whose services Yeats employed to create and execute some of the dances, could not possibly have schooled western actors in the elaborate symbolic gestures, nor could even the most select Dublin or London audience have been able to understand had he been able to do so. Rather Yeats achieved a similar marionette-like effect by having his actors move "stiffly and gravely", and by co-ordinating their movements with the drum-taps

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[82] Bowers, p. 22.

[83] Shimanouchi, p. 10.

[84] In "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," (p. 268) Yeats re-told a story which Pound had discovered in Fenelossa's manuscript, and which is traditional among Japanese actors:
"A young man was following a stately old woman through the streets of a Japanese town, and presently she turned to him and spoke: 'Why do you follow me?' 'Because you are so interesting.' 'That is not so, I am too old to be interesting.' But he wished, he told her, to become a player of old women on the Noh stage. 'If he would become famous as a Noh player,' she said, 'he must not observe life, nor put on an old voice and stint the music of his voice. He must know how to suggest an old woman and yet find it all in the heart.'"

[85] See above, p. 21.

of the musicians.[86] Yeats' purpose was not to re-create the Japanese drama, but to modify it to suit his own talent and dramatic ideals.

However, stylization of gesture is not the only way in which the art of the Noh actor is removed from reality. The actors sing as much as they speak.[87] and, in addition to the fact that the acting is often confused with dancing because each movement is regulated by prescribed form and measure,[88] there is also in Noh the mai or dance whose "... purpose is to interpret the lyrical passages in the play by a continuous flow of simple, graceful lines which resemble, in the illusion created, those of sumi-e, the ink-painting in black and white."[89] A set of strictly prescribed regulations governs the mai dance. Shells are distributed under the floor boards of the stage which, when the boards above them are stamped upon, produce five notes of the Noh scale, which correspond approximately to the notes D,E,G,A, and B. "D" represents the "dog-days" of mid-summer, "E" the summer, "G" spring, "A" fall, and "B" winter. During the mai, dancing must take place only on that part of the stage designated for the particular season being represented.[90]

Strictly speaking, there is very little acting, in the sense of the revelation of the development of character with the progression of the action, or of the portrayal of the inter-action of two or more characters in a dramatic situation. The action is usually recollected, the plot hingeing on an event which has already occurred. The dramatic situation is not

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[86]W.B. Yeats, Preface to Four Plays for Dancers, Plays and Controversies, p. 331.
[87]W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 284.
[88]Shimanouchi, p. 11.
[89]Shimanouchi, p. 12.
[90]Shimanouchi, p. 13.

realized in front of the audience, but is poetically recalled and discussed by the characters and chorus.[91] And, at the climax of the play, "... instead of the disordered passion of nature there is a dance, a series of positions and movements which may represent a battle, or a marriage, or the pain of a ghost in the Buddhist purgatory."[92] In the light of Yeats' earlier insistence on the pre-eminence of the art of the poet in the theatre over that of the actor or scenic designer, his choice of an acting company because they were comparatively immobile so that the words of the play received the maximum attention, and in the light of his condemnation of the setting of verse to music with the resultant distortion of the words; it is rather surprising to find him embracing an art which is climaxed not by the lyric expression of passion which he advocated but by a stylized dance, and in which the words are not only subservient to movement but are also distorted by being sung. This distortion apparently does not necessarily occur in the Japanese, where the natural rhythm of the language permits of being set to music naturally.[93] However, in English the same felicity could not be expected. Bowers points out that the language of Noh is not only exaggeratedly polite, but is also obscure and archaic.[94] Clearly the graceful and meaningful gestures of the actors would distract the attention of the audience from the words which were difficult to follow. In Yeats' adaptations of the medium the same detraction from the verse would result, and, although his language is neither obscure nor archaic, his symbolism is frequently sufficiently difficult to necessitate

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[91] Bowers, p. 17.

[92] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 285.

[93] Shimanouchi, p. 13.

[94] Bowers, pp. 19-20.

complete concentration on the words on the part of the audience in order for his meaning to be apprehended. Why then did Yeats reverse his position with regard to the singing of verse and the role of movement in a dramatic presentation?

In the first instance the change is less a reversal than a shift in emphasis. In the early days of the Abbey he had expressed the desire to hear verse spoken "with a musical emphasis" in the half-chant with which he believed men spoke poetry in the old days.[95] He had experimented with the speaking of verse to the accompaniment of a single simple instrument, the Psaltery. The music in this case took second place to the words. But, W.J. Turner suggests, "This subservience was in Yeats's mind the necessary preliminary to a perfect and equal marriage."[96] In the Noh plays he found, as he thought, the method by which the two could be wedded. In 1916 he continued to object to the arrangement in which the singer must compete with an orchestra so that he sings too loudly and loses in articulation by "... discovering some new musical sort of roar or scream."[97] He suggests instead that "... the voice must be freed from this competition and find itself among little instruments, only heard at their best perhaps when we are close about them."[98] The traditional instruments of the Noh are a flute, called a fuē, and three drums, the ôtsuzumi, the kotsuzumi and the taiko.[99] The

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[95] See above, p. 19.

[96] W.J. Turner, "Yeats and Song-Writing," New Statesman and Nation, XVII (April 22, 1939), 606.

[97] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 276.

[98] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 276.

[99] Shimanouchi, p. 14.

drummers keep time and help create dramatic tensions; the flute is used only at stated intervals - at the beginning to indicate the nature of the play and to quiet the audience and put them in a receptive mood, with the drummers at the climax to carry the audience to the heights of dramatic ecstacy, and at the end.[100] Although Yeats did not employ the musical instruments in quite this way, he adapted their function to suit his purposes. The drum taps could effectively underline the rhythm of the verse, when spoken or sung. Yeats' actors did not sing the verse as frequently as their Japanese counterparts, but songs were incorporated in those of his plays which were based on the Noh. The flute and the zither, the two other instruments which he employed, produce a delicate sound which would heighten the effect of the verse without competing with it. Certainly the Japanese convention of using music at the climax in order to carry the audience to the height of dramatic ecstasy is not incompatible with Yeats' dramatic theory.

The solution to the second question, that of Yeats' reversal of opinion in the matter of incorporating the movement of the dance into the plays, where it would compete with the words, is less obvious perhaps. The answer lies in his conception of the anima mundi. His earlier pronouncements against gesture were directed against those realistic motions which detracted from the words and anchored the character in the anima hominis. However, as early as 1900 he had written:

> The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it

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[100] Shimanouchi, p. 14.

holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols.[101]

That "state of trance" which he later described as the time at which the "anti-self" or creative self could function, is related to the anima mundi. On the stage, the rhythm of the dancer's movements would presumably have the same effect of lulling the consciousness and permitting union with the world soul. The rhythmic movement of the dance would have precisely the opposite effect to that of naturalistic gesture.

The Japanese dancer, Mr. Ito, whom Yeats and Ezra Pound found living in London, was able to recede from reality in the practice of his art. Yeats described the effect:

"... he was able, as he rose from the floor, where he had been sitting crossed-legged, or as he threw out an arm, to recede from us into some more powerful life. Because that separation was achieved by human means alone, he receded, but to inhabit as it were the deeps of the mind.[102]

Yeats' major concern at this time was the preservation of poetic distance, which as we have seen, was fundamental to his theory of tragedy. The conventions of the Japanese Noh drama, the masks, the absence of scenery and props, the chorus, the music and the dance all help to remove the drama from life. As Una Ellis-Fermor points out, Yeats' adoption of this form is a logical development of "... his early desire for remoteness in treatment of poetic drama, which extends into a highly interesting theory of the functions of certain plays, like the Nō plays of Japan, where dancers, screens and masks are the medium of production."[103] In justifying his use of the Noh form,

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[101] W.B. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," Ideas of Good and Evil, Essays, pp. 195-196

[102] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 277.

[103] Ellis-Fermor, p. 85.

Yeats reiterated the necessity of maintaining poetic distance:

> All imaginative art remains at a distance and this distance once chosen must be firmly held against a pushing world. Verse, ritual, music, and dance in association with action require that gesture, costume, facial expression, stage arrangement must help in keeping the door.[104]

But although poetic distance must be maintained, physical distance is a detriment:

> ... the arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation. As a deep of the mind can only be approached through what is most human, most delicate, we should distrust bodily distance, mechanism, and loud noise.[105]

And, he wrote, "... the measure of all arts' greatness can be but in their intimacy."[106] But this is impossible to attain in the public theatre where:

> The stage-opening, the powerful light and shade, the number of feet between myself and the players have destroyed intimacy. I have found myself thinking of players who needed perhaps but to unroll a mat in some Eastern garden.[107]

Whereas the conventions of Noh provided the poetic distance which he required, the simple production before a small audience provided intimacy. As Bentley points out:

> The big modern theatre begins by separating audience from actor by the proscenium arch and then proceeds to try to cancel the distance thus established with fourth-wall illusionism, Yeats's procedure is clean contrary. He insists on a very small auditorium - "a friend's drawing room" - with no stage at all let alone a proscenium arch. This gives him intimacy, which is needed if we are to hear his delicate pianissimo. Aesthetic distance, in the absence of physical distance, has to be established by stylization of décor, costume, gesture, movement, speech, and finally, the human face. His technique expresses his intention. Every item in this stylization helps Yeats to ignore psychology (or character) and to limit himself to symbols of "the soul life," the inner "deeps." An intention that might seem too subjective and insubstantial for the stage is thus given objective form and substance.[108]

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[104] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," pp. 277-278

[105] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 278.

[106] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 276.

[107] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 275.

[108] Bentley, p. 304.

Yeats' desire to ignore psychology or character is of course a fundamental of his dramatic theory. Within the Noh form he could legitimately ignore character, as his Japanese models had done, and for which Yeats praised them:

> In neglecting character which seems to us essential in drama, as do their artists in neglecting relief and depth, whether in their paintings or in arranging flowers in a vase in a thin row, they have made possible a hundred lovely intricacies.[109]

Yeats turned to the Noh drama because it was aristocratic and lyric, and bedause Zen practice conformed to Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist theory. The similarities between Japanese legendary material and Irish myth attracted him. The individual conventions, where they agreed with his own ideas, provided him with a working system and a precedent; when they did not suit his purpose he ignored them. The masks and the stylized movements appealed to Yeats particularly because they contributed to the absence of character of the dramatis personae. Collectively, the conventions resulted in a lack of realism, and established the poetic distance which was so important to his dramatic theory and practice. He wrote of the Noh: "It is a child's game become the most noble poetry, and there is no observation of life, because the poet would set before us all those things which we feel and imagine in silence."[110] In other words the poet unlocks the door to the anima mundi. Surely the adoption of the Noh form represents a logical extension of Yeats' dramatic ideals.

The Noh drama appealed to Yeats because it coincided with those principles which he had evolved out of his early interests and experience, and which were modified by the influence of contemporary trends and individuals.

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[109] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 290.

[110] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 286.

Gordon Craig is one of those whose influence on Yeats' theatrical ideas must not be ignored. Yeats was influenced by Craig's theories, the more so because they so closely agreed with his own. Craig was more interested in the actual considerations of production in the theatre than was Yeats, whose theatrical theories grew out of his dramatic ideals which they were intended to support. As the more theatrically minded of the two, Craig made suggestions which supported Yeats' less well-defined ideas about production.[111]

Yeats, like so many others, learned from Craig, and successfully put some of his ideas into practice, an achievement which Craig himself was rarely able to accomplish. "His own productions were few and never completely successful. His romantic nocturnal sketches were basically impractical as scenic designs. Even the manifestoes were contradictory and often illogical."[112] Yeats, the poet, in the Plays for Dancers, with the help of the Noh model realized many of the ideas which Craig, the designer and director, was never able to execute.

Craig and Yeats shared an aversion to theatrical naturalism. Craig wrote in 1907:

> The necessary action at a certain moment may be said to be the natural action for that moment; and if that is what is meant by "natural", well and good. In so far as it is right it is natural, but we must not get into our heads that every haphazard natural action is right. In fact, there is hardly any action that is right, there is hardly any which is natural.[113]

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[111] St. John Ervine - Some Impressions of My Elders (New York, 1922), p. 283 - was rather less than enthusiastic about Craig's influence on Yeats' ideas regarding staging. Yeats, he wrote, "... had borrowed some foolish notions from Mr. Gordon Craig about lighting and scenery and dehumanized actors. He had a model of the Abbey Theatre in his rooms and was fond of experimenting with it."

[112] Helen Krich Chinoy, "The Emergence of the Director," Directing The Play, ed. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (Indianapolis, New York, 1953) p.44.

[113] Edward Gordon Craig, On the Art of the Theatre, (London, 1912), pp. 35-36.

But where Yeats had placed the words of the playwright above other arts of the theatre, subordinating setting and lighting to speech,[114] Craig advocated a composite art in which all the elements carried equal weight.[115] Where Yeats had placed the poet at the head of the hierarchy of artists in the theatre, Craig placed the stage director: "Only an 'artist of the theatre' could master 'actions, words, lines, color and rhythm.' By his mastery this artist 'would restore the art of the theatre to its home by means of his own creative genius.'"[116] "In Craig's manifesto the director became the alchemist of theatre."[116] Although Yeats never arrived at the position of placing the art of the director above that of the playwright, he did come to the ideal of the theatre as a composite art when he embraced the Noh form.

Craig's position was diametrically opposed to that of Yeats on another point. He said: "The theatre was for the people, and always for the people. The poets would make theatre for the select dilettante."[117] Yeats, with his desire for a small aristocratic audience was a case in point; although he might once have agreed that the theatre was for the people, his idealized view of "the people" had been severely jolted.

Craig's plans for the reform of the theatre were summarized in The Theatre Advancing. Under the heading "Rearrangements" he compared contemporary theatrical conditions to those by which he thought they should be replaced.[118]

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[114] See above, p. 23.

[115] Chinoy, p. 43.

[116] Chinoy, p. 43.

[117] Quoted by Chinoy, p. 43.

[118] Edward Gordon Craig, The Theatre Advancing (London, 1921), pp. 204-205.

He did not feel that any change need be made in the work of the poet, but thought that the actor must not attempt to deliver lines colloquially, or even naturally, as contemporary performers did, but should develop an unnatural mode of delivery. Yeats too insisted on an unnaturalistic way of speaking verse in the theatre.

Craig wanted to see scenery which imitated nature in paint and canvas replaced by non-natural scenery, which would be timeless and of no locality. Yeats' wish for unrealistic, decorative scenery is the same as Craig's. Craig did design settings for some of Yeats' plays, including The Hour-Glass, for which he also designed the costumes, and The Player Queen. Of their collaboration Morris comments:

> Together they developed a scheme in which the decoration, although suggestive and evocative of the mood of the drama, was completely subordinated to the action and the spoken line, functioning only as a background to them, and thus never distracting the audience from concentration upon the play itself.[119]

From this one gathers that, in the production of his own plays at least, Yeats' influence on Craig was the stronger. Craig's designs for the scenery of The Player Queen were in strict accord with his own theory and with that of Yeats. Yeats expressed his satisfaction in a note to the play: My dramatis personae have no nationality because Mr. Craig's screens, where every line must suggest some mathematical proportion, where all is fantastic, incredible and luminous, have no nationality."[120] Those of Yeats' plays which were based on the Noh form were performed on a bare stage, with no actual sets present. The scenes are described by the chorus, in Noh tradition.

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[119] Lloyd R. Morris, The Celtic Dawn, pp. 98-99. Sir William Rothenstein - in Scattering Branches, p. 43 - provides a side-light on this collaboration: "From Craig's dramatic sense he learned much, though he remarked, with some wry amusement, that Craig's seemingly simple screens proved more costly than the professional scene-painter's work."

[120] W.B. Yeats, Plays in Prose and Verse (London, 1922), p. 429.

Craig further required that flesh and blood actors should be disguised beyond recognition to resemble the marionette. Although Craig's influence was primarily felt in the area of scenic design, much of his writing was devoted to the marionette, which he felt should entirely replace the actor in the Ideal Theatre. Because his ideas on this subject so closely approximate those of Yeats, they require more detailed examination.

The puppet and the marionette are preferable to live actors because their faces are not distorted by emotion.[121] But he envisions something more than a mere puppet, a creation which he calls the "ueber-marionette."[122]

> The ueber-marionette will not compete with life - rather it will go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in a trance - it will aim to clothe itself with a death-like beauty while exhaling a living spirit.[123]

This concept is close to Yeats' ideal of the masked, characterless figure whose soul can unite with the anima mundi. And, like Yeats, Craig turned to the East for his model:

> In Asia, too, the forgotten masters of the temples and all that those temples contained have permeated every thought, every mark, in their work with this sense of calm motion resembling death - glorifying and greeting it.[124]

Yeats noted too that in poetical painting and sculpture the face seems the nobler for lacking "vitality". He speculates that, "It is even possible that being is only possessed completely by the dead, and that it is some knowledge of this that makes us gaze with so much emotion upon the face of the Sphinx

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[121] Craig, On The Art of The Theatre, pp. 82-83.
[122] Craig, On The Art of The Theatre, p. 81.
[123] Craig, On The Art of The Theatre, pp. 84-85.
[124] Craig, On The Art of The Theatre, p. 86.

or of Buddha."[125]

In 1908, in an essay entitled "Gentlemen, The Marionnette!", Craig elaborated somewhat on the merits of the marionette. He wrote, "There is only one actor - nay, one man - who has the soul of the dramatic poet, and who has ever served as true and loyal interpreter of the poet. This is the Marionnette."[126] The marionnette has two supreme virtues - obedience and silence,[127] and it "... is more than natural; it has style - that is to say, Unity of Expression; therefore the Marionnette Theatre is the true theatre."[128] There is a striking parallel to Craig's ideal of the marionette theatre in Yeats' suggestion that plays be written for masks rather than for actors: "The face of the speaker should be as much a work of art as the lines that he speaks or the costume that he wears, that all may be as arfificial as possible. Perhaps in the end one would write plays for certain masks.[129]

Since the time of Craig's "true theatre" had not yet arrived, the cast of the play would have to be composed of men and women. As a step in the right direction, Craig suggested that their movements, which were now half-natural and half-artificial, be conventionalized, according to some system. Craig stressed the importance and beauty of movement, but the movement to which he referred was not that of the natural human being.[130] In the

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[125]W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 280.

[126]Craig, The Theatre Advancing, p. 107. Craig spelled "Marion(n)ette both ways.

[127]Craig, The Theatre Advancing, p. 110.

[128]Craig, The Theatre Advancing, p. 112.

[129]W.B. Yeats, Preface, Four Plays for Dancers, Plays and Controversies, p.332.

[130]Craig, On the Art of The Theatre, p. 47.

dance plays, Yeats' actors were dehumanized, and their movements, regulated by drum taps, were highly stylized.

Craig complained that theatrical lighting invariably failed in the attempt to simulate the light of Nature. It should be replaced by frankly non-natural lighting, disposed to illuminate the scene and the actors. Yeats also wished to see reforms in theatrical lighting, but he was not satisfied with Craig's solutions to the problem:

> Mr. Gordon Craig has done wonderful things with the lighting, but he is not greatly interested in the actor, and his streams of coloured direct light, beautiful as they are, will always seem, apart from certain exceptional moments, a new externality. We should rather desire, for all but a few exceptional moments, an even, shadow-less light, like that of noon, and it may be that a light reflected out of mirrors will give us what we need.[131]

In the dance plays, Yeats experimented with unorthodox methods of stage illumination. In the stage directions for At The Hawk's Well Yeats wrote that he had attempted to use lanterns upon posts (the Japanese method of lighting Noh productions), "... but they did not give enough light, and we found it better to play by the light of a large chandelier. Indeed, I think so far as my present experience goes, that the most effective lighting is the lighting we are most accustomed to in our rooms."[132]

Craig advocated the wearing of masks instead of painting and otherwise disguising the face of the actor. Under the current arrangement, he thought, the facial expression was constantly attempting to penetrate the make-up, and "Human facial expression is for the most part worthless ...."[133] If masks were used, however, the expression would be dependent on the masks and on the conventional movements, which are in turn dependent on the skill of the actor. The masks, "... carry conviction when he who creates them

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[131] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 135.

[132] At The Hawk's Well, p. 207, s.d.

[133] Craig, The Theatre Advancing, p. 120.

is an artist, for the artist limits the statements which he places upon these masks. The face of the actor carries no such conviction; it is overfull of fleeting expression - frail, restless, disturbed and disturbing."[134] This was written in 1909. In 1916 Yeats wrote that in the theatre the figures gain in dignity and power from the immobility of the mask.[135] Yeats' ideas about the mask have already been discussed, both in connection with Craig's theory of the "ueber-marionette" and with Japanese Noh drama. There is no doubt of his obligation to Craig. The similarity between his views and those of the designer is especially evident in the following reminiscence of St. John Ervine:

> There was some inconsistency in his talk about acting: at one moment he was anxious for anonymous, masked players, "freed" from personality, and at the next moment, he was demanding that players should act with their entire bodies, not merely with their voices and faces."[136]

There is of course no contradiction. The masked figures of the Dance Plays did not have to concentrate on portraying character and were therefore free to explore the realm of pure emotion. Nothing is lost "... by stilling the movement of the features, for deep feeling is expressed by a movement of the whole body."[137]

At The Hawk's Well, the first of the Four Plays for Dancers, was the first of Yeats' plays to be modelled on the Noh. In it, Yeats returned to the mythical hero, Cuchulain, his purpose being to "explore the 'heart-mysteries' of the Cuchulain myth, to grasp at the abiding

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[134] Craig, The Theatre Advancing, p. 121.

[135] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 280.

[136] St. John Ervine, Some Impressions of My Elders (op. cit. p. 114, n.111), p. 283.

[137] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 280.

significance of this master figure."[138] Unlike the earlier plays dealing with this figure, the story of At The Hawk's Well has no single source in Cuchulain legends - it is purely symbolic.[139] Yeats' interest in Cuchulain was, as we have seen, really an interest in the nature of the hero,[140] and in this play about heroic nature the poet places no stress on the traditional attributes attached to Cuchulain, nor does he give him any personal distinctiveness.[141] The protagonist is a representative of the hero-type. There is therefore, some relation between this play and the second category of Japanese Noh plays, the shura-mono which revolves around the heroism of warriors. Ure notes the appropriateness with which Yeats cast this play in the form of the heroic warrior art.[142]

The conflict of the play is another aspect of the same opposition with which Yeats was concerned in his other plays. In On Baile's Strand and in Deirdre the conflict is between the representatives of the world of institutions and those of the world of "imaginative reality." In At The Hawk's Well, the values themselves, symbolized by the figures on the stage, are set into conflict.

If the play is considered as a study of heroism, then Cuchulain is seen to be the symbol of the hero, who, like the poet and the mystic in Yeats' view, stands above the rest of the world because of his ability to pass beyond it into another realm. The Old Man who desires yet fears, is a

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[138] Ure, p. 19.
[139] Ellmann, p. 218.
[140] See above, p. 67.
[141] Ure, p. 20.
[142] Ure, p. 20.

foil for Cuchulain whose heroic temper is seen in contrast to the frightened old man whose insensitivity to heroic values is symbolized by his sleeping during the Hawk's dance.[143] The hero searches for Unity of Being which is symbolized by the water in the well, but is doomed to the tragedy of frustration by the hawk which "... is here meant to represent what Yeats always regarded as the enemy of the heroic values, abstract thought, which destroys the Unity of Being, as in the poem about the yellow-eyed hawk of the mind in The Wild Swans at Coole."[144] If Yeats intended the play as an exaltation of heroic values, the question arises as to why Cuchulain could not drink at the Well,[145] and thus achieve immortality, Unity of Being, the anima mundi. Perhaps the answer lies in the consideration of the entire cycle of Cuchulain plays, of which At The Hawk's Well is the first.[146] Cuchulain leaves the Well in order to do battle with Aoife, thus setting in motion the chain of events which lead eventually to the killing of his own son and subsequent battle with the waves, in On Baile's Strand. If Yeats had the earlier play in mind, as references within At The Hawk's Well indicate,[147] he might well have intended the hero to be frustrated in his attempt to attain immortality by symbolically drinking at the Well, in order that he might achieve the anima mundi through the more difficult course of exalted emotion. This is of course pure speculation, and ignores the late Death of

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[143] Ure, p. 20.

[144] Ure, p. 20.

[145] This question is raised by Strabel, p. 198.

[146] W.B. Yeats, Preface, Plays in Prose and Verse, p. vi.

[147] There is a forewarning of Cuchulain's killing of his own son in the Old Man's description of the Hawk's curse (At The Hawk's Well, p. 215), and of course of Cuchulain's battle with Aoife (p. 218)

Cuchulain, in which the hero's death is far from exalted. There is an alternate possibility of course, that Yeats was disillusioned in his view of the nature of the hero, but there is little reason to believe that this was so. On the other hand, if Unity of Being is not equated with the anima mundi, the fact that Cuchulain does not achieve one does not preclude his attainment of the other. In 1919 he wrote, "... what is passion but the straining of man's being against some obstacle that obstructs its unity?"[148] If passion is the requirement for admission to the world soul, then Cuchulain reaches that level by virtue of the fact that he did not drink of the Well. This idea unites Yeats' early theory of the anima mundi with the search for unity of being which was becoming dominant in his thought.

The symbols of At The Hawk's Well are meaningful on a second level.[149] Ellmann suggests that the Old Man, who had been waiting for fifty years symbolizes Yeats' own intellect (the poet was fifty at the time he wrote the play) and that Cuchulain symbolizes his instinctive self. That is,

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[148] W.B. Yeats, "A People's Theatre," Plays and Controversies, p. 209.

[149] Francis J. Thompson - "Ezra in Dublin," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXI (1951-52), 67. - interprets the symbolism on still another level. The play, which was written on the eve of the Easter Rebellion (April, 23-30, 1916) might possibly be interpreted as representing the conflict between the various factions in the Irish political upheaval. The Old Man would symbolize the Fenian (Yeats) who had given up hope of freedom for Ireland. Cuchulain is the new generation who form the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and the Guardian of the Well represents the Unionists, the forces opposed to Home Rule. Aoife, Thompson suggests, is Cathleen ni Houlihan. If one accepts this, one must accept the notion that the spirit of Ireland, for which Cathleen ni Houlihan was a symbol which Yeats had adopted and used in the past, was on the side of the Unionists, an idea which is most unlikely to have come from even a disillusioned Yeats.

the dramatis personae represent directly those antithetical aspects of Yeats' character on which he based the philosophical idea of self and anti-self. But unlike the earlier representatives of the values, Conchubar and Cuchulain, the Old Man and the young warrior are not in opposition but share a common goal - wisdom, as symbolized by the Well of Immortality. They are prevented from its attainment by "logic" and "abstract thought", symbolized by the Hawk.[150] The dry tree symbolizes the ruined land; the dry well, individual sterility; and the stone, the danger of intellectual narrowness.[151] On this level, the question of why Cuchulain could not drink of the waters is perhaps more easily answered. Yeats had been searching for an answer to the problem of the duality of his own nature, and of the seemingly disordered nature of the universe itself, for many years. He had been able to discover no meaningful pattern which would explain history, nor any means of reconciling the warring halves of his own nature. He thought that he was incapable of attaining true wisdom either intellectually or intuitively, for the demon abstract thought always interfered. The following year, the revelations which comprise A Vision were to put an end to his despair, but at the time of the writing of At The Hawk's Well, he saw no hope of achieving unity within himself, nor did he feel that he would ever attain true wisdom. Thus Cuchulain, Yeats' intuitive self, and the Old Man, his intellect, are both prevented from drinking the water of wisdom, or of attaining Unity of Being.

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[150] See Ellmann, p. 218.

[151] Strabel, p. 201.

The play was to be performed before a small audience of forty or fifty people, in a drawing room.[152] The stage is "any bare space before a wall."[153] Against the wall is a "patterned screen", reminiscent of the "mirror-board" of the Japanese stage. The lighting is supplied by a large chandelier.[154]

Yeats utilized the Noh convention of the chorus to provide an ominous setting in which his symbolist drama could most effectively take place. Their song, to the folding and the unfolding of the cloth, conjures up a vision of the dry well, choked with withered leaves blown always by the sea-wind.

> First Musician [speaking]. Night falls;
> The mountain-side grows dark;
> The withered leaves of the hazel
> Half choke the dry bed of the well;
> The guardian of the well is sitting
> Upon the old grey stone at its side,
> Worn out from gathering up the leaves.
> Her heavy eyes
> Know nothing, or but look upon stone.
> The wind that blows out of the sea
> Turns over the heaped-up leaves at her side;
> They rustle and diminish.[155]

The stupor of the Guardian of the Well adds to the mood of apprehension evoked by the chorus and intensified by the Second Musician's simple statement, "I am afraid of this place."[156] It was customary for Japanese playwrights to dwell on the descriptions of holy places: "These Japanese poets,

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[152] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 273.

[153] At The Hawk's Well, p. 207, s.d.

[154] At The Hawk's Well, p. 207, s.d.

[155] At The Hawk's Well, p. 209.

[156] At The Hawk's Well, p. 209.

too, feel for tomb and wood the emotion, the sense of awe that our Gaelic-speaking country people will sometimes show when you speak to them of Castle Hackett or of some Holy Well ...."[157] and Yeats took full advantage of this precedent.

The dramatis personae wear masks, or have their faces made up to resemble masks. (One suspects that this latter was an economy measure). The mask of Cuchulain, designed by Dulac, is "noble, half-Greek, half-Asiatic" which will appear "perhaps like an image seen in reverie by some Orphic worshipper."[158] The characters, with the exception of the Guardian of the Well, enter through the audience, and are described by the musicians, who perform the functions of the chorus in addition to their own, as they appear. The musicians sometimes sing and sometimes speak their lines, singing those passages which set the mood or intensify the lyric emotion but speaking those descriptions which are necessary to the understanding of the action. There is no scenery and no props, the actors simulate those actions which would otherwise require physical properties, and the chorus explains their actions. While the old man crouches and moves his hands as if making a fire, the First Musician speaks:

> He has made a little heap of leaves;
> He lays the dry sticks on the leaves;
> And shivering with cold, he has taken up
> The fire-stick and socket from its hole.
> He whirls it round to get a flame;
> And now the dry sticks take the fire,
> And now the fire leaps up and shines
> Upon the hazels and the empty well.[159]

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[157] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 287.

[158] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 273.

[159] At The Hawk's Well, p, 210.

The figures move in time to drum taps so that they resemble marionettes.[160] At other times the musicians "whose seeming sunburned faces will ... suggest that they have wandered from village to village in some country of our dreams ...."[161] accompany the actors with the zither or the gong.

Yeats adopted all of these conventions from the Noh because by means of them, he wrote, "I hope to have attained the distance from life which can make credible strange events, elaborate words."[162]

The climax of the play occurs when the Guardian of the Well prevents Cuchulain from drinking of the water by enchanting him through her movements in a dance. This is in keeping with the Japanese tradition in which the mai always takes place at the moment of climax. The lyric intensity is increased by the song of the First Musician. "Instead of the players working themselves into a violence of passion indecorous in our sitting room, the music, the beauty of form and voice all come to climax in pantomimic dance."[163]

The sum of these factors is the communication of an emotional immediacy, a feeling that is substantial and gripping. The play conveys a sense of intense life; only the object is remote.[164] "Irrealities are symbols that evoke a reality."[164]

The Only Jealousy of Emer, written in 1917 and 1918, was published in 1919. Ten years later it was rewritten as Fighting the Waves, in

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[160] W.B. Yeats, At The Hawk's Well, p. 210, s.d.
[161] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 273.
[162] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 273.
[163] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 274.
[164] Peacock, p. 123.

prose. The second of the Plays for Dancers, The Only Jealousy of Emer is the fourth in the cycle of plays about Cuchulain, and deals with the events which follow his insane battle with the sea. The plot is derived from a story called The Wasting Away of Cuchulain, but the original tale has been adapted and altered beyond recognition, retaining only the incident of Emer's attempt to kill Fand.[165]

Like At The Hawk's Well, The Only Jealousy of Emer is cast in the Noh form, with all the simplicity of staging and with all the conventional accoutrements including masks, chorus of musicians, and dance. Thompson suggests that the play is related to the third category of Japanese Noh plays, the onna-mono in which the leading character is a woman.[166] On the formal Noh programme, this play follows the hero play, as peace follows war, and since At The Hawk's Well fits the hero-play category, it may be assumed that Yeats intended to create a full series of Noh plays, although not in all probability for performance on the same evening.[167]

On the primary level there are two conflicts in the play.[168] The major conflict is between the human love offered by Emer and the unearthly love of Fand. This conflict is the same as that of The Land of Heart's Desire and of The Shadowy Waters, but where the other world proved the stronger attraction in the early plays, earthly love triumphs in Emer's

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[165] Ure, p. 21.

[166] Thompson (op.cit., p.123, n.149), p.70.

[167] Bowers, p.17, points out that in Japan a full programme is no longer presented in one evening bedause of the great length of such a performance.

[168] See Ure, pp. 21-22.

victory over Fand. On another level, Fand is seen as the old enemy abstraction, the Guardian of the Well in the first of the Plays for Dancers:

> Ghost of Cuchulain. I know you now, for long ago
> I met you on a cloudy hill
> Beside old thorn-trees and a well.
> A woman danced and a hawk flew,
> I held out arms and hands; but you,
> That now seem friendly, fled away,
> Half woman and half bird of prey.[169]

Fand attempts to destroy love by destroying the memory of love, but is defeated.

The second conflict is between Emer and Eithne Inguba, in which Emer is defeated by her sacrifice. Thompson points out that this is a variation of the Alcestis legend,[170] and Ure suggests that Emer's tragedy, as stated by the musicians:

> Although the door be shut
> And all seem well enough,
> Although wide world hold not
> A man but will give you his love
> The moment he has looked at you,
> He that has loved the best
> May turn from a statue
> His too human breast,[171]

is a veiled reference to the tragedy which he saw as a result of the abstract thought which permeated Maud Gonne's life.[172]

Emer is the central character of the play; she is a clearly noble personage who becomes her own opposite by renouncing her desire.[173] The idea of the desirability of becoming one with one's opposite is an out-

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[169] The Only Jealousy of Emer, p. 292.
[170] Thompson, p. 69.
[171] The Only Jealousy of Emer, p. 295.
[172] Ure, p. 22.
[173] Strabel, p. 209.

growth of the ideas of "self" and "anti-self" which Yeats had formulated years earlier in an attempt to explain the duality of his own nature. In 1917 these ideas and that of the anima mundi were further developed in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, and were expanded in greater detail within the larger framework of the System of A Vision.[174] Basic is the desire of the self to become its opposite, the anti-self.

One might expect that Emer, through her sacrifice, would become part of the anima mundi. Her sacrifice is a true act of heroism, as Yeats understood heroic actions:

> The heroic act, as it descends through tradition, is an act done because a man is himself, because, being himself, he can ask nothing of other men but room amid remembered tragedies; a sacrifice of himself to himself, almost, so little may he bargain, of the moment to the moment.[175]

It is to be expected also that Emer's renunciation of Cuchulain's love would be the climax of the play, and that it would be marked by a surge of lyric emotion. Within the Noh form this would be heightened by music, song and dance, as it was in At The Hawk's Well. But the dance in The Only Jealousy of Emer is executed not by Emer but by Fand, at an earlier point in the action, when she dances about Cuchulain tempting him to follow her. The emotional effect is intensified by the rhymed lyric verse of the exchange between the Woman of the Sidhe and the Ghost of Cuchulain:

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[174] For a further discussion of this subject see below pp. 151-152.

[175] W.B. Yeats, Introduction to Fighting The Waves, Wheels and Butterflies (London, 1934), p. 75.

Ghost of Cuchulain. Who is it stands before me there
Shedding such light from limb and hair
As when the moon, complete at last
With every labouring crescent past,
And lonely with extreme delight,
Flings out upon the fifteenth night?

Woman of the Sidhe. Because I long I am not complete.
What pulled your hands about your feet,
Pulled down your head upon your knees,
And hid your face?[176]

From this it may be concluded that either Yeats had abandoned his theory of heightening the moment of climax by a surge of lyric emotion, intensified by the conventions made available by the Noh form, or that the climax occurs when Cuchulain yields to Fand rather than when Emer rescues him by her sacrifice. This is unlikely, for the union of Emer with her antithetical self is undoubtedly the focal point of the play, just as the idea of such a union was uppermost in Yeats' thought at the time. He explained:

... Emer too must renounce desire, but there is another love, that which is like the man-at-arms in the Anglo-Saxon poem, 'doom eager.' Young, we discover an opposite through our love; old, we discover our love through some opposite neither hate nor despair can destroy, because it is another self, a self we have fled in vain.[177]

However, it may be that Yeats, shifting his technique, intended Fand's dance to be the beginning of a long build in emotional tension which culminates in Emer's cry: "I renounce Cuchulain's love for ever."[178] If this was Yeats' intention I feel that he was unsuccessful, because the long discussion between Fand and Cuchulain breaks rather than intensifies the emotional build. In the later version, Fighting the Waves, this fault is remedied by the fact that neither Fand nor Cuchulain utters a word.

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[176] The Only Jealousy of Emer, p. 291.
[177] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 79.
[178] The Only Jealousy of Emer, p. 294.

The play has symbolic meaning on another level as well, at which the three female characters represent three of the phases of the Great Wheel of A Vision.[179] Fand represents phase 15, the phase of complete supernatural beauty which is impossible for humans since it is completely antithetical, subjective and individual. Eithne Inguba and Emer represent phases 14 and 16, the phases of greatest earthly beauty. Since Yeats had not yet fully evolved his system, it may be assumed that although this third level is present, it is neither complete nor necessary to the understanding of the play. Strabel points out that Cuchulain is not associated with any phase.[180] Emer and Eithne Inguba are peffectly acceptable on the primary level, and the Woman of the Sidhe is equally so, either on that level or as the symbol of abstract thought.[181]

The action of The Only Jealousy of Emer is unified in the manifestations of the love of three women for Cuchulain.[182] The two earthly

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[179] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 433.

[180] Strabel, p. 222.

[181] Strabel, p. 222, disagrees with this last. She writes "I definitely feel the symbolism of Fand and the Figure too difficult to be desirable and without advantages to balance the disadvantages of obscurity."

[182] In a Japanese Noh play there is a similar situation, but one which is resolved differently. According to legend, Prince Genji, while still a boy, was married to Princess Aoi, but did not live with her. At 16 he fell in love with Princess Rokujô but later deserted her for Lady Yûgao. One night the apparition of a madly jealous woman, the phantom of Rokujô, appeared at the bedside of Genji and Yûgao. The next morning Yûgao was found dead. Genji became reconciled with Aoi, but continued to visit Rokujô. An argument occurred between the two ladies, and soon after Aoi fell ill. The play Aoi-No-Uye, opens with Aoi languishing in her sick bed, suffering under the spell of an evil spirit. A sorceress is summoned who conjures up the phantom of the jealous Rokujô, who wrathfully strikes the sleeping Aoi. Aoi's condition becomes worse, and the Little Saint of Yokawa is brought to attempt to cure the princess through the power of divine prayer. Rokujô returns, transformed into a demon, and the action reaches a climax in a struggle between the Saint and the demon for control over Aoi. The demon is finally subdued and as the play ends, Rokujô undergoes a transformation and attains Buddhahood. [Shimanouchi, pp. 47-48.]

women who join forces in order to bring him back to life are drawn with more homeliness of detail than any of Yeats' other heroic figures. The following passage is more characteristic of ordinary mortals than of the exalted heroes of Irish myth:

> Eithne Inguba. He loves me best,
> Being his newest love, but in the end
> Will love the woman best who loved him first
> And loved him through the years when love seemed lost.
>
> Emer. I have that hope, the hope that some day somewhere
> We'll sit together at the hearth again.
>
> Eithne Inguba. Women like me, the violent hour passed over,
> Are flung into some corner like old nut-shells.[183]

In contrast Fand, the Woman of the Sidhe, appears even more exalted and supernatural. She is dressed as an idol, her mask and clothes and even her hair suggesting metal. Her movements repeat the suggestion that she is an idol.[184] Within the Noh framework, her appearance is not out of keeping with the rest of the play.

All the characters, with the exception of the musicians, are masked. In this play the masks perform an additional function besides those of providing distance from life and absence of character. Indeed, Yeats suggested that the play was written in order to provide him with a vehicle in which he could experiment with the mask as a theatrical device:

> The mask, apart from its beauty, may suggest new situations at a moment when old ones seem exhausted; The Only Jealousy of Emer was written to find what dramatic effect one could get out of a mask, changed while the player remains upon the stage to suggest a change of personality.[185]

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[183] The Only Jealousy of Emer, p. 285.

[184] The Only Jealousy of Emer, p. 291, s.d.

[185] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 332.

The exchange of masks allows Yeats to show on stage the body of Cuchulain and his ghost at the same time, and to present with great effectiveness the entrance of Bricriu into Cuchulain's body and his subsequent replacement by Cuchulain's soul. The exchange of masks was not unknown in the Japanese Noh drama,[186] and within that form it does not intrude as a discordant note.[187]

In order to effect the exchange of masks however, Yeats was forced to employ a bed or litter which could be blocked from the audience's view by a curtain, so that he broke with the Noh tradition to the extent of using a physical property. Yeats observed the conventions of the Noh only to the extent that they aided in the effectiveness of the art which he wished to create, not in slavish imitation of tradition.

In Fighting the Waves, the later prose version of The Only Jealousy of Emer he asked for a backcloth painted with waves, in addition to the curtained bed.[188] Greater emphasis was placed on the dancing and less on the dialogue. Yeats said that, "Fighting the Waves is in itself nothing, a mere occasion for sculptor and dancer, for the exciting dramatic music of George Antheil."[189] The original play in Noh form had been performed on the

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[186] In Aoi-No-Uye, Rokujô wears four different masks indicating the change of a beautiful woman into a demon. See Shimanouchi, plates VI, VII, VIII, and IX.

[187] Eugene O'Neill in The Great God Brown had his characters change their masks frequently, but the result, while effective, is confusing, and the play does not have the unity of effect which the Noh form gives to The Only Jealousy of Emer.

[188] Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," p. 107.

[189] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 70.

public stage in Holland, the actors wearing the "powerful masks" designed by Hildo van Krop. Yeats was so impressed by these masks, which enclosed the entire head and enlarged it quite out of proportion to the body, that he rewrote the play in order to make it suitable for performance on the public stage, and "to free it from distraction and confusion."[190]

In the more simple prose version, the conversation between Fand and Cuchulain which impeded the ascent to the climax in The Only Jealousy of Emer is removed. Furthermore, as Strabel points out, the entire responsibility for the denouement belongs to Emer, because of the elimination of Cuchulain's words which removes the personal reason for the hero's hesitation before following Fand.[191]

The opening and closing songs of the musicians are retained unchanged, because "... they suggest strange patterns to the ear without obtruding upon it their difficult irrelevant words."[192] An objection has been raised to these songs as they appeared in The Only Jealousy of Emer on the grounds that, although they are exquisite, they add little to the dramatic mood and are only justified by the Noh form.[193] They are not out of place however in Fighting the Waves, in which the visual and musical effects are frankly as important as the words and action.

Two more dances were added to Fighting the Waves, one as a

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[190] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 69.
[191] Strabel, p. 216.
[192] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 69.
[193] Strabel, p. 215.

prologue which recalls the events of On Baile's Strand and which increases the emotional effectiveness of the play by visual means. Yeats described the effect he wished in the stage directions:

> There is a curtain with a wave pattern. A man wearing the Cuchulain mask enters from one side with sword and shield. He dances a dance which represents a man fighting the waves. The waves may be represented by other dancers: in his frenzy he supposes the waves to be his enemies: gradually he sinks down as if overcome, then fixes his eyes with a cataleptic stare upon some imaginary distant object. The stage becomes dark, and when the light returns it is empty.[194]

At the end of the play, after the final song, Fand returns to the stage and

> ... dances a dance which expresses her despair for the loss of Cuchulain. As before there may be other dancers who represent the waves. It is called, in order to balance the first dance, 'Fand mourns among the waves.' It is essentially a dance which symbolizes, like water in the fortune-telling books, bitterness. As she takes her final pose of despair the Curtain falls.[195]

Fighting the Waves is a ballet with dialogue and songs rather than a play. In it Yeats stretched the boundaries of the Noh form considerably. In its revised form, the production of the play required a stage and an augmented orchestra, as well as more trained dancers. "But the play, as rewritten, had passed beyond the range of a drawing room; it was intended for an ordinary stage.... nor could 'forty or fifty readers of poetry' pay its price ...."[196]

Yeats did not stop developing the form of his drama with his discovery of the Japanese Noh; in certain of his later plays he extended some of the principles and ignored others, in an effort to achieve exactly the right form for his expression, and in two plays he returned to the

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[194] Fighting the Waves, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 81, s.d.

[195] Fighting the Waves, pp. 94-95

[196] Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," p. 109.

standard method of presentation of drama as it is usually found in the West.

To return to the plays which were written in the Noh form: the third of the Four Plays for Dancers, The dreaming of the Bones must be considered as the first play in which Yeats effectively combined the ideas of A Vision with Irish mythology, and in which he most effectively mastered the Noh form.

The idea that the dead must pass through a cycle of expiation was expressed in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, and later developed at greater length in the third book of A Vision, "The Soul in Judgement." In a Note to the play Yeats explained the concept which is the basis of The Dreaming of The Bones. The belief that the dead dream back through the more personal thoughts and deeds of their lives is world-wide, Yeats thought. He refers to a Japanese Noh play, in which a spirit suffering the tortures of being consumed by flames is told that the pain will cease if she stops believing in her dream. The lovers in Yeats' play have lost themselves in a self-created winding of the labyrinth of conscience.[197]

According to Yeats' theory, experience in the after-life may be of two kinds. The Shade dreams back events in order of their intensity, and becomes happier as the more painful recollections, which are also the more intense, wear away; the Spiritual Being lives back events in order of their occurrence.[198] Eventually the Shade fades out, but the Spiritual Being does not. Instead it passes on "to other states of existence after it has

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[197] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 454.

[198] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controbersies, p. 454.

attained a spiritual state, of which the surroundings and aptitudes of early life are a correspondence."[199] The "dreaming back" of the play is only a small fraction of the expiation between death and rebirth as laid down in A Vision.[200]

Yeats wrote that, "At certain moments the Spiritual Being, or rather that part of it which Robartes calls 'the Spirit' is said to enter into the Shade, and during those moments it can converse with living men, though but within the narrow limits of its dream."[201] Diarmuid and Dervorgilla are in this state when they encounter the Young Man.

This pair are ideal personages around which to build a play whose theme involves the expiation of a crime. Their crime was not one of passion, Yeats is careful to point out, but one which had political significance. Yeats took the opportunity to re-tell an Irish story which interested him on its own account, and to dramatize his own theory of the after-life, and also to give to these political significance for modern Ireland. The fusion of these elements is complete, and the play presents a unified whole.

The story of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla's crime and the torture of their expiation is recounted by them to a young Irish revolutionary.

Young Girl. Her king and lover
Was overthrown in battle by her husband,
And for her sake and for his own, being blind
And bitter and bitterly in love, he brought
a foreign army from across the sea.

Young Man. You speak of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla
Who brought the Norman in?

Young Girl. Yes, yes, I spoke
Of that most miserable, most accursed pair
Who sold their country into slavery; and yet
They were not wholly miserable and accursed
If somebody of their race at last would say,
'I have forgiven them'.

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[199] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 455.

[200] Strabel, p. 208.

[201] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 457.

Young Man. O, never, never
Shall Diarmuid and Dervorgilla be forgiven.

Young Girl. If some one of their race forgave at last
Lip would be pressed on lip.

Young Man. O, never, never
Shall Diarmuid and Dervorgilla be forgiven.[202]

The expiation which they must endure is reminiscent of that of the lovers in the Japanese play Nishikigi[203] to which The Dreaming of The Bones doubtless owes a great deal.[204]

To the mingled myths - of Irish legend and of A Vision - is added the element of modern politidal nationalism. The Young Man, who had fought for the freedom of Ireland at the Post Office, is a fugitive from the foreign oppressors, whose way had been opened by the pair of lovers seven centuries before. The intense emotion which builds to the climax is that of fanatic Irish patriotism, given definition by the refusal of the Young Man to forgive.[205] In the words of Peacock, "... the passions evoked are those of a whole nation of men and the life of centuries. The dramatic intensity of the climax lies in the perspectives it unfolds."[206]

In intensifying the emotional impact, Yeats, in addition to making use of the conventions of the Noh and the intrinsic dramatic qualities of the story, took the opportunity to deplore the destruction of the old houses which was taking place. The Young Man says,

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[202] The Dreaming of The Bones, p.442.
[203] See above, p. 97.
[204] Strabel, p. 236.
[205] Peacock, p. 124.
[206] Peacock, p. 125.

> Is there no house
> Famous for sanctity or architectural beauty
> In Clare or Kerry, or in all wide Connacht,
> The enemy has not unroofed?[207]

And later:

> So here we're on the summit. I can see
> The Aran Islands, Connemara Hills,
> And Galway in the breaking light; there too
> The enemy has toppled roof and gable,
> And torn the panelling from ancient rooms;
> What generations of old men had known
> Like their own hands, and children wondered at,
> Has boiled a trooper's porridge. That town had lain
> But for the pair that you would have me pardon,
> Amid its gables and its battlements
> Like any old admired Italian town;
> For though we have neither coal, nor iron ore,
> To make us wealthy and corrupt the air,
> Our country, if that crime were uncommitted,
> Had been most beautiful.[208]

There is a mingling of the old myth and the new nationalism, represented by the figures of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla and of the Young Man. The pattern of the two is so skillfully woven that "... the sense of time is not lost but its immediacy sharpened by a continual shifting from the old to the new heroism and back again."[209] The two lovers contribute a sense of immediacy by the evocation of emotion under Yeats' theory of generalized passion.[210] Although they are spirits which are those of figures of Irish legend, they have universality.[211]

The Young Man infuses the play with the emotion of modern patriotism, and increases the strangeness of the spirit world by contrast to his connection with the contemporary world as a revolutionary.[212] The

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[207] The Dreaming of The Bones, p. 439.
[208] The Dreaming of The Bones, p. 443.
[209] Ure, p. 80.
[210] Strabel, p. 204.
[211] Eliot, "The Poetry of W.B. Yeats," p. 451.
[212] See Strabel, p. 205.

effectiveness of this contrast is heightened by the fact that the Young Man, unlike the legendary figures, is unmasked. Yeats' manipulation of the Noh convention increased the dramatic effectiveness of the play by visual means, establishing at the same time a link with reality and a greater aesthetic distance.

In The Dreaming of The Bones, Yeats employed other conventions of the Noh to their greatest advantage. The Musicians' Song for the folding and unfolding of the curtain, sets the scene and establishes a mood of foreboding, in beautiful lyric verse. During the action they describe the changing scene along the way as the three people walk about the stage with very slow figurative steps, two paces to each musical measure,[213] in representation of the journey to the sea. At intervals they intersperse songs which increase the mood of apprehension.

The play is climaxed by a dance, in which the terrible longing of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla and a reenactment of the ritual of their expiation are presented, while their movements and their meaning are described by the young man. Yeats, like the Japanese playwrights, was most concerned that the dance, which is the culmination of the play, be as effective as possible. In order to ensure the perfection of the dance, he suggested that if a suitable actress-dancer could not be found, "Dervorgilla's few lines can be given, if need be, to Dermot,[214] and Dervorgilla's part be taken by a dancer who has the training of a dancer alone; nor need the masked dancer be

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[213] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 441.

[214] Alternative spelling of "Diarmuid".

a woman."[215]

No physical properties are required for the production of this play, as they are for The Only Jealousy of Emer; the musicians function as the chorus does in the Japanese equivalent, describing action and changes of scene when required, as well as indicating changes of mood and passage of time.

Indeed, The Dreaming of The Bones is a much more successful play than The Only Jealousy of Emer, both in the integration and dramatization of the ideas, and in structure, as an adaptation of the Noh form. There is none of the confusion of symbolism that was noted in connection with the earlier play. The theme is explained clearly at the out-set:

> Young Man.
> My Grandam
> Would have it they [the dead] did penance every where;
> Some lived through their old lives again.
>
> Stranger.
> In a dream;
> And some for an old scruple must hang spitted
> Upon the swaying tops of lofty trees;
> Some are consumed in fire, some withered up
> By hail and sleet out of the wintry North,
> And some but live through their old lives again.[216]

The material drawn from A Vision is combined with Irish legend and the spirit of modern political nationalism to form a unified work of dramatic art. The Musicians' songs are an integral part of the play, and are neither irrelevant nor obscure as are those of The Only Jealousy of Emer. In keeping with Noh tradition and Yeats' own theory, the masked figures have no individual character, but attain universality through their power to evoke strong emotion.

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[215] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 454.

[216] The Dreaming of The Bones, pp. 436-437.

There is no confusion as to the nature of the climax which is accompanied by a dance, according to Noh tradition, and which increases the emotional impact. In this play Yeats showed a complete mastery of both his material and the form in which he cast it.

Calvary, the fourth of the Plays for Dancers, was first published in 1921.[217] It too is in the Noh form, and it has been suggested that despite the treatment of the theme it should be classified with the plays of the first Japanese Noh category, in which are included plays which offer praise and prayer to the gods.[218] In the Japanese god-play, the chief performer impersonates a divine personage in an awe-inspiring atmosphere.[219]

The figure of Christ is at the centre of the play; He is surrounded by Lazarus and Judas and the Roman Soldiers for whom He died in vain.[220] The philosophy of A Vision is presented dramatically in Calvary, the theme of which is the limitation of the powers of a God. "It depicts the self-sufficiency of people of subjectivity and the dependence of certain simple folk upon Christ, contrasting Christ's need for the dependency of others with the first, and His aloneness with the second."[221]

The idea of the dead "dreaming-back" events of life, which was the theme of The Dreaming of The Bones, is presented here, but incidentally

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[217] Strabel, p. 223.
[218] Thompson, p. 70.
[219] See above, p. 96.
[220] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 460.
[221] Strabel, p. 224.

as it were. The First Musician describes the scene:

> The road to Calvary, and I beside it
> Upon an ancient stone. Good Friday's come,
> The day whereon Christ dreams His passion through.
> He climbs up hither but as a dreamer climbs.
> The cross that but exists bedause He dreams it
> Shortens His breath and wears away His strength.
> And now He stands amid a mocking crowd,
> Heavily breathing.[222]

Lazarus appears before the dreaming figure of Christ, protesting that he did not want to be raised from the dead:

> Christ. I gave you life.
>
> Lazarus. But death is what I ask.
> Alive I could never escape your love,
> And when I sickened towards my death I thought,
> 'I'll to the desert, or chuckle in a corner,
> Mere ghost, a solitary thing.' I died
> And saw no more until I saw you stand
> In the opening of the tomb; 'Come out!' you called;
> You dragged me to the light as boys drag out
> A rabbit when they have dug its hole away;
> And now with all the shouting at your heels
> You travel towards the death I am denied.
> And that is why I have hurried to this road
> And claimed your death.[223]

Lazarus is representative of Phase 14 of the Great Wheel of A Vision, whose true mask is oblivion.[224] Judas belongs to Phase 16; he is the positive man who cannot stand submission to anything and must make his own fate.[225]

> Christ. My Father put all men into my hands.
>
> Judas. That was the very thought that drove me wild.

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[222] Calvary, p.450.
[223] Calvary, p. 452
[224] See W.B. Yeats, A Vision (London, 1937), p. 97.
[225] W.B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 98.

I could not bear to think you had but to whistle
And I must do; but after that I thought,
'Whatever man betrays Him will be free';
And life grew bearable again. And now
Is there a secret left I do not know,
Knowing that if a man betrays a God
He is the stronger of the two?[226]

Lazarus and Judas exemplify types of intellectual despair that lay completely beyond Christ's sympathy;[227] they are both highly subjective types and thus cannot be dependent on Him.[228]

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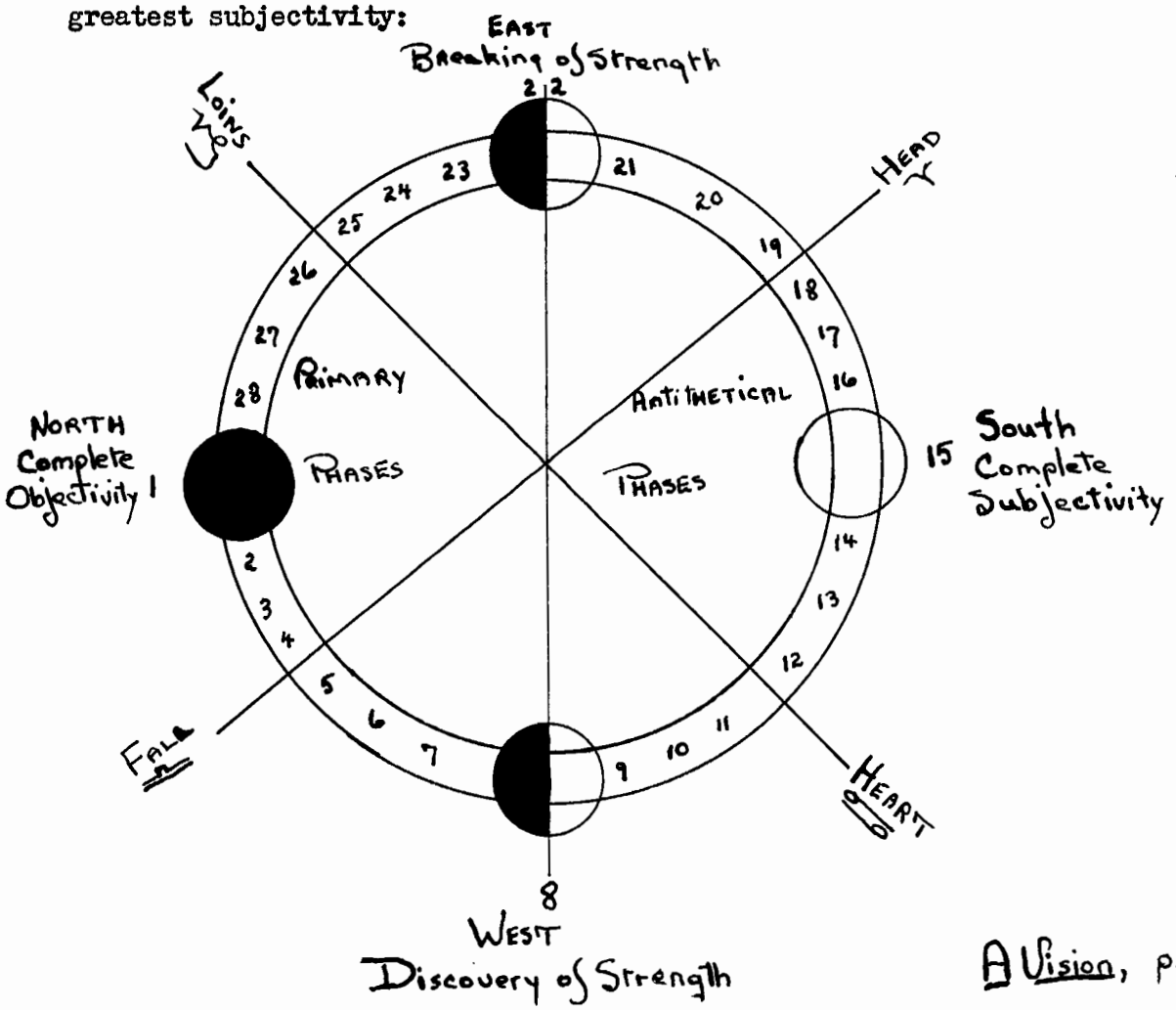
[226] Calvary, p. 454

[227] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 460.

[228] Phases 14 and 16 lie in the quarter of the wheel which is the area of greatest subjectivity:



A Vision, p. 81.

In the Roman soldiers is embodied a form of objectivity that is beyond Christ's help.[229] On the Great Wheel they are close to Phase 1, the area of complete objectivity, and accept almost completely their environment.[230]

First Roman Soldier. Although but one of us can win the cloak
That will not make us quarrel; what does it matter?
One day one loses and the next day wins.

Second Roman Soldier. Whatever happens is the best, we say,
So that it's unexpected.

Third Roman Soldier. Had you sent
A crier through the world you had not found
More comfortable companions for a death-bed
Than three old gamblers that have asked for nothing.[231]

Christ's followers are the direct opposite of Lazarus. They are probably representative of Phase 27,[232] which is characterized by an extreme desire for spiritual authority.[233] Christ came mostly to those subject to external vicissitudes,[234] and thus the extremely subjective had no need of Him, nor did those who accepted their fate unquestioningly. But it is not necessary to have studied A Vision in order to apprehend Yeats' meaning, for the motivations of the characters are clearly defined within the play. As Strabel points out, "... the play may be fully understood and

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[229] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 460.
[230] See W.B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 96.
[231] Calvary, pp. 455-456.
[232] Strabel, p. 227.
[233] W.B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 180-181.
[234] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 460.

appreciated without even a realization that any particular phases are represented, so completely has Yeats given a sense of actuality to the phases of his system."[235]

The Musicians set the scene and enhance the mood of the play. Yeats did not intend their songs to be understood by the audience, but he explained the meaning of their symbols in a Note to the play, for the benefit of those interested enough to read the play.[236] For Yeats, birds symbolized subjective life, and animals, especially those which live in packs, symbolize objective life.[237] Thus he explained the symbolic meaning of the white heron: "I have used my bird-symbolism in these songs to increase the objective loneliness of Christ by contrasting it with a loneliness, opposite in kind, that unlike His can be, whether joyous or sorrowful, sufficient to itself."[238] Thus the Musicians' songs are an integral part of the play.

The other conventions of Noh - the dance, the music, the masks - are all observed and all contribute equally to the generation of intense emotion which culminates in Christ's cry: "My Father, why has Thou forsaken Me?" The ideals of generalized passion and the couching of philosophy in plot have become one,[239] and have been perfectly achieved. The characters reveal philosophy through emotion. In Calvary Yeats proved that his dramatic

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[235] Strabel, p. 228.
[236] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 458.
[237] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, pp. 458-459.
[238] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 459.
[239] Strabel, p. 229.

and theatrical theories were sound, and that they could be executed in a manner which is truly dramatic.

One cannot classify The Player Queen chronologically, because although it was begun (as a verse tragedy) in 1907, it was not completed until many years later in quite a different form. In its final form it emerged as a farce treatment of the "self" - "anti-self" antithesis. In a note to the play, Yeats explained why he could not write the tragedy he intended. "I wasted the best working months of several years in an attempt to write a poetical play where every character became an example of the finding or not finding of what I have called the Antithetical Self; and because passion and not thought makes tragedy, what I made had neither simplicity nor life."[240] The problem was that Yeats was attempting to expound an idea through the medium of the stage, in flat contradiction of his own theories of what constitutes tragic drama. He had always opposed the intellectual plays of the Ibsenite movement, and found that he was unable to write an intellectual play, albeit of quite a different type, in a serious manner. The idea had been used by him before in the theatre but he had never explained it in a play; it appeared symbolically on a second level which the audience might apprehend intuitively or emotionally, but not intellectually. Emer, for example, achieves her opposite in her renunciation of Cuchulain's love, but her attainment is never stated explicitly. In Calvary the ideas of

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[240] W.B. Yeats, Plays in Prose and Verse, p. 429.

A Vision are completely expressed through the emotions of the people in the play. In the words of Strabel: "Now Yeats has so woven the idea into the character that he need not even resort to giving his characters opinions. Judas does not announce abstractly his stand against subservience to power because his whole personality resists bowing to authority."[241] Yeats continued in his Note to The Player Queen "I knew precisely what was wrong and yet could neither escape from thought nor give up my play. At last it came into my head all of a sudden that I could get rid of the play if I turned it into a farce; and never did I do anything so easily, for I think I wrote the present play in about a month ...." [242] The play was first performed in 1919 at the Stage Society, and was published in 1922.

Nevertheless, the play is by no means simply an explicit statement of Yeats' philosophy; it is symbolic, but the symbolism is less difficult to grasp than that of the Plays For Dancers. The form is much less esoteric than that of the Noh plays, and its impace is intellectual rather than emotional. Thus it lends itself to analysis more readily than do the Noh plays.

Hone suggests:

> It is possible that the many years of work on The Player Queen helped the poet to come to certain conclusions: (a) If a play is to be a drama of life, it cannot be too life-like in technique even though such a drama be highly symbolic as The Player Queen is; (b) if, however, the drama is to be abstract,

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[241] Strabel, p. 229.

[242] W.B. Yeats, Plays in Prose and Verse, p. 429.

and functions by hypnotic compulsion, it cannot be too limited, formal and hence lyrical. Certainly no greater contrast could be imagined than that between the techniques of The Player Queen and the FOUR PLAYS FOR DANCERS, for the first is all abandon, and the second are all reserve.[243]

Both the Plays for Dancers and The Player Queen are remote from reality, but the remoteness differs both in the means by which it is achieved and in the effect it produces. They may be seen as opposite ends of a scale, at the centre of which is the realistic play. The Plays for Dancers are on the romantic, emotional side of reality; they have the distance from life "which can make credible strange events, elaborate words."[244] The masks, the dance, the music are independent means of evoking emotion - together they give "musical depth" to the action and to the language which itself employs rhythm, sound and image.[245] The Plays for Dancers show the full development of a technique which was first revealed in The Shadowy Waters.[246] "And the poet's effect flows finally from an imagery of emotion that is intense in proportion to the complex use of different media towards a single end."[247]

Quite a different effect is sought in The Player Queen. It is cerebral, abstract, and appeals to the intellect rather than to the emotions. Perhaps it is less a symbolist play than an elaborate allegory, according to Yeats' definitions of these.[248] It was to be played before screens designed

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[243] Hone, p. 362.

[244] W.B. Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," p. 273.

[245] Peacock, p. 121.

[246] Peacock, p. 121.

[247] Peacock, p. 121.

[248] See above, p. 13.

by Gordon Craig of which, according to Yeats, "every line must suggest some mathematical proportion," and where "all is phantastic, incredible, and luminous."[249] The names of the characters, Decima, Septimus, Nona, carry out the mathematical abstraction suggested by Craig's screens. Although the settings are elaborate compared to the bare stage of the Noh plays, and there are many more people on the stage, paradoxically The Player Queen is stark in comparison to the Dance Plays.

The Player Queen marks a complete reversal of Yeats' usual dramatic practice. It is a prose farce rather than a poetic tragedy. It is intellectual rather than emotional, abstract rather than lyric, bright and cold rather than shadowy and mysterious - it is antiseptic rather than romantic. Yet it achieves the same effects - absence of character and distance from life, but with a different purpose.

The question of the antithetical self, as we have seen, troubled Yeats for many years. As a young man he was concerned by the antithetical halves of his own nature; later he tried to resolve the conflict by setting up the philosophical contradiction of "self and anti-self" "face and mask", anima hominis and anima mundi. These concepts and their relationships with with one another were further developed in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, and formed the basis of the elaborate system of A Vision.

For purposes of this thesis it is unnecessary to examine the complicated structure of inter-locking gyres or cones, the Great Wheel, and the phases of that Wheel, each of which is a wheel in itself,[250] or the method

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[249] W.B. Yeats, Plays in Prose and Verse, p. 429.

[250] W.B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 89.

by which Yeats arrived at the classifications. It is however important to understand that the system is based on the continual opposition of the four Faculties - the Will or ego, the Mask or anti-self which is that which we wish to become, the Creative Mind or conscious mind, and the Body of Fate or environment,[251] "The being becomes conscious of itself as a separate being, bedause of certain facts of Opposition and Discord, the emotional Opposition of Will and Mask, the intellectual Opposition of Creative Mind and Body of Fate...." [252] Furthermore, man seeks his opposite or the opposite of his condition and attains his object so far as it is attainable at the phase of complete subjectivity and returns to the phase of complete objectivity[253] where there is complete plasticity.[254]

The pattern of The Player Queen is a series of situations revealing the dualism of self and anti-self. Becker sums up the theme: "... creative power is the outcome of conflict: wholeness is achieved through opposition. The Mask or the anti-self, the dream or the aspiration, becomes the enabling force of all creative life."[255] This idea is stated explicitly by Septimus:

> Tie all upon my back and I will tell you the great secret that came to me at the second mouthful of the bottle. Man is nothing till he is united to an image. Now the Unicorn is both an image and beast; that is why he alone can be the new Adam.[256]

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[251] W.B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 73.

[252] W.B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 93.

[253] W.B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 81. See above, p. 145, n. 228, for the position of Phases1 and 15 on the Wheel.

[254] W.B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 96.

[255] William Becker, "The Mask Mocked: Or, Farce and the Dialectic of Self (Notes on Yeats's The Player Queen)," Sewanee Review, LXI (1953), 97.

[256] The Player Queen, p. 420.

The Unicorn is the symbol of the images sought by the other characters. Septimus cries: "Gather about me, for I announce the end of the Christian Era, the coming of a New Dispensation, that of the New Adam, that of the Unicorn; but alas, he is chaste, he hesitates, he hesitates." And then, "His unborn children are but images; we merely play with images." Therefore, he exclaims, "I will rail upon the Unicorn for his chastity. I will bid him trample mankind to death and beget a new race."[257] Septimus understands that if the chaste Unicorn should fulfill itself through copulation, a new era would commence in which man would be united with image.[258]

But the idea is expressed dramatically also. For Septimus the Unicorn is the symbol of beauty, of vigour, and of nobility. These are the qualities which he desires for himself, and which he has in his capacity of poet, but which he can achieve only when he is drunk.

Decima represents the ultimate expression of the qualities of womanhood. She is beautiful, vain, cruel, highly sexual, a natural ruler. At the beginning of the play her situation is intolerable for her. She was "born in a ditch between two towns and wrapped in a sheet that was stolen from a hedge",[259] she is used by her husband as a source of poetic inspiration when it is in her nature to use men rather than be used by them,[260] and she is expected to play the part of Noah's ugly wife who is beaten by her husband for refusing to enter the Ark, when she knows full well that she "could play a queen's part, a great queen's part; the only part in the world

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[257] The Player Queen, pp. 416-417.

[258] Becker, p. 98.

[259] The Player Queen, p. 408

[260] Becker, p. 91.

... [she] can play is a great queen's part."[261] She becomes Queen by means which are in keeping with her character, and thus unites with her anti-self.

The Real Queen represents the fullest negation of womanhood.[262] She is weak, gauche, timid, and dowdy. She too is in a position completely unsuited to her desires and her capabilities, at the beginning of the play. She is not qualified to be a queen, nor does she wish to be a ruler. She desires to be a martyr but has not the courage:

> Queen. I, too, am very unhappy. When I saw the great angry crowd and knew that they wished to kill me, though I had wanted to be a martyr, I was afraid and ran away.[263]

Neither is she suited to marry the Prime Minister, for she is obsessed by the need for chastity:

> Queen. Was it love? [Decima nods.] O, that is a great sin. I have never known love. Of all things, that is what I have most fear of. Saint Octema shut herself up in a tower on a mountain because she was loved by a beautiful prince. I was afraid it would come in at the eye and seize upon me in a moment. I am not naturally good, and they say people will do anything for love, there is so much sweetness in it. Even Saint Octema was afraid of it. But you will escape all that and go up to God as a pure virgin.[264]

At the end of the play she flees to a convent where she can lose her name and disappear, but she does not attain union with her anti-self by achieving martyrdom. Like Septimus, for whom the Unicorn also has symbolic value, the Queen does not unite permanently with the image which it symbolizes for her.

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[261] The Player Queen, p. 408.

[262] Becker, p. 92.

[263] The Player Queen, p. 425.

[264] The Player Queen, p. 426.

As the Unicorn cannot achieve union with its opposite by begetting a new race, so the two for whom it has meaning cannot do so either. The Unicorn thus becomes a symbol of man's inability to unite with his image.

Nona, a simple average woman desires permanence and security, but has neither at the beginning of the action. Her values are those of society, she is the sensible representative of the world of institutions, like Conchubar in the earlier plays.

> Nona. ...There is not another woman in the world would treat a man like that, and you were sworn to him in church - yes, you were, there is no good denying it .... I have never sworn to a man in church, but if I did swear, I would not treat him like a tinker's donkey - before God I would not - I was properly brought up; my mother always told me it was no light thing to take a man in church.[265]

She, who is cut out to be a wife, is instead Septimus' mistress, a position which offers neither security nor permanence. At the end of the play she has Septimus, because Decima wanted him no longer, but she does not have the security which she needs, for the poet's unfaithfulness will inevitably place her back in the same insecure position.

Decima then is the only one who does unite with her anti-self permanently, and thus achieves happiness. The other two "... revert to individuals with personal problems and thus pass to obscurity."[266]

Although the play can be appreciated on the level of mere plot interest, and has the additional significance of the symbolic meaning discussed above, it has also two additional themes which have been so fused with the primary meaning that they do not appear extraneous, although they can be isolated easily for purposes of discussion.

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[265] The Player Queen, pp. 409-410.

[266] Strabel, p. 180.

The first of these themes is the nature of poetry and the poet. Unlike the serious, romantic treatment which Yeats gave this theme in The King's Threshold, in this play is an "extravagant mockery of his own extremely serious view of the poet's nature and calling."[267] Septimus, the poet, is continuously drunk; he is "a great genius that can't take care of himself."[268] There is comment on the plight of the serious poet, in the Prime Minister's directions to the players: "You want some dull, poetical thing, full of long speeches. I will have that play and no other,"[269] and in the exchange between Septimus and the Second Man:

> Septimus. Bad, popular poets.
>
> Second Man. You would be a popular poet if you could.
>
> Septimus. Bad, popular poets.[270]

There is satire of Yeats' own method of composition in Nona's description of how Septimus wrote his poems:

> Nona. That one with fourteen verses kept me from my sleep two hours, and when the lines were finished he lay upon his back another hour waving one arm in the air, making up the music. I liked him well enough to seem to be asleep through it all, and many another poem too - but when he made up that short one you sang he was so pleased that he muttered the words all about his lying alone in his bed thinking of you, and that made me mad.[271]

The third theme is political, centred around the figure of the Prime Minister, who is a "kind of comic Machiavelli."[272] He plots with the

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[267] Becker, p. 92.
[268] The Player Queen, p. 409.
[269] The Player Queen, p. 403.
[270] The Player Queen, p. 391.
[271] The Player Queen, pp. 412-413.
[272] Becker, p. 93.

Bishop to ensure his own marriage with the Queen, whom he knows he will be able to dominate completely. However he finds that he must wed Septimus' "bad, flighty wife" who will assuredly dominate him. Again, the Prime Minister is shown in relation to the arts in his choice of a bad play:

> Prime Minister. I will not be trifled with. I chose the play myself; I chose 'The Tragical History of Noah's Deluge' because when Noah beats his wife to make her go into the Ark everybody understands, everybody is pleased, everybody recognises the mulish obstinacy of their own wives, sweethearts, sisters. And now, when it is of greatest importance to the State that everybody should be pleased, the play cannot be given.[273]

Here Yeats mocks those politicians, Unionist and Nationalist alike, who value art only for its propaganda value.

The Player Queen is a play of intellectual complexity in which several ideas are successfully united to form a single dramatic pattern. In conception and execution it is quite different from anything else Yeats attempted in the field of drama, and, indeed, stands in direct opposition to the dramatic and theatrical theory that he had so painstakingly erected. Yet on its own terms it is as successful a work of art as any of the Plays for Dancers, and marks Yeats as a dramatist who could write a play which could stand on its own merits without the assistance of other art forms, such as ballet, song, and musical accompaniment.

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[273] The Player Queen, p. 403.

Chapter IV - The Late Plays

With the writing of the Plays for Dancers, Yeats "had set aside with an overweening gesture the European tradition of Playwrighting."[1] After 1917 he ignored the Western form of dramatic art in all his plays, with the exception of The Words Upon the Window Pane. He had abandoned the European tradition and the public theatre because, he said, "... I seek, not a theatre, but the theatre's anti-self, an art that can appease all within us that becomes uneasy as the curtain falls and the house breaks into applause."[2] He had not forgotten or lost sight of his old conception of the purpose of tragedy - that of raising men to the anima mundi through passion. At this time, 1919, he also wrote that, "Meanwhile the Popular Theatre should grow always more objective; more and more a reflection of the general mind; more and more a discovery of the simple emotions that make all men kin...."[3] Yeats' art was too subjective for the public theatre, his symbols were too personal to be intelligible for more than a small group of people. Arland Ussher complains that, "His expression - in his later work - is almost perfect within its own terms: but the terms are too unfamiliar, remote and chilly to mean much to ordinary men - even to ordinary cultivated men."[4] This is not entirely true of Yeats' plays, because although the symbols are difficult, frequently requiring a knowledge of A Vision for their understanding, the meaning of the plays is almost always self-contained,

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[1] Menon, p. 87.
[2] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 215.
[3] W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 216.
[4] Ussher, p. 84.

and the dramatic effectiveness diminished only slightly by the obscurity of some symbols. Nevertheless these plays are quite unlikely to appeal to a large audience; nor were they intended to do so.

Before examining the last eight plays of Yeats' career as a dramatist, it would be well to re-examine the theory of tragedy which stated that the hero reaches the world soul through passion. Throughout his life Yeats believed that "... the subject of all art is passion, and a passion can only be contemplated when separated by itself, purified of all but itself, and aroused into a perfect intensity by opposition with some other passion, or it may be with the law...."[5] In the early plays and in those of the middle period, as we have seen, the conflict was between the hero - warrior, poet, mystic - and the representatives of the established law and institutions. In At The Hawk's Well the Old Man and Cuchulain are personifications rather than representatives of these two aspects of life. Then, after the revelation of A Vision, Yeats became increasingly concerned with the desire of the self to become its anti-self, or to become one with it. This theme recurs in several plays and represents not a change in the nature of the conflict from that with which he was concerned earlier, but a particularization of that conflict; the struggle between two worlds has been localized in one individual, where indeed it originated in Yeats' early sense of the duality of his nature. Neither has the "passion theory" gone by the board. Violent emotion is generated by internal battle as well as by external ones, "...for what is passion but the straining of man's being against some obstacle that obstructs its unity?"[6]

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[5]W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 105.

[6]W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 209.

Passion is aroused in the struggle of self to unite with anti-self, and anima mundi is achieved along with unity of being.

The Cat and The Moon, written in 1917 and published in 1924, is a humorous treatment of an Irish folk-tale of the early Christian period. Not far from Yeats' home at Galway was a blessed well, beside which many offerings were left by afflicted men and women. "The tradition is that centuries ago a blind man and a lame man dreamed that somewhere in Ireland a well would cure them and set out to find it, the lame man on the blind man's back."[7] Yeats intended the play to supply the Gaelic League with a model for little plays commemorating known places and events.[8] It is fitting that he selected the Noh form for his play, since one of the features of the Japanese Noh which had attracted him was the fact that they so often celebrated holy places.[9]

Yeats had another purpose in writing The Cat and The Moon. He needed some light entertainment to include in a programme of two dance plays, or later of a dance play and The Resurrection.[10] Thompson suggests that it might be called a "Kiogen" play, which in Japan is traditionally a type of farce which combines two types of comedy - rustic and sacred.[11] In this connection it might be noted that in this play more than in any

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[7]W.B. Yeats, Introduction, The Cat and The Moon, Wheels and Butterflies, p.137.
[8]W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 137.
[9]See above, pp. 125-126.
[10]W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 138.
[11]Thompson, p. 60.

other since The Pot of Broth Yeats used language that is strongly flavoured with Irish idiom, and used it, as in The Pot of Broth, for humorous rather than poetic effect.[12]

Blind Beggar. It's great daring you have, and how could I make a long stride and you on my back from the peep o' day?

Lame Beggar. And maybe the beggar of the cross-roads was only making it up when he said a thousand paces and a few paces more. You and I, being beggars, know the way of beggars, and maybe he never paced it at all, being a lazy man.

Blind Beggar. Get up. It's too much talk you have.[13]

The friendship of Edward Martyn and George Moore is described in the play,[14] in the Blind Beggar's tale of the holy man of Laban, which was the town where Martyn went to Church:

Blind Beggar. What does he do but go knocking about the roads with an old lecher from the county of Mayo, and he a woman-hater from the day of his birth! And what do they talk of by candlelight and by daylight? The old lecher does be telling over all the sins he committed, or maybe never committed at all, and the man of Laban does be trying to head him off and quiet him down that he may quit telling them.

Lame Beggar. Maybe it is converting him he is.

Blind Beggar. If you were a blind man you wouldn't say a foolish thing the like of that. He wouldn't have him different, no, not if he was to get all Ireland. If he was different, what would they find to talk about, will you answer me that now?[15]

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[12] The dialect of The Pot of Broth was Lady Gregory's work, but in The Cat and The Moon Yeats revealed his own mastery of native speech.

[13] The Cat and The Moon, p. 462.

[14] W.B. Yeats, Dramatis Personae, Autobiographies, p. 402.

[15] The Cat and The Moon, p.465

But in spite of the amusing dialogue and the humorous picture of the two friends, The Cat and The Moon is not merely a bit of light entertainment to relieve an audience from the emotional strain engendered by the Dance Plays. There is a serious meaning underlying the banter. The Blind Man represents the body, the Lame Man the soul. Such a symbolic representation is almost traditional. Yeats wrote that after he had completed the play, he found the Lame Man and the Blind Man in a mediaeval Irish sermon "as a simile of soul and body," and that later he discovered that they had a similar meaning in a Buddhist Sutra.[16] The Lame Man of the play chooses to be blessed, for the not very elevated reason that he wishes his name to be entered in the book of the blessed saints and martyrs. In addition to being blessed he also regains the use of his legs.

First Musician. No good at all. You must dance.

Lame Beggar. But how can I dance? Ain't I a lame man?

First Musician. Aren't you blessed?

Lame Beggar. Maybe so.

First Musician. Aren't you a miracle?

Lame Beggar. I am, Holy Man.

First Musician. Then dance, and that'll be a miracle.[17]

The play is meaningful on this level of the ultimate victory of the spiritual man, but there is a second level of meaning which is a dramatization of some of the ideas expressed in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, and which have already been discussed here in connection with The Player Queen. The Cat and The Moon is also concerned with man's search for unity

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[16] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 138.

[17] The Cat and The Moon, p. 471

of being. This theme is introduced symbolically in the song of the First Musician:

> The cat went here and there
> And the moon spun round like a top,
> And the nearest kin of the moon,
> The creeping cat, looked up.
> Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,
> For, wander and wail as he would,
> The pure cold light in the sky
> Troubled his animal blood.[18]

However, the symbolic meaning of the song is by no means obvious to the casual spectator. Yeats explained in the Introduction to the play that he had, "...allowed myself as I wrote to think of the cat as the normal man and of the moon as the opposite he seeks perpetually...."[19] The theme of the search for opposites is carried through the play, in the Blind Man's search for sight and the search of the Lame Man, who has stolen his friend's sheep and denied doing so, for salvation. Again, this idea appears in the attraction between the holy man and the lecher (Martyn and Moore) and in the concept of the love of the saint for the sinner.

The Lame Man does attain unity of being, as Yeats points out: "Doubtless, too, when the lame man takes the saint upon his back, the normal man has become one with his opposite...."[20]

The Musician's songs at first glance seem irrelevant to the play itself in that they neither describe the setting or the action, nor explain the emotions of the characters. Yeats maintained the convention of the Noh form, but utilized it with a different purpose and a different

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[18] The Cat and The Moon, p. 461.

[19] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 138.

[20] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 138.

effect from that sought by the Japanese playwrights. Peacock points out that the symbolic references heighten the dramatic impact by establishing the tension between the animal (or nature) and the cosmic moon.[21] The Musician's songs have a deeper relevance than the structural purpose they normally serve in the Noh play.

The Musicians do have a structural function also, though not quite the same as in the usual Noh play. The part of the invisible Saint is spoken by the First Musician. Thus for the first time the chorus becomes a part of the action rather than merely serving to describe it. But this is not a reversion to the inclusion of the chorus as figures taking part in the action as in On Baile's Strand. In The Cat and The Moon Yeats developed a conventional device, for though the Musician speaks the part of the Saint, he does not cease to be a Musician. This adaptation of the Noh convention points forward to A Full Moon In March where it is further developed.

Other conventions of Noh are utilized in the usual way: the masks, the movements of the actors regulated by drum taps, the stylized movements of the dance-beating administered to the Lame Man by his no-longer blind companion, which is accompanied by music, and the dance of the Lame Man at the climax when he has become a miracle by attaining unity of being. The folding and unfolding of the curtain has been dispensed with. Yeats had begun to modify the Noh form.

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[21] Peacock, p. 122.

The Resurrection, published in its final form in 1931, receded further from the Noh model, although the influence of that form is still strong. The original draught was begun in 1925[22] but Yeats found it necessary to revise the play, particularly with regard to the form of its presentation. He explained in the stage directions for the 1931 version:

> Before I had finished this play I saw that its subject-matter might make it unsuited for the public stage in England or in Ireland. I had begun it with an ordinary stage scene in the mind's eye, curtained walls, a window and a door at back, a curtained door at left. I now changed the stage directions and wrote songs for the unfolding and folding of the curtain that it might be played in a studio or a drawing-room like my dance plays, or at the Peacock Theatre before a specially chosen audience.[23]

The final form then is a mixture of genres, but there is no lack of homogeneity; the play presents a unified whole. Yeats had progressed from the mastery of the Noh form to the evolution of a completely new form which was particularly his own.

The opening song of the Musicians to the unfolding and folding of the curtain (at the Peacock Theatre the musicians drew open the proscenium curtain) sets the psychological background of the action.[24] It expresses the idea that history is a series of cycles, and that the birth of Christ had brought one cycle to a close.

> Another Troy must rise and set,
> Another lineage feed the crow,
> Another Argo's painted prow
> Drive to a flashier bauble yet.
> The Roman Empire stood appalled:
> It dropped the reins of peace and war
> When that fierce virgin and her Star
> Out of the fabulous darkness called.[25]

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[22] Strabel, p. 254.

[23] The Resurrection, p.579.

[24] Thompson, p.71.

[25] The Resurrection, p.580.

"The beginning of the Christian era meant for Yeats the defeat of the Greek doctrine of measure and the flooding of the world by what a neo-Platonist philosopher called 'that fabulous, formless darkness'."[26] Thus the first verse of the closing song:

> In pity for man's darkening thought
> He walked that room and issued thence
> In Galilean turbulence;
> The Babylonian starlight brought
> A fabulous, formless darkness in;
> Odour of blood when Christ was slain
> Made all Platonic tolerance vain
> And vain all Doric discipline.[27]

In the closing song is also expressed the idea that all historical creation exhausts itself in the creating and at the same time exhausts the creator.[28]

> Everything that man esteems
> Endures a moment or a day:
> Love's pleasure drives his love away,
> The painter's brush consumes his dreams;
> The herald's cry, the soldier's tread
> Exhausts his glory and his might:
> Whatever flames upon the night
> Man's own resinous heart has fed.[29]

These conceptions of the nature of history, drawn from A Vision, are relevant to the main body of the play, but not essential to it. As they were added to the text after the original conception, so they re-enforce the meaning of the play but are not necessary to the dramatic structure. In this Yeats departed from the Noh tradition in which the musicians or chorus were responsible for explaining the action and describing the emotions of the characters and the physical setting, as well as supplying the emotional atmosphere in

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[26] Louis MacNeice, The Poetry of W.B. Yeats (London, New York, Toronto, 1941) p. 175.

[27] The Resurrection, p. 594.

[28] Ure, p. 44.

[29] The Resurrection, p. 594.

which the action takes place. In The Resurrection, Yeats used the convention of the chorus to increase the philosophical depth of the play rather than as a device to increase the dramatic effectiveness.

The action of the play consists of a discussion between the three men, The Greek, The Hebrew, and The Syrian, about the nature of Christ and the implications of the Crucifixion. The Hebrew's argument, based on reason, denies the divinity of Christ:

> The Hebrew. He was nothing more than a man, the best man who ever lived. Nobody before him had so pitied human misery. He preached the coming of the Messiah because he thought the Messiah would take it all upon himself. Then some day when he was very tired, after a long journey perhaps, he thought that he himself was the Messiah. He thought it because of all destinies it seemed the most terrible.[30]

He is a representative of rational thought, and doubtless he is also a representative of a phase of the Great Wheel very close to that of Judas in Calvary. He is relieved that Christ was not the Messiah because if He were:

> One had to give up all worldly knowledge, all ambition, do nothing of one's own will. Only the divine could have any reality. God had to take complete possession. It must be a terrible thing when one is old, and the tomb round the corner, to think of all the ambitions one has put aside; to think, perhaps, a great deal about women. I want to marry and have children.[31]

Compare Judas' explanation, "I could not bear to think you had but to whistle/ And I must do...." Neither is the type of follower Christ required; both are unwilling to subject themselves entirely to their belief in Him.

The Apostles are of the same part of the Wheel as that of the

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[30] The Resurrection, pp. 583-584.

[31] The Resurrection, p. 585.

followers of Christ in Calvary.[32] Unlike the Greek whose subjectivity and independence are reiterated, or the Hebrew, who can find consolation in the world around him, the Apostles are entirely dependent on Christ. They are "dogs who have lost their master."[33]

> The Hebrew. They are afraid because they do not know what to think. When Jesus was taken they could no longer believe him the Messiah. We can find consolation, but for the Eleven it was always complete light or complete darkness.
>
> The Greek. Because they are so much older.
>
> The Hebrew. No, no. You have only to look into their faces to see they were intended to be saints. They are unfitted for anything else.[34]

The Greek's point of view is diametrically opposed to that of the Hebrew but it is equally rational. He accepts Christ's divinity but not His humanity.

> The Greek. We Greeks understand these things. No god has ever been buried; no god has ever suffered. Christ only seemed to be born, only seemed to eat, seemed to sleep, seemed to walk, seemed to die. I did not mean to tell you until I had proof.[35]

And later he says:

> To say that a god can be born of a woman, carried in her womb, fed upon her breast, washed as children are washed, is the most terrible blasphemy.[36]

The Greek is a representative of the same subjectivity that prevented the others, Lazarus and Judas, from following Christ. Independent, he demands that his independence remain intact.

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[32] See above, p. 146.

[33] The Resurrection, p. 582.

[34] The Resurrection, p. 582.

[35] The Resurrection, p. 583.

[36] The Resurrection, p. 584.

The Greek. I cannot think all that self-surrender and self-abasement is Greek, despite the Greek name of its god. When the goddess came to Achilles in the battle she did not interfere with his soul, she took him by his yellow hair.... What seems their [the gods'] indifference is but their eternal possession of themselves. Man, too, remains separate. He does not surrender his soul. He keeps his privacy.[37]

The Syrian is the mouthpiece for Yeats' own point of view, that of the inevitability of the occurrence of the irrational.

The Syrian. What if there is always something that lies outside knowledge, outside order? What if at the moment when knowledge and order seem complete that something appears?.... What if the irrational return? What if the circle begin again?[38]

The climax of the play is reached when the Syrian's point of view is proved dramatically when the Greek passes his hand over the side of the Risen Christ and finds that "The heart of a phantom is beating!"[39] Yeats chose this rather horrific, albeit dramatic, way of illustrating his point because, as he said: "It has seemed to me of late that the sense of spiritual reality comes whether to the individual or to crowds from some violent shock, and that idea has the support of tradition."[40]

The Hebrew and the Greek are forced to accept the irrational nature of Christ and of the Resurrection. Their rationality has been challenged and destroyed, in the same way that Christianity broke up the historical pattern of order and knowledge, of which these two are representative,

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[37] The Resurrection, pp. 587-588

[38] The Resurrection, p. 591.

[39] The Resurrection, p. 593.

[40] W.B. Yeats, Introduction to The Resurrection, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 109.

within whose framework men had been able to achieve unity of being.[41] Since unity of being was in Yeats' view that which was most to be desired, the advent of Christianity must necessarily be an unfortunate development in the historical process, but one that would inevitably pass and a new cycle begin:

> The Syrian. What matter if it contradicts all human knowledge? - another Argo seeks another fleece, another Troy is sacked.[42]

Thus the action of the play is a demonstration of Yeats' theory of history,[43] which is stated in the Musician's songs.

As such it does not have the characteristics which Yeats stated were required in accordance with his theory of tragedy. Indeed the play is not a tragedy at all, unless it is that of the cycle of history which was brought to an end with the birth of Christianity.

Nor is Yeats concerned in this play with the hero. None of the figures in it have heroic characteristics, neither is there any occasion on which these might be revealed. However, the fact that Yeats had not ceased to be interested in the nature of heroism is shown in the Greek's description of the nature of the gods: "They can be discovered by contemplation, in their faces a high keen joy like the cry of a bat, and the man who lives heroically gives them the only earthly body that they covet. He, as it were, copies their gestures and their acts."[44]

In The Resurrection Yeats came closer to the discussion play which he so abhorred than in any of his other plays. There is action only

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[41] Ure, pp. 44-45.

[42] The Resurrection, p. 590.

[43] Strabel, p. 254.

[44] The Resurrection, pp. 587-588.

at the climax: the rest of the time is occupied in argument between the three men. Although they are personifications of certain ideas of A Vision, they also state other ideas explicitly. Thus there are no masks, for the figures are representatives of points of view. They have characteristics but no character, and since they are not intended to reach the anima mundi it is not necessary that they lose even their characteristics.

The Noh play is essentially emotional, but The Resurrection is intellectual for the most part. For this reason some of the appurtenances of Noh, such as the dance, could be and were ignored. There is emotion in the play of course, generated by the associations with the Resurrection itself, and by the rattles and the felt presence of the orgiastic mob, but these are behind the main action rather than a part of it. The logical, rational argument preceding the appearance of Christ through the wall increases the shock of the discovery of the beating heart, but the emotion engendered by that shock is intended to bring belief in spiritual reality, not elevation to that level.

Indeed the play is not really dramatic, even on Yeats' terms. In addition to absence of character there is absence of plot. The climax arises not out of the action, of which there is none, but independently, as a refutation of argument. Shock is substituted for ennobling emotion, prose discussion for lyric verse, a theory of history for tragedy. What dramatic qualities there are come from the inherent drama of the story of the Resurrection itself, and from the skillfully written dialogue which conveys the ideas forcefully. Yeats succeeded in the creation of a play of the type against which he was reacting - the drama of ideas. Its success is due to his training in the theatre and to his mastery of the Noh

conventions. These he incorporated into a form essentially different from that in which they originated in order to give an undramatic play theatrical force by the inclusion of non-essentials.

The Words Upon The Window Pane, written and produced in 1930 and published in 1934, represents a departure from Yeats' general tendency to develop the Noh form into a particularly unique type of drama. Like The Resurrection, The Words Upon The Window Pane is intellectual in conception, but unlike the earlier play it makes us of none of the conventions of Noh. Indeed in it Yeats forsook his earlier dramatic and theatrical theories, and produced a play in the realistic style which he had denounced from the time of his first experiments in the theatre.

But although stylistically the play is outside the line of his dramatic development, it treats in a different manner several aspects of his thought which have been discussed in relation to the formation of the theory from which it is a departure. Two main aspects of this play, the mistrust of the middle classes and the belief in the supernatural, were contributing factors to the adoption of the esoteric Noh form. Furthermore, material drawn from A Vision which had been presented symbolically in the dance plays is stated explicitly by certain of the characters of The Words Upon The Window Pane. Thus the play is consistent with Yeats' thought, although not with the technique of his other dramatic writings.

The admiration for the virtues of the aristocracy and the hatred of the middle classes which was a contributing cause of Yeats' departure from the Abbey theatre[45] twenty years earlier had developed into

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[45]See above, p. 89.

a desire to identify himself with the great Protestant Irishmen of the eighteenth century. In Wheels and Butterflies he wrote of his ever increasing interest in those men: "But now I read Swift for months together, Burke and Berkeley less often but always with excitement, and Goldsmith lures and waits."[46] In the eighteenth century, he believed, "Unity of being was still possible though somewhat over-rationalized and abstract." [47] John Corbet, the student of Swift in The Words Upon The Window Pane, expresses Yeats' admiration of that period:

> I hope to prove that in Swift's day men of intellect reached the height of their power - the greatest position they ever attained in society and the State, that everything great in Ireland and in our character, in what remains of our architecture, comes from that day; that we have kept its seal longer than England.[48]

Yeats' disillusionment with the masses of men, arising from his earlier experiences, lead him to fear the political developments taking place in Ireland and in the rest of Europe.

> After dabbling in revolutionary nationalism, at the skirts of Miss Gonne, he had rallied to his Ascendancy forbears: in his later poems the heroes are not Cuchulain and Forgael but Swift and Berkeley and Burke. In both phases he was constant to one hatred, the hatred of the Greek virtue of sophrosyne, or as he preferred to call it, Whiggery....[49]

His intense dislike of democracy he saw reflected in Swift's attitudes towards humanity as a mass. John Corbet again states Swift's (and Yeats') view of political democracy:

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[46] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 7.

[47] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 24.

[48] The Words Upon The Window Pane, p. 601.

[49] Raymond Mortimer, "Books in General, " New Statesman and Nation, XXV, Feb. 13, 1943, 111.

His ideal order was the Roman Senate, his ideal men Brutus and Cato. Such an order and such men had seemed possible once more, but the movement passed and he foresaw the ruin to come, Democracy, Rousseau, the French Revolution; that is why he hated the common run of men - 'I hate lawyers, I hate doctors,' he said, 'though I love Dr. So-and-so and Judge So-and-so'....[50]

Ireland, perhaps because of the continuing influence of the eighteenth century, and perhaps because of her long history of subservience to England, was still in a position to choose her social and political future. "We must, I think, decide among these three ideas of national life: that of Swift; that of a great Italian of his day; that of modern England."[51] Yeats allied himself with Swift.

Yeats' interest in all types of studies of the supernatural, including Occultism, Rosicrucianism and Spiritualism, had been justified and reconciled philosophically by him in the concept of anima mundi and the theories of the after-life set down in A Vision. Having accepted these and having dramatized them in a series of plays, he now returned to an attempt to justify one of the studies themselves, or rather one of the means by which a belief in the life after death and an understanding of that in which it consists had been effected. Yeats never stated a positive belief in the powers of spiritualism, though he attended many séances as a young man, perhaps because the demonstrations were unconvincing, or perhaps out of fear of ridicule. Spiritualism does not have the same status that mysticism has. Thus, even in the Introduction to The Words Upon The Window Pane, he hedged:

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[50] The Words Upon The Window Pane, pp. 601-602.

[51] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 6.

I consider it certain that every voice that speaks, every form that appears, whether to the medium's eyes and ears alone or to someone or two others or to all present, whether it remains a sight or sound or affects the sense of touch, whether it is confined to a room or can make itself apparent at some distant place, whether it can or cannot alter the position of material objects, is first of all a secondary personality or dramatization created by, in, or through the medium.[52]

Yet there is no doubt that the play, if not necessarily an attempt to show the veracity of spiritualism is certainly intended to induce in the audience a belief in the supernatural. As Ure points out, until the last few lines there is the possibility that the medium is speaking not as possessed by the spirit but as the recipient of thoughts transferred from the mind of John Corbet.[53] But after all have left, the woman, whose ignorance of Swift has been demonstrated, becomes the vehicle of his spirit again. The audience is shocked into belief. This is precisely the same technique used in The Resurrection. Its effectiveness in this case depends of course on the ability of the actress playing the medium.

The theme of The Words Upon The Window Pane is the same as that of The Dreaming of The Bones. Swift and Vanessa are forced to dream back through an intense situation which they had experienced while alive. This theory is stated explicitly by Dr. Trench:

Dr. Trench. Some spirits are earth-bound - they think they are still living and go over and over some action of their past lives, just as we go over and over some painful thought, except that where they are thought is reality....

Mrs. Mallet. When my husband came for the first time the medium gasped and struggled as if she was drowning. It was terrible to watch.

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[52] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, pp. 31-32

[53] Ure, p. 83.

Dr. Trench. Sometimes a spirit re-lives not the pain of death but some passionate or tragic moment of life .... Such spirits do not often come to séances unless those séances are held in houses where those spirits lived, or where the event took place....[54]

Though Dr. Trench has apparently had experience with spirits who interrupt séances with their "dreaming back," Yeats had no precedent for such an occurrence. He explained:

I have not heard of spirits in a European séance-room re-enacting their past lives; our séances take their characteristics from the desire of those present to speak to, or perhaps obtain the counsel of their dead; yet under the conditions described in my play such re-enactment might occur, indeed most hauntings are of that nature.[55]

Nevertheless the union of these two aspects of the supernatural has been skillfully effected and is perfectly acceptable to spectator or reader. It is all the more acceptable because of the matter of fact realism of every other aspect of the play, in the same way that the shock at the end is intensified by contrast to the almost naturalistic behaviour of Mrs. Henderson.

The play is a demonstration of Yeats' ability to write realistically and to create contemporary character.[56] The realistic prose is an accurate representation of the speech of middle-class modern Dublin.[57] Of the persons in the play Yeats said: "No character upon the stage spoke my thoughts. All were people I had met or might have met in just such a séance."[58] This is not strictly accurate. The student expounds Yeats'

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[54] The Words Upon The Window Pane, p. 604.

[55] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 35.

[56] A. Norman Jeffares, W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet (London, 1949), p. 263.

[57] Robinson, "The Man and The Dramatist," p. 110.

[58] W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 31.

conception of Swift, just as Dr. Trench describes the poet's theory of dreaming back. In all other respects however, these and the other characters are real people, such as Yeats might indeed have encountered in Dublin or in London.

> Only the characters created by the medium, particularly Swift in his loneliness and despair, transcend this impression of surface actuality to become poetically significant by virtue of general passions; and this will only be true in production when a great actress plays the medium.[59]

The play makes tremendous demands on even a great actress in the part of the medium, for not only must she speak in the voices of four different persons including a six year old girl and an old man, but she must be able to portray effectively the inner conflict of Swift which becomes the central conflict of the play.

Yeats managed to write a realistic play within which he neatly combined several ideas - political, mystical, and philosophical - and presented them most effectively. Within the realistic form, however, he produces in the passions of Swift and Vanessa emotions quite as powerful as any evolved in the Dance Plays. This in no way contradicts the ideal of absence of character found in moments of passion, for though the visitors to the séance have personality they are not passionate, and Vanessa and Swift, though some of their characteristics, as they have come down to us, are described by the others, within the play have no character but great passion. Thus a dramatic ideal is transferred to a form for which it had never been intended.

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[59] Strabel, p. 302.

The King of the Great Clock Tower was written in prose in 1934 and published in that year. The following year Yeats rewrote it in verse because, he explained,

> I came to the conclusion that prose dialogue is as unpopular among my studious friends as dialogue in verse among actors and playgoers. I have therefore rewritten The King of the Great Clock Tower in verse, but if anybody is inclined to play it, I recommend the prose version....[60]

The play represents a further adaptation of the Noh form. It was written not for presentation in the drawing room but for production in a regular theatre. Some of the Noh conventions are retained, but their nature has been somewhat modified. The Musicians are replaced by two Attendants, who open the play with a song, accompany the action occasionally with drum taps, and provide certain effects by sounding a gong. They take part in the action by speaking the parts of certain characters who are supposedly present but who do not actually appear. Yeats had used this device previously in The Cat and The Moon.[61] Furthermore, the Attendants laugh and sing for those characters actually present on the stage, and for the severed head. The Queen and the Stroller are both masked. The Queen's mask is "beautiful" and "impassive," that of the Stroller is "wild, half-savage," and covers only half of his face, the lower part being hidden by a red beard. The back-drop consists of a curtain hung in a semi-circle or of a semi-circle of Gordon Craig's screens. Four cube-like thrones complete the setting. There is a dance at the climax in keeping with Noh tradition.

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[60] W.B. Yeats, Preface, A Full Moon in March (London, 1935), p.v.

[61] See above, p. 163.

The myth which is treated in the play is part of the ritual of the year; it is the myth of the Mother Goddess and the Slain God.[62] Pound pronounced the play "Putrid" when Yeats showed him the manuscript in June, 1934, but it was very successful when produced in Dublin with F.J. McCormick as the King and Ninette de Valois as the Queen.[63] Its popularity was perhaps due to the fact that the philosophy which Yeats presented was so well hidden that the audience could remain unaware of its presence and enjoy the obvious effects of the story and the dance without puzzling over the ideas. There is no doubt that this was Yeats' intention. He directed:

"Lose my words in patterns of sound as the name of God is lost in Arabian arabesques. They are a secret between the singers, myself, yourself. The plain fable, the plain prose of the dialogue, Ninette de Valois' dance are there for the audience. They can find my words in the book if they are curious, but we will not thrust our secret upon them. I can be as subtle or metaphysical as I like without endangering the clarity necessary for dramatic effect."[64]

It is to Yeats' credit that he accomplished that which he intended: the symbolic meaning is so imbedded in the dramatization of the myth that its presence would pass unnoticed by the uninitiate. Nonetheless there is a level of such meaning. The beautiful, remote Queen seeks her opposite and finds it not in the King but in the Stroller who represents earthiness. When the Queen kisses the severed head she becomes one with her opposite

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[62] W.B. Yeats, Preface, A Full Moon in March, p. vi

[63] Jeffares, p. 285.

[64] W.B. Yeats, "Commentaries," The King of the Great Clock Tower, Commentaries and Poems (New York, 1935), p. 21; quoted by Strabel, p. 264.

and thus achieves unity of being.

The play conforms to Yeats' dramatic theory. The masked figures are characterless, they are the expression of passions which reach their climax in the kiss. This climax is intensified by the song of the Head, by the Queen's dance, and by the strokes of the clock represented by blows on the gong. These effects, coupled with the drama of the myth, made this the most popular of Yeats' plays for dancers.[65] Yeats expressed his satisfaction with the production: "'It has proved most effective; it was magnificently acted and danced....My dance is a long expression of horror and fascination. She first bows before the head (it is on the seat) then in her dance lays it on the ground and dances before it then holds it in her hands.'"[66]

But Yeats did not remain satisfied with the play itself for very long, and a few months later he published A Full Moon In March, another version of the same myth. Structurally it represents a great improvement over its predecessor. Yeats saw that the King was unnecessary to the action and that if the cast were reduced to the essential members, the Queen and the Stroller (now become the Swineherd), the fable would have greater intensity.[67] The nearly irrelevant discussion between the King and the Stroller is eliminated, and the consequent compression increases the dramatic intensity. The Queen becomes an active participant in the action. It is she, not the King, who causes the decapitation of the

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[65] Jeffares, p. 285.

[66] W.B. Yeats, Letter from Riversdale, dated 7 August, 1934, quoted by Jeffares, p. 285.

[67] W.B. Yeats, Preface, A Full Moon In March, pp. v-vi.

Swineherd; she has become a positive personality; she is cruel and wintry as opposed to the Queen of The King of The Great Clock Tower whose remoteness was a negative quality. Without the King to mediate between them, the conflict and the attraction between the Queen and the Swineherd are sharpened, and the climax is both more intense and a more logical development of the preceding action. The King in the earlier play served to diffuse the emotion built up by the myth itself and by the theatrical devices. Furthermore, the quarrel with the Stroller is his, not the Queen's; consequently the climactic kiss, although it indicates the union of opposites, is not as effective as it might be, since their conflict has been passive rather than active. The elimination of the role of the King was made possible by the extension of a Noh convention.

The Japanese Noh actor was highly skilled as both actor and dancer. Thus he could be expected to pass from one type of artistic communication to the other (both were very similar in the Japanese theatre anyway) with no difficulty. In the writing of a European Noh play, particularly one to be performed on the public stage, Yeats was faced with a serious problem. It would be very difficult to find an actress who was also an accomplished dancer or a dancer who could project a dramatic role vocally from behind the proscenium arch. Even in The Dreaming of The Bones, where the drawing room production would supply a narrower gulf and thus compensate for certain lacks in dramatic technique, this problem had arisen. Yeats had solved it by giving Dervorgilla very few lines which could be spoken if necessary by Diarmuid.[68] In The King of the Great Clock Tower

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[68] See above, pp. 141-142.

a similar solution was found. The King was introduced to take that part in the action which should rightly have been taken by the Queen, so that the dancer playing the Queen could sit quietly by until the time for the performance of her art. This solution proved theatrically effective, but as Yeats realized, it spoiled the dramatic pattern of the work. He had to find another way.

In The King of The Great Clock Tower he had surmounted a different but related problem. The chorus of the Japanese Noh drama were responsible for the songs in each play, but these were descriptive rather than dramatic. The fable which he was treating required that a severed head sing to the Queen. Of course he could write a song for the chorus which would describe the singing of the head in the convantional way. Instead he chose to have an Attendant sing directly for the Head and the result is purely dramatic rather than descriptive at least in part. Furthermore, if an Attendant could sing for the Head, another Attendant could sing for the Queen, greatly heightening the lyrical intensity approaching the climax. The dancer playing the Queen, who was unable to act, could hardly be expected to sing; the song could be given to the chorus in the usual way, but as was the case above, the song would have to be descriptive in part, thus lessening the dramatic effect. In production the new arrangement proved highly successful.

In A Full Moon In March this substitution of a musician for an actor is carried one step further, and a dancer takes the place of the actress playing the Queen for the second part of the play. The Queen's part may now be taken by an accomplished actress in the opening half, and the role rewritten so that she becomes actively the center of the action;

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by

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the King's part is eliminated and with it the flaws that were so evident in the dramatic structure of The King of The Great Clock Tower.

Of course in order to make the appearance of a new dancer-Queen half way through the play acceptable, the rest of the production must be highly stylized. To this end the masks, music, and drum taps are employed. The convention of having the Attendants speak for persons who do not appear and sing for those who are actually present on stage contributes to the lack of realism. The calculated informality of the opening speeches between the Attendants emphasizes by contrast the stylization of the rest of the play. The symbolic blood-stains on the Queen's dress, the dropped veil and its implications add to the effect. The Noh conventions of song and dance function exactly as Yeats would have them do; they increase the poetic distance and contribute lyric emotion to the passionate climax. This was true of Yeats' other dance plays also, but in A Full Moon in March a new development may be noted. In the earlier plays the dance and the song functioned to this end but purely as conventions. They added depth to the play but never, except perhaps for Fand's dance in The Only Jealousy of Emer, became an integral part of the action, as they do in The King of The Great Clock Tower and A Full Moon In March. In the earlier play the Stroller is determined that the Queen shall dance for him, and her dance with the severed head is a result of her submission to his will, as well as an independent means of evoking emotion at the climax. Similarly, in A Full Moon In March the winning of the Queen and her Kingdom is conditional upon the singing of a song that will move her heart. Thus the song of the severed head is a part of the action as well as a theatrical convention.

Dramatically A Full Moon in March is much superior to The King of The Great Clock Tower. Theatrically it is equally effective and has profited greatly from the condensation made possible by the extension of the Noh convention. In both plays Yeats demonstrated his technical mastery of form, his strong theatridal sense and his ability to modify or extend the conventions of his model to their best advantage. To this is added, in A Full Moon In March, a truly dramatic treatment of a legend which is in itself highly dramatic.

It was noted in connection with The King of The Great Clock Tower that Yeats did not intend his audience to grasp the symbolic meaning of the play, for he knew that it would stand alone on the merits of plot and treatment. The same is true of A Full Moon in March, but in the case of the latter the symbolism is much clearer, although it is still so much a part of the play that it does not intrude on the unsuspecting ear. Nevertheless the symbolic meaning is so important a manifestation of Yeats' thought that it must be considered here.

The opening song of the Attendants, who here fulfill the functions of the Musicians of the Noh play, introduces the theme of love which is both "crown of gold" and "dung of swine". Bentley identifies the Queen with the "crown of gold" and the Swineherd with "dung of swine".[69] The latter association is doubtless true. The Swineherd describes himself:

> Queen, look at me, look long at these foul rags,
> At hair more foul and ragged than my rags;
> Look on my scratched foul flesh. Have I not come
> Through dust and mire? There in the dust and mire

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[69] Bentley, p. 305.

Beasts scratched my flesh; my memory too is gone,
Because great solitudes have driven me mad.
But when I look into a stream, the face
That trembles upon the surface makes me think
My origin more foul than rag or flesh.[70]

He is not interested in taking possession of the Queen's kingdom. Rather he wants to introduce her to:

A song - the night of love,
An ignorant forest and the dung of swine.[71]

But is the Queen identified with "crown of gold"? Kenneth Burke, in an essay entitled "On Motivation in Yeats," is of the opinion that, "... the lunar white of Yeats's imagery is related to the seminal, and the solar gold related to the excremental. (These being, we might say, at the bottom of the ladder, with lunar white and solar gold bearing their sublime correspondences at the top)."[72] The Queen is related not to the sun but to the moon, and the word "white" is associated with her rather than "gold":

Second Attendant. Why most those holy, haughty feet descend
From emblematic niches, and what hand
Ran that delicate raddle through their white?
x x x x x x x x
I cannot face that emblem of the moon
Nor eyelids that the unmixed heavens dart,
Nor stand upon my feet, so great a fright
Descends upon my savage, sunlit heart?
What can she lack whose emblem is the moon?[73]

At the beginning of the play she is at the lunar level of her scale, while the Swineherd is at the excremental level of his. Through their symbolic

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[70] A Full Moon In March, p. 623.

[71] A Full Moon In March, p. 625.

[72] Kenneth Burke, "On Motivation in Yeats," The Southern Review VII, Winter (1941), 552-553.

[73] A Full Moon In March, pp. 629-30. The underlining is my own.

union she embraces the seminal level, symbolized by the stains of blood which was earlier equated with conception:

> There is a story in my country of a woman
> That stood all bathed in blood - a drop of blood
> Entered her womb and there begat a child.[74]

Similarly the Swineherd reaches the solar level and becomes a "twinkle in the sky". Both have achieved completion by union with their opposite.

Strabel explains the symbolism in terms of the system of A Vision: "'March' of the title stands for the beginning of a cycle at Phase 1, 'A Full Moon' for the height of a cycle at Phase 15."[75] Phase 1 on the Great Wheel is characterized by complete absence of moon,[76] and thus is solar, Phase 15 is opposite and is characterized by complete dominance of the full moon. Thus the two are united when the moon is full in March, the exact time of the union of the lunar Queen and the solar Swineherd.

Even if we ignore the symbolism of sun and moon, the theme of the necessity of union with one's opposite is obvious. The oppositions of "crown of gold" and "dung of swine", and of Queen and Swineherd are resolved in their union. Even their love has a dual nature, spiritual, as symbolized by the Swineherd's elevation to eternity on the one hand, and earthy, as symbolized by the blood of conception on the Queen's gown on the other hand. The theme, as it is repeated on all levels, is summarized in the closing song. Saints, although they carry in their pitchers "all time's completed treasure," must descend from their niches for "desecration and the lover's night." Man must unite with his opposite, or on

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[74] A Full Moon In March, p. 626.
[75] Strabel, p. 276.
[76] See above, p. 145, n.228.

another level, in the words of Bentley, "... if we are to live, as artists or, for that matter, as men, our wintry and saintly virginity must descend into the dung of passion."[77]

With all of this Yeats has adhered to his theory of the role of passion in drama. The Queen represents the passion of virgin cruelty:

> First Attendant. [singing as Queen]
> Child and darling, hear my song,
> Never cry I did you wrong;
> Cry that wrong came not from me
> But my virgin cruelty.
> Great my love before you came,
> Greater when I loved in shame,
> Greatest when there broke from me
> Storm of virgin cruelty.[78]

The Swineherd represents earthiness but he exemplifies also the heroic passion of recklessness:

> The Swineherd. Why should I ask?
> What do those features matter? When I set out
> I picked a number on the roulette wheel,
> I trust the wheel, as every lover must.[79]

The two are united in a moment of passion, marked at the climax by the Queen's dance.

In conception and execution the play is both a vindication, if one is necessary, of Yeats' dramatic theorizing and a demonstration of his abilities as a tragic dramatist. Bentley writes: "One recalls Kenneth Burke's description of the tragic rhythm: from purpose to passion to perception. Is not that exactly the rhythm and shape of A Full Moon in March? From the Swineherd's boldly affirmed purpose, to the Queen's climactic

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[77] Bentley, p. 306.
[78] A Full Moon In March, p. 628.
[79] A Full Moon In March, p. 626.

passion, to the perception on our part of what it all signifies."[80]

A Full Moon In March is perhaps Yeats' greatest creation as a tragic dramatist.

The Herne's Egg, written in 1936 and 1937, was published in 1938. Structurally it represents a new departure for Yeats, in that it is longer and more complex than anything he had yet attempted. With a very few exceptions, notably The Countess Cathleen and The Player Queen, Yeats limited his plays to one act of great compression. The Herne's Egg is written in six brief scenes, set in four different localities. There are fourteen speaking parts, more even than in The Player Queen, too large a cast for a drawing room performance.

The play was intended for presentation in the public theatre, but unlike The Words Upon The Window Pane, it is not cast in the form of the modern realistic play. It is no closer to the usual type of drama than is A Full Moon In March, but it is considerably more elaborate. But neither does it resemble the Noh play or any modification thereof. The Musicians, masks, chorus, and climactic dance have been dispensed with. The physical distance, stage setting, and large number of characters are quite out of the Noh tradition.

Nevertheless, aesthetic distance, lack of realism, and absence of character are maintained by a series of devices, some of which may have grown out of the Noh conventions with which Yeats had so much experience. The settings are kept to a minimum and are by no means realistic: "Mist and rocks; high up on backcloth a rock, its base hidden in mist; on this rock stands a great herne. All should be suggested, not painted realistically."[81]

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[80] Bentley, p. 306.

[81] The Herne's Egg, p. 645, s.d.

This is the setting for the first and second scenes. Scene vi is set even more unrealistically: "A mountain-top, the moon has just risen; the moon of comic tradition, a round smiling face."[82] The donkey that is led onto the stage is "on wheels like a child's toy, but life-size."[83] The creel of eggs is painted on his side. The achievement of poetic distance by the use of un-poetic, even ludicrous objects in place of the more usual ones seen in the theatre is reminiscent less of the Japanese Noh drama than it is of the modern European techniques of "Da-da-ism" and "Surrealism". The relationship of Yeats' plays to these European movements is less remote than would appear at first glance.[84]

The aim of surrealism is the achievement of effects of "super"-realism through the juztaposition and combination of images and objects ordinarily considered incongruous. "The Freudian concept of the unconscious ... plays an important role in theoretical surrealism, it being claimed as the origin of the arrangements of incongruities which produce these effects."[85] "In poetry, it is a descendant of Symbolism with its emphasis on isolated images and individual associations."[86] The influence of Symbolism, which is common to both, is the most obvious point of contact

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[82] The Herne's Egg, p. 671, s.d.

[83] The Herne's Egg, p. 647, s.d.

[84] The resemblance of Yeats' earlier dance plays to another modern movement has been noted by Hone (p. 362,n.1.); "The ultra-modern Robot plays - or plays of types and forces rather than personalities and destinies - attempt to achieve what Yeats succeeded in doing so much earlier, but without the salutary formalism of poetry, a medium which Yeats realized was as essential to success as the lack of scenery and the masks; the clockwork motion to the tap of a drum."

[85] Reader's Encyclopedia, IV, 1085-1086.

[86] Reader's Encyclopedia, IV, 1086.

between Yeats and the Surrealists. One is justified in comparing the source of surrealist images, the individual subconscious, to the source of Yeats' imagery in the subconscious of the human race, as it were, since the poet also made that comparison:

> Before the mind's eye whether in sleep or waking, came images that one was to discover presently in some book one had never read, and after looking in vain for explanation to the current theory of forgotten personal memory, I came to believe in a great memory passing on from generation to generation.[87]

Certain similarities are likely to result from the practice of the two techniques although on the one hand the individual is the repository of symbols and on the other the entire race is. Indeed, if one does not accept the existence of the world memory or anima mundi as Yeats postulated it, one might conclude that he, by his own confession, was a practising surrealist although he himself was not aware of it.

But whatever the relation of Yeats to Surrealism, his use of the smiling moon, the rocking-horse donkey, and spits and table-legs for weapons is a means of achieving distance from reality. Ure calls the treatment "Aristophanic,"[88] and it is certainly a far cry from the lyric devices employed in the Noh plays. The desired end, aesthetic distance, is however the same in both cases.

As in the Noh plays, music is employed in The Herne's Egg, but whereas in the dance plays the drums were tapped and the other instruments that were played produced delicate sounds, as the zither and the flute, now the drums "boom", cymbals "clash", and the flute is replaced by the concertina.

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[87] W.B. Yeats, Per Amica Silentia Lunae, Essays, p. 510.

[88] Ure, p. 91.

In the same way, the nature and function of the dance have been considerably changed. In the Noh plays, the dance was the expression of lyric emotion on the part of one, or at most two, characters, at the climax of the play. In The Herne's Egg the dance takes place at the beginning of the play and is executed by several men who are engaged in a battle. Yeats made use of the dance to present a battle on the stage in what is probably the only way mass fighting can be effectively represented in the theatre.

"Many men fighting with swords and shields, but sword and sword, shield and sword, never meet. The men move rhythmically as if in a dance; when swords approach one another cymbals clash; when swords and shields approach drums boom".[89]

Like The Player Queen, The Herne's Egg is a lighthearted, satiric treatment of ideas which Yeats took very seriously. Before turning to a discussion of the material of A Vision which is presented symbolically in the play, it would be well to examine the symbolism on a less esoteric level.

Donald R. Pearce interprets the symbolism in terms of the contemporary Irish political situation.[90] In his view Attracta symbolizes spiritual Ireland and the Great Herne represents the "national genius" which claims the elect of each generation. The two Kings, Congal and Aedh,

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[89] The Herne's Egg, p. 645, s.d.

[90] Donald R. Pearce, "Yeats' Last Plays: An Interpretation," ELH (June, 1951) XVIII, 67-76.

symbolize the leaders or the leading forces in public Ireland, and their followers are the general public. The rape becomes the treatment Ireland has received at the hands of the misdirected public. Corney is the symbol of the Irish countryman whose allegiance is the correct one, but who does not understand the issues. The Herne's eggs symbolize the "nascent potentialities in Irish art and life wrecked by the general unleashing of the forces of 'vulgarity'.[91] Thus Congal receives a hen's egg because he is incapable of appreciating the higher object, the Herne's egg. In his disillusionment with the results of his youthful political activity, Yeats wrote:

> All that trouble and nothing to show for it,
> Nothing but just another donkey,[92]

meaning "just another donkey-nation".

This interpretation is borne out to a certain extent by internal as well as external evidence. The frequent references to political divisions in Ireland - Connacht, Tara, Clare, Munster - indicate that Yeats had modern Ireland in mind. The following exclamation by Corney reflects modern county loyalties:

> A king, a king but a Mayo man.
> A Mayo man's lying tongue can best
> A Clare highwayman's rapscallion eye....[93]

There is no doubt that Yeats was disillusioned with Irish politics and might certainly have satirized political leaders in Aedh and Congal whose pointless battle is never-ending and whose followers kill each other for

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[91] Pearce, p.69.

[92] The Herne's Egg, p. 678.

[93] The Herne's Egg, p. 667.

no other reason than loyalty to their Kings. He had represented the soul of Ireland as a woman before, in Cathleen ni Houlihan, and might well have expressed his disgust with events as they turned out by symbolizing the destruction of spiritual Ireland by the forces of materialism in the rape of Attracta. Here the symbolism, or Pearce's explanation of it breaks down, for Attracta's rape does not actually take place, but only occurs in the imaginations of the seven men who later deny that they had possessed her. Or if it does actually take place, it is erased from the minds of the participants by the Great Herne himself. Unless this can be interpreted to mean that Yeats still held out hope for the spiritual rejuvenation of the country, the act of the rape has no symbolic meaning. It is also true that Yeats objected to the preference of Irishmen, particularly politicians, for bad propaganda verse over poetry that had artistic merit. Thus Congal receives a hen's egg in place of a Herne's egg, but instead of accepting it as we might expect in the light of this interpretation, he becomes insulted and starts a battle on that account.

Nevertheless a political interpretation is valid, although the symbolism is not quite so complete as Pearce suggests. On one level at least the theory that "... this play is a satire of materialistic democracy,"[94] is acceptable, such a meaning being entirely in keeping with Yeats' thought.

However there is a second level of significant symbolic meaning. Ure points out that Yeats had invented a myth by which he could express the antithesis of subjective and objective forces,[95] which is a prominent

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[94]Pearce, p. 71.
[95]Ure, p. 91.

part of the system of A Vision. The Herne, like the white heron of Calvary, is the symbol of subjective man,[96] a representative of phase 15 on the Wheel.[97] Congal is a fool, he has proved it by his anger over the petty slight incurred when he received the hen's egg, and the seriousness with which he defends himself against the charge of having practised fighting with a table-leg. The phase of the Fool is the 28th, closest to the phase of complete objectivity. These two are in opposition. Congal is defeated in accordance with the prophetic curse; in killing himself he dies at the hands of a Fool.

At this level the repetition of the idea of re-incarnation, indicating Yeats' continued interest in the after-life, may be noted. Corney addresses the donkey:

> What if before your present shape
> You could slit purses and break hearts,
> You are a donkey now, a chattel,
> A taker of blows, not a giver of blows.[98]

The dying Congal asks Attracta's protection because he is afraid of what the Great Herne might do to him after he is dead:

> I am afraid that he may put me
> Into the shape of a brute beast.[99]

His fears are well founded, for because a donkey has conceived upon the mountain, "King Congal must be born a donkey!"[100]

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[96] See Ure, p. 92, or Henn, p. 274.

[97] See above, p. 145, n. 228.

[98] The Herne's Egg, p. 647.

[99] The Herne's Egg, p. 677.

[100] The Herne's Egg, p. 678.

In The King of the Great Clock Tower, A Full Moon In March, and The Herne's Egg, Yeats showed an increasing interest in copulation and conception, two phases of existence which he had ignored in his previous work. Houghton explains that after undergoing a serious illness in 1928 the poet experienced a rebirth of energy and returned to the body, to elemental life, as the source of creativity.[101] This shift from asceticism is manifested in the late poems as well as in the plays. Yet Yeats is reputed to have said in 1931 that, "Sexual intercourse is an attempt to solve the eternal antinomy, doomed to failure because it takes place only on one side of the gulf. The gulf is that which separates the one and the many, or if you like, God and man.'"[102] Attracta then has bridged the gulf by her marriage with the Great Herne, who is a god.

Purgatory, designated by Eric Bentley as "the finest of all Yeats's plays,"[103] was written in 1938 and published in 1939, after Yeats' death. In it two themes are woven together, one of which is the same as that treated in The Dreaming of The Bones and The Words Upon the Window Pane: the dreaming back of the events of life by spirits after their death. The second theme is concerned with the degeneration of Ireland.

Besides sharing the same theme as the above mentioned plays, Purgatory has certain structural and stylistic qualities in common with each.

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[101] Houghton, p. 320.

[102] W.B. Yeats, Conversation with John Sparrow (May, 1931), quoted from Sparrow's notes by Jeffares, p. 267.

[103] Bentley, p. 312.

It combines the realism of The Words Upon The Window Pane with the ceremony of The Dreaming of The Bones.[104] The play consists of a conversation between an old man and his son, culminating in the murder of the boy by his father. The tone of the conversation is realistic, the ideas are presented in a straightforward manner, the verse is bare of adornment, at times colloquial.

Boy. I have had enough!
Talk to the jackdaws, if talk you must.

Old Man. Stop! Sit there upon that stone.
That is the house where I was born.

Boy. The big old house that was burnt down?

Old Man. My mother that was your grand-dam owned it,
This scenery and this countryside,
Kennel and stable, horse and hound -
She had a horse at the Curragh, and there met
My father, a groom in a training stable,
Looked at him and married him.
Her mother never spoke to her again,
And she did right.

Boy. What's right and wrong?
My grand-dad got the girl and the money.[105]

No devices are introduced to add a lyric element, no songs nor dance, no musicians and no masks. Like The Words Upon the Window Pane it has an aura of realism. On the other hand, it shares with The Dreaming of The Bones certain characteristics of the Noh form. Having only two characters and a minimum of scenery it can be played in the drawing room,[106] and the characters are sufficiently stylized so that the players will not be made less believable by physical proximity to the audience. The meeting with the

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[104] Ure, p. 85.
[105] Purgatory, pp. 682-683
[106] Thompson, p. 73.

ghost and the significance attached to the tree resemble similar practices of the Japanese dramatists. Thompson goes so far as to classify the play with the "Oni-No"[107] type of Japanese play, which deals with the struggles and sins of mortals with the intention of leading the audience to think about the coming world.[108]

The elements of realism are combined with the resultant evolution of form which is unique and powerful. Purgatory represents the culmination of Yeats' development as poet and dramatist, as this development is described by T.S. Eliot:

> The course of improvement is towards a greater and greater starkness. The beautiful line is a luxury dangerous even for the poet who has made himself a virtuoso of the technique of the theater. What is necessary is a beauty which shall not be in the line or the isolable passage, but woven into the dramatic texture itself; so that you can hardly say whether the lines give grandeur to the drama, or whether it is the drama which turns the words into poetry.[109]

This starkness is one of the characteristics which distinguishes Yeats' later poetry from his early verse and which marks his later work as that of a great modern poet.

The dreaming back is stated explicitly by the Old Man:

> Old Man. ... The souls in Purgatory that come back
> To habitations and familiar spots.
>
> Boy. Your wits are out again.
>
> Old Man. Re-live
> Their transgressions, and that not once
> But many times; they know at last
> The consequence of those transgressions
> Whether upon others or upon themselves;
> Upon others, others may bring help,
> For when the consequence is at an end
> The dream must end; if upon themselves,
> There is no help but in themselves
> And in the mercy of God.[110]

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[107] Onna Mono. See above, p. 87.
[108] Thompson, p. 73.
[109] T.S. Eliot, "The Poetry of W.B. Yeats," p. 451.
[110] Purgatory, p. 682.

Unlike The Dreaming of The Bones and The Words Upon The Window Pane where the events which are being "dreamed back" are re-enacted by the leading characters, by the legendary figures of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla in the earlier play and by Swift and Vanessa in the later, in Purgatory the re-enactment is described by the old man while silent figures appear at the lighted window.[111] All irrelevancies have been pruned away, and what remains is hard, bare and intensely dramatic.

> The progression in method is interesting - from the heroic mythology of tradition through the new personalized mythology, created round the Protestant culture and summed up in the figure of Swift, to Purgatory, where mythological characters drop away and nothing is left but the sticks and stones of incident and belief.[112]

After the Old Man has related the family tragedy to his son, explaining the dreaming back of his mother, he suddenly turns and stabs the boy, thinking to end the polluted line. But then he hears the hoof-beats of his dead father's approach to his mother's home on their wedding night or the night of his conception, and the horrible realization comes to him that,

> Her mind cannot hold up that dream.
> Twice a murderer and all for nothing,
> And she must animate that dead night
> Not once but many times!
> O God,
> Release my mother's soul from its dreams!
> Mankind can do no more. Appease
> The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.[113]

A new idea is here introduced into Yeats' theory of dreaming back, that of the ultimate dependence of the soul in that phase of life after death upon God, if the person has transgressed against himself. In The Dreaming of

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[111] One assumes that if the play is performed in a drawing room these figures need not appear.

[112] Ure, p. 79.

[113] Purgatory, p. 689.

The Bones, Diarmuid and Dervorgilla could have been released if some person of Ireland, against which country they had sinned, would forgive them. Ure points out that the introduction of God into Purgatory marks an exception in Yeats' work.[114] Yet the introduction of God into the system cannot be discounted as either casual or accidental. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley he repeated a remark he had made in a speech about Purgatory: "I said: 'I have put nothing into the play because it seemed picturesque; I have put there my own conviction about this world and the next.'"[115] The idea of the ultimate dependence of the soul on God is close to the doctrine of organized religion, and is seemingly remote from the view expressed in Per Amica Silentia Lunae. After listening to Yeats discourse on the after life, Dorothy Wellesley commented: "'Well, it seems to me that you are hurrying us back to the great arms of the Roman Catholic Church.'" "His only retort," she reports, "was his splendid laugh."[116] Certainly the inclusion of God into Yeats' conception of the after life provides an element of confusion not easily reconciled with the rest of his thought.

There is no confusion in the second theme of Purgatory. Yeats' disillusionment with Ireland had been increasing. In The Herne's Egg he had treated the problems of political disunity and the subjection of

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[114] Ure, p. 86.

[115] W.B. Yeats, Letter to Dorothy Wellesley, Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley (London, New York, Toronto, 1940), p. 202. Hereafter this collection will be cited as Letters on Poetry.

[116] D. Wellesley, "Comments and Conversations," Letters on Poetry, p. 195.

spiritual values to material ones. Now he returned to the question of the destruction of the great houses, occurring all over the country, which was a manifestation of the passing of a way of life. In The Dreaming of The Bones this theme had been introduced to increase the emotional atmosphere of general despair. Yeats continued to deplore this turn of events, and in Purgatory it became the motivating force of the action. Yeats explained, "'In my play a spirit suffers because of its share, when alive, in the destruction of an honoured house. The destruction is taking place all over Ireland today.'"[117] The mother of the Old Man must relive her sin of marriage with the man who destroyed her ancestral home.

Old Man. Looked at him and married him,
And he squandered everything she had.
She never knew the worst, because
She died in giving birth to me,
But now she knows it all, being dead.
Great people lived and died in this house;
Magistrates, colonels, members of Parliament,
Captains and Governors, and long ago
Men that had fought at Aughrim and the Boyne.
Some that had gone on Government work
To London or to India came home to die,
Or came from London every spring
To look at the may-blossom in the park.
They had loved the trees that he cut down
To pay what he had lost at cards
Or spent on horses, drink and women;
Had loved the house, had loved all
The intricate passages of the house,
But he killed the house; to kill a house
Where great men grew up, married, died,
I here declare a capital offence.[118]

In addition to explicitly deploring the destruction of the old

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[117] Quoted by Bentley, p. 318.

[118] Purgatory, p. 683.

houses, Yeats symbolically depicted the destruction of Ireland's spirituality and her aristocratic tradition at the hands of the vulgar and the ignorant. Pearce[119] interprets the symbolism thus: The house symbolizes the Anglo-Irish tradition which had reached its peak in the eighteenth century, and which Yeats had admired and praised. The marriage of the owner of the house to a groom represents the debasement of the aristocratic tradition by degenerate alliances.

> The off-spring of this marriage (latter-day nationalism) slew the father (degenerate landlordism), took to the roads as a peddlar (of popular materialistic nationalism throughout the country) and, in the old man's words, "got upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch" (Proletarian Ireland) a bastard son (the modern Free State) who has neither memory of, nor belief in, the old man's tale.[120]

Pearce gives as additional grounds for his theory the fact that the boy in the play is sixteen years old, that the play was written in 1938, and that therefore the boy was born in 1922, the year of the founding of the Irish Free State.[121] If this meaning was not intended, why is the boy's age stated specifically?

> Boy. But that is my age, sixteen years old,
> At the Puck Fair.[122]

If the Old Man cannot end his mother's suffering by killing his own son, the solution to Ireland's problem does not lie in the dissolution of the Free State. Ireland is in Purgatory, caught in a dream of remorse for its

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[119] Pearce, pp. 72-73.
[120] Pearce, p. 74.
[121] Pearce, p. 74.
[122] Purgatory, p. 684.

own political and cultural betrayal,[123] but release can be granted only by God, as can the release of the mother. That is to say, Yeats, who as a young man had been so active in the nationalist movement which he then thought would bring Ireland to greatness culturally and spiritually, could not now see any solution to her problems. When Dorothy Wellesley asked Yeats what was his solution for the ills which he saw and deplored, he replied: "'O my dear, I have no solution, none'."[124]

The effect of Purgatory is emotional, like that of the dance plays, rather than intellectual, as is that of The Player Queen. The emotion aroused is that of despair, for Ireland and for man who cannot control his fate. It is tragedy, but unlike the tragedy we have come to expect from Yeats, in it no character is raised to eternity through tragic emotion. Its relation to his dramatic theory lies in the universality of emotion and the realization of the necessity of the surrender of the individual will to the all-embracing anima mundi, or, in the words of Peacock, "the submission of a soul to the all-enveloping spiritual mystery."[125]

The Death of Cuchulain, Yeats' last play, was written in 1938 and 1939, and published posthumously. He worked on it almost until the time of his death, giving corrections for it to his wife on January 26, 1939, two days before he died.[126]

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[123] Pearce, p. 74.

[124] Quoted by D. Wellesley, "Comments and Conversations," Letters on Poetry, p. 196.

[125] Peacock, p. 121.

[126] D. Wellesley, "Last Days," Letters on Poetry, p. 215.

It is fitting that in his last play Yeats should return to the subject of the life and death of Cuchulain which he had treated so extensively during his life-time. Indeed The Death of Cuchulain seems to gather up the other plays about that mythical hero and present the cycle in its entirety, bringing together at the end of Cuchulain's life many of the people with whom he had been involved in the earlier plays. Thus Eithne Inguba and Emer from The Only Jealousy of Emer, the Blind Man of On Baile's Strand and Aoife, the mother of Cuchulain's son, who was roused to do battle with him in At The Hawk's Well and sent their son to destroy him in On Baile's Strand, all reappear in The Death of Cuchulain. Conchubar, the representative of established authority, does not actually appear, but he is mentioned.

Structurally too, The Death of Cuchulain seems to gather up all that Yeats had learned of dramatic form and of stagecraft. It is written for the stage, but there are no scenic effects; the stage is bare in all but the second scene which requires a "pillar-stone" to which Cuchulain is tied. The play could be performed in a drawing room were it not for the use of the dropped curtain and the blackout to indicate the passage of time. There are many more actors than in the usual Noh presentation, but they resemble the stylized people of Noh tradition rather than the realistic characters of The Words Upon the Window Pane, or the heroic figures of On Baile's Strand. There is a Prologue, but not of the lyric type sung by Noh musicians. Instead it is a prose satire of Yeats' own dramatic theory, delivered by an old man who is thought to be a satirical

self-portrait of the poet.[127] There are musicians, but these do not appear on the stage until the very end of the play. During the action the sounds of their instruments come from behind the scenes. When they appear at last they are not the sunburned musicians who have "wandered from village to village in some country of our dreams,"[128] but are instead ragged street singers who have walked the hard and dusty roads of Ireland. The beautifully carved masks of the dance plays are replaced by black parallelograms because, "no wood-carving can look as well as a parallelogram of painted wood."[129] The lyric dance of the Noh form is retained. The combination of these factors results in a form which is allied to the Noh and also to the later Purgatory. The dance before the severed heads if reminiscent of The King of The Great Clock Tower and A Full Moon In March, the satiric element recalls The Herne's Egg. Withal it is perfectly unified and in an odd way unique.

The Death of Cuchulain is a curious combination of a dramatic form brought nearly to perfection and a satirical treatment of certain elements of that form. The same is true of the subject-matter.

The Prologue satirizes Yeats' earlier demands for a small audience of knowledgable people, yet the play itself was surely not intended for performance before the masses of the public. The Old Man speaks disparagingly of the Musicians: "I have picked them up here and there about the streets, and I will teach them, if I live, the music

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[127] See Ure, p. 23.

[128] See above, p. 127.

[129] The Death of Cuchulain, p. 694.

of the beggar-man, Homer's music,"[130] and as we have seen, the musicians have descended a long way from the mysterious, romantic figures they once were; but their song is the culmination of the play. The replacement of the opening song by a prose diatribe is in itself a rejection, almost a parody of the Noh convention, but Yeats returns to the Noh form with Emer's dance. Even the use of the dance itself is explained bitterly: "I wanted a dance because where there are no words there is less to spoil."[131] That which was an ideal has become merely an expediency. Nevertheless Emer's dance fulfills precisely the function prescribed for it in Yeats' theory and in Noh tradition. It adds emotional depth to the climax of the action, and does so exactly as Yeats wished it to. The substitution of parallelograms for masks seems also to be almost a burlesque of the Noh convention, and certainly indicates a reversal of Yeats' earlier pronouncements on the merits of masks as works of art in themselves. On the other hand, would not seven masks lying about the stage appear ludicrous rather than symbolic or artistic? And parallelograms are even more in keeping with the absence of character and generalized passion theories than were masks. This will be discussed at greater length below. Again, the Hawk head of the Guardian of the Well of At the Hawk's Well has been replaced by a crow's head on the shoulders of the Morrigu, indicating a certain disillusionment with the heroic nature of the gods. This has the two-fold effect of satirizing the heroic convention and conveying Yeats' sense of disillusion.

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[130] The Death of Cuchulain, p. 694.

[131] The Death of Cuchulain, p. 294.

The question then arises as to why Yeats satirized these conventions while at the same time making most effective use of them. I believe that the answer is that in the first place it gave him an opportunity to lash out at the "pickpockets and opinionated bitches," and at bourgeois culture generally; and secondly that it gave him an excuse, if one were necessary, to further modify the conventions which he had been developing from the Noh originals. These conventions, as traditionally used, were a lyrical, poetic means of supplying aesthetic distance, certainly quite the opposite effects from those that were needed for this play. The conventions as modified serve admirably, however, for the distance is maintained yet coupled with a sense of immediacy, and the lyricism of Noh is replaced by satire, matching in form the content of the play. Yet just as Yeats' disillusionment, as expressed in the play, is incomplete, so the Noh conventions are not entirely perverted, but return to their original function in Emer's dance.

The legendary material which is treated in the play is described in the Prologue as "antiquated romantic stuff". It would seem that Yeats had no illusions left when he so disposed of the mythology that had been such a stimulus to his creativity as a poet and as a dramatist. His treatment of the subject of the play would certainly seem to bear out that conclusion. Furthermore, the nature of heroism, which he had held to be so exalted, is now treated with grim satire. The story itself has been turned into a bitter defeat of the heroic.[132] Cuchulain and Eithne Inguba wrangle in

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[132] Ure, p. 23.

most unheroic fashion:

Cuchulain. When I went mad at my son's death and drew
My sword against the sea, it was my wife
That brought me back.

Eithne. Better women than I
Have served you well, but 'twas to me you turned.

Cuchulain. You thought that if you changed I'd kill you for it,
When everything sublunary must change,
And if I have not changed that goes to prove
That I am monstrous.

Eithne. You're not the man I loved,
That violent man forgave no treachery.
If thinking what you think, you can forgive,
It is because you are about to die.[133]

Aoife, now white-haired, old and no longer strong, comes to take Cuchulain's life in revenge, but she is not permitted this heroic gesture, nor is Cuchulain allowed the dignity of death at her hands. Instead the Blind Man of On Baile's Strand kills Cuchulain, with the knife with which he cuts his food, for a reward of twelve pennies. Until this point in the progression of the play there is a deepening sense of disillusionment. Heroism is degraded, vanquished by the trivial.

The next scene begins with the Morrigu, the goddess of war, holding the parallelogram which represents Cuchulain's head, and reciting the history of the battle. Six more parallelograms are lined up near the backdrop, and she indicates each of these as she recounts how each of the men, whose heads are thus represented, wounded the hero in battle. We are reminded that Cuchulain had been mortally wounded six times in battle, and that only two of the wounds were administered by unworthy men. Then

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[133] The Death of Cuchulain, p. 697.

Emer enters and begins her dance of adoration and of suffering. There is nothing satiric about her movements, they are a genuine expression of tragic emotion, and thus her dance raises the action to the heroic plane. The faint bird notes which are heard at the climax of her dance indicate that Cuchulain's soul has reached anima mundi. They recall his vision immediately preceding his death:

> Cuchulain. There floats out there
> The shape that I shall take when I am dead,
> My soul's first shape, a soft feathery shape,
> And is not that a strange shape for the soul
> Of a great fighting-man?
>
> Blind Man. Your shoulder is there,
> This is your neck. Ah! Ah! Are you ready, Cuchulain!
>
> Cuchulain. I say it is about to sing.[134]

The return to the heroic plane is marked by a return also to the utilization of a Noh convention in its traditional form and for the usual purpose of increasing the emotional intensity at the moment of climax.

The parallelograms, which replace the conventional masks, are employed not in an effort to satirize the poet's earlier use of masks but rather as a development of the convention for a serious purpose. As was pointed out above, half-a-dozen masks lying about the stage would not be nearly as visually effective as the black parallelograms. More important it is the complete lack of character evidenced by these cubes which symbolizes the loss of personal characteristics of the souls of the warriors that are about to unite with the anima mundi. This absence of character coupled with the emotion generated by Emer's dance fulfill the qualifi-

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[134] The Death of Cuchulain, p. 702-703.

cations necessary for the tragic climax which Yeats had propounded in his dramatic theory.

Cuchulain's immortality is reiterated in the closing song:

> Are those things that men adore and loathe
> Their sole reality?
> What stood in the Post Office
> With Pearse and Connolly?
> What comes out of the mountain
> Where men first shed their blood?
> Who thought Cuchulain till it seemed
> He stood where they had stood?[135]

Yeats' disillusionment did not extend to the stories of Irish myth though he spoke satirically of it in the prologue, nor to the legendary heroes. His disillusionment with modern Ireland, for which the heroes, both legendary and of recent history, have no more meaning than a "tale that the harlot/Sang to the beggar-man," was complete . There is no doubt of his disgust with the ignorance and vulgarity, the materialism and the political machinations which he saw around him. Pearce interprets The Death of Cuchulain in terms of political symbols:

> Cuchulain (the heroic spirt [sic] of Ireland) dies, but not idealistically at the hands of some supernatural enemy (there would have been some kind of satisfaction in that) but vulgarly at the hands of an ignominious old blind man who does the job for cash (triumph of materialism). National Ireland was, by now, really dead and gone for Yeats.[136]

Although Yeats retained his faith in the heroic virtues which he attributed to Cuchulain and saw practised by such men as Pearse and Connolly, it seemed to him that their sacrifices were in vain, for that which came after them was unworthy.

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[135] The Death of Cuchulain, pp. 704-705.

[136] Pearce, p. 76.

No body like his body
Has modern woman borne,
But an old man looking on life
Imagines it in scorn.
A statue's there to mark the place,
By Oliver Sheppard done.
So ends the tale that the harlot
Sang to the beggar-man.[137]

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137 The Death of Cuchulain, p. 705.

Conclusion

The course of Yeats' development as a dramatic theoretician and as a practising playwright is inseparable from his development as a man, as a philosopher, and as a poet. The interactions of these aspects of his life and art have been discussed as they affected his work as a dramatist; and the important influences on his work, as they were modified by these aspects, separately or in combination, have been traced. The changing attitudes and ideals in other areas are reflected in his dramatic writing, and in part it has been the purpose of this thesis to examine these changes as they affected the plays.

Yeats entered the theatre as a poet and emerged a dramatist. His work in and for the Abbey was a most important factor in the development of his skill in writing for the stage, and the effects are easily seen in his increasing grasp of the medium as it is demonstrated in each of the plays of the early and middle periods, and in the change from the position that words were more important than any other art of the theater to an acceptance of the idea of the composite art. The Nationalist movement in Ireland was a continuing influence on his writing. The change in his attitude towards it is revealed in his plays. As his idealism with regard to National Ireland was replaced by disillusionment, so the romantic Cathleen ni Houlihan was superseded by the satirical last plays, The Herne's Egg and The Death of Cuchulain.

Yeats had begun by drawing his symbols from the vast storehouse of Irish myth and folk-lore. Gradually however, as his interest in philosophy increased, the symbols which he used became less intelligible to

even an Irish audience, and with the revelation of A Vision they became extremely personal, requiring a knowledge of that work for their understanding. The increasing esotericism in symbolism was accompanied by a similar development in dramatic form. The vague mysticism envisioned in The Land of Heart's Desire and The Shadowy Waters was succeeded by the precise and elaborate System of A Vision. The mist surrounding the "fairy-land" of the early plays is dissolved and the ideas of the nature of the after life become increasingly clearer and better defined in the later works. Even after the discovery of Noh the development away from lyricism and romanticism continued, for as Yeats became increasingly concerned with intellectual ideas, the plays became more cerebral. The earliest Noh play, At The Hawk's Well, makes use of all the conventions available for the evocation of emotion, but Purgatory ignores these entirely, and the emotion of the climax of the later play is generated purely by the ideas.

In addition to these changes and developments, there is a unifying factor which connects and explains, to a certain extent, all of these. The early influences of Pre-Raphaelitism and mysticism led to the creation of the philosophic concepts of anima hominis and anima mundi and of a dramatic theory based on these which stressed the necessity of aesthetic distance, absence of character, and generalized passion. This theory led in turn to the adoption and adaptation of the form of the Japanese Noh drama, which suited the poet's theory and his particular talent almost exactly. After mastering the Noh form, Yeats proceeded to modify it, and in certain instances to abandon it entirely, in an effort

to evolve a form which would serve as the best possible means for the dramatic expression of the theories of history, of personality, and of life after death with which he was preoccupied.

Thus the importance of the original theory must not be underestimated. In his early attempts to execute the ideal of absence of character in order to bring pure emotion onto the stage, Yeats found that it was necessary to compromise somewhat. Although he never showed the development of character during the action, some of the personages had distinct attributes. In The King's Threshold, for example, all the persons in the play, with the exception of Seanchan and his pupils, are individuals whose characters are fully though lightly drawn when they appear. Only the hero conforms to the theory. The difficulty was, of course, that Yeats was trying to cast the drama which he conceived into a form with which it was basically incompatible. Historically European drama has been concerned with the development, reactions and interaction of a group of characters. In the Japanese Noh drama, Yeats found a form which he could embrace without encountering this problem. The Noh play is traditionally unconcerned with character, which is subservient to beauty of form, of mood, of music, and of dance. The Noh convention of the mask removed any vestige of individuality from the actor, and other conventions were powerful aids in engendering the emotion which was in Yeats' view the most important aspect of tragedy. Thus in the dance plays, particularly The Dreaming of The Bones and Calvary, distance from life and absence of character are perfectly achieved, and strong emotion is evoked. In the later more radical adaptations of the Noh form, The King of The Great Clock Tower, A Full Moon In March, Purgatory, the theoretical

requirements are met with equal success. It might be concluded that Yeats had successfully executed his theory in his dramatic practice where this was possible, the necessary conditions being stylization, formal conventions, and, in some cases though not in all (Purgatory is an exception), independent means of evoking emotion, such as music, dance, and the like. Given such conditions, Yeats' theories, when put into practice, produce plays which are intensely dramatic.

In attempting to evaluate Yeats' stature as a dramatist, we might reconsider briefly the value of certain of the plays which have been discussed. Some of the plays, especially the early ones, have very obvious faults. The Land of Heart's Desire is a slight thing, more lyric than dramatic, Cathleen ni Houlihan is now dated, and The Shadowy Waters, despite the great improvements resulting from successive revisions, suffers in comparison to his later work. Other plays are of unquestionable excellence. Deirdre, although not comparable to Synge's treatment of the same theme, is structurally almost perfect, and the great compression of the single act results in the generation of intense dramatic emotion. On Baile's Strand is a powerful treatment of the legend of Cuchulain's killing of his own son. T.S. Eliot suggests that the early verse plays, if not great in their own right, were the "best verse plays written in their time."[1]

Of the Four Plays For Dancers, The Dreaming of The Bones may be singled out as the first play in which Yeats effectively combined the ideas of A Vision with Irish mythology, and in which he showed complete mastery of the Noh form, producing a unified work of great dramatic effectiveness. Calvary represents the culmination of Yeats' work in this form, before he proceeded to modify it; there is no doubt of the complete success of the play on its own terms.

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[1] T.S. Eliot, "The Poetry of W.B. Yeats," p. 450.

The Cat and The Moon succeeds in its avowed purpose of amusing, and The Words Upon the Window Pane, a complete departure from the trend of the major part of Yeats' dramatic writing, is a demonstration of his ability to write good realistic drama when necessary. The Resurrection comes close to the discussion play against which Yeats had been in reaction. The play consists almost entirely of an argument between the representatives of three different points of view. There is action only at the climax which arises independently, as a vindication of one point of view and a refutation of the others set forth, rather than as a development of the action. On Yeats' own terms the play cannot be considered dramatic, since the shock of the climax is not the exalted emotion which he thought necessary to tragedy. The Resurrection is a philosophical success, and perhaps even a theatrical one, but it is not truly dramatic.

There is no doubt of the excellence of A Full Moon In March, which represents a high point in Yeats' career as a dramatist. In form it is unique, but perfectly suited to the theme being dealt with. Structurally it is as flawless as the early Deirdre. The legend, or ritual, in itself intensely dramatic, as adapted for the stage by Yeats gains immeasurably in beauty and power. Purgatory has a right equal to that of A Full Moon In March to be classified as great drama, although they differ greatly in technique and in effect. Purgatory is bare of adornment; in its very starkness lies the stabbing effect of the climax, which generates a terrible sense of despair. The Death of Cuchulain, though perhaps of greater interest to the student of Yeats than to the student of the drama, cannot be dismissed as a play of little merit, for if it is not up to the level of Purgatory, it has dramatic values of its own, both according to

Yeats' theory and to more generally accepted standards. Of the other plays we might note The Herne's Egg as an example of Yeats' ability as a dramatic satirist and symbolist, in spite of the rather confusing nature of the play; and The Player Queen, which, like The Words Upon the Window Pane is a non-symbolic dramatization of intellectual concepts.

During his life-time Yeats wrote more than twenty plays, excluding collaborations and translations, almost all of which have dramatic merit. There can be no question of his genius as a literary artist. He acquired a thorough knowledge of theatrical presentation and an understanding of the problems, the possibilities and the obstacles to be overcome in the effective presentation of a work of art in the theatre. In combination these entitle Yeats to greater recognition as a dramatist than he has received, because, in the words of Bentley:

> The art of the theater includes much, of course, that is not literature, just as the art of literature includes much that is not theater. Where literature and theater overlap, you have drama. The plays of Yeats are an instructive case in point.[2]

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[2] Bentley, p. 306.

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