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"To write for my own race"

The Irish Response to

W. B. Yeats

in his Lifetime

Eamonn R. Cantwell

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Dublin



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November 2002

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For Anne, whose love, support and encouragement made it all possible.

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Summary

This thesis examines the reception accorded to W. B. Yeats in Ireland during his lifetime. While the principal focus is on his literary work, due attention is also paid to the many political and cultural conflicts in which he became involved.

The primary sources of material used in the thesis were the many newspapers and journals published in Ireland between 1885, when Yeats's first poems were published in the <u>Dublin University Review</u>, and his death in January 1939. Much emphasis is placed on the fact that the material used gives a contemporary response to Yeats written often in haste and without the benefit of the hindsight available to later critics. In this way Yeats's reputation in Ireland is captured as it developed chronologically over a period of remarkable change in that country. The changes occurring in the political and social life of Ireland are a constant backdrop to the study of the varying responses to his work whether in the literary or in other fields.

An appendix to the thesis lists over 160 Irish reviews of Yeats's books and identifies the journal or newspaper in which they were published. A further appendix gives a number of illustrations from contemporary publications to give a visual image of how some of Yeats's literary work was originally presented to the Irish reader and also demonstrates some contemporary responses to Yeats both complimentary and derogatory.

The extensive searches carried out through a large quantity of contemporary published newspapers and journals enable the thesis to describe the reception of Yeats and his work in Ireland in a manner that has not been previously attempted in any detail. The outcome is a complex picture as each of the different journals or newspapers in Ireland attempted to interpret Yeats in a manner which they felt appropriate to meet the aspirations of their own particular community of readers. The changes to those aspirations, as the political status of Ireland developed over the period from the mid eighteen-eighties to the late nineteen-thirties, also adds complexity to the final outcome.

As the thesis points out there were many different interpretive communities in Ireland responding to Yeats in very different ways during his lifetime and because of the scale of his literary output each community could, as the years progressed, select some particular element of his work to hold as representative. In this way the different communities could respond to Yeats in a manner to suit their own cultural code, whether it be as the writer of the early nationalistic drama or of the complex poetry of his later years, or of the Yeats promoting independence for Ireland in the final decades of the nineteenth century, or the international figure in receipt of the Nobel Prize and a British Government pension many years later.

In researching for the thesis some elements of Yeats's reception have been identified which have received little previous attention in Yeats criticism. These range from the influence of Katherine Tynan in getting his early work published in The Irish Monthly, the influence of his ban on having his work sent for review in Ireland, the key influence of the 1916 Rising to his attitude to Ireland and the muted response both to his note on the Rising in Responsibilities as well as to the poems on the Rising when first published in Ireland in 1920, and finally the attacks on Yeats by some Catholic journals which are discussed in the context of the new role which that church wished to play in Ireland after independence.

What it is hoped is most valuable in the thesis is the perspective it offers, a contemporary Irish perspective which is responding both to Yeats's works as they were published or to his public activities as they took place. In its immediacy and its extensive use of contemporary primary material it can be seen as a useful addition to Yeats studies.

"To write for my own race."

The Irish Response to W.B. Yeats in his Lifetime

Introduction

In March 1934 W.B. Yeats made a broadcast on BBC radio from Belfast, which was subsequently published in <u>The Listener</u> under the title "The Growth of a Poet." In this broadcast he spoke of a poem entitled "The Fisherman" which he had written in 1914 and published in the American magazine <u>Poetry</u> in February 1916, almost at the mid point of his career. In this poem he had created as his ideal audience "a man who lived in the country where I had lived, who fished in mountain streams where I had fished; I said to myself, 'I do not know whether he is born yet, but born or unborn it is for him I write.'"

The need for the creation of this ideal audience for his writing was, Yeats tells us, due to his bitterness at the "unreasonable opposition" that he had met in Ireland and the realisation that it was not for those who attacked him or for "lukewarm friends" that he wrote but for "a man I have never seen." This man, however, was clearly an Irishman. Yeats wanted "to write for my own race" even if he had to create an ideal member of that race.

In this thesis I will examine the reception that Yeats did, in fact, receive in Ireland in his lifetime and why he felt it necessary, by 1914, to imagine a more acceptable Irish audience for his work. I will examine how his countrymen's perception of him changed over the years, how it varied across the different communities in Ireland, and how the changing political, cultural and religious environments in Ireland influenced his reception, as he was writing and being published. This reception has been gleaned from a reading of the multiplicity of contemporary newspapers, periodicals, and books published in Ireland between 1885, the year of Yeats's first published work, and his death in January 1939. As the newspapers and periodicals of the period were attempting to cater for the aspirations of their own particular community of readers, the picture which emerges will, of necessity, be complex and multi-faceted and it must be constantly kept in mind that it will be Yeats as represented in the contemporary press. The Yeats that emerges from this contemporary

¹ Frayne, John P., & Johnson, Colton, (ed.) <u>Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats, Volume Two</u>, p.498

perspective will not, of necessity, be the Yeats who has become familiar today, as his letters, notebooks, and private papers are becoming available to researchers and scholars, but it will give an important perspective on, and increase our understanding of, the man and his work.

Particular emphasis is placed on contemporary reviews of Yeats's published work as it appeared and on performances of his plays as they were produced. Over 160 contemporary Irish reviews of 57 books have been located and are listed in Appendix I of the thesis. In all cases the publication in which the review originally appeared has been identified and described, and the implications of the approaches taken in the reviews discussed are considered in the light of their source. Where possible, the identity of the individual reviewer has also been identified and the implications of the critical position adopted to Yeats's work are considered in the text.

These responses to Yeats's work are examined as Ireland went through a period of remarkable change from the early optimism of the mid eighteen eighties that the achievement of Home Rule was imminent, to the disillusionment following the death of Parnell, and the political and cultural activities of the final decade of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century. Then followed World War I, the 1916 Rising, the conscription crisis, the War of Independence, the Treaty, the Civil War and its aftermath, the setting up of the Irish Free State, the increasing influence of the Catholic Church in legislating for the new state, and finally the rise of Fascism in Europe and the increasing isolation of Ireland as Europe became threatened by another major war.

To the Irish people Yeats was much more than a poet. His early moderate nationalism developed into an association, in the eyes of contemporary commentators, with the advanced nationalist organisers of the 1798 centenary celebrations. In the following year he founded the Irish Literary Theatre with Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn and created a new audience for his work. From the opening of the Abbey Theatre in December 1904, he became a considerable and controversial public figure; a position emphasised during the Playboy riots in 1907. The controversy over the provision of a Dublin Municipal Art Gallery continued to keep his name before the Irish public as did his efforts to regain the Lane pictures from the National Gallery in London following Sir Hugh Lane's death on the Lusitania in 1915. As a Senator from 1922 to 1928 in the newly instituted Irish Free State,

his speeches on divorce and censorship, in particular, raised major controversies. In the final decade of his life he was less of a public figure, spending considerable time outside Ireland, and his public influence waned as Irish isolation grew and legislation was enacted such as the Censorship of Publications Act (1929), which, while it did not affect Yeats directly, had an ever-increasing impact on Irish cultural life.

It is clear that an examination of the reception of Yeats in Ireland during his lifetime has to look at a wider picture than the critical reception of his poetry and plays. Through his lifetime it was always difficult to separate Yeats the poet, dramatist, and essayist from Yeats the public man, and in an environment as politically and religiously sensitive as Ireland in the years in which he was writing, his public life and the lives and political activities of those with whom he associated, were to have a considerable influence on his contemporary reception in Ireland. In examining how he was regarded by his countrymen of all hues, I hope, in this thesis, to create a new and different perspective on Yeats, a perspective which is immediate and contemporary, which doesn't avail of the benefit of hindsight, but which looks at Yeats as his countrymen looked at him as he lived among them from his youth to his old age.

There will be some engagement with critical theory. Stanley Fish's concept of "interpretive communities" will be helpful in distinguishing between the different attitudes being displayed by the diverse groupings in Ireland to Yeats both as literary figure and public man. Wolfgang Iser's term "cultural code" will be particularly useful in describing how the changing cultural and political environments in Ireland during Yeats's working life affected the reception of his work. This is particularly significant in Yeats's case, as the period from 1885 to 1939 embraced the most momentous changes in Ireland as the country's political status evolved from that of colony to that of independent nation. Yeats was so involved in these changes that he cannot be properly understood in isolation from them. He had an "historical importance" as T.S. Eliot pointed out at a memorial service held in Dublin after the poet's death. In Eliot's opinion, "he was one of those few whose history is the history of our own time, who are a part of the consciousness of their age, which cannot be understood without them."

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² Fish, Stanley, <u>Doing What Comes Naturally</u>, p. 141

³ Iser, Wolfgang, The Act of Reading, p.28

⁴ Quoted in Hone, Joseph, <u>W.B.Yeats 1865 – 1939</u>, p.479.

My contention is that for a full understanding of Yeats one must incorporate another perspective into the great mass of critical and biographical work already published – the perspective of Yeats's contemporaries in Ireland, as his work was being published and as his theatrical, political and public activities were being enacted. This will, in many cases, consist of the writings of unidentified reviewers and journalistic commentators, many of whom had no great literary or critical skills. It will, however, also incorporate the views of critics and writers of considerable status whose reputations have survived into the twentyfirst century. The perspective in this thesis will be a contemporary one. Its source material will be reviews and comment often written very quickly to meet required publication deadlines and it will assess Yeats within the cultural and political climate of the day, frequently using the actual words of contemporary commentators.⁵ The perspective will be an Irish one, influenced by the editorial policy of the publication in which it appeared, the events of contemporary Irish life and the divisions in contemporary Irish society. It will, however, in its immediacy give an accurate picture of how Yeats was viewed by his contemporaries in the Ireland in which he lived and by the audience for whom he first wrote.

The thesis is divided into nine chapters of varying length. Chapter one covers Yeats's early years in Dublin, paying particular attention to how his association with Trinity College and the <u>Dublin University Review</u> influenced the early Irish reception of his work. It also traces the added influence on this reception of his friendship with Katherine Tynan and his introduction to a Catholic and nationalist audience. Chapter two sees the poet living in London in his twenties but still writing for an Irish audience and having his first book <u>The Wanderings of Oisin and other poems</u> published in London but extensively reviewed in Ireland. The centrepiece of chapter three is the controversy over the first production of <u>The Countess Cathleen</u>, which was a key influence on his early reception in Ireland. Chapter four commences at the beginning of the twentieth century and recounts a deterioration in his relationship with the Irish interpretive communities as his instruction not to have his books sent to Ireland for review limits attention to his poetry. This is compensated for by the attention paid to his plays as "Kathleen Ni Houlihan" receives a muted initial reception

⁵ In some cases it is felt more appropriate to quote the actual commentators directly rather than to paraphrase, even at the risk of extending the length of the thesis. In all quotations, the punctuation, spelling, use of italics, etc. is reproduced as in the original. Obvious spelling mistakes are noted with the conventional (sic).

but soon establishes itself as a nationalist icon and the Abbey Theatre is born. Chapter five, commencing in 1905, covers further controversy as Synge's The Playboy of the Western World receives a baptism of fire at the Abbey. Chapter six which runs from 1911 to 1917 places particular emphasis on Yeats's response to the 1916 Rising arguing for greater attention to be paid to a note in his volume Responsibilities which indicates earlier public support for the rebels than is generally acknowledged. The rescinding of his ban on sending his books for review in Ireland, also in 1916, revived attention to his published work in his native country. Chapter seven covers the dark days of the War of Independence, the Treaty and the Civil War, and on a brighter note culminates in Yeats's appointment as a Senator in the new Irish Free State and the award of the Nobel Prize. It also describes an increasing antagonism towards Yeats by elements of the Catholic press. Chapter eight attends to an improved quality of Yeats criticism now evident in publications such as The Irish Statesman and The Dublin Magazine ending with the reception afforded to his Collected Poems published in November 1933 and to his Collected Plays published in November 1934. Chapter nine begins the final appraisal of Yeats's life and work commencing with the celebrations on the occasion of his seventieth birthday in June 1935 and culminating in the obituary notices and notices of appreciation on his death in January 1939. A short Conclusion looks back briefly at this Introduction and assesses how the issues raised here have been addressed.

Chapter 1 1882 - 1886

The earliest known occasion when a poem by W. B. Yeats reached an audience outside his immediate family was in 1882. He was seventeen and living with his parents and sisters at Howth, County Dublin while his younger brother Jack was still living with their Pollexfen grand-parents in Sligo. During that year Yeats wrote to Mary Cronin: "I send you the verses you asked for. I have very few poem under a great many hundred lines but of those that I have this is the shortest and most intelligible." A six-line poem, which begins "A flower has blossomed" written on the verso of a draft of the letter, is presumed to be the poem sent. We have no indication what Mary Cronin thought of the poem, but Yeats himself was clear on how it should be received, writing in a postscript to his letter, "as you will see my great aim is directness and extreme simplicity."

In the absence of any critical response from Mary Cronin, we must, when seeking the earliest extant Irish critical response to of Yeats's poetry go to no less a critic than Edward Dowden (1843-1913), who had been appointed the first Professor of English Literature at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1867 at the early age of 24, and was an old college friend of the poet's father John Butler Yeats. Dowden had gained a scholarly reputation with his books Shakespere: His Mind and Art, 4 published in 1875, Studies in Literature published in 1878 and A Life of Shelley published in 1886, and was an established literary figure in Dublin when Yeats first met him. In his Autobiographies, published in 1926, Yeats describes meetings with Dowden at his house in Dublin in the early 1880s when the Yeats family had returned from living in London:

From our first arrival in Dublin, my father had brought me from time to time to see Edward Dowden. He and my father had been college friends and were trying, perhaps, to take up again their old friendship. Sometimes we were asked to breakfast, and afterwards my father would tell me to read out one of my poems. Dowden was wise in his encouragement, never overpraising and never unsympathetic, and he would sometimes lend me books.⁵

² The poem is also included in George Bornstein's edition of Yeats's previously unpublished poetry, <u>Under</u> the Moon.

¹ Domville, Eric, and Kelly, John, (ed.) <u>The Collected Letters of W.B.Yeats, Vol. I</u>, p.5 (Henceforth <u>Collected Letters, Vol. I</u>) Mary Cronin is tentatively identified as the wife of a solicitor then based in Dublin. In quoting from Yeats's letters his eccentric spelling and grammar is retained.

³ Collected Letters, Vol. I, p.6. Added as a postscript to his letter.

⁴ Dowden's spelling of Shakespeare.

⁵ Yeats, W.B., <u>Autobiographies</u>, p.85

Although Yeats was later to become a literary opponent of Dowden, this early praise, coming from so respected a source must have been encouraging. However, in private, Dowden was more guarded. Writing to John Todhunter on 23 July 1885 he stated: "Willie Yeats is an interesting bow of hope in the clouds - an interesting boy whether he turn out much of a poet or not. The sap in him is all so green & young that I cannot guess what his fibre may afterwards be. So I shall only prophecy that he is to be a poet after the event." In a further letter to the same correspondent in August of the following year Dowden is even less circumspect in giving his opinion of the young poet, so much so that he asks Todhunter to keep this opinion private. "I sometimes see Willie Yeats. He hangs in the balance between genius & (to speak rudely) fool. I shall rejoice if he be the first. But it remains doubtful. Don't make public the brutalities of this letter." This final sentence clearly shows Dowden's ambivalence towards Yeats's potential as a poet coupled with his wish to be discreet about exposing his real feelings, perhaps so as not to offend the poet's father. Such sensitivity would not be shown by many of Yeats's critics in future years.

John Todhunter had trained as a medical doctor and had been a friend of John B. Yeats at Trinity. He had a life-long interest in English literature and had served as Professor of English at Alexandra College Dublin in the 1870s before going to live in London. He subsequently published a number of books of poetry and drama, and his verse play A Sicilian Idyll was particularly admired by Yeats at its first production in a small theatre in Bedford Park, London in 1890. William M. Murphy, in Prodigal Father, a biography of John B. Yeats, contrasted Todhunter's view of Yeats's early publications in the Dublin University Review during the summer of 1885 with Dowden's critical opinion. Todhunter, according to Murphy, was "more perceptive, paying the teen-aged youth a compliment by declaring that the drama in the April and July issues, 'The Island of Statues', was not 'on the highest level,' thereby presuming WBY's work to be worthy of judgement by only the severest standards." That two such influential academics and writers should take the young Yeats's work so seriously, indicates that from the very beginning he was acknowledged by at least some of his readers as a special talent with the evident potential to be a significant poet. By the time Dowden and Todhunter were corresponding, the first

⁶ Edward Dowden's Letters, TCD MS 3715/37

⁷ TCD MS 3715/38

⁸ Murphy, William M., Prodigal Father, p. 144

work by Yeats to be published, "The Island of Statues", had appeared in the <u>Dublin</u>

<u>University Review</u> in March 1885 and his poetry was being subjected to the critical view of a wider audience in Ireland.

This year of Yeats's first publication was a year of political turmoil in Ireland and it is significant for his subsequent reception that his name became associated at an early stage with the nationalist community which was at last achieving political influence congruent with its numbers in the population. A franchise reform bill passed in Westminster in the summer of 1885 had increased the Irish electorate from approximately 220,000 to over 700,000. Alan O'Day in his book, <u>Irish Home Rule</u> described the situation as follows:

About one in every two adult males possessed the ballot in Ireland, a slightly lower proportion than in the United Kingdom as a whole. The effect was to create a vastly enlarged Catholic electorate comprising not just the better-off classes but also a substratum of cottiers and agricultural labourers. A reduction in borough constituencies and enfranchisement virtually ended Conservative and Protestant influence outside Trinity College and south Dublin in the southern provinces. 9

At a General Election held in December 1885, Parnell's Irish Party won a total of eighty six seats, which included all seventy seats in the three provinces of Leinster, Munster and Connacht with the exception only of the two Trinity College seats in Dublin which were won by Hugh Holmes Q.C. who had a short time previously been appointed Attorney General, and by David Plunkett Q.C. who was the sitting deputy. Both were returned unopposed, a fact which emphasised the political influence of the pro-Union, Trinity College establishment within the graduate body that constituted the electorate. After the election Parnell held the balance of power between Gladstone's Liberals and Lord Salisbury's Conservatives and when Salisbury resigned as Prime Minister in February 1886, Gladstone returned to office and in April introduced a Home Rule Bill in Parliament. At long last it seemed as if Home Rule for Ireland was imminent. However, Gladstone's Bill was defeated at its second reading in June 1886, forcing Gladstone to resign; and at the subsequent general election in July, the Conservative party under Lord Salisbury, with the support of Liberal Unionists, was returned to office with a substantial majority. The result was described by F. S. L. Lyons as follows: "Lord Salisbury at once formed a government

⁹ O'Day, Alan, <u>Irish Home Rule</u>, p.93

dedicated to the proposition that what Ireland needed was twenty years of resolute government and the first major crisis of Home Rule was over."¹⁰

It was during this period while the debate over Home Rule was being waged throughout Ireland that Charles Hubert Oldham, a graduate of TCD, set up a company called the Dublin University Review Co. Ltd. with the objective of publishing a new magazine as a successor to the Dublin University Magazine which had ceased publication some seven years previously. Neither Oldham's Dublin University Review (hereafter <u>DUR</u>) nor its predecessor the Dublin University Magazine (hereafter DUM) had any formal association with Dublin University, but the use of the University's name in both titles did lead readers to make comparisons between them. The <u>DUM</u> had been founded in 1833 by "a group of bitter young Tories" in TCD who rebelled against "the senior group of University authorities, [who] were liberal in policy and believed in co-operation with Irish Catholicism, (and to a certain extent also with Irish Nationalism)." The journal ceased publication at the end of 1877, but during its existence it had achieved a high reputation for its literary excellence. It included among its editors such luminaries as Isaac Butt, Charles Lever, and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, and had published the work of William Carleton and James Clarence Mangan as well as that of its editors. In 1875 it had published the earliest known poem of the young Oscar Wilde. As well as attempting to match the literary quality of the DUM, Oldham was also attempting, like his predecessors, to use his new magazine to counter the political views of the College authorities, but, by contrast with the <u>DUM</u> which had opposed the perceived pro-nationalist stance of the TCD authorities Oldham was opposing the pro- unionist stance of the current TCD establishment.

There is no record of when Yeats first met Charles Oldham but as Oldham would, most likely, have discussed his proposal to found a new literary magazine with Edward Dowden the College's Professor of English Literature, 12 particularly as he was seeking shareholders for his new company and his most promising source of investors would be among college staff and graduates, it may well have been Dowden who recommended Yeats to the new periodical's founder. In the early numbers of the <u>DUR</u>, a facility was provided for its readers to purchase shares in the Dublin University Review Company. This facility would

¹⁰ Lyons, F.S.L., <u>Ireland since the Famine</u>, p.187

¹¹ Sadleir, Michael, Proceedings of the Bibliographical Society of Ireland Vol. V No.4, p. 60

Dowden contributed an article on the French poet Sully Prudhomme to the August 1885 number.

undoubtedly have been taken up by Trinity College graduates or people associated with the college who would have been predominately unionist in political allegiance. This was a significant factor, as will become evident, in the journal ceasing publication within two years of its launch.

Oldham is described in a note to Dominick Daly's study of Douglas Hyde's early years as follows:

Charles Hubert Oldham, B.A. (1860-1926) was the best man of his year at Trinity College, Dublin. He graduated with a senior moderatorship and large gold medal in experimental physics and a senior moderatorship and gold medal in mathematics. In 1886 he founded the Protestant Home Rule Association, and was a frequent speaker at political meetings. He was called to the Irish Bar and went on the northern circuit; later, on the establishment of the Rathmines School of Commerce he was appointed principal. In 1909 he became the first professor of Commerce in the National University of Ireland, and in 1916 he was promoted to the Chair of National Economics in the University, a position he held until his death. ¹³

The Protestant Home Rule Association, which in fact Oldham did not found, (see note below) was a forum at which the case for an Irish Parliament in Dublin dealing with Irish domestic affairs was constantly argued. By his involvement with such an organisation, Oldham was setting himself at odds with the Trinity College establishment to whom any form of Home Rule for Ireland was anathema. He was also praised in the nationalist press. For example, the ultra nationalist weekly paper The Nation described him as deserving "the unstinted gratitude of Ireland for his services during the whole of the present struggle."

It is possible that the nationalist opinions expressed by Oldham and his colleagues at the <u>DUR</u> strengthened the moderate Home Rule views that Yeats had inherited from his father,

¹³ Daly, Dominic, <u>The Young Douglas Hyde</u>, p.203. Oldham was Hon. Sec. of the Dublin branch the IPHRA. It was founded in Belfast in May 1886 at a meeting reported in the Dublin nationalist paper <u>The Nation</u> on 5 June 1886, p.4 as follows:

A meeting of Protestant gentlemen from various parts of Ulster was held on Friday, 21st of May, in Castle Restaurant, Donegall Place, Belfast, and an Irish Protestant Home Rule Association was Established, with Mr. Thomas Shillington, JP, Portadown as president, and Mr. David Briggs, a Belfast linen manufacturer as secretary.

¹⁴ The Nation, 26 June 1886, p.8

John B. Yeats, whose "position on Irish politics had been taken from Isaac Butt." This would have been before he came under the influence of better-known and more determined and advanced nationalists like John O'Leary, who is usually thought to have initiated that process. ¹⁶

A second major figure involved in the setting up of the <u>DUR</u> was T.W. Rolleston (1857-1920) who acted as editor from August 1885 until the review's demise under its original rubric in December 1886. Born at Shinrone, County Offaly, and the son of a county-court judge, Rolleston was educated at St. Columba's College in Rathfarnham and at Trinity College. He also supported the nationalist cause and endeavoured to use the <u>DUR</u> to bridge the gap between the traditional Trinity College unionist stance and the ambitions of Irish nationalism. Subsequently, when living in London he worked with Yeats to found the Irish Literary Society in 1892, and was a member, with Yeats, of The Rhymers' Club in London in the early 1890s. Throughout his life Rolleston was a strong supporter of Irish letters and of the Irish language. He was president of a branch of the Gaelic League in the late 1890s and was a strong supporter of Douglas Hyde. In fact he is on record as endorsing Hyde's candidature for the new position of Professor of Irish at TCD in 1896.¹⁷

A third graduate of Trinity College who was influential in the early days of the <u>DUR</u> was John Bagnell Bury (1861 – 1927), the son of a clergyman from Clontibret, Co. Monaghan. Bury was educated at Foyle College, Derry and entered Trinity College in 1878 to study classics. His appointment as a fellow of the college was noted in the July 1885 number of the <u>DUR</u>, and four years later his two volume <u>A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene</u> was published. Bury was appointed Erasmus Smith Professor of Modern History at Trinity College in 1893, a position he held until he left for Cambridge in 1902. His status as a classical scholar was recognised in 1898 by his appointment as Regius Professor of Greek in TCD, a position he held concurrently with his professorship of history. At Cambridge he was appointed Regius Professor of History and continued to publish in the field of Greek history as well as producing a <u>Life of St. Patrick and his Place in History</u> in 1905. Bury did not share the pro-Home Rule politics of Oldham and

15 Murphy, William M., Prodigal Father, p.141

¹⁶ See Ellmann, Richard, <u>The Identity of Yeats</u>, p.13, and Foster, R.F., <u>W. B. Yeats: A Life</u>, p.43, among others.

¹⁷ Letter dated 6.3.96 TCD MSS 3454 -6/191

Rolleston, but, as will be noted later, he was a key influence in the decision to publish Yeats's early work in the newly launched DUR.

As Yeats's first publications were in a periodical associated, if only in name, with Trinity College, Dublin, and as the <u>DUR</u>'s founders and a number of its principal contributors, as well as its likely readership, were Trinity men, it is well to look briefly at the history of the college and note how publication in such a periodical as the <u>DUR</u> influenced the reception of Yeats's early work in Ireland.

The University of Dublin, with Trinity College as its sole constituent college, had been founded in 1592, in the thirty-fourth year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. From the beginning, the senior staff of the University were required to be members of the Established Churches of Great Britain or Ireland, which in effect meant that the College was an Anglican institution. Although Catholics and other denominations were allowed entry from 1793, they were not permitted to compete for scholarships or obtain fellowships. In fact the poet Thomas Moore who was born in 1779 was one of the earliest Catholics to enter Trinity after the passing of this act. He did however, as the TCD Entrance Book for 1794 shows, enter on 2 June 1794 as a Protestant. 18 It was only in 1873 that the restrictions on Catholics and others were finally removed, throwing the College open on an equal basis to candidates of every creed. But there was strong Catholic Church resistance to allowing its members to attend.

Catholics did have the alternative of attending the Catholic University on St. Stephen's Green, which had begun life in 1854 with John Henry Newman as its first Rector, but which, receiving no Government support and not being permitted to grant degrees, had fallen into decline until the Jesuits took over its work and governance in November 1883. 19 The Queen's Colleges in Cork, Galway, and Belfast had been established in 1845 as nondenominational colleges, but these were not favoured by the Catholic bishops who were

18 TCD MUN V 23/4

¹⁹ From 1854 to 1882 the College on St. Stephen's Green had been called the Catholic University. In 1882, following the establishment of the Royal University of Ireland under Disraeli's University Education Bill (1874), it became University College, Dublin. When it became a constituent college of the National University of Ireland in 1908, it retained this title. See McCartney, Donal, UCD: A National Idea, p. xiii.

arguing for "the right of Catholics to parity with the Protestants of Britain and Ireland in having a system of denominational education appropriate to their beliefs."²⁰

In 1885, therefore, Trinity College was very much a Protestant institution. In a brief history of the College, produced in 1892 as a Tercentenary Souvenir of its foundation, Charles Oldham wrote:

In the year 1891 the total number of Students on the College Books under the degree of M.A. was 1,151. The great majority of these are Protestant Episcopalians. A Return made to Parliament in 1889, stated that out of a total of 981 *Undergraduates* on the College Books on December 31st, 1888, there were: - Protestant Episcopalians, 771; Presbyterians, 80; Roman Catholics, 61; Other Denominations, 64; Unrecorded, 5.²¹

Professor F.S.L Lyons has described Trinity as being "for much of its history intensely conscious of its position as a bastion of the Ascendancy in general and of Anglicanism in particular." ²² In 1885 Trinity College could also be described as a bastion of unionism, totally opposed to the concept of Home Rule for Ireland. In October of that year <u>The Irish Times</u> quoted from the manifesto of the recently formed Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union, a unionist society well supported in Trinity College. The Union was formed

to uphold the true interests of Ireland by affording to those Irishmen of all creeds and political opinions, who believe that their country can best prosper as a part of the Imperial system, an opportunity of uniting in an organised opposition to the efforts being made by the party led by Mr. Parnell to sever the legislative connection between Ireland and Great Britain; and of thus asserting and maintaining by their votes the integrity of the Empire, the general supremacy of the united Parliament, and, not least, the social freedom of the individual, of which, in the opinion of the association, these are essential bulwarks and guarantees.²³

In his book <u>Irish Unionism</u>, Patrick Buckland identified two of the leading organisers in the "group of landowners and academics"²⁴ who had set up the Irish Loyal and Patriotic

²⁰ Morrissey, Thomas J., <u>Towards a National University</u>, p.39

²¹ Oldham, Charles, Hubert, <u>Trinity College Pictorial</u>, p. 56

²² Lyons, F.S.L., <u>Ireland since the Famine</u>, p.93 ²³ <u>The Irish Times</u>, 16 October 1885, p.5

Buckland, Patrick, <u>Irish Unionism</u>; One, p.1

Union as Dr. John Hewitt Jellett (1817-1888) Provost of Trinity College from 1881 to 1888, and Professor John Pentland Mahaffy (1839-1919) who had been appointed first professor of Ancient History at Trinity in 1869 (he was subsequently Provost from 1914 to 1919). A primary objective of the ILPU was to support those candidates in the general Election of December 1885 who were in favour of the maintenance of the British connection.

That the governing body of Trinity College was at the forefront of support for maintaining the union is further emphasised in an address presented by the senior staff of Trinity College to the Earl of Aberdeen in February 1886, on the occasion of his appointment as "Lord Lieutenant-General and General Governor of Ireland".

The address read as follows:

May it please your Excellency,

We, the Vice Chancellor, Doctors, and Masters of the University of Dublin, beg leave to congratulate your Excellency on your appointment to the office of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

The Institution which we represent has been for almost three centuries engaged in the work of education, and in literary and scientific research, endeavouring in both departments to aid the progress and diffusion of knowledge in the country. Trinity College opens its honours and emoluments to all whom the test of examination proves the most worthy, without other distinction than that of merit.

In the discharge of our duties we have sought to spread among those who resort to us for education, and through them among the people generally, the knowledge and intellectual training which tend to elevate the character and improve the condition of the community.

In this way we endeavour to promote that social harmony and well-being, which we hope it will be the result, as we feel confident it will be the object, of your Excellency's government to encourage and uphold.

The peace and prosperity of all classes are, in our judgement, indissolubly connected with the Legislative union between England and Ireland. We therefore conclude with the earnest hope, that this, and every other tie which makes Ireland an integral part of the United Kingdom, may be fully maintained.²⁵

²⁵ TCD MUN/P/1/2419

The appearance of the first number of the <u>DUR</u> in February 1885 did not appear to issue any immediate challenge to the unionist views of the College authorities. The format of the magazine was attractive, the cover included the arms of the University in its design and the typescript and layout were of a high quality as can be seen from the photocopy in Appendix 2 of the title page listing the contents for the second number for March 1885. Among the contents in the "Kottabistic" section can be seen the titles of Yeats's first two poems to be published "Song of the Fairies" and "Voices". With this edition of the magazine with the subtitle "A Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and University Intelligence" the reception in Ireland of Yeats's work began, and already there is a foretaste of the complexity involved in examining this reception.

While the <u>DUR</u> was a high quality publication seemingly appropriate to Dublin University's unique position in Irish cultural and political life, even in its first issue the seeds of potential conflict with the University authorities were evident. An introductory statement of intent in the first issue read in part:

it is felt that, in a country where the principles of political freedom excite so much interest, the attempt to assert the intellectual independence of Irishmen, and to provide it with a local outlet, will not be viewed with disfavour. It is true that, nowadays, in the world of intellectual effort, all roads seem to lead to London; but, if it is anywhere possible to resist successfully the centralizing tendencies of the time, and to strive for local individuality, it is surely in a great national seat of learning, the home of much of the rising talent of the country.²⁸

The founders of the new journal intended to avoid political controversy. However they believed that the journal

can assume and maintain a distinctly national tone; and in its pages Irish writers can express to Irish readers their views on the social problems of the day, and on the phases and aspects of contemporary art and literature. It cannot be too emphatically declared that with the vexed questions of current politics The Review has nothing whatever to do. There is, however, no reason why the general problems of political

²⁸ Dublin University Review, February 1885, p.1

²⁶ Appendix 2 also shows these two poems as they originally appeared in "Kottabistic".

²⁷ This subtitle was dropped for the August 1885 issue as the "Irish spirit" began to make its impact.

philosophy which these questions involve should not form legitimate subjects of enquiry, and receive broad and liberal treatment.²⁹

Given the widespread and bitter debate on Home Rule which was underway throughout Ireland and indeed England in 1885, it seems naive on the part of the journal's founders to have imagined that they could engage in a theoretical debate on Irish "social problems", and not be drawn into conflict with the Trinity College authorities.

The first numbers of the <u>DUR</u> did manage to avoid political pitfalls. In fact the major article in the first issue was "New Tendencies of English Political Economy", a study of the works of Arnold Toynbee – this probably reflected C. H. Oldham's interest in economics. The "Kottabistic" section was very much in the undergraduate mode of verse writing, being primarily given over to translations from, and into, Greek and Latin. The title "Kottabistic" was taken from the Greek word *Kottabos* defined in the <u>Oxford Dictionary</u> as "An amusement of young men in ancient Greece, much in vogue at drinking parties, consisting in throwing a portion of wine into some vessel, so as to strike it in a particular manner." This section connected the Review directly with a previous Trinity College publication <u>Kottabos</u>, one edition of which issued in each term in the 1870s and contained verses in English, Latin or Greek. Contributors had included Oscar Wilde and, when the publication was revived in the 1890s, would number John M. Synge, whose sonnet "Glencullen" published in the Hilary term 1893, was the only poem by Synge published in his lifetime.

It was in the Kottabistic section of the second number of the <u>DUR</u>, dated March 1885, that, as has been noted, Yeats's first published work appeared. The two lyrics published, "Song of the Faeries" and "Voices", had not been written as individual poems, but were extracted from the verse play "The Island of Statues" the composition of which was then nearing completion. To readers of the magazine, the impact made by the two poems, placed as they were on the same page with three translations - a couplet by Herrick translated into Latin, a verse from Sophocles translated into English, and an extract from Addison's "Cato" translated into Greek - must have been appreciable. The first verse of "Song of the Faeries" – the first verse by Yeats published - seems already to sing of another world, and although never reprinted by Yeats, except for its inclusion in a slightly amended form in "The Island

²⁹ *Ibid.* p.2

of Statues" in a subsequent number of the <u>DUR</u>, the poem presages those early poems of his which were to retain their popularity in Ireland among all communities of readers to the end of his life:

A Man has a hope for heaven,
But soulless a faery dies,
As a leaf that is old, and withered and cold
When the wint'ry vapours rise.

In <u>Reveries over Childhood and Youth</u>, which was completed in 1914 and published the following year, Yeats remembered how the decision to publish the complete play, from which the two verses had been extracted, in the <u>DUR</u> was arrived at:

I had been invited to read out a poem called *The Island of Statues*, an Arcadian play in imitation of Edmund Spenser, to a gathering of critics who were to decide whether it was worthy of publication in the College magazine. The magazine had already published a lyric of mine, the first ever printed, and people began to know my name.³⁰ We met in the rooms of Mr. C. H. Oldham, now Professor of Political Economy at our new University; and though Professor Bury, then a very young man, was to be the deciding voice, Mr. Oldham had asked quite a large audience.³¹

Why Bury was to be the "deciding voice" is not clear. The fact that he was a classical scholar and the two lyrics previously printed from <u>The Island of Statues</u> had been in the Kottabistic section may be relevant. However the editorial decision made by this small "gathering of critics" in Oldham's rooms in Trinity represented the first interpretive community to make a judgement on Yeats's work. The judgement was positive, and the play, in what was to be its only complete publication, appeared in the <u>DUR</u> over the four months from April to July 1885.

Though not a graduate of Trinity himself, as his father and paternal grandfather had been, Yeats was now an accepted contributor to the <u>DUR</u>. Therefore it is not surprising that he was involved in discussions held during June 1885 to determine the future direction of the journal. At that time, Douglas Hyde (1860-1949) was still a student at Trinity. He had received his BA in 1884, had then continued in the Divinity School until the Autumn of 1886 when he transferred to Law, taking his LL.B in 1887 and his LL.D. in 1888. Hyde

31 Yeats W.B., Autobiographies, p.92

³⁰ In fact, as has been noted, the magazine had printed two lyrics in its March 1885 number.

was a confidant of Oldham and Rolleston, and a strong supporter of the <u>DUR</u>. Although, like many other Trinity students, he was the son of a Church of Ireland rector, he was also strongly in favour of Home Rule and was, in particular, a keen advocate of the Irish language. He was, furthermore, an inveterate diarist and noted in his diary for 2 June 1885: "I spent the night in Oldham's rooms with Cherry, Yeats, a man named Gregg, the elder Stockley, Coffey and someone called Stokes, discussing how to introduce an Irish national spirit into the Review." It is particularly interesting to note Yeats's presence in this group and at such a meeting. The term "Irish national spirit" used by Hyde is also notable as it echoed the title of <u>The Spirit of the Nation</u>, a collection of "Political Songs and Ballads" which had been previously published in <u>The Nation</u>, the newspaper of the Young Ireland movement, and which, when published in book form in 1843, was a key influence in the development of popular interest in an Irish national literature.

At this stage in Yeats's own writing, apart from his fairies made Irish by Allingham, there was nothing of Irish nationalism or of Irish themes to be found. While it is now difficult to read these early poems without the benefit of hindsight as to the direction his poetry would take, and the Irish tone which he would create, it was not until late in the following year with the publication of "The Stolen Child" in December 1886 that he could be clearly identifiable as a poet who treated Irish subject matter. However while his earliest poetry was not specifically Irish, Yeats, through his association with Oldham and his colleagues, was becoming more interested in the possibility of developing an Irish literature in the English language, to help to meet one of the original objectives of the <u>DUR</u> in asserting "the intellectual independence of Irishmen."

According to Hyde's diary, there were many meetings during the month of June 1885 with Oldham and others to define a new editorial policy for the <u>DUR</u>, but Yeats's presence at them was not recorded. One of the results of these discussions was the appointment of T. W. Rolleston to act as editor from the August number. Another outcome was announced in the July editorial, which, having noted a change in the journal's format from the larger size used for the early issues to a smaller magazine format, then stated:

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³³ The Irish Monthly, December 1886, p.646

³² Daly, Dominic, The Young Douglas Hyde, p.57

The phrase "to Sligo town" in the canonical version of his poem "The Meditation of an Old Fisherman" was not included in its original publication in December 1886, but was substituted in later versions for the original and more general, "the far-away town."

We also intend to open our columns to a temperate discussion of certain public questions by representatives of the different parties or social movements in Ireland. The first article of this description will appear in our August issue, and will be contributed by Mr. Standish O'Grady. It will deal with *Conservatism in Ireland: its Policy and Future*. 36

Standish O'Grady (1846-1928), yet another son of a Protestant rector, born in Co. Cork, was educated in Trinity College and called to the bar in 1872. Between 1878 and 1881 he published History of Ireland: The Heroic Period, Early Bardic Literature, Ireland, History of Ireland: Cuchulain and His Contemporaries, and History of Ireland: Critical and Philosophical. With his retelling of the ancient Irish sagas, O'Grady became a key influence on the Irish Literary Revival. Yeats, in a review of a later book, The Coming of Cuculain, published in the Bookman in February 1895 called the O'Grady's History of Ireland: The Heroic Period "the starting point of what may yet prove a new influence in the literature of the world." O'Grady's article in the August number of the DUR, which was commissioned by Rolleston, was very pessimistic regarding the current state of the country: "I perceive every class, interest, and persuasion dominated each by an ardent desire to compass its own material welfare, all thoughts of the national welfare being quite second-rate, or even tenth-rate, in comparison." He went on to attack the Conservative leaders among the landlord classes in Ireland for not giving the sort of leadership which the country required.

A response in the September number by Michael Davitt³⁹ was predictably dismissive of O'Grady's argument, pointing out: "The cause of a people against a class is invariably just: that of a class against a nation never,"⁴⁰ and making a case for a socialist government for Ireland: "it is by the votes and voices of the industrious many, rather than by the rank and

³⁵ Dublin University Review, February 1885, p.1

³⁶ *Ibid.* July 1885, p.1

³⁷ Frayne, John, P., <u>Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats Vol. 1</u>, p.350

³⁸ <u>Dublin University Review</u>, August 1885, p.4

Michael Davitt (1846-1906) was the son of a small farmer in Co. Mayo. Evicted in 1851 the family emigrated to Lancashire. After spending seven years in prison for his Fenian activities, he went to America, returning to found The National Land League in 1879. This organisation was suppressed in 1881 and replaced by a new political mass organisation called the National League with which Davitt remained involved. However, with the Parnellite split in November1890 he opposed Parnell. He was elected MP for North Meath in 1892 and later for South Mayo from 1895 to 1899.

⁴⁰ <u>Dublin University Review</u>, September 1885, p.108

privileges of the idle few, that a country like ours should be ruled."⁴¹ Such sentiments were not likely to endear him to the majority of Trinity College readers of the DUR.

While the debate between O'Grady and Davitt was underway, Rolleston was attempting to maintain a political and literary balance in the journal. In the August number, as well as O'Grady's article, he published Edward Dowden's article on the French poet, Sully Prudhomme, his only publication in the <u>DUR</u>, and one that studiously avoided any reference to the current political situation. A further article by H. Rowlandson on "William Morris and The Socialist League" - an organisation which Morris had founded in London in the previous December, must also have been judged unlikely to give offence to the journal's Trinity based shareholders. This number did however include an article entitled "The Irish Language and Literature" by Justin Huntly McCarthy, an Irish nationalist MP and novelist, which may well have been recommended by Douglas Hyde, given his interest in the topic. This article could indeed have been an early influence on Yeats, invoking as it did the ancient Irish legends of Fionn Mac Cumhaill and the Fianna. One sentence in particular presages a view that Yeats would subsequently promulgate:

What I should like to see come to pass, and what I hope will yet come to pass, is that every Irishman should be as familiar with these varied legends, which are his own magnificent heritage, as with the stories which were told by Athenian fathers to their children.⁴²

In September, Rolleston continued his efforts to achieve a balance in the <u>DUR</u> with an article on "Lord Randolph Churchill and Indian Affairs" by John R Eyre, a story by John Todhunter, entitled "How Thomas Connolly met the Banshee", as well as a substantial verse play by Yeats entitled "The Seeker". ⁴³

By October 1885 the authorities in Trinity College were becoming concerned with the increasing politicisation of the journal and began to make moves to distance themselves formally from it. These included requiring Oldham to move his business activities from his rooms in Trinity to new premises outside the college in Grafton Street from which the DUR was published from November 1885. This distancing was further reinforced with the

⁴² *Ibid.* August 1885, p.46

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 94

⁴³ "The Seeker" was included in <u>The Wanderings of Oisin and other poems</u> but was never subsequently republished by Yeats.

January 1886 issue when the coat of arms of Trinity College, which had been used on the journal's cover, was withdrawn at the request of the Board of the College, and was replaced by the coat of arms of the city of Dublin. In that same January issue an editorial comment stated: "By mere force of circumstances the Dublin University Review has been drawn into the position of an independent Irish organ for political and social, as well as merely literary or scientific discussion." This editorial comment went on to give its view of the position of Trinity College in the Ireland of 1885, in a paragraph which is worth quoting in part:

It may be asked, however, whether the title and the birthplace of the Review do not constitute a tradition which must prevent it from becoming an acceptable organ for Catholic as well as for Protestant, for National as well as for 'West British' opinion. The best answer to this objection is that in point of fact no such obstacle to the representative and impartial character aimed at has ever been felt. Why, indeed, should it? Legally, Trinity College is at present as open to Catholics as to Protestants.

Notwithstanding this rather naive plea for understanding, the <u>DUR</u> was becoming more and more associated with the pro-Home Rule and anti-College establishment position. Yeats, through his close involvement with the journal, was also now allied with its pronationalist political stance and was distancing himself from the Conservative pro-union establishment of Trinity College as well as from his erstwhile supporters like Dowden whom he now began to see as "representative of all that he disliked in the Victorian frame of mind, particularly in its West British, Anglo-Irish manifestation." This new stance of the <u>DUR</u> was aimed at attracting more attention from the broader community outside the University, an attempt to bridge the contemporary political divisions in Irish society that was doomed to failure.

Oldham's move from his rooms in Trinity College to Grafton Street led to an expansion of the mostly Trinity College based group who were accustomed to meet in his Trinity rooms on Saturday evenings to debate issues of the day. In addition to Rolleston, Hyde, Bury and the others mentioned by Hyde in his diary, the group was now joined by people such as

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⁴⁴ Dublin University Review, January 1886, p.71

Michael Davitt, Dr. George Sigerson, a medical doctor who was also a translator of Irish Ballads and a committed nationalist, the poet's father John B. Yeats, and most importantly, the Fenian John O'Leary (1830-1907), who had returned to Ireland earlier that year after twenty years of exile, and who was to have a substantial influence on the direction in which Yeats's literary career was now moving. To this group Oldham gave the name 'The Contemporary Club', and during his time in Dublin, and indeed on subsequent visits when living in London, Yeats was a regular attendee. In the early years of his attendance he used the debates at the club to improve his ability to speak in public. It was a valuable training ground as can be seen from his description of these debates in his Autobiographies. "In Ireland harsh argument which had gone out of fashion in England was still the manner of our conversation, and at this club Unionist and Nationalist could interrupt one another and insult one another without the formal and traditional restraint of public speech."46 His experience here was to stand him in good stead when dealing with a hostile public in the years to come. The club also played host to visitors from outside Dublin who came to speak at meetings which it organised, and it was at such a meeting that Yeats first met William Morris when he came to address the club in April 1886.

It was also through Charles Oldham that, during the summer of 1885, Yeats had met Katherine Tynan (1859-1931), another person who was to have very considerable influence on his early career by arranging access for him to a different community of readers from those of the <u>DUR</u>, through such publications as <u>The Irish Monthly</u>, as will be described later. Tynan had been a reader of the <u>DUR</u> from its inception, and was eventually a contributor. In a letter dated 11 Feb. 1885, she wrote to her friend and editor of The Irish Monthly, Fr. Matthew Russell: "If you get the first number of the T.C.D. Magazine, will you lend it to me." Then on 25 February she wrote again: "The <u>Dublin</u> <u>University Review</u> is pitifully poor. Disgracefully below the standard of 'the Oxford Mag." The comparison made with an Oxford publication is significant, as this is how the University of Dublin and any publications associated with it, even by name, were judged in Ireland at that time. Oldham and his colleagues recognised this, and indeed had promoted the comparison by printing "Notes from Oxford" and "Notes from Cambridge" in early numbers of the Review. It was only after their decision to "introduce an Irish national spirit into the Review" at the meetings in Oldham's rooms in June 1885 that these notes were

⁴⁶ Yeats, W.B. <u>Autobiographies</u>, p.93

⁴⁷ Letters of Katherine Tynan to Fr. Matthew Russell, Irish Jesuit Archives, Leeson St., Dublin, Ref. J 27/73

dropped, again demonstrating the ambitions of the review's management to broaden the magazine's appeal beyond a primarily university educated readership.

Yeats continued to publish in the <u>DUR</u> through 1886, as it became further drawn into political controversy. Articles such as John F. Taylor's "Is the Act of Union a Fundamental Law" in the February number, and a response by Frederick J. Gregg, who termed himself "A Presbyterian Nationalist", set the tone. Rolleston published an article entitled "The Archbishop in Politics" in February, criticising the role of the Catholic Hierarchy in Irish politics that drew a response from L. Ginnell, a Catholic MP, in the next number. Even Yeats's poem "The Two Titans" in the March issue was subtitled "A Political Poem". It would appear that the publication of such articles was causing a decrease in support among the original shareholders that had funded the magazine from its foundation. There is a hint of trouble mentioned in correspondence between Katherine Tynan and Fr. Russell. On 28 December 1885 she wrote: "Do you know anything more about the D.U.R., Mr. Rolleston must have resigned and I feel sorry because I think he was a splendid editor (?)"48 On 21 January 1886, she wrote again with reference to a promised notice for Rosa Mulholland's book of poems Vagrant Verses: "Mr Oldham says the Dublin University Review notice has been attended to. Mr. Rolleston's resignation was merely a ruse in view of a meeting of the shareholders, he will return for the March issue. This is private." By May 1886, however, the troubles with shareholders must have come to a head as the magazine was taken over by its Dublin publishers Messrs. Sealy, Bryers and Walker. All that remained of the original Trinity College connection was the name and the presence of Rolleston who remained as editor and continued to encourage his Trinity friends to publish in its pages.

In June 1886 the DUR published Yeats's play Mosada, an offprint of which was then published by the review's new owners in the following September or October. This was Yeats's first book⁵⁰ and in noting its publication in the November number of the DUR, Rolleston wrote the first published critical comment on his work:

We are glad to note the publication by Messrs. Sealy, Bryers & Walker of the powerful and pathetic poem, 'Mosada' contributed to a recent number of this Review by Mr. W. B. Yeats. The reprint contains a pen-and-ink portrait of the

⁴⁸ Ibid. ⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Probably more accurately described as a pamphlet, being bound in brown paper covers and comprising

author by Mr. J.B. Yeats – a very beautiful and characteristic piece of work admirably reproduced on zinc by a Dublin engraver, Mr. Lewis.⁵¹

Mosada was a very limited publication, only one hundred copies were printed,⁵² but it did give Yeats the satisfaction of seeing his work published in a more permanent form for the first time. More importantly, it won him his first substantial review, written by his friend Katherine Tynan, and printed in the March 1887 issue of <u>The Irish Monthly</u>, a magazine in which Yeats's work was also, by now, being published, as will be discussed.

The <u>Dublin University Review</u> ceased publication under its original rubric with the December 1886 issue. Its publishers, Sealy, Bryers and Walker, did produce five more thoroughly undistinguished numbers in the following year, which were conducted on non-political principles and without Rolleston as editor.

With the demise of the DUR, Yeats's link with the type of unionist reader in Ireland who would have been originally attracted to a magazine issuing from Trinity College was broken. The other Irish journals available to him were of the more popular type, appealing in the main to a Catholic and nationalist audience and in the final months of 1886; it was to these that he now turned. His acceptance by a nationally minded readership would have been strengthened by his article in the November 1886 issue of the DUR entitled "The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson." This was an extended version of an article published in the October issue of another Dublin journal, The Irish Fireside, which was Yeats's first prose publication, written as a response to Ferguson's death in August of that year. Indeed, it seems likely that, of the two articles, the DUR's was the first written, having been held over for publication from the October issue. Yug Mohit Chaudhry in his recent book Yeats, the Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print has discussed both articles in some detail. Chaudhry argues that Yeats had misrepresented Ferguson as an Irish nationalist, and in accounting for his lack of success in England had identified reasons that had "clearly been foisted onto Ferguson by Yeats to strengthen, and even perhaps sensationalise, the nationalist argument against English literature."53 The reason for Yeats's action was, according to Chaudhry, an early example of Yeats's "tendency to balance literary

⁵¹ <u>Dublin University Review</u>, November 1886, p.958

53 Chaudhry, Yug Mohit, Yeats, the Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print, p.85

¹² pages. See Wade, Allan, A Bibliography of the Writings of W.B. Yeats, p.17.

⁵² There is currently no copy in The National Library of Ireland, The British Library, or the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. The only copy in a Dublin library is in Dublin Corporation's Gilbert Library.

evaluation with political considerations"54 as by this time the <u>DUR</u> had become more overtly supportive of the nationalist cause and Yeats, as Chaudhry phrases it, was "toeing the editorial line,"55 an aspect of Yeats's early publishing career in Ireland which, as we shall see, became more notable in his writings for the advanced nationalist publication United Ireland.

While Fr. Russell in The Irish Monthly considered Yeats's article on Ferguson "an eloquent and sympathetic essay,"56 another reader of the <u>DUR</u> took umbrage at its concluding paragraph, which read:

I do not appeal to the professional classes who, in Ireland, at least, appear at no time to have thought of the affairs of their country till they first feared for their emoluments – nor do I appeal to the shoddy society of "West Britonism," - but to those young men clustered here and there throughout our land, whom the emotion of Patriotism has lifted into that world of selfless passion in which heroic deeds are possible and heroic poetry credible.⁵⁷

The correspondent's letter, signed "A Nationalist in Literature", was printed in the "Notes of the Month" in the December 1886, and final, number of the DUR. Having commended Yeats's "enthusiastic paper" on Ferguson, the letter noted that the writer's pleasure was "spoiled by the rather petulant intrusion of political polemics in almost every page of Mr. Yeats' article". It then deprecated "the tone which the writer had seen fit to adopt," and concluded:

Apart from the sneers, wholly out of place in a literary criticism, at West Britonism and the alleged political apathy of the professional classes, it seems to me not only absurd but highly injurious to Irish literature to narrow its study to a peculiarly limited section of Irishmen. Whatever our political opinions, we are all prepared to be Nationalists in literature, and to admire genius and poetic gifts independently of the side on which they are enlisted; and it cannot but be regretted that pleasure in the writings of a man of such wide sympathies and broad tolerance as Sir S.

⁵⁴ op. cit. p.90 ⁵⁵ op. cit. p.92

⁵⁶ The Irish Monthly, March 1887 p.175

⁵⁷ Dublin University Review, November 1886, p.941

Ferguson should be thus denied by the intolerance of his critic, to a large number of his cultured fellow-countrymen.⁵⁸

Yeats's editor, Rolleston, commented:

We are not responsible for Mr. Yeats' views or sentiments, nor does our correspondent seek to make us so. But without desiring or presuming to fight Mr. Yeats' battles for him, we may take exception to his critic's general statement that "we are all nationalists in literature." Would that we were! But we fear it is a fact that the Unionist classes in Ireland have on the whole a distinct aversion to literature which treats of Irish subjects, from whatever point of view. 59

This letter marked the first occasion that Yeats's work was subjected to adverse criticism in print, and it is interesting to note that it was not the literary merit of his prose that was being deprecated but rather the nationalist cultural identity which he was now assuming through his relationship with the <u>DUR</u>. He was also starting to learn that the different communities in Ireland were loath to listen to, or to subscribe to, any voices dissenting from their own convictions, a fact which may have helped to bring about the failure of the <u>DUR</u>, as its shareholders and subscribers began to desert it. An editorial in the final issue identified the problem: "Wise after the event, however, we may say confidently that any attempt to found in Ireland an organ of political discussion which shall be open to writers of every shade of politics, must, under present conditions, fail."

Yeats's involvement with the <u>DUR</u>, which initiated his literary career, had brought his work to the attention of a small but influential community of readers in Ireland. These readers would have been attracted by the number of significant figures in contemporary Irish writing whose work was published in its twenty-three issues. Apart from Yeats, Rolleston, Oldham and Bury, and figures already mentioned, such as Dowden, Todhunter, O'Grady, Davitt, and Douglas Hyde, publishing under the pseudonym *An Craoibhin Aoibhinn*, it also published work by Rose Kavanagh, Katherine Tynan, John Boyle O'Reilly, John F. Taylor, and John O'Leary. By his association, in the pages of the <u>DUR</u>, with these well known and influential figures, Yeats, while still only twenty-two years of age, had now established a reputation as a promising Irish writer within what was

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* December 1886, p.1047

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.1048

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.1046

admittedly a small literary circle. Because of the political stance that the <u>DUR</u> had adopted, particularly in its later issues, he was also seen as sympathetic to the nationalist cause, a perception which was to his advantage as he began to address a new community of readers in the Catholic press.

His acceptance in Catholic nationalist circles was very much influenced by his friendship with Katherine Tynan, who was able to introduce him into Dublin's Catholic intellectual society, represented most ably by Fr. Matthew Russell (1834- 1912), the Jesuit editor of The Irish Monthly. In a letter to a Mrs. Pritchard in London on 30 June 1885, Tynan described her first meeting with Yeats:

Then a Mr Charles Oldham, a Scholar of Trinity College, wrote to me about a magazine they are starting, and then asked me if he might come to see me. He has come twice since, and last time he brought a young poet, Mr Yeats, with him. I found him very interesting, he has the saddest, most poetical, face I ever saw.⁶¹

As this description of Katherine Tynan's first meeting with Yeats was written shortly after the event it must be accepted as an accurate report of a meeting that was to be of great significance to the young Yeats. In her autobiography <u>Twenty-Five Years</u>, published in 1913, Tynan describes the meeting somewhat differently in respect of chronology:

Some time in the spring of 1885 I had a letter from Mr. Charles Hubert Oldham, a young Trinity College man who was about to start the *Dublin University Review*, asking me to help him. Such a request gave me great pleasure in those days. I contributed a poem to an early number, after which Mr. Oldham came to see me and told me about Willie Yeats and his father, showing me the *Island of Statues*, Willie Yeats's first considerable poem, which he had acquired for the new magazine. Presently Mr. Oldham came to see me accompanied by Willie Yeats.⁶²

The chronology of this description is suspect as Katherine Tynan's first poem published in the <u>DUR</u> was "In The May" in the August 1885 number, whereas Yeats's "The Island of Statues" had been published, as we have seen, in the four numbers from April to July of that year. However, irrespective of the date of their first meeting, it was through his

⁶¹ Barrow, Geoffrey, (ed.) <u>Apex One: Katherine Tynan Letters 1884 –1886</u>, p.23. In a note to this letter Barrow writes: "of Mrs. Pritchard almost nothing is known save that she is evidently the 'London hostess of those days' mentioned in the Reminiscences of 1912. The acquaintanceship undoubtedly derives from the business relationship between Katherine's father Andrew C. Tynan and James Pritchard."

friendship with Katherine Tynan that Yeats was able to gain access to a non-Trinity based, and predominately Catholic Dublin society which was to be very supportive of his work at this early stage of his career.

At the time of their meeting Katherine Tynan was already a published poet. She had seen her first poem printed in Young Ireland in 1875 when she was only seventeen. Her work was also published in *Hibernia*, a periodical that presaged and echoed to a considerable extent the experience of the DUR having been founded in January 1882 "to extend popular cultivated opinion in Ireland" and for the "encouragement of Irish talent on a common ground from which political and sectarian discussion shall be excluded." It also presaged the <u>DUR</u> in wishing "to afford Irishmen to write in an Irish spirit for Irishman, some of whom now find no means of directly communicating with their countrymen." In its short life (it ceased publication in December 1885), it published articles by John Todhunter, George Noble Plunkett, and T.W. Lyster, poems by Edward Dowden and Denis Florence MacCarthy and reviews by J. P. Mahaffy of TCD. It also reviewed at some length Katherine Tynan's first book of poems <u>Louis de la Vallière</u>, which had been published in London by Kegan Paul and Co. in April 1885, her father paying twenty pounds for the privilege!

Tynan's background was very different from that of Yeats and his Trinity College friends. Her father was a substantial farmer in Clondalkin outside Dublin. She had been educated up to the age of fourteen by the Dominican nuns in the Siene Convent in Drogheda after which she had no further formal education. She was a devout Catholic, her letters to Fr. Russell making frequent references to her Mass-going, her receipt of the Sacraments and, subsequent to her marriage to Henry Hinkson in 1893, to her efforts to convert him to Catholicism. She was a nationalist in politics, had visited Michael Davitt in prison in 1883, and had been a member of the Ladies' Land League, a short-lived adjunct of Davitt's organisation which had been set up by Anna Parnell, a sister of Charles Stewart Parnell, in 1880. She shared with Yeats a great interest in literature, and he found her a sounding-board for many of his early literary ideas. Katherine Tynan was also an energetic correspondent and collector of literary friends who included both Christina and Dante

⁶² Tynan, Katherine, Twenty -Five Years, p.141

⁶³ Hibernia, 2 January 1882, p.1

Gabriel Rossetti, but most importantly for Yeats she provided access to a Dublin literary life not previously available to him.

One of the most important of these new contacts provided by Katherine Tynan was the above-mentioned Jesuit priest, Fr. Matthew Russell. He was born in Newry Co. Down in 1834, educated at Castleknock and Maynooth and ordained in 1864. He taught in Crescent College, Limerick until 1873 when he returned to Dublin and founded the new magazine originally called Catholic Ireland and then The Irish Monthly, which he edited until his death in 1912. From 1877 to 1886 and again from 1903 to 1912, Fr. Russell also carried out religious duties at the then very fashionable Jesuit Church, St. Francis Xavier's in Gardiner Street. Part of the interim period was spent working in the Jesuit-run Catholic University in Newman House, St. Stephen's Green, where for a short time he was a colleague of Fr. Gerard Manley Hopkins. Katherine Tynan tells us that he brought Hopkins to meet John B. Yeats at his studio in St. Stephen's Green, giving the painter the opportunity to present Fr. Hopkins with a copy of Mosada, his son's first little book.⁶⁴ In a letter to his friend Coventry Patmore, Hopkins gave his opinion, not of Mosada, which he had not read at that stage, but of Yeats's poem "The Two Titans" which he had read in the DUR of March 1886. This early criticism of Yeats was, as Hopkins said, prosaic, but it did detect Yeats's fine poetic instinct:

Now this 'Mosada' I cannot think highly of, but I was happily not required then to praise what presumably I had not then read, and I had read and could praise another piece. It was a strained and unworkable allegory about a young man and a sphinx on a rock in the sea (how did they get there? what did they eat? and so on: people think such criticisms very prosaic; but common-sense is never out of place anywhere, . . .) but still containing fine lines and vivid imagery. 65

Through his long editorship of <u>The Irish Monthly</u>, Fr. Russell was a very influential figure in the literary life of Dublin, and this influence extended beyond the specifically Catholic community. At that time the Jesuit order in Dublin was considered to be the elite religious order in the city, its status enhanced by its role in running the Catholic University in St. Stephen's Green. Fr. Russell's own social background affirmed this high status. His uncle Dr. Charles Russell had been president of The Royal College of St. Patrick, Maynooth,

⁶⁴ Tynan, Katherine, Memories, p.155

⁶⁵ Jeffares, A. Norman, (ed.) W.B. Yeats: The Critical Heritage, p.65

from 1857 until his death in 1877, and his brother, Charles Russell was Lord Chief Justice of England. Charles Russell's wife was a sister of the poet Rosa Mulholland whose work appeared very frequently in <u>The Irish Monthly</u>, and who was to review Yeats's <u>The Wanderings of Oisin and other poems</u> very favourably in its pages some years later.

In July 1886, Fr. Russell published Yeats's poem "Remembrance" in <u>The Irish Monthly</u>. It was his first publication outside of the pages of the <u>DUR</u>. Published in a magazine that had started life as an "Irish Monthly Magazine of Religious Literature" under the title <u>Catholic Ireland</u>, the occasion undoubtedly introduced him to a new community of readers. These readers would have been accustomed to reading poetry of a religious nature from such poets as Rosa Mulholland, Evelyne Pine and Katherine Tynan as well as Mulholland's stories and religious writing of members of the Jesuit order. It was a strange environment for Yeats, epitomised in the September 1887 issue when his poem "She who Dwelt among the Sycamores" was placed on a page with the final paragraphs of an article on "Holiness" by one Rev. William Sutton S. J.⁶⁶

The acceptance of "Remembrance" for publication was directly due to Katherine Tynan. On 27 May 1886 she sent the poem to Fr. Russell with a letter which also gives an interesting picture of John B. Yeats's studio, where she was having her portrait painted:

This is a sonnet Mr. Yeats asked me to send to you. I copied it because his M. S. was so illegible. Please publish it. His father began painting a large portrait of me on Tuesday; I was sitting to him all that wet day. It was very amusing as plenty of people were coming & going, – nice people; - among others the Protestant Bishop of Limerick Dr. Graves. Mr. Yeats Senior is awfully nice. R.M. [Rosa Mulholland, afterwards Lady Gilbert] is coming there with me some day; she met him at the Meynells.⁶⁷

Fr. Russell published two more of Yeats's poems in <u>The Irish Monthly</u> during 1886, "The Meditations of the Old Fisherman" in October and "The Stolen Child" in December, both of which have survived in the Yeats canon. Russell also published reviews of Yeats's work and comments on his progress as an Irish man of letters in later years. In the March 1887

⁶⁷ Irish Jesuit Archives ref. J27/73

⁶⁶ The Irish Monthly, September 1887, p.533. A photocopy of this page with Yeats's poem is included in Appendix 2.

number of <u>The Irish Monthly</u>, Katherine Tynan reviewed Yeats's <u>Mosada</u>. (She wrote to Fr. Russell on 19January 1887 that she was also reviewing <u>Mosada</u> for <u>United Ireland</u>, but this review does not appear to have been published.)⁶⁸ <u>The Irish Monthly</u> review was the first substantial review that Yeats received, and has been included by A.Norman Jeffares in his <u>W.B. Yeats</u>: The <u>Critical Heritage</u>. It was published under the title "Three Young Poets".⁶⁹ The review has high praise for Yeats: "The young poet follows no master, and reminds us of no elder poet. This poem is rich with colour, alive with dramatic feeling, and the stately measure of the blank verse never halts or is disconcerted." At the end of the review Tynan strikes a note which was to become familiar in early Irish notices of Yeats's work: "Of Mr. Yeats' future position as a poet, great things may be prophesied; we to whom he belongs by blood and birth, will watch his career with especial trust and pride." In these early years, Yeats's Irishness was almost invariably emphasised by his Irish reviewers as he was seen, almost immediately, as adding lustre to the cultural life of his country.

The third Irish journal in which Yeats was published in these early Dublin years was <u>The Irish Fireside</u>. This first appeared in July 1883 as a supplement given away free with <u>The Weekly Freeman</u>, a weekly publication by <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>, a conservative nationalist daily which had been published in Dublin since 1763. The Irish Fireside later became a penny weekly (by contrast <u>DUR</u> sold for sixpence) with the following editorial objective:

To supply first-class serial and short stories, to give information on all subjects of general interest, to afford those who wish to employ themselves in literary work an opportunity of doing so with profit, and to enable all to beguile, without wasting, the idle hour⁷¹

In appearance and in content <u>The Irish Fireside</u> was a more popular type of magazine than either the <u>DUR</u> or <u>The Irish Monthly</u>, concentrating as it did on illustrated serial stories by

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ The Irish Monthly, March 1887, p.166 The other two poets were Henry Hamilton and Frances Fahy, neither of whose work has survived in print. Yeats's poem "The Fairy Pedant" was published in the same issue of The Irish Monthly. There was no consistency in Yeats's spelling of fairy/ faery. The former was favoured in his early years.

There were two unionist daily papers published in Dublin at that time; The Irish Times and the Daily Express as well as two evening papers, the unionist Evening Mail and the nationalist Evening Telegraph. These will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

The Irish Fireside, 2 July 1883, p.16

popular writers and containing columns on Chess, Beekeeping, Gardening and Fashions. It did, however, publish poems by both James Clarence Mangan and Sir Samuel Ferguson during its first year. Furthermore it demonstrated that, by the mid 1880s, there was a movement underway in Ireland to reactivate what Hyde had called "an Irish national spirit" and that this movement was not confined to pro-Home-Rule intellectuals like Oldham, Rolleston and Hyde, but was also being promoted by Catholic and nationalist journals. In support of this movement The Irish Fireside began the publication, in July 1885, of a series of articles on Irish history, written generally from a nationalist perspective to accommodate the preconceptions of its readers. These articles continued for over fifty issues. It also published another series, extolling what it called "Heroines of Irish History" which included articles on Anne Devlin and Sarah Curran as well as ancient mythic figures such as Oscar's wife Aedeen and her burial mound at Howth. A further series, in December 1885, entitled "The Men of the Old Guard" dealt with Charles Kickham, John O'Leary, Thomas Clarke Luby, Thomas F. Burke and Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa – all influential figures in the Irish nationalist movement. Stories by Wilkie Collins and Thomas Hardy in October 1885 maintained some overall balance in the magazine.

In January 1886 a special number of The Irish Fireside was published subtitled "The Great Irish Revival Number" and included the statement: "Our pages to-day are devoted entirely to Irish subjects and the revival and advancement of the language and literature of our country."⁷² The number included articles on "The Revival of Irish Music" by Professor P. Goodman; "The Revival of the Irish Language" by John Fleming (editor of the Gaelic Journal); "The Revival of Irish Trade" by Michael Davitt; "The Revival of Irish Literature" by a Dublin Journalist (substituting for Daniel Crilly MP who was ill); and "The Revival of Irish Games" by J. Wyse Power. An editorial comment in this special number read:

We have never brought party politics into the columns of the *Fireside*, nor do we do so now. But we have always endeavoured to encourage the true Irish spirit in our people, and at no time have we more nearly approached the full idea of our aim, than in this, the first number of 1886.⁷³

It is notable that the same expression an "Irish spirit" was used here as had been used previously by the promoters both of the DUR and of *Hibernia*. As well as demonstrating a wish to reactivate the nationalist enthusiasm originally created by the publication of The

⁷² *Ibid.* 2 January 1886, p.5 ⁷³ *Ibid.* p.17

Spirit of the Nation some forty-three years previously, it also showed that the wish to "de-Anglicise Ireland" as Hyde famously called it in his 1892 address to the National Literary Society in Dublin, had already taken root. This promotion of a "Great Irish Revival" by a popular magazine such as The Irish Fireside was also helping to create a receptive nationalist community ready to respond positively to Yeats's early work as it moved away from the Indian and Arcadian themes evident in poems such as "Mosada" or "The Island of Statues" and became more distinctively Irish. This special "Great Irish Revival" edition of The Irish Fireside of January 1886, including as it did the article on "The Revival of Irish Literature" is also a very early example of the use of the term "Irish Literary Revival" which was to become so well known in the following years.

Yeats's friend Katherine Tynan had been a frequent contributor to The Irish Fireside. Her poem "Answering the Signal" was specially written for the summer 1886 number, and she also had poems published on 24 April and 12 June of that year. Then on 4 October 1888, she introduced a new series of articles devoted to "The Poets and Poetry of Ireland" which was to appear over the subsequent months. A separate notice in the same number described Tynan's article as "the first in a series of papers on 'The Poets and Poetry of Ireland' which will be written by several eminent Irish authors – amongst others Katherine Tynan, W. Yeats, Rose Kavanagh etc." It seems remarkable that, at this early stage in his career, with just his publications in the DUR and the offprint Mosada to his name, Yeats should be referred to as an "eminent Irish author." However, this appellation may tell us more about the journalistic standard of The Irish Fireside than the esteem in which Yeats was held in his native land at this time, particularly as in other notices publicising the forthcoming series on Irish poets, Yeats was referred to on different occasions as Mr R. Yeates, W. Yeats, and Mr. B. Yeats.

In her introductory article to the series Tynan looked back nostalgically to "the Island of Saints and Scholars"; and having castigated Trinity College for "a foolish clinging to English traditions and English ways of thought," she wrote:

We need to be delivered from the reproach of neglecting our own art and literature. To help towards this end is the design of the present series of papers ...if one could bring to Irish homes and hearts, Mangan and Ferguson, Davis and Duffy and many

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 4 October 1886, p.208

another whose names are unfamiliar to Irish ears, a great advance would be made towards the laying of the corner-stone and more than the corner-stone of Ireland a Nation – Ireland the Mother of Nations.⁷⁵

This was an interesting early evocation of the three writers whom Yeats wished to be "accounted with" in his poem "To Ireland in the Coming Times" published some six years later.

The first article in the new series, which is also the first piece of Yeats's published prose to survive, was Yeats's article on Sir Samuel Ferguson, published in The Irish Fireside on 9 October 1886. It was a shorter version of the article written for the DUR, which, as we have seen, had led him into controversy. In line with Tynan's introduction, and indeed echoing her words, Yeats praised Ferguson specifically for the nationality of his poems and regretted his poor critical reception in England, quoting from a letter, written by Ferguson and published in The Irish Monthly in which Ferguson, according to Yeats, had "given the true cause of this want of recognition in English critical centres." These, again according to Yeats, were because Ferguson had "sought to lay the foundation of a literature for Ireland that should be in every way characteristic and national, hence the critics were against him." Further articles in the series during 1886 continued to advance the cause of Irish literature. These included Katherine Tynan on William Allingham and Aubrey De Vere; J.F. Taylor on Thomas Davis; Ellen O'Leary (John O'Leary's sister) on Charles Kickham; Rose Kavanagh on Gerard Griffin and Richard Dalton Williams, (who wrote under the pseudonym "Shamrock"), and by Yeats again on R.D.Joyce and James Clarence Mangan.

When the series was revived in February 1887, the first article was on George Francis Armstrong, and, interestingly, was written by T.W. Rolleston, the one-time editor of the DUR. Rolleston went on to publish further articles in the series on "Kottabos and some of its poets" and on Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. Other contributors to <u>The Irish Fireside</u> during 1887 included Frederick J Gregg (presumably the same Gregg noted by Hyde at the meeting in Oldham's rooms in Trinity), Hyde himself, as usual under the pseudonym "An

75

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.205

The Irish Fireside, 9 October 1886, p.220. This interpretation of Ferguson's letter has been disputed by Chaudhry who quotes from writings by Aubrey de Vere that give different reasons for Ferguson's lack of success in England: "a different style, a novel subject, 'embarrassing... Gaelic names', 'mediocrity in high places', the indolence of readers and the degeneration of literary tastes." See Chaudhry, p.84.

Craoibhin Aoibhinn", and J.S.F. Coffey, (presumably another of those who attended the Trinity meeting), who wrote on Jean François Millet. It appears that with the <u>DUR</u> no longer available, these outcasts from the Trinity establishment were now prepared to join in with the popular movement represented by <u>The Irish Fireside's</u> efforts to create an Irish Revival.

There is no doubt that Yeats's name (however <u>The Irish Fireside</u> spelled it) was, by the end of 1886, firmly associated with the nationalist perspective. His reviews of Sir Samuel Ferguson in <u>The Irish Fireside</u> and the <u>DUR</u> and of James Clarence Mangan in <u>The Irish Fireside</u> in March 1887 all supported the growing desire to see an Irish national literature recreated in the English language. Ferguson and Mangan were constantly invoked as precursors to a new beginning in Irish writing in English. In writing so positively about them, Yeats was establishing himself, in the eyes of the nationalist community at least, as a successor to those "That sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong." In defending Ferguson's nationalism in a footnote to his article in the penultimate number of the <u>DUR</u>, Yeats had set down clearly how he wanted his own work to be seen:

True it is that he afterwards suppressed some of his patriotic poems, 'lest, by any means, the Nationalists should claim him for their own.' But the suppression was not carried far enough. We claim him through every line. Irish singers, who are genuinely Irish in thought, subject and style, must, whether they will or no, nourish the forces that make for the political liberties of Ireland.⁷⁷

In this footnote Yeats openly claims to be seen and read as a nationalist and this is how his Irish readers now regarded him. By mid-1887 he had published nothing outside Ireland, and his publications in Irish periodicals were all in journals which had a nationalist tendency, whether they were appealing to the intellectual Trinity College educated community in the <u>DUR</u>, to a Catholic educated community in <u>The Irish Monthly</u> or to a predominately nationalist general reading public in <u>The Irish Fireside</u>.

In looking back at the two first years of Yeats's publishing career we see how the theme of "The Island of Statues", his early "Arcadian play in imitation of Edmund Spencer" or of

Dublin University Review, November 1886, p. 937. In his edition of Uncollected Prose Vol.I, which includes this article, (p.100) John P. Frayne places a comma after "through every line" rather than the full period as in the original, which weakens the emphasis of the statement.

specifically Irish literature in the English language. The Trinity College based promoters of the DUR - Oldham, Rolleston, Hyde and the others who used to meet in Oldham's rooms in Trinity and subsequently formed the nucleus of The Contemporary Club – influenced this development. It is usually acknowledged that John O'Leary was the primary influence in developing Yeats's interest in Irish literature, and Yeats himself has supported this view in his Reveries over Childhood and Youth. However, the earlier influence of Oldham and his colleagues was also extremely significant in instigating Yeats's interest in the literature of his homeland. This influence on the young poet was all the stronger as it came from a group who were members of his own Protestant community in Ireland but who, unlike the vast majority of their co-religionists, were anxious to develop an independence from England both politically and culturally. The fact that the year in which Yeats began to publish was a year of great general optimism among the Irish nationalist community that the long awaited goal of Home Rule was about to be achieved and the possibility of at last achieving political autonomy was probably instrumental in inspiring a strong desire for cultural as well as political independence. This was reflected in a growing interest in traditional Irish music, language and literature. The influence of this new Irish spirit, then developing among the community of readers which his work was addressing, was now shaping Yeats's writing, in particular his prose pieces on Ferguson and Mangan, into a more nationalistic mode.

By addressing the desire for a national revival in literature, Yeats was creating a larger audience for his work, and the growth of this audience was encouraging him to become more and more involved with the developing revival movement. The response of this interpretive community to Yeats's work was conditioned by the contemporary political situation in Ireland. Wolfgang Iser has defined a member of such an audience as "a real reader" who is

invoked mainly in studies of the history of responses, i.e. when attention is focused on the way in which a literary work has been received by a specific reading public. Now whatever judgements may have been passed on the work will also reflect various attitudes and norms of that public, so that literature can be said to mirror the cultural code which conditions these judgements.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Iser, Wolfgang, <u>The Act of Reading</u>, p.28

We have already seen how accurately this statement of Iser's defined the early reception of Yeats's work in Ireland. His work was being judged as supportive of the desire to promote a revival of interest in Irish literature by one particular community. As the years progress, we will see how the cultural code of this particular community influenced the reception of Yeats's work and how other communities with different cultural codes responded. We will also note how the developing political situation in Ireland influenced the cultural codes of the different communities there, which in turn impacted on the reception accorded to Yeats as a writer and a public figure.

Chapter 2 1887 - 1895

In early April 1887 Yeats left Dublin to join his family in London. His immediate concern was to find literary work in this new environment. For the moment, however, he was still addressing a receptive community of Irish readers through the Irish journals, The Irish Fireside, which ceased publication in October 1887, and The Irish Monthly. These were his only literary outlets in Ireland. In August 1887 an outlet in America became available when he had a poem "How Ferencz Renyi kept Silent" published in a Boston paper, The Pilot, and in May of the following year another poem, "A Legend of the Phantom Ship," was published in another American publication, The Providence Sunday Journal. During the four years from August 1888 to November 1892, Yeats contributed one poem and a total of fourteen articles or reviews to The Pilot, and one poem and five reviews to The Providence Sunday Journal. From the point of view of his Irish audience, what was important was that a number of these articles, particularly those in The Pilot, were reprinted, in whole or in part, in The Irish Monthly, and also in the monthly United Ireland and the weekly The Nation - two strongly nationalist publications which were now taking a considerable interest in Yeats and would strongly influence his reception by the Irish nationalist community in the coming years.

<u>United Ireland</u> was established in 1881 when Charles Stewart Parnell acquired three papers <u>Shamrock</u>, <u>Flag of Ireland</u> and the <u>Irishman</u>, "nominally on behalf of the Land League, and largely with funds subscribed from America for the general purposes of the League." The twenty-eight year old William O'Brien³ was appointed as editor and the first issue of the new weekly paper was published in August 1881. The advanced nationalist and radical politics of <u>United Ireland</u> made it a very different publication from the <u>Dublin University</u> <u>Review</u>, <u>The Irish Fireside</u>, or <u>The Irish Monthly</u>, where Yeats had previously been introduced to an Irish readership. In its early years, (it survived with occasional

¹ Yeats's initial connection with these American journals is described by Horace Reynolds in his edition of Yeats's contributions entitled <u>Letters to the New Island.</u>

² Lyons, F. S. L., <u>Charles Stewart Parnell</u>, p.162

³ William O'Brien (1852- 1928) was born in Mallow, Co. Cork. He had worked as a journalist for <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> before editing <u>United Ireland</u>, an activity for which he spent a number of periods in jail. He was elected M.P. in 1883. He became an Anti- Parnellite after the Parnell split in 1890 and was ejected from his editorship of <u>United Ireland</u>. He founded the United Irish League in 1898 and helped to unify the Irish party in 1900.

suppressions and with some editions published in London or Liverpool or Glasgow until September 1898), it paid only limited attention to literature, concentrating on promoting the activities of the Land League, projecting a militant nationalism and attacking the British establishment in Ireland in the most extreme language, particularly during the violence of the Land War in the early eighteen eighties. In October 1886 it published "the Plan of Campaign"; a scheme to reduce the rents paid to landlords, which in turn led to further violence. When literary matters were dealt with it, it was invariably in a propagandist mode. Patriotic verses were published each week⁴ and any books that were reviewed were praised for their nationalistic fervour and patriotism. Yeats's first appearance in United Ireland in January 1888 was an article entitled "The Prose and Poetry of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt". Yeats's opening comment: "Mr. Wilfrid Blunt has asked for pen and paper that he may edit a volume of his poems"⁵ did not need to tell United Ireland's readers that Blunt⁶ had asked for writing materials from a cell in Galway jail where he was serving a two month sentence for speaking at a meeting "calculated to provoke a breach of the peace," as Blunt's arrest, the presence at the meeting of his wife, a grand-daughter of Lord Byron, and his subsequent imprisonment, had been reported in detail in United Ireland between October1887 and January 1888.

In being published and discussed by <u>United Ireland</u>, Yeats's name was now being associated, in the eyes of that journal's readers and supporters, with a distinctive, advanced nationalist and republican strand in the broad nationalist community. Yug Mohit Chaudry has argued that his article on Blunt was in fact commissioned by <u>United Ireland</u> because its editor had been impressed by the "nationalist rhetoric and unionist bashing" of Yeats's previous pieces on Ferguson for the <u>Dublin University Review</u> and <u>The Irish Fireside</u>. In any case there is no doubt that the article was produced to suit <u>United Ireland's</u> politics rather than having any literary objective. It was Yeats's only publication in <u>United Ireland</u> prior to the Parnellite split in December 1890, although it did review his <u>The Wanderings of Oisin</u>, as we will note, in March 1889. However, following O'Brien's removal as editor after December 1890, Yeats's relationship with the journal was strengthened with the

⁷ United Ireland, 7 January 1888, p. 5

⁴ During 1897 it had published a number of poems by Katherine Tynan. This is another interesting example of Yeats's first publication in an Irish journal being preceded by Tynan's publication in the same journal. Her influence in having him published may also have been relevant here as it was previously.

⁵ United Ireland, 28 January 1888, p.6

⁶ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, an English poet and traveler, was arrested following a meeting which he addressed at Woodford, Co. Galway which was broken up by a police charge.

subsequent appointment of Edmund Leamy who had been O'Brien's deputy as editor, and of John McGrath¹⁰ as literary editor. With these new appointments, <u>United Ireland</u>, while still maintaining its advanced nationalist politics, took a considerably greater interest in literary matters. Indeed Chaudhry forcefully argues that the beginning of the Irish Literary Revival can be credited to this renewed interest in literature by the editors of <u>United Ireland</u>: ¹¹

The UI played a major role in conceptualising, organising and propagating the Irish Literary Revival. Its decision to do so was taken consciously almost immediately after the split when the paper increased its literary coverage.¹²

Undoubtedly the literary interests of the new editorial team worked in Yeats's favour as in the early 1890s <u>United Ireland</u> reviewed Yeats's books regularly, published his speeches, and was his main source of contact with at least one element of the nationalist community throughout Ireland. As such the journal will feature quite extensively in the following pages. After the split, Yeats had also aligned himself with the greater emphasis on Irishness and the role of literature in nation building, which were features of the journal's editorial policy. As Chaudhry describes it, Yeats was continuing to toe the "editorial line," and, as he wrote to Katharine Tynan in February 1888 following his Blunt article, "writing on other men's truths." This is a feature of Yeats's publications in Irish newspapers and magazines, which has constantly to be kept in mind. James Joyce's early identification in Yeats of a "treacherous instinct of adaptability" may be somewhat extreme, but there is no doubt that Yeats was adept at projecting his views in an appropriate manner to suit both the editorial policy of the publication in which he was published and the expectations of his audience, a factor that was to have a considerable

⁸ Chaudrey, Yug Mohit, Yeats, the Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print, p.118

⁹ Edmund Leamy (1848 – 1904) was born in Waterford. He was elected M.P. in 1880 and was a consistent supporter of Parnell.

John McGrath (1864 – 1956) was born in Portaferry, Co. Down. He had left <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> when it opposed Parnell and, with Edmund Leamy, was largely responsible for making <u>United Ireland</u> into a more literary paper.

The history of <u>United Ireland</u> and Yeats's involvement with it has been dealt with in some detail by Yug Mohit Chaudhry in his Yeats, the Irish Literary Revival, and the Politics of Print.

¹² Chaudhry, p.200

¹³ Chaudhry gives a circulation figure of over 100,000 for <u>United Ireland</u> in 1886 and suggests a readership of over half-million during 1885 -1890. This figure, however, dropped considerably after the split.

¹⁴ Chaudhry, p.122

¹⁵ Collected Letters, Vol. I, p.48

^{16 &}quot;The Day of the Rabblement" in Ellmann, Richard, and Mason, Ellsworth, (ed.) The Critical Writings of James Joyce, p.71

influence on his reception by the different communities in Ireland throughout his career. Undoubtedly there must have been occasions where Yeats's views or the views of a particular reviewer or commentator might not necessarily cohere with those of the editor and these would have been allowed as long as they were not seen as an attack on the basic editorial line.

Another nationalist publication The Nation, which is not discussed by Chaudhry, was also influential in projecting Yeats as an Irish poet to its readers at this time. It had commenced publication in 1849, as a successor to the influential nationalist publication of the same name founded in October 1842 by Thomas Davis, John Blake Dillon and Charles Gavan Duffy, which had been suppressed in 1848. While this "second series" of The Nation with "its Catholic lower-middle-class orientation" was never as influential as its predecessor, it did give considerable prominence to literary matters and was one of the earlier reviewers of Yeats's work. Its editors were two brothers from Bantry, Co. Cork, A.M. and T.D. Sullivan who were both Nationalist MPs and initially strong supporters of Parnell. ¹⁸ As James Loughlin has written: "The paper remained loyal to Parnell even after United Ireland was started as a party organ in August 1881." An editorial in its edition of 3 November 1888 entitled "The Cultivation of Irish Literature" set out clearly its "cultural code": "The study of Irish literature must, therefore, be reckoned on as a potent factor in the Irish national struggle."²⁰ To this end it concentrated on the literary work of which it approved, publishing extensive reviews of the works of Charles Gavan Duffy and John Boyd O'Reilly and its treatment of Yeats was consistent with this approach. However in 1891 The Nation, having taken the anti-Parnell side in the split, merged with the Irish Catholic in July of that year to become The Irish Catholic and Nation and its interest in literary matters waned.

It is interesting to note that both <u>United Ireland</u> and <u>The Nation</u> approved of the <u>Dublin</u> <u>University Review</u>: the former admired its "distinct but subdued flavour of National

Maume, Patrick, <u>The Long Gestation</u>, p.5

The Nation, 3 November 1888, p.9

Termed "the Sullivan gang" by Yeats, they sided with the Catholic church against Parnell following the split. See Collected Letters Vol. I p.242.

Loughlin, James, "Constructing the Political Spectacle" in Boyce, D. George, and O'Day, Alan, (ed.) Parnell in Perspective, p.230

individuality,"²¹ and later noted that "it promises to be an important focus of higher thought,"²² while the latter considered that "for the most part the tone and spirit of this review are distinctly national."²³

Both United Ireland and The Nation took note of Yeats's articles for the American paper, The Pilot. In these articles, the majority of which featured prominently on its front page, Yeats wrote primarily of what was happening in the world of Irish letters under the title of "The Celt in London". He did, however, inscribe his initials WBY, or on some occasions, his full name beneath his articles which were helping to reinforce his developing status as an Irish writer writing of things Irish for an Irish audience, whether this audience was an Irish /American one, or the predominant nationalist and Catholic readership of the journals in Ireland where portions of these articles were reprinted. His readers, either Irish or American, were left in no doubt as to his nationalist views. In his final letter to The Pilot, in November 1892, he began: "Your Celt has written the greater bulk of his letters from the capital of the enemy, but he is now among his own people again, and no longer The Celt in London, but The Celt in Dublin."²⁴ The editors of the Dublin papers were somewhat circumspect in what they copied for their columns, reproducing mainly his critical views on recently published books by Irish writers. However, these reproductions, prefaced generally with remarks such as "Mr. W.B. Yeats writes a very interesting letter to the Boston Pilot³²⁵ or "Mr. W.B. Yeats writing to the Boston Pilot says," helped to keep his name before his Irish readers, and, as noted, always in a nationalist context.

In May 1888 Yeats's name was associated with a new collection of Irish verse published in Dublin, called <u>Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland</u>. By its choice of name this collection was immediately claiming continuity with the writings of Thomas Davis and his contemporaries of the Young Ireland movement some forty-five years previously. Yeats contributed a total of four poems that included "The Meditation of the Old Fisherman" and "The Stolen Child" both of which, as noted, had been previously published in <u>The Irish Monthly.</u> ²⁷ He had also been involved in the selection and editing of this book which

²¹ United Ireland, 14 February 1885, p.5

²² *Ibid.* 10 October 1885, p.5

²³ The Nation, 20 February 1886, p.4

Reynolds, Horace,(ed.) Letters to the New Island, p.153

²⁵ United Ireland, 2 May 1891, p.1

²⁶ The Nation, 31 May 1890, p.5

²⁷ "The Meditation of the Old Fisherman" in October 1886 and "The Stolen Child" in December 1886.

included poems by Tynan, Todhunter, Rolleston, Hyde, Rose Kavanagh, and Ellen O'Leary, all of whom were members of the close-knit Dublin community of poets with whom his name was associated in those early years.

Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland was reviewed in The Nation which listed and praised the poets contributing including Yeats, whose poem "The Stolen Child" was singled out for special mention, being described as "a charming poem . . . full of sweetness and pathos". The reviewer then suggested that the publication of this little book "may possibly augur the advent of a new literary era which would redound to the honour and glory of the country at large," a comment which again demonstrates the implied connection between literature and nationalism that was a feature of the nationalist press.

In his review of the book in <u>The Irish Monthly</u> Fr. Russell also looked back to Davis's <u>The Spirit of the Nation</u> and the political dimension when he wrote: "it is forty years since Young Ireland of 1848, but the echo of the strains that "Davis' clarion blew" has not died out. Having praised the contributions of Todhunter, Rolleston, Tynan, and Count Plunkett, Fr. Russell remarked: "Mr. Yeats sings here with the true poetic tone he has used us to." ²⁸

Later in 1888 Yeats was asked by Ernest Rhys, the editor of the Camelot Classics series, whom he had met "at one of William Morris's Sunday gatherings" in London, and who later became a member of the Rhymers' Club, to edit what became his first book to issue from a London publisher. This was <u>Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry</u>, published in September by Walter Scott as number 37 in the Camelot Series. An extensive and very positive review of this book was published on 27 October in <u>The Nation</u>, praising in particular, the "interesting and appreciative introduction" in which "the editor has succeeded wonderfully in conveying, under a light and pleasing form, the fullest explanation of the subjects of the text." The review then perspicaciously added, in one of the first published comments in Ireland of Yeats's interest in the occult: "In fact when he comes to deal with the more mystical forms of primitive belief, he fairly revels in his theme. Into the study of occultism, Mr. Yeats has evidently entered *con amore*." The

²⁸ The Irish Monthly, June 1888, p.376

²⁹ Foster R.F., <u>W.B.Yeats: A Life Vol.1</u> p.63. Foster described Rhys as "a born-again Welshman starry-eyed about all things 'Celtic'."

³⁰ The Nation, 27 October 1888, p.4

³¹ <u>Dublin University Review</u> of July 1885 had noted Yeats's address to the first meeting of the Dublin

format that Yeats had used in collecting the stories under various headings such as, "The Trooping Fairies," "The Solitary Fairies," and "Ghosts," and so dividing the book into sections, "to which are prefixed valuable explanatory introductions," ³² was noted as being particularly appropriate. The poems by Ferguson, Allingham, and Ellen O'Leary, as well as those by Yeats himself, were further praised and a verse from Yeats's "The Stolen Child" was quoted approvingly.

By contrast with the extensive review in <u>The Nation</u>, Fr. Russell, in the November issue of <u>The Irish Monthly</u>, was very brief. He praised the introduction and the care that Yeats had taken in collecting the stories, but then, in wishing the book success, he wrote: "But when is Mr. Yeats to entertain us with minstrelsy of his own? Very soon, we rejoice to hear." Fr. Russell's wish for the publication of original rather than editorial work from Yeats was fulfilled just two months after this review when, in January 1889 <u>The Wanderings of Oisin and other poems</u> was published in London.

With the publication of this, his first substantial book of poems, the Irish critical community subjected Yeats's original work for the first time to intense scrutiny. For a first book of poems it was remarkable how much attention the book gained. It was extensively reviewed in eleven separate Irish publications: <u>United Ireland, The Freeman's Journal, The Evening Telegraph, The Evening Mail, The Irish Monthly, The Irish Times, The Sligo Independent, The Weekly Freeman, The Clonmel Chronicle, The Nation and The Lyceum. These reviews were generally positive, noting considerable potential in the work and in particular celebrating the nationality of the young poet. Yeats collected all the reviews that this book received, and preserved them in a notebook now in the National Library in Dublin. As well as the eleven Irish reviews there are twenty-eight further reviews pasted into this notebook making a total of thirty-nine reviews in all. This is a very large number for a poet's first book, and shows how diligent Yeats was in having the book sent for review wherever he could. It is interesting to look at the Irish reviews from the point of view of the politics of the particular paper or journal in which they appeared. The particular paper or journal in which they appeared.</u>

Hermetic Society at TCD on 16 June of that year.

³² Prepared with the help of Douglas Hyde. See Collected Letters, Vol. 1, p.88.

³³ The Irish Monthly, November 1888, p.688

³⁴ NLI MS 31,087

³⁵ All reviews are identified in Appendix 1 to this thesis. More detailed comment on the development and perspectives of the different Irish papers and journals at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century will be given in Chapter 3.

The Irish Times and the Evening Mail (the Daily Express did not review the book) representing the unionist, Conservative, Protestant perspective, treated Yeats as a poet in the English poetic tradition. The Irish Times opened its review by reminding its readers that Yeats's name would be well known to "several" of them from his publications in the Dublin University Review. It then criticised as "a piece of pedantry" Yeats's use of the name Oisin rather than the anglicised version Ossian, but praised the "originality and luxuriance" of his treatment of the story of Oisin's wanderings. It did not care for the "Celtic note of fairies" in many of the poems and identified "Kanva, the Indian, on God" as "the best poem by far in the volume". The Evening Mail looked back to Tennyson and did not like the title poem, as with a long poem it considered it difficult to retain the reader's interest particularly when the poem "is of a legendary character and deals with fays, fairies, and demi-semi-supernaturalism." This paper favored "Mosada" with some reservations about the accuracy of its use of Hindu mythology. Other poems contained "a touch of Shelley" or a "Wordsworthian simplicity" and, all in all, the book was considered a promising beginning.

By contrast with these two reviews which made no mention of the poet's nationality, <u>The Nation</u> gave the title "A New Irish Poet" to its review. In support of the paper's avowed policy of promoting Irish nationality through Irish literature, the reviewer was more intent on decrying the remoteness of contemporary literature from "the vital needs of the hour" than attending to the book in question. The reviewer was convinced that for all its considerable merits the book did not hold "much promise of better things" in future. It was too remote. Yeats's lyric ability was admired and the review ended by quoting a verse from "The Stolen Child" and praising "our newest poet" who added "to his English inspiration a fancy and spirituality and a grace and a talent for style which are intensely Celtic." ³⁸

Katherine Tynan writing for <u>The Weekly Freeman</u>, a sister paper to <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> the well established if relatively conservative nationalist daily also emphasised Yeats's Irishness, but surprisingly used the English version of Oisin, writing it as Ossian. She praised the book's originality, and in a phrase which recognised how other elements of the

³⁶ The Irish Times, 4 March 1889, p.6

Evening Mail, 13 February 1889, p.4

nationalist press might view the book she wrote that "it is not poetry with a purpose such as we often have in those purposeful days." She made comparisons with Blake, Heine and Landor and gave as her final opinion: "this young book of a young Irishman has rare performance and still rarer promise."

The Freeman's Journal expressed disappointment with the book, considering it too obscure, and accusing Yeats of hiding "a jumble of confused ideas in a maze of verbiage." This review irritated Yeats, particularly a remark that he "should study the ways of poultry" as he had peahens dancing in one of his poems. Yeats took exception to this comment in a letter to Katherine Tynan in February 1889, when he called the reviewer "some person of old fashioned taste" and then announced "Peahens do dance. At least they dance through out the whole of Indian poetry." The reviewer, however, did quote the prologue to "How Ferencz Renyi kept Silent", particularly admiring the couplet:

Therefore, O nation of the bleeding breast, Libations, from the Hungary of the West!

<u>United Ireland</u>, surprisingly for such a radical nationalist publication, did not emphasise the poet's Irishness, but instead was content to argue that, in literature, "the theme of Fionn and Oisin, and Oscar and Aideen and that company in general, has been rather overworked." In the reviewer's opinion Yeats's "*metier* is dramatic poetry" and to demonstrate this, quoted the poem "King Goll" in full.

The <u>Evening Telegraph</u> admired the book's "extended range" and "large scope" and "the peculiarly musical quality of the verse" and then displayed its nationalistic leanings by quoting the couplet from "How Ferencz Renyi kept Silent" which had been admired by <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>, and stating that in these lines "we read the writer's Irish feeling and sympathy with the struggle for Irish nationality." <u>The Irish Monthly</u> in a brief review

³⁹ The Weekly Freeman, 9 March 1889, p. 4

The Freeman's Journal, 1 February 1889, p. This particular criticism is reminiscent of the criticism raised by Gerard Manley Hopkins to Yeats's early poem "The Island of Statues".

⁴¹ Collected Letters, Vol. I, p.141

⁴² United Ireland, 23 March 1889, p.6 Chaudhry has noted that the review was probably written by Edward Leamy, who being a poet himself was possibly experiencing some professional rivalry. Chaudhry, p.123 ⁴³ Evening Telegraph, 6 February 1889, p.4

and a promise of further consideration, proclaimed "that Ireland can boast of another true poet in William Yeats." 44

The Sligo Independent, one of the two provincial papers to review the book, predictably focussed on "An Old Song Re-Sung" which was the original name of the poem now known as "Down by the Sally Gardens". It drew attention to the footnote that placed the origin of the song in the village of Ballisodare, County Sligo, before quoting it in full. The other provincial paper, The Clonmel Chronicle, initially subjected the reader to a dissertation on the difficulty of treating ancient traditional fables in a modern manner, but then congratulated Yeats on the title poem by "making his story interesting by picturesque descriptions and some pretty lays." The review admired Mosada and "several pretty ballads" which, the reviewer wrote, would give the author "rank among our Irish poets."

The final review was in <u>The Lyceum</u>, a literary magazine from the Jesuit-run Catholic University in St Stephen's Green, where Gerard Manley Hopkins had been Professor of Classics. The Lyceum had been established in 1887 as a "Monthly Educational and Literary Magazine and Review," dedicated to "promote a higher Catholic literature, to discuss questions of scientific and literary interest from the Catholic point of view." Its review described Yeats's book as being "brimful of charming artistic feeling and imagination, and, though somewhat too suggestive of the modern school of word painting inaugurated by Tennyson and Rossetti to be called original, is by no means a servile copy of any cult."

Such an extensive and generally positive reception gave added impetus to Yeats's growing reputation as a young poet of considerable promise who could appeal to a broad constituency of opinion in Ireland. His treatment of Irish themes was seen as just one element in his repertoire, counterbalanced for non-nationalist readers by his more exotic poems like Mosada and The Island of Statues which were the works favoured by such publications as the Evening Telegraph and Evening Mail. Overall, however, what is most remarkable is that Yeats is praised in all cases, even in the nationalist papers such as The

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⁴⁴ The Irish Monthly, February 1889, p.109

The Clonmel Chronicle, 23 February 1889, p.4

⁴⁶ Hopkins died in June 1889, the month in which the review was published.

⁴⁷ The Lyceum, September 1887, p.1

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* June 1889, p.312

Nation or United Ireland, as well as in Katherine Tynan's review in The Weekly Freeman, and in The Lyceum as a poet in the English tradition. Nobody mentions the names of Davis, or Mangan, or Ferguson, or of any Irish predecessor. The names most prominently mentioned are Tennyson, Browning, Wordsworth and Shelley. The basis for an Irish critical evaluation of Yeats at this stage was clearly in relation to the tradition of English poetry and not in relation to the poets of The Spirit of the Nation. As we will see it was Yeats himself who led the campaign to have Irish poets judged as Irish poets, writing in the English language, but carrying on in an ancient Celtic tradition which differentiated them from their English contemporaries. Developing such an Irish tradition and in Iser's term, creating a new "cultural code", but one which would be literary rather than purely national, as some elements of the nationalist press proposed, was one of the primary goals of the Irish literary movement with which Yeats's name became associated by the Irish public in the years to follow.

As well as continuing to review Yeats's literary output, Irish newspapers and journals were attending to Yeats's involvement in a number of literary and political controversies during the late 1880s and through the 1890s. For example his involvement with the Southwark Irish Literary Club in London, which he had first visited in March 1888, was given considerable attention. This club, which was the forerunner of the Irish Literary Society in London, sponsored talks by Irish literary figures that were frequently reported in the Irish press. Yeats's first talk at the club was in June 1888 when he spoke on "Folklore of the West of Ireland". His lecture was noted in a report published in The Nation in January 1889 when he was listed among the non-members of the club who had lectured during the previous year. ⁴⁹ In June 1889 when he lectured again to the Southwark Literary Club on Mangan, the favourable report in The Nation showed how much his speaking style had improved since his early efforts at the Contemporary Club in Dublin. He was described as having commenced with "a scholarly *resumé* of Irish poetry from the Bardic period down to the Young Ireland revival," and then the review concluded:

The learned lecturer illustrated many events in the chequered life of Mangan by quotations from his poetry and by many good stories, which he told in an easy and

⁴⁹ The Nation, 19 January 1889, p.5

familiar style: a poet speaking on a poet. The lecture was both interesting and instructive. The audience included Miss. Tynan.⁵⁰

This positive appreciation of Yeats was tempered somewhat later in 1889 when his <u>Stories</u> from <u>Carleton</u> was published. In its review on the 28 December 1889, <u>The Nation</u> criticised Yeats's introduction:

The introduction is a model of interpretative and sympathetic criticism. But it is criticism by a poet. The 'faint idealising haze' has flowed round Carleton and hid his defects. ⁵¹

The review went on to argue of Carleton that "justice demands at least one of his defects should be pointed out" and the particular defect identified by the reviewer was Carleton's picture of Catholic priests as "gluttonous, drunken, and ignorant." For this reason the reviewer thought "Carleton should be kept by Irish critics in literary pillory." Yeats responded to this criticism of his Carleton book in a long letter to <u>The Nation</u> in January 1890. He was forceful in his defense of Carleton, accusing <u>The Nation's</u> reviewer of a lack of balance in considering Carleton's work, which, in many of the books of his maturity contained "some eulogy, defence, or tender description of the Faith of his childhood." ⁵²

Yeats's response to <u>The Nation</u> demonstrated that, although he was now mostly living in London and busy developing his contacts in the literary world there, he was still sensitive to the views of his Irish critics, and was quick to defend himself if he thought the occasion warranted it. It was also becoming evident, as he came to look more critically at the Irish writers of Young Ireland or of later years, that the nationalist press in Ireland, which had been his champion, would remain so only as long as he continued to praise things Irish, and in particular, only if he refrained from criticism of the Catholic church or its priests. However for the moment his articles appearing in Ireland, whether written directly for Irish journals, or selected from <u>The Pilot</u> or <u>The Providence Sunday Journal</u> were such as not to cause controversy, being in general positively disposed to the writers under consideration, and being written or selected, as has previously been noted, to satisfy the expectations of the particular publication's editor and community of readers.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 8 June 1889, p.7

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 28 December 1889, p.4

⁵² Frayne, John P., Uncollected Prose of W.B. Yeats, Vol.1, p.168

After mid 1890 Yeats's outlet for original work in Irish journals was limited primarily to United Ireland as very few journals or newspapers in Ireland took a serious interest in literature. The Irish Fireside had ceased publication in October 1887; The Nation even before its amalgamated with The Irish Catholic in July 1891 was losing interest in literary matters. It was revived under its original name in June 1897, but retained a Catholic flavour most evident in its treatment of Yeats during the Countess Cathleen controversy in May 1899. The Irish Monthly continued to review Yeats's work but tended to revert to the type of Catholic conservative journal which it had been in its early years.

In May 1891 Yeats's two-volume selection of Irish stories entitled Representative Irish Tales, which had been published in March by G.P.Putnam's Knickerbocker Nuggets series in New York and London, was favourably reviewed in United Ireland. The review was particularly impressed by Yeats's introduction to the edition, demonstrating the status that Yeats had achieved, in some eyes, as a critic of Irish letters at this early stage in his career:

Mr. W.B. Yeats is rapidly emerging into the upper strata of Irish authorship. He works quietly and unostentatiously, like a true literary labourer; but when he gives us a book – and he is already responsible for several – we look for something worth more than a mere passing attention. In the volumes before us his work is, of course, mainly that of selection. But he has prefaced them with an introduction in which his own views on the relative merits and position of our principal Irish story-tellers are stated. The essay is short, but admirably to the point. Some of Mr. Yeats's criticisms we can hardly agree with, but generally speaking they are marked by sound judgement and taste.

. . . We do not think we can do better than quote some of the principal passages in the essay, which is really one of the honestest bits of criticism of Irish literature we have recently seen.⁵³

The review then listed the book's contents without, however, noticing the mis-attribution of Ferguson's story "Fr. Tom and the Pope" which Yeats had credited to William Maginn.⁵⁴

By contrast, Fr. Russell, in his review in The Irish Monthly, was particularly unhappy with this mis-attribution. Although Ferguson is not actually named, Fr. Russell disapproved of

⁵³ United Ireland, 16 May 1891, p.5

⁵⁴ This omission was corrected in the "Irish Literary Notes" in <u>United Ireland</u> on 30 May 1891, p.5

the inclusion of the story and thought that Yeats should not only have expunged its "most reprehensible passages," which indeed he had, but should have omitted it altogether. In fact Yeats had exercised quite considerable editorial discretion by eliminating a complete chapter from the original anonymous publication of the story in <u>Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine</u> in May 1838. This chapter, entitled "How Fr. Tom and his Holiness disputed on Metaphysics and Algebra," included a scene where Fr. Tom surreptitiously kisses the Pope's housekeeper and tells the Pope that the noise he had overheard was that of a cork coming out of a bottle. Fr. Russell considered that Yeats's general choice of stories was not in good taste, writing:

The same mistaken notion of 'representativeness' has, I think, spoiled almost the whole selection, in which the rollicking, savage, and droll elements are much too largely represented. We are far nicer people than the American is or English reader will gather from these samples.⁵⁷

This is an early example of a difficulty with which Yeats would meet frequently, most famously in defending Synge's <u>The Playboy of the Western World.</u> Many among the Irish nationalist community tended to idealise their country and were not prepared to accept what they considered caricatures of Irishness as presented in some of these stories. Yeats's was aware of this tendency, and was prepared, at this early stage of his career, to compromise in deference to his audience with respect to other writers' work, as his editing of the Carleton story demonstrated. This is not something he would do in his maturity, and certainly not something he would do in respect of his own work in the later stages of his career. He was, however, and continued to be, circumspect and shrewd as to the most appropriate and timely outlets for his work in Ireland.

Later, in May 1891, Yeats was again featured in the pages of <u>United Ireland</u>, on this occasion in a note from "A London Correspondent" commenting on a book on "Irish Adventurers" which he was preparing for Fisher Unwin, but which was never completed.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ The Irish Monthly, July 1891,p.379

⁵⁶ Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, May 1838, p. 614

The Irish Monthly, July 1891,p.379

As we will note he did compromise in the case of <u>The Countess Cathleen</u>, removing a few scenes contained in the published work before its first performance in May 1899.

⁵⁹ The work done for the book was used in an article on "Irish Rakes and Duellists" which was published in United Ireland in September 1891.

The description of the poet by the paper's London Correspondent is worth reproducing as an example of the way in which Yeats was seen at this time:

It has been remarked with much truth that Mr. Yeats looks the ideal poet. He is dreamy, pleasantly mystic in appearance, and very suggestive of elf land. If a countryman were to suddenly meet him on an Irish hill in the moonlight he would very probably rush away to the nearest friends with a circumstantial story of a new, but gracious and kindly-looking, spirit of the mountains. But the peasant would very likely be greatly surprised to learn the large amount of hard and practical work that the spirit could set himself to do.⁶⁰

A somewhat different, and more human contemporary view of Yeats was given by his friend Katherine Tynan in a letter to Fr. Russell, dated 17 August 1891:

I had Willie Yeats staying here since last Monday. He went away last night. He is an extremely bothering visitor. He thinks all the rest of the world created specially to minister to him, and there is no rebuffing of him possible. I did nothing while he was here, nor should if he was here a twelvemonth.⁶¹

A separate facet of the reputation which Yeats had now developed in Ireland is evident in a note in October1891, again in <u>United Ireland</u>, regarding "An International Congress of Folk-Lorists" which was due to meet shortly in London. Pointing out that Ireland should have a representative at the Congress, the editor recommended that Yeats should be that representative as the introduction to his "book of Irish fairy tales" showed that "he deeply understands the Celtic spirit, and that the lore of the Celtic mind in all its phases is with him a passion." The note concluded: "If it is possible for an Irishman like Mr. Yeats to be present at the Folk-Lore Congress no mean service will have been indirectly rendered to Irish literature."

On Tuesday 6 October 1891, Charles Stewart Parnell died at Brighton and Yeats took a major positive step to be seen and praised by the Irish nationalist community in the political sphere. In its edition on Saturday, 10 October, <u>United Ireland</u> acknowledged Parnell's death by inscribing black lines between its news columns. However as most of

⁶⁰ United Ireland, 30 May 1891, p.5

⁶¹ Irish Jesuit Archives, ref. J 27/73

⁶² United Ireland, 3 October 1891, p. 4

the paper's contents had already gone to press there was relatively little journalistic comment, apart from a hastily written editorial under the title "Done to Death". Full tributes to Parnell were published in the subsequent issue of 17 October. One notable inclusion, however, in the issue of 10 October, was a poem by Yeats, "Mourn – And Then Onward", which was placed directly above the editorial. It is not a good poem and indeed Yeats never again published it. However in its original publication, its position on the page and the absence of any other literary tribute to Parnell in that issue, even more than its nationalist sentiments, served to strengthen the association of Yeats's name with the nationalist movement, and its speedy writing and publication was in sharp contrast to his delay in publishing his poem "Easter 1916" many years later.

Mourn ye on grass-green plains of Eri fated, For closed in darkness now Is he who laboured on, derided, hated, And made the tyrant bow.

Mourn –and then onward, there is no returning
He guides ye from the tomb;
His memory now is a tall pillar, burning
Before us in the gloom!⁶⁵

Three days before Parnell's death Yeats had published a "manifesto" for the newly formed Young Ireland League in <u>United Ireland</u>, probably, as Roy Foster states, "probably prompted by O'Leary." The League, according to Yeats, was to be an "educational instrument" which would provide books and reading rooms to give the Irish people access to the best of Irish imaginative writing. This projection of Yeats as a promoter of Irish literature, concerned with reviving interest in writers of the previous generations was now supplemented by the appearance of his poem in a key position in Parnell's paper, in the issue announcing and mourning Parnell's death, so placing Yeats's name before the nationalist community in a new and more political light. It introduced a new "condition of significance", a more focussed, even if temporary, alignment of Yeats with the Parnellite

⁶³ See Appendix 2 for a reproduction of this page.

⁶⁴The poem was republished in the <u>Irish Weekly Independent</u>, 20 May 1893, p.4, as one of the "extracts from the series of beautiful poems published by <u>United Ireland after Parnell's death</u>".

⁶⁵ United Ireland, 10 October 1891, p.4

⁶⁶ Foster, R.F., W. B. Yeats: A Life, Vol.1 p.115

cause in the eyes of the readers of <u>United Ireland</u> and other nationalist papers and periodicals. It also placed on him a new responsibility, in their eyes, to represent that cause in his work, a responsibility which he, however, was not prepared to accept if it involved any compromise of his art.

For the moment the potential for conflict between art and politics was kept at bay. In November 1891, the only novel by Yeats to be published during his lifetime was issued by T Fisher Unwin in London as No.10 of their Pseudonym Library Series. John Sherman and Dhoya consisted of two stories; "John Sherman", which had been written primarily to satisfy his father's wishes for "a book dealing with real people" and "Dhoya" an earlier story with which JBY had been disappointed and which has been described as "an extravagant and quite unrealistic tale set in Sligo which involved a heroic giant of the old times." Yeats used the pseudonym "Ganconagh", but as he had included a previously published poem in Dhoya, his identity was immediately recognised by the reviewer in United Ireland who wrote: "Mr. Yeats is to be congratulated on his book." Dhoya" was considered to be "a delightful love tale" and was admired more than "John Sherman" which, the reviewer considered, lacked power or plot. While the review was somewhat perfunctory, filling space with quotation, Yeats was described as a "most promising young Irish author of the day" so continuing the ongoing emphasis on his nationality in the Irish press.

Fr. Russell in <u>The Irish Monthly</u>, also identified Yeats's poem in "Dhoya," and wrote in a similar vein: "We are therefore justified in recognising our young Irish poet in this new character of story teller." He praised "John Sherman" finding the style "most remarkable for a dainty simplicity, lit up now and then by a striking thought and even a brilliant aphorism." Katherine Tynan also reviewed the book, in two unaccredited reviews, one in the <u>Evening Telegraph</u> and another, more briefly, in the <u>Irish Daily Independent</u>. Tynan much preferred "John Sherman" to "Dhoya" considering the protagonist and his story to be "human to a miracle" in contrast to "Dhoya" of which, in an interesting phrase which

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⁶⁷ Murphy, William M., Prodigal Father, p.154.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ The poem "Girl's Song" published originally in <u>The Wanderings of Oisin</u> (p.61) was reprinted in Dhoya as the song of the fairy woman.

⁷⁰ United Ireland, 28 November 1891, p.5

The Irish Monthly, November 1891, p. 662
See note in Collected Letters, Vol. I, p.275.

presages the name of a future book by Yeats, she wrote that it "might well be blown upon the reeds whereof fairy folk make their trumpets."⁷³

As well as Yeats's activities in the Southwark Irish Literary Club, the Irish press was also attending in the early 1890s to his membership of The Rhymers' Club, a group of young poets who were accustomed to meet, mostly in a Fleet Street pub, The Cheshire Cheese, to debate literary matters and to test their poetry by reading it aloud to each other. The Club, which Karl Beckson considers was most likely founded in May 1890, ⁷⁴ was described by Roy Foster as "mainly 'Celtic', with a strong Irish predominance. Rhys, Rolleston and WBY were original moving spirits, joined off and on by Todhunter, Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Richard Le Gallienne, John Davidson and others."⁷⁵ This circle of poets and writers afforded Yeats with another receptive community with whom he could discuss his work and aesthetic ideas. There was no dominating political figure like John O'Leary at the Contemporary Club in Dublin to continue the emphasis on politics and Irish nationalism which had been a major feature in that circle although O'Leary was present at some of the early meetings. Here in London other interests of Yeats were nourished in the company of people like Arthur Symons, whose influential book, The Symbolist Movement in Literature, dedicated to Yeats, was published in 1899. A major objective of the group was achieved when Elkin Mathews in London published the first book of their selected poetry entitled The Book of the Rhymers' Club in February 1892.

In June 1891Yeats wrote to Katherine Tynan, who was to review the book for the <u>Irish</u> <u>Daily Independent:</u>

'The Rhymers Club' will publish a book of verse almost at once. You might take it as a subject of one article. It will give you a chance of saying much about the younger writers – Le Galleone, A Symonds, < myself > & so forth. ⁷⁶

When Tynan reviewed the book, she focussed attention on three Irish poets among its contributors; Todhunter, Rolleston and Yeats, whom she wrote, "sustain the honour of Ireland very satisfactorily." She then continued before quoting "The Lake Isle of Inisfree" in full:

Evening Telegraph, 29 December 1891, p.2
 Beckson, Karl, London in the 1890s, p.91

⁷⁵ Foster, R.F., W. B. Yeats: A Life, p.107

⁷⁶ Collected Letters, Vol. I, p.253. Yeats's eccentric spelling of the names of Le Gallienne and Symons is retained.

Mr. Yeats contributes two or three poems more exquisite than any in "The Wanderings of Ossian" and which give welcome proof of the growth of his mind. No riches gleaned by Sir Samuel Ferguson from an old bard, and transmuted to his own golden glow could excel this.⁷⁷

An extensive review of the book by D. J. O'Donoghue⁷⁸ was published in <u>United Ireland</u>, and was consistent with this journal's nationalist position in selecting the Irish poets for special mention from among the twelve contributors to the collection. In this case six Irish poets were identified: Yeats, Rolleston, Todhunter, Ernest Dowson, George Arthur Greene, and, rather imaginatively, Lionel Johnson. O'Donoghue noted Yeats's allocation of six poems and quoted two, "Dedication of 'Irish Tales'" and "The Lake Isle of Innisfree". Of the former he commented:

It has become almost superfluous to praise Mr. Yeats's poetry, as we are sure to get something refreshingly original from him whenever he writes, but every phrase and every point in the above tells.

He then continued:

One or two of his pieces in the present book are slight and vague, but they are of the dreamy kind which lulls the reader into satisfaction. Here is his "Lake Isle of Inisfree" which is indefinite enough to be true poetry.⁷⁹

This review of Yeats's contribution to <u>The Book of the Rhymers' Club</u> anticipated much of the Irish critical approach to Yeats's poetry in the years to follow; the quotation of "The Lake Isle of Inisfree," the use of the descriptive adjectives "dreamy" and "vague," and the emphasis on his Irish nationality.

A reviewer in <u>The Irish Monthly</u>, not Fr. Russell in this case, also focused on the Irish contributors to the collection, among whom he assigned to Yeats "the highest place in order of merit." He admired, and quoted from "The Man who Dreamed of Faeryland" which he described as "a tale full of strange Celtic fancy in verse, whose sustained music rises at times to real power." Then he also turned to "The Lake Isle of Inisfree" and again quoted it in full, commenting: "As true poetry must do, it carries the reader by a subtle

⁷⁹ United Ireland, 5 March 1892, p.5

⁷⁷ Irish Daily Independent, 25 February 1892, p.7

David James O'Donoghue (1866 - 1917) was born in London and was a member of the Southwark Irish Literary Society. He came to live in Dublin in 1896 and was appointed librarian at UCD in 1909. He was a notable editor and wrote biographies of William Carleton and James Clarence Mangan.

process, he knows not how, out of his material surroundings, to the distant, beautiful land of the poet's dreams."⁸⁰

In June 1894 when <u>The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club</u> was published, Yeats's poems were again selected for special praise in <u>United Ireland</u> with all five verses of "The Fiddler of Dooney" quoted. However by this time The Rhymers' Club was in decline. A reason given by Karl Beckson, was that "the growing involvement of the Irish Rhymers in the Irish Literary Society progressively shifted their interest from the informally structured, undoctrinaire club to the ideologically determined society." It was a move, supported by the reception which the two books had received in Ireland, towards a more conscious promotion of themselves as Irish poets looking to Ireland for an audience and creating there a national literary environment in which their work could take its place.

In September 1892 Yeats's long-awaited second book of poetry was published with the full title, The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics. In a Preface to the book Yeats again emphasised the Irish background to his work: "The greater number of the poems in this book, as also in 'The Wanderings of Oisin', are founded on Irish tradition." This new book of poems was quite extensively reviewed in Ireland. Reviews appeared in the Irish Daily Independent as well as in United Ireland, The Daily Express, Irish Monthly, The Irish Catholic and Nation, and a society paper, Irish Society.

Katherine Tynan's review in <u>United Ireland</u> on 3 September was predictably positive, particularly regarding the title play, which she described as "an old, exquisite, tender legend, which only the Celtic imagination could have brought forth." Having admired the drama, Tynan was not so unequivocally positive about the poetry, and considered some of the poems including "The Peace of the Rose", "The Rose of the World", "When You are Old", "A Cradle Song" and "When You are Sad", all "unworthy of him." She did praise "The Man who Dreamed of Fairyland" "The Ballad of the Old Foxhunter" and "Father Gilligan". Of "The Lake Isle of Inisfree" she wrote, little realising how true her prophecy

The Irish Monthly, April 1892, p. 212

Beckson, Karl, London in the 1890s, p.91

⁸² Yeats, W.B., The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics, p.7

⁸³ United Ireland, 3 September 1892, p.5

The spelling was changed to Faeryland in Poems 1895.

would turn out to be, that this poem "will, some day I trust, be known to all Irish children, as well as to all Irish men and women."

In his review of The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics in The Irish Monthly, Fr. Russell also had some reservations, writing of Yeats: "Many will consider he is spoiled by his devotion to that very peculiar genius Blake." And then commenting that of the "shorter poems" in the book,

by far the most satisfactory for the ordinary reader are probably not the author's favourites, - "Father Gilligan," "Father O'Hart," and "The Ballad of the Old Foxhunter." The other dreamy, mystical lyrics require a peculiar mood and a peculiar nature for their appreciation.

Mr. Yeats has been wise enough and patriotic enough to seek his inspiration in Irish subjects, and his muse has undoubtedly gained by this choice.⁸⁵

Fr. Russell quoted a comment in the English paper, The Sunday Sun, noting the influence of Blake on Yeats's work, 86 and gave an early indication of the difficulties which would arise in Dublin in a few years when The Countess Cathleen⁸⁷ came to be played there on stage:

With this same reviewer we also are sceptical about the genuiness of this legend; and we agree with him that the story and this treatment of it are not representative of any phase of Christian Ireland.

The reviewer in the Irish Catholic and Nation had similar concerns. While admiring the poems which were "old favourites" and "amongst the simplest, yet most delightful, offerings of a lyrical kind yet made to our native literature" reservations were expressed about the play which, the reviewer felt," sins against the truth," as "I do not think that Irish people in any age, or in any time of calamity, thought so much more about their bodies than their souls."88

The reviewer in the Daily Express identified "The Man who Dreamed of Fairyland" and "The Lake Isle of Inisfree" as the two finest poems in the book. In calling Yeats an

⁸⁵ The Irish Monthly, October 1892, pp.557-8

⁸⁶ An article by Justin Huntley McCarthy, an Irish nationalist M.P., and novelist, entitled "Books and Book Gossip" in the London newspaper The Sunday Sun, 28 August 1892, p.3.

⁸⁷ The new spelling of Cathleen instead of Kathleen was first introduced when the play was included in Poems 1895 which was published in October of that year.

"original" the review echoed Katherine Tynan's review of <u>The Wanderings of Oisin</u> over two years previously. However a line quoted from "Apologia addressed to Ireland in the coming days" was to create some difficulty for Yeats in subsequent months:

He seems to claim rank with 'Mangan, Davis, Ferguson'. It is too early in the day to assign Mr. Yeats his rank as a singer, but his place, when he takes it, will be his own. Mr. Yeats is original; neither in the quality of his thought, nor in the quality of his style does he even remotely recall anyone else. ⁹⁰

The reviewer's favourable opinion of the verse in <u>The Countess Kathleen and Various</u> <u>Legends and Lyrics</u> was countered by a negative response to the theme of the play: "No merit in execution can quite reconcile the imagination to a long and elaborately related legend, which is everywhere incredible and frequently absurd." A charge of obscurity was also made against some of his verse which, "however clear to himself, yields no meaning, or several possible meanings, to the most attentive reader."

Irish Society was a magazine devoted to ladies' fashion and the activities of the Irish gentry which had commenced publication in January 1888 and which, by 1892, claimed to have the "guaranteed largest circulation in Ireland of any society paper published in the United Kingdom, and three times that of any Irish journal or periodical, the leading dailies and their weekly editions only excepted." As such it was an unusual contributor to contemporary Yeats criticism in Ireland, but in its 22 October 1892 edition there was an extensive and extremely positive review of The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics. The reviewer, Louis H. Victory⁹², whose review Yeats described in a letter to John O'Leary as "wildly laudatory," identified Yeats's interest in the occult which, up to this point, had received little attention in Ireland: "I know that Mr. Yeats is a student of, nay an initiate in, occultism." Victory also suggested that "Mr. Yeats' poems will live and will find innumerable commentators and would-be interpreters as long as the world lasts."

While these reviews of <u>The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics</u> sounded a warning of the controversy which the staging of "The Countess Cathleen" in Dublin would

⁸⁸ The Irish Catholic and Nation, 3 September 1892, p.4

⁸⁹ In subsequent printings the title was changed to "To Ireland in the Coming Times".

⁹⁰ Daily Express, 5 September 1892, p.6

⁹¹ Irish Society, 2 January 1892, p.1

⁹² Louis H. Victory was a writer and critic who wrote reviews and articles for Irish papers and journals. Many of these were collected in his <u>Essays for Ireland</u> published in 1905.

⁹³ Collected Letters, Vol. I, p.324

engender some years later, it was through the setting up of Irish Literary Societies in London and Dublin and the selection of a list of books to be made available to the Irish people through a specially subsidised publishing scheme, that Yeats's reception in Ireland was to be primarily influenced in the immediate future.

In December 1891 a meeting, attended by Yeats, Rolleston, Todhunter, D. J. O'Donoghue and others, had been held in the Yeats home in London with the objective of setting up an Irish Literary Society in that city which would incorporate the already well-established and successful Southwark Irish Literary Club. The society was eventually set up with Charles Gavan Duffy as its titular president – an appointment that launched Yeats into controversy. It began with the suggestion in an article in the London Daily Telegraph in March, which found it fitting that seat of an Irish literary society should be in London, "the fountainhead and centre of the intellectual life of England." This suggestion understandably engendered considerable correspondence and resistance particularly in United Ireland where John McGrath, its literary editor, in a front-page article, described a speech which Yeats gave at a dinner for D. J. O'Donoghue in London as

a happy and graceful speech, in which he dealt with the many indications that promise an intellectual Ireland in the near future. When the pressure of political struggles is removed from the country, our *litterateurs*, he said, will have time and leisure for calm thought and deliberation, and a higher literature will be a gradual but sure growth in the land.⁹⁶

McGrath then emphasised that

there must be no mistake as to the exact spot on the earth where the intellectual centre of the Irish race is located, . . . the Hub of the Irish Universe, in society, in politics, and in art, is, was, and must be forever, the old town on the Anna Liffey.

Further letters followed, one from a member of the Irish Literary Society in London describing the operation of the society there which gives an interesting picture of the key figures: "Rolleston, Yeats, O'Keeffe and Foley are the prime movers - Rolleston, most of all, very energetic, suave and enthusiastic; Yeats, irrepressible, but all at sea in matters of

⁹⁴ Irish Society, 22 October 1892, p.1008

⁹⁵ Collected Letters, Vol.I, p.297

detail."⁹⁷ Yeats contributed a long letter to the debate on 14 May, demonstrating once again his awareness of his Irish audience by suggesting that the objective of the London Society was to contribute towards arresting the denationalisation of Ireland by the influences of America and England and not "anything so absurd and impossible as to make London 'the intellectual centre of Ireland.'" ⁹⁸

In mid-May Yeats returned to Ireland and was instrumental in arranging a meeting at the Rotunda in Dublin on 9 June to announce the setting up of a National Literary Society in Dublin. He had written to the <u>Daily Express</u> in Dublin in the previous week about the meeting, stating that it would be "addressed by Ashe King, Count Plunkett, Dr Sigerson, Miss Maud Gonne, myself, and others." The <u>Daily Express</u> responded to Yeats's letter on the following day in an editorial that noted Yeats's description of the Irish people being "scattered here and there, far from book shops and 'burning questions' and the literary cult of educated life." In the view of the <u>Daily Express</u> the "people of Ireland, whether scattered or congregated, are a little too accessible to the influence of burning questions, or of one burning question at all events." The article pointed out that if the lectures to be given by the new society were to deal with "the problems and difficulties of today," it would be very hard to avoid conflict between different political viewpoints. While, it felt, some nationalists could be engaged with in a fruitful debate there were some nationalists "with whom it would be difficult to cultivate even a distant acquaintance."

Some two weeks later a Dublin satirical journal <u>The Dublin Figaro</u>, edited by Ramsey Colles, ¹⁰¹ printed a profile of the poet, with a sketch, which gave a different view of Yeats from that in the more literary or political minded periodicals. An editorial in the first number of the journal published in February 1892 under the title <u>Irish Life</u> (the name was changed to <u>The Dublin Figaro</u> for the second issue and subsequently in June 1895 to <u>The Irish Figaro</u>) indicated the type of readership it was aiming for: "Dublin requires such a

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⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 16 April 1892, p.1

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 14 May, 1892, p.1-2

⁹⁹ Daily Express, 2 June 1892, p.6

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 3 June 1892, p.4

on his death in London in 1919 Colles was described in The Irish Book –Lover (April – May 1919, p.94) as "Once a well-known figure in Dublin literary circles . . . Sprung from an old Sligo family, he was born in Gyah in India in 1862 and educated at Bective and Wesley Colleges in Dublin. He founded and edited for four years The Irish Figaro and in 1901 Irish Masonry."

journal as this. Something is wanted that is not overburthened (sic) with political rancour and party strife. . . . Politics have no part in the programme sketched out for Irish Life." While politics was avoided in The Dublin Figaro, it was clearly aiming at an educated upper-class readership, which in the Dublin of the time would have been primarily Protestant and unionist. In a letter to Lady Gregory in April 1900 Yeats described the journal as "a kind of society paper & very loyal as you may imagine." In his autobiographical memoir In Castle and Court House published in 1911, Colles wrote of meeting Yeats "who had not at that time published a volume of verse," at Winstead, the home of "my friend Edward Dowden" in Rathmines, and also at the home of Katherine Tynan in Clondalkin in 1887.

On 18 June 1892 <u>The Dublin Figaro</u> introduced its readers to Yeats in a manner which indicates that there must have been another substantial community in Ireland that his published work was not reaching:

I wonder how many Dublin folk are acquainted with the personality or the works of Mr. W. B. Yeats, the moving spirit in the new Irish Literary Society, and the most promising of all our young authors? Although a Dublin man born and bred, I am afraid Mr. Yeats is practically still a *scriptor ignotus* in his native land, if not in his native city, notwithstanding that his work mainly relates to Ireland and things Irish. He is a son of Mr. J.B. Yeats, the Royal Hibernian Academician, whose mystical and Rosetti-like portrait – drawn by himself – formed the frontispiece of the Figaro's Academy Number some time ago.

The article then listed Yeats's publications and commented:

This is not a bad record for a very young man; and if the new National Literary Society goes on and prospers, as it is likely to, Mr. Yeats will probably be amongst the earliest to contribute fresh poems and legends of Ireland 'redolent of turf smoke'- as he knows how to make them – to the proposed lending library to be established in connection with the society, and so strike a good blow for the longed for intellectual revival of the inhabitants of this beautiful land, who might, indeed,

¹⁰² Irish Life, 20 February 1892, p.1-2

Gould, Warwick, Kelly, John, and Toomey, Deirdre, (ed.) <u>The Collected Letters of W.B.Yeats, Vol. II</u>, p.511 (Henceforth <u>Collected Letters, Vol. II</u>)

¹⁰⁴ Colles, Ramsey, <u>In Castle and Court House</u>, p. 126

be termed, for their poetical feeling and warmheartedness, dwellers in Tir-na-n-Og. 105

In the same number of The Dublin Figaro there was a further article about the proposed new Literary Society in a type of satirical vein with which the journal became associated in subsequent issues:

No doubt you have read about the recent meeting for the establishment of an Irish Literature racy of the soil. Mr. Yeats, Dr. Sigerson, Count Plunkett and other distinguished literary men, propose to abolish English literature and foreign music. The R.I.A.M. is to be razed to the ground, and in future all Irish musicians will be restricted to the harp and concertina. Why should we study Wagner, Mozart, Beethoven, Gounod and Verdi, when we have such melodies as "The Wearin' of the Green" and "The Boys of Wexford"? Why demoralise young Ireland with vulgar English writers like Shakespeare, Shelley, Dickens and Darwin when we have the inexhaustible mine of "The Spirit of the Nation" and the Book of Kells? The new society is palpably aggressive. A fund will be at once be started to purchase the remains of the old wall of China, with the object of erecting it round this island. 106

Notwithstanding the views of The Dublin Figaro, the inaugural meeting of the new Irish Literary Society which was held in the Antient Concert Rooms on 17 August 1892 was very well attended and extensively reported on by United Ireland, Weekly Freeman, Evening Telegraph and other papers. Among the speakers were Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, who presided, Dr. Sigerson who gave the main address on "The Origin and Influence of Celtic Literature," Richard Ashe-King, J.F. Taylor, John O'Leary, Maud Gonne, Count Plunkett, and Yeats. Yeats's speech was favourably received as can be seen from the extensive report in **United Ireland**:

Mr. W.B. Yeates [sic] said that those who were responsible for the inauguration of that society had never put forward the claim that they wanted to create literature. But there was one thing they could do, and that was to bring the literature that already exists to the doors of the people of Ireland (hear, hear). They could labour to enlarge and make more enlightened the reading public of Ireland. They hoped to do much to elevate at any rate a section of the people. They would endeavour to

The <u>Dublin Figaro</u>, 18 June 1892, p.278
 Ibid. p.282

make their central body in Dublin a model to the other societies. They hoped in the course of a week or two to establish their own reading rooms, and what they believed would be the nucleus of their library. In a word they would do everything they could to bring education more into the minds of the people (applause). 107

The argument regarding the location of the intellectual capital of Ireland, and the relationship between the London and Dublin Societies was soon extended when the issue of what books the Irish Literary Society's planned new publishing company should publish and provide in reading rooms around the country, was raised. Yeats had his own ideas as Gavan Duffy had his, and an argument took place, primarily in the letters page of The Freeman's Journal, during the early part of September 1892 between Yeats and John F. Taylor, a Dublin barrister and supporter of Gavan Duffy, who had met Yeats in the Contemporary Club and had a reputation as an orator. He was to prove a difficult opponent for Yeats. The leader writer of The Freeman's Journal was supportive of Taylor's side of the argument seeing a danger "lest the new company should be used as a propagandist machine for sectional ideas and principles in conflict with the sentiment of the people. Such a danger lurks in Mr. Yeats's proposal." On 9 September, a letter from Taylor accused Yeats of

setting himself to 'thwart, obstruct, retard, and wreck' Gavan Duffy's work, while O'Leary [who had come to Yeats's support] has laboured in this matter with that loyalty to the ties of comradeship which is one of the noblest of his many noble qualities. I wish I could say the same for Mr. Yeats. 109

Further letters appeared in the following days in support of Gavan Duffy from Sigerson, Rolleston and a Fr. Hogan from Maynooth, who, in a phrase that was to become familiar in the years ahead, warned of "the baneful effects that are produced by pernicious books."¹¹⁰

An article that had appeared in the <u>Wexford People</u> and was quoted in <u>United Ireland</u> showed a nasty side to the debate. It describing Duffy in glowing terms as follows:

His (Sir C.G.D's) experience, his strong nationality, and at the same time his practical Christian spirit, furnish guarantees that he is not, under the pretense of advancing and elevating the rising generation, prepared to risk its degradation and

109 *Ibid.* 9 September 1892, p.6

¹⁰⁷ United Ireland, 20 August 1892, p.1

The Freeman's Journal, 7 September 1892, p.4

debasement by propagating a sensual, semi-Pagan, and materialistic literature, or the fantastic fads of notoriety- seeking dabblers in Theosophy or Pantheism. These were strong words indeed which demonstrated that there was an extremely conservative Catholic nationalism in contemporary Ireland that would, if the occasion arose, resist any new literature which it saw as a threat to its strongly held beliefs. <u>United Ireland</u> came to Yeats's defense in the same issue, criticising the views put forward in the article and stating that there was nobody involved in the Irish Literary Society "who is either a Theosophist or a Pantheist," an opinion which Yeats was fortunately not called upon to defend.

Yeats had to admit defeat in his efforts to control the selection of books to be published under the auspices of the Society but subsequently took some revenge by unfavourably reviewing the early books produced under Duffy's editorial control. The review was printed in the English journal <u>The Bookman</u> but <u>United Ireland</u> advised its Irish readers that Yeats's criticism of Thomas Davis's <u>Patriot Parliament</u>, which he proclaimed "bored beyond measure"

oversteps the mark. I quite allow Mr. Yeats's claim to be a very good judge of poetry, and to be a tolerably good judge of literature in general; but why he should set himself up, especially in an English publication, as a critic in Irish history, I do not know; for I am not aware that he has any special qualification for the task.¹¹³

Even within the supportive pages of <u>United Ireland</u> there were still some 'sacred cows' which should remain immune from attack. However as Yeats was now reviewing and publishing regularly in <u>The Bookman</u> and was having his original poetry and stories published in another English journal <u>The National Observer</u> he was no longer quite so dependent on Irish editors and had freed himself, to some extent, of the requirement to conform to their expectations.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 14 September 1892, p.5

United Ireland, 24 September 1892, p.1

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid. 18 August 1894, p.1

In 1892 Yeats published five poems and two stories in <u>The National Observer</u> and four reviews and two poems in <u>The Bookman</u>. By comparison he published one poem, four articles, one review and five letters in <u>United Ireland</u>. In 1894 he published one poem and three stories in <u>The National Observer</u>, and one poem, one article and five reviews in <u>The Bookman</u>. His contributions to <u>United Ireland</u> in that year consisted of three letters, two of which were signed "A Student of Irish Literature".

For the moment, he was, however, careful to retain the loyalty of the nationalist community in Ireland. Early in 1893 he spoke at a meeting of the National Club in Dublin, chaired by John O'Leary, to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Robert Emmet. His speech which was reported in <u>United Ireland</u> in some detail described how he had been "enthusiastically received" as he praised Robert Emmet and the "men who had struggled for the freedom of Ireland". The report described how he concluded his address

in a fitting manner and amidst great enthusiasm, by quoting the magnificent speech from the dock, which concluded in the following words – "When my country takes her place amongst the nations of the earth, then, and not till then, let my epitaph be written; I have done" (loud applause).¹¹⁵

To nationalist Ireland Emmet had now joined Parnell in Yeats's pantheon of heroes.

Some days after this meeting the first notice in Ireland of the edition of The Works of William Blake on which Yeats had been working with Edwin Ellis since early 1889, 116 and which had been finally published in March 1893, appeared in the Irish Weekly Independent. It was a very short notice from a London correspondent, complimenting the editors on their work, but it did make one remark that was to dominate a later review of the book in United Ireland when it described Blake as "a great, but little known, Irishman, who was at once a poet, a thinker, and a painter." 117 United Ireland noted that both Yeats and Ellis were "enthusiastic symbolists," 118 and expressed the hope that Yeats would "not give to mysticism what was meant for Ireland." It then quoted from a review in The Speaker which had commented on Yeats's attribution of Irish nationality to Blake: "The most interesting thing brought out in the memoir is that Blake was of Irish family, and his real name was O'Neil (sic). The fact is vouched for, but rather curiously the source of information is not given." With considerable delight <u>United Ireland's</u> reviewer announced: "Mr. Yeats has given me liberty to supply the omission here referred to" and goes on to identify the source of the information as "Dr. Carter Blake of London" and to explain how Blake's grandfather's name was John O'Neill, and how he came to change it to Blake. The review then concludes: "Such is the curious history by which it is now proven that Mr.

¹¹⁵ United Ireland, 11 March 1893, p.1

¹¹⁶ In a letter to Katherine Tynan on 8 March 1889, he wrote that he was already working on "A commentary on the mystical writing of Blake." <u>Collected Letters, Vol.1</u>, p.151

¹¹⁷ Irish Weekly Independent, 22 April 1893 p.4

Blake, one of the most remarkable of *English* poets, was an Irishman named O'Neill." Among Yeats's fellow countrymen the attribution of Irish nationality to Blake was more significant than any theory of Blake's symbolism.

In April 1894 the first small book to describe what was to be a much studied and written about period in Irish literary history was published in London. Written by W. P. Ryan¹¹⁹ from the point of view of one of the participants and therefore a somewhat biased account The Irish Literary Revival: Its History, Pioneers and Possibilities traced the history of the Irish literary movement from the foundation of the Southwark Irish Literary Club in 1883 to its transformation into the Irish Literary Society, London, early in 1891. Ryan, who was a committee member of the society had also attended the meeting in Yeats's house in London in December 1891 at which a new direction for the Society was first discussed, including the plan for the publication and circulation of Irish books which drew Yeats into conflict with Gavan Duffy. Ryan described the main participants in the London movement including Gavan Duffy, Alfred Perceval Graves, Francis A. Fahy and D. J. O'Donoghue, and went on to discuss "The Movement in Dublin." Yeats's efforts on behalf of the society were praised and then after a brief biographical sketch the author gave his views on where Yeats currently stood in the Irish literary pantheon:

Critics have been concerned of late to know if he has not really done his best work, or if there is, or will be much in his poetry of the enduring kind. He will dream away and answer the questions eventually, with new books and visions. That he will be a great poet depends to a large extent on the possibility of his developing other characteristics to the same degree as that already attained by his imaginative faculty and power of vision. He must shake himself free from the passing craze of occultism and symbolism, and realise also that the universe is not tenanted solely by *soulths* and *sheogues*. Even now he has done much the finest poetical work of any of those in the present movement. If it is true as John Boyle O'Reilly sings that "the dreamer lives for ever," no one is more certain than he of immortality. 120

Ryan, W. P., The Irish Literary Revival: Its History, Pioneers and Possibilities, p.135

W.P.Ryan (1867 – 1942) was born in Templemore, Co. Tipperary, became a successful journalist in London, involved in the Southwark Literary Club and the Irish Literary Society. He returned to Ireland in 1905 and edited a number of socialist papers that proved unsuccessful. He returned to London in 1911 and wrote poetry and novels.

Ryan's book created its own controversy, as shortly after its publication a series of letters was printed in <u>United Ireland</u>, arguing whether Ryan's view of the early years of the society was accurate and in particular if his account of the leading role played by The Southwark Irish Literary Club was true. Unusually for him, Yeats kept clear of this argument which continued for some weeks and showed the sensitivities of the correspondents, and of <u>United Ireland's</u> literary editor John McGrath in particular, to the suggestion that revival movement was initiated in London at the Southwark Club and not in Dublin. One correspondent in particular, an A. McBride from London, demonstrated an attitude to Irish literature that had prevailed since the time of the poets of <u>The Nation</u> by writing that literature "is only a factor in the working out of the main and supreme problem of National Independence." ¹²¹

Following the literary controversies in which he had been involved during 1892, some balance was restored to Yeats's reception in Ireland when, in December his new book <u>The Celtic Twilight</u> which had been published by Lawrence and Bullen in London, was reviewed in <u>United Ireland</u> and the <u>Irish Daily Independent</u>.

<u>United Ireland's</u> favourable review, by John McGrath, quoted extensively from the book with one particular story, "The Man and his Boots" which McGrath called "one of the most perfect in the book," being quoted in full. McGrath described Yeats as a symbolist and a poet in whose work he has detected

a vein of philosophy, of speculation, but, above all, of poetry, running through it from beginning to end which makes it One - one in its subtle and mystical suggestiveness, and one in the personality – Mr. Yeats himself. . . . There are three elements which go to make up the fascination which is in these morsels: their writer believes in them, they are told in the simplest language, and behind them all the time is the great unknown of Ghostland and of Fairyland. 122

A further long review in the <u>Irish Daily Independent</u>, copied in part from two English sources, the <u>Daily Chronicle</u> and the <u>Fortnightly Review</u>, demonstrated how Yeats's work was now being read in Ireland in an Irish, as distinct from an English, tradition as had been the case with earlier reviews. The book contributed "by means of art, to the study of the

¹²¹ <u>United Ireland</u>, 3 May 1894, p.1 ¹²² *Ibid*. 23 December 1893, p.5

ancient Irish question, and the problem of race". It was not "a far-away echo of Hazlitt, Lamb, or Mr. Stevenson"; it had an assured life of its own:

His men and women are not all strange and wild beings, filled with melancholy, passion and desire. They are just Celtic, not Byronic; and if in their fireside tales and legendary lore they express an hunger and thirst after something of which their hearts whisper to them, and of which they catch visions upon mountain and moor and sea, it is no conscious straining after the impossible, but an instinct of their very natures. To Mr. Yeats, who shows us this indomitable strength and this not ignoble weakness of a great and ardent race, lovers of Ireland and of art are deeply grateful. ¹²³

On 21 April 1894 <u>United Ireland</u> reviewed a performance of Todhunter's <u>Comedy of Sighs</u> and of Yeats's <u>The Land of Heart's Desire</u> which had taken place in the Avenue Theatre in London on 12 April. This was the first of Yeats's play to be produced on stage, but according to the reviewer, it did not receive the type of reception it might have expected in Dublin, being played in front of an audience that was not sympathetic to "Irish folk-lore and Irish feeling" or "Irish fairy traditions." However, the reviewer along with "the more thoughtful section in the house," was favourably impressed by the play:

There are great dramatic possibilities in the little tragedy, and it seemed to the present writer that from the dramatic point of view "The Land of Heart's Desire" is the strongest piece of work which Mr. Yeats has yet done. It is much more suited to the stage, for instance, than would be "The Countess Kathleen". Though possessing to the full his old power of faery charming, Mr. Yeats seems to have grown more human. He did a somewhat daring thing in bringing an Irish priest into such prominence upon such a stage. . . . Certainly Father Hart seemed to rouse all the latent bigotry of the Saxon. ¹²⁴

The mixed reception which his play received, and which was also accorded to him when he appeared before the curtain at the close, must have influenced Yeats in coming to a decision that the type of drama he wished to create would be better received by an Irish audience in his native city. The first steps to develop a receptive Irish audience for his plays were to be taken just two years later when he met with Lady Gregory at Tullira Castle, Edward Martyn's Galway home, in August 1896.

¹²³ Irish Daily Independent, 17 January 1894, p.2

Early in 1895 the quality of Yeats's predecessors as Irish poets was placed in question by Professor Edward Dowden, his father's friend and the supporter of his early youthful poetry. Following a lecture on Sir Samuel Ferguson originally given by Roden Noel¹²⁵ at the Irish Literary Society in London in May 1894, and delivered by Emily Hickey in Dublin on 14 January 1895 after Noel's death. Dowden was reported as saying that "he did not think that Davis, Mangan or several of the other poets mentioned could be classed as in the first, second, or even third rank of poets." He followed this in a letter to the Daily Express on 22 January, accusing Irish poets of a tendency to rhetoric and to sentimentality as well as suffering from a deficiency of technique. He then quoted an extract from the introduction to his forthcoming book New Studies in Literature:

We should be far better patriots if, instead of singing paeans about Irish genius, we were to set ourselves to correct some of the defects of Irish intellect. Let an Irish poet teach his countrymen to write a song free from rhetoric, free from false imagery, free from green tinsel, and with thoroughly sound workmanship in the matter of verse, and he will have done a good and a needful thing. Let an Irish prose writer show that he can be patient, exact, just, enlightened, and he will have done better service for Ireland, whether he treats of Irish themes or not, than if he wore shamrocks in all his buttonholes and had his mouth for ever filled with the glories of Brian the Brave. 127

This letter drew a series of responses in the <u>Daily Express</u>¹²⁸ including Yeats who accused Dowden of doing "little for the reputation of Ferguson, whom he admires, and nothing for the reputation of these others whom Ferguson admired." Standish O'Grady supported Yeats in a letter on 28 January, accusing Dowden of ignoring Ferguson's work and continued:

Mr. Yeats, waxing hot on this extraordinary neglect, apathy, ignorance, or whatever it may have been, expressed himself with more point than consideration for Mr. Dowden's feelings. But he did not ask Mr. Dowden to array himself in shamrocks;

¹²⁶ Daily Express, 15 January 1895, p.7

Daily Express, 26 January 1895, p.5

¹²⁵ Roden Noel was an English aristocrat, the son of the first Earl of Gainsborough. He was educated at Cambridge and had written essays and poetry as well as a life of Byron. He died in May 1894.

Dowden, Edward, New Studies in Literature, p.20

¹²⁸ A selection from the letters was published in <u>United Ireland</u>, 2 February 1895, p.3

only called upon him, and with a tone of indignation in his voice, to do justice to a great Irish poet. 130

In March 1895 Professor Dowden took the opportunity at a meeting of the Trinity College Historical Society, which he chaired, to continue his attack on the new Irish literary movement in terms which were to become the familiar weapons of all those who were opposed to the literary revival, either because it was regarded as too exclusively Irish as was Dowden's view, or because it was not sufficiently Irish as was the view of many nationalists. Dowden's address was reported in the Evening Herald of 2 March in some detail and is worth quoting as representative of a hardening antagonism to the Irish literary revival by a spokesperson for one particular Irish community. Dowden

declared that in literature Ireland is a province of England, and that whatever is written in English by Irishmen is English literature. This literary movement, he said, was essentially a movement in English literature and in so far as it succeeded, just so far did it prove its provincialism and, he might say, command his sympathy. For it could never hope to rival the great mother literature of England. England was too large, too populous, too wealthy, had too many opportunities and advantages, in comparison with Ireland, for it to be possible that the English literature made in Ireland, or by Irishmen could ever hope to be anything more than a section, a small proportion, of the great English literature. A National literature it was not, in any sense. An Irish National literature was an impossibility except it sprang from the old Celtic race of Ireland. . . . An Irish National literature — the Professor was here remarkably emphatic — must be based on the old Celtic literature and legends, must come from the Celtic people of the country, must have the basis and inspiration of race and racial tradition, and must not and cannot be divorced from the philosophy, and influence, and inspiration of the Roman Catholic religion. ¹³¹

Professor Dowden then criticised the list of thirty best Irish books that Yeats had chosen in a letter to the <u>Daily Express</u> on 27 February. However, as <u>The Evening Herald's</u> reporter noted, the books listed by Yeats generally fitted Dowden's own definition of Irish literature, whereas, under this definition, the books suggested by Dowden himself, which included Swift's <u>Gulliver's Travels</u>, Farquhar's <u>The Beaux Stratagem</u>, Sterne's <u>Tristram</u>

¹³⁰ Ibid. 28 January 1895, p.5

¹³¹ Evening Herald, 2 March 1895, p.4

Shandy, Sheridan's Plays, and Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield, were not Irish at all. Yeats pointed this out in a further letter to the Daily Express on 8 March, writing that it is important to show that "our acknowledged authority" brings to a merely Irish literary matter something less than that careful logic, that scrupulous accuracy, that sympathetic understanding, which he brings to an English literary question; in fact he is no authority at all when he speaks of Irish verse or Irish legend, but a partisan ready to seize upon any argument which promises a momentary victory. 132

Dowden did respond on the following day arguing that he had been misreported at the Trinity meeting but went ahead to publish his views anyway in his book of essays, <u>New</u> Studies in Literature.

This public argument further demonstrates the resistance that the writers of what was now becoming known as the Irish literary revival, were experiencing in their attempt to establish a new literary tradition. This new tradition looked back to the writers of The
Nation, and of the Dublin University Magazine, but by contrast with the extant nationalist view, recognised and acknowledged their limitations. It also looked further back to literature originally written in the Irish language but now being translated into English that still bore the marks of its origin. A primary objective of the National Literary Society was to create a new Irish community of readers who would be knowledgeable in Irish history and traditional culture, but who could bring to their reading of the new Irish writers a critical judgement of the highest standard. Yeats was well aware that such a community did not currently exist in Ireland. In November 1894, he wrote to United Ireland that

it is often necessary for an original Irish writer, to appeal first, not to his countrymen, but to that small group of men of imagination and scholarship which is scattered through many lands and many cities, and to trust to his own influence and the influence of his fellow-workers to build up in the fullness of time a cultivated public in the land where he lives and works. The true ambition is to make criticism as international, and literature as National, as possible.¹³³

Yeats's efforts to create such an informed community was enhanced when, in March 1895, his selection of modern Irish verse was published by Methuen and Co. in London. <u>A Book of Irish Verse</u>, which was dedicated by Yeats "To the Members of the National Literary

United Ireland, 24 November 1894, p.1

Daily Express, 8 March 1895, p.7

Society of Dublin and the Irish Literary Society of London," did not raise as much controversy as might have been expected, given its almost total exclusion of the "Young Ireland" poets. The Irish Weekly Independent agreed with their exclusion: "Mr. Yeats is right in deploring that the young writers springing up in the literary societies should take Moore or the '48 men as their masters in style, seeing that their style was anything but native-born and Celtic." The reviewer had some points of disagreement with Yeats's selections, but also suggested that in the references in the introduction to Moore and the '48 poets, Yeats was "trailing his coat," being controversial on purpose in order to get a debate underway.

The <u>United Ireland</u> reviewer commended Yeats's introduction, "probably the best short essay on Irish poetry yet published," but considered that Yeats "goes a little too far in his references to Moore." The review also expressed some reservations regarding Yeats's comments on Mangan of whom he had written in his introduction:

Like those who had gone before him, he was the slave of life, for he had nothing of the self-knowledge, the power of selection, the harmony of mind, which enables the poet to be its master, and to mould the world to a trumpet for his lips. ¹³⁶

It is evident from the views expressed by Yeats's reviewers that his project of developing a more critical attitude to Irish literature in English, both with regard to who or what should be included, and how this literature should be distinguished from the main stream of English literature was by this time bearing fruit. Yeats's views on Irish poetry as described in the introduction to his <u>Book of Irish Verse</u> would have had relatively few readers in Ireland, as it was an expensive book, selling at three shillings and sixpence. However in July 1895, he contributed the first in a series of articles on Irish national literature to the English magazine <u>The Bookman</u>, which received wider attention in Ireland. The second of these articles was subjected to an extensive critique in the 17 August issue of <u>United Ireland</u>. The judgement of <u>United Ireland's</u> reviewer on this article "Contemporary Irish Prose Writers" was not at all positive. It was particularly critical of Yeats's opening paragraph, which intriguingly, was the only part of the article later reprinted by Yeats in Ideas of Good and Evil under the title "The Moods". The section to which the reviewer

¹³⁴ The Irish Weekly Independent, 23 March 1895, p.6

United Ireland, 23 March 1895, p.1

Yeats, W. B., A Book of Irish Verse, p. xvii

objected, and which was quoted in the article, concerned "the imaginative artist" of whom Yeats had written:

We hear much of his need for the restraints of reason, but the only restraint he can obey is the mysterious instinct that has made him an artist, and that teaches him to discover immortal moods in mortal desires, an undecaying hope in our trivial ambitions, a divine love in sexual passions. ¹³⁷

This was dangerous ground in the Ireland of the eighteen nineties, (or even well into the twentieth century) as Yeats was to discover, and <u>United Ireland</u> gave an early warning, describing his view of the artist as

a very pernicious doctrine . . . because it exalts passion at the expense of reason, and asserts the right of every man to write what he likes, to extol even vice if his 'mysterious instinct' so urges, and to overthrow all the barriers raised by reason and wisdom to save society from the reckless propagation of dangerous theories. In the advocacy of this doctrine Mr. Yeats writes like one who has been under the influence of the eccentric philosophy of Oscar Wilde.

Such a comment, published just three months after Wilde had been committed to Pentonville prison, was certain to cause some damage to Yeats's reputation in Ireland. His work continued to be admired, but his personal philosophy and his support for his literary friends which <u>United Ireland</u>, in the same article, condemned as 'log rolling' were beginning to elicit a more aggressive criticism. Yeats was no longer conforming to the ideal of an Irish literary figure who would align his views on Irish literature in support of the political purposes of the day, serving the national struggle for independence as Thomas Davis and the writers of <u>The Nation</u> had previously done. As we have noted, he was no longer dependent on Irish editors to publish his work so that he was now more free to express his own views while still having to be aware of the cultural codes of the journals to which he was now contributing in England such as <u>The Bookman</u> or <u>The National</u> Observer.

In October 1895, Yeats brought out the first of his many editions of collected poems in a volume simply called <u>Poems by W.B.Yeats</u>, which was published by T Fisher Unwin again in London. His friend and fellow mystic George Russell (AE) reviewed the book in the

¹³⁷ Ibid. 17 August 1895, p.1

<u>Irish Weekly Independent</u> in the first of many reviews that Russell wrote of Yeats's work. Predictably, Russell's views of poetry were different from those of the <u>United Ireland's</u> reviewer of the <u>Bookman</u> article quoted above. While AE was more concerned with the ethereal world rather than the political one, in his review he defended Yeats from those nationalists who wanted him merely to serve separation:

As one wishing for our true freedom, I hail in this book one of the signs of a real dawn, for intellectual and spiritual independence must precede the material. Of what use is it to be free from contact with disagreeable neighbours if we have still to depend on them for our ideals of life and art and all that goes to make up true nationality? . . . it seems to me Mr. Yeats has interpreted the indefinite spiritual atmosphere which has pervaded Ireland from its dawn until today, and which has hitherto been more clearly perceptible in the life of the common people than in the utterances of our writers. . . . It is an exaltation of feeling rather than of thought, and it is as much to be prized as that literature which aims more especially at wisdom and to be a guide in life. 138

The book was also reviewed by John McGrath in <u>United Ireland</u> under the title "The Changing of Oisin." This review focussed attention, as the title indicated, on the many changes that Yeats had made to the original published version of <u>The Wanderings of Oisin</u>. These changes, the reviewer thought, had "transposed the poem almost into a new work." The review was lavish in its praise:

The poem is chastened almost in every line, and yet it has gained in strength. Mr. Yeats, the least rhetorical of writers from the beginning, has become less rhetorical still, and yet the power that is in this poem has been distinctly added to. 139

In looking at the passages that Yeats had rejected for this revised version of the poem, the reviewer described his view of the true artist:

Genius has been defined as an infinite capacity for taking pains, but in art, and perhaps in the art of poetry above all, there can be no real genius unless there is an infinite capacity for rejection. In its original form "the wanderings of Oisin" (sic) was a remarkable performance. Any ordinary writer, and a great many "poets", would have allowed it to stand as at first written. But the longing for perfection

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¹³⁸ Irish Weekly Independent, 26 October 1895, p.9

which is in the soul of the born artist is tireless and passionate, and in the end invincible.

In his final paragraph, the reviewer placed Yeats, for the first time, not just as a promising young poet whose future progress would be followed with interest, but as the premier contemporary poet in Ireland placing him "not alone at the head of Irish poetry, but amongst the five or six living men who can write verse in the English tongue that the next generation will care to read." He concluded:

Mr. Yeats's art is a developing and progressive force, and not a stationary one. A national poet, in the true sense of the word, is a gift from the gods. Have the gods at last looked on Ireland with the kindly eye they so long turned away from her, in sorrow or in anger?

By the end of 1895, the name of W.B. Yeats, now thirty years old, was known in Ireland through the reviews of his books and through the controversies associated with the Irish Literary Society and the proposed New Library of Ireland edited by Gavan Duffy, but it is unlikely that the books themselves were, at this stage, widely read in Ireland. Indeed, from the comments made in the debates on the publication of Irish books it is likely that very few Irish, or in fact any books, were widely read in Ireland in these closing years of the nineteenth century. In a letter to Katherine Tynan in July 1895, Yeats had acknowledged his difficulty in getting access to an Irish readership. Commenting on his series of articles on Irish National Literature for The Bookman, he wrote: "These Bookman articles are my only way of getting at the Irish public. The first was copied by the 'Express' as well as by 'United Ireland'." 140

Here Yeats acknowledges that his Irish readership was primarily composed of readers of the Irish journals or newspapers that published his original work or reprinted articles from British or American publications. After Mosada all of his books had been published in London and in quite small editions; 500 copies of The Wanderings of Oisin, and The Countess Kathleen, and 750 copies of his Poems of 1895. In 1892 The Book of the Rhymer's Club had only 450 copies printed, while The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club had 550 copies printed. When we examine the reception of Yeats in Ireland at this time, we can see that knowledge of him as a poet primarily came from the poems published in

¹⁴⁰ Collected Letters, Vol. I, p.471

journals and newspapers, or from those poems which were reproduced in reviews of books which the vast majority of the newspapers' readers would not have the opportunity of reading for themselves. In this context it is easy, for example, to explain the immediate popularity of such poems as "The Lake Isle of Inisfree", because it was reproduced in its entirety in both the Irish Daily Independent's and The Irish Monthly's reviews of The Book of the Rhymers' Club in 1892, as well as in George Russell's review of Poems in 1895 in the Irish Weekly Independent. Of his original books it is interesting to note that John Sherman and Dhoya, which was published in an edition of 1,644 copies, by far exceeded the print run of his poetry books. Also his editions of Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry and Representative Irish Tales, as part of The Camelot Series and the Knickerbocker Nuggets series, would likely have had substantial numbers sold in Ireland.

Yeats's reception in Ireland by the middle of the last decade of the century was primarily influenced by his reputation as an active defender of things Irish, an advanced nationalist and admirer of Robert Emmet, an elegist of Parnell, an expert on Irish folklore, and a writer of accessible, dreamy ballads extolling the virtues of the simple Irish peasant and of the Irish countryside. John McGrath, in <u>United Ireland</u>, had expressed a sense of Yeats as "a symbolist" and Louis Victory, in <u>Irish Society</u>, had described him as "an initiate of occultism", but these attributes had as yet received little attention in Ireland. There had also been inklings, particularly in the opening section of his article in <u>The Bookman</u> on "Contemporary Irish Prose Writers" that as "an imaginative artist" he was preparing to assert his independence from his admirers in Ireland, whether they were members of the broad Catholic nationalist community such as readers of the <u>Irish Monthly</u> or the advanced nationalist and republican community with whom Yeats had latterly become more associated through his frequent appearance in the pages of <u>United Ireland</u>.

Chapter 3 1896 - 1899

In February 1896 Yeats moved from rooms shared with Arthur Symons in the Temple to Woburn Buildings which was to be his London home for the next twenty years. He continued, however, to travel frequently to Dublin, and, after the summer of 1897, to Coole, and remained heavily involved in Irish political and cultural activities. In March 1896 he wrote to Henry Davray, a "French critic, translator, and journalist," in response to a request for biographical details:

I have spent a good deal of time speaking & lecturing & doing committee work in connection with our Irish literary propaganda. I emphasize this because I want you to understand that I am an Irish poet, looking to my own people for my ultimate best audience & trying to express the things that interest them & which will make them care for the land in which they live.¹

During the eighteen nineties the land in which Yeats's "own people" lived was in the process of radical change both politically and culturally. Following the fall of Parnell the political situation on the nationalist side was in flux with Parnellite and anti-Parnellite factions vying with each other and with William O'Brien's United Irish League, which he had founded in 1898, for control of the nationalist community. When the Irish Parliamentary Party was eventually reunited in 1900 under John Redmond, a Conservative government was firmly in control in Westminster and, with the Liberal Party divided, the prospect of achieving a Home-Rule settlement in the short term was not promising. Attention was focussed instead on areas such as land reform which culminated in the Wyndham's Land Bill in 1903 bringing a resolution to the long-running conflict over land purchase, and, most importantly, a shift in local government into nationalist hands, described by Roy Foster as "real local government reform" which "was a vital step in entrenching nationalist influence on county councils."

In parallel with this political activity, the eighteen nineties saw a great advance in the growth of cultural nationalism. New journals were established, new writers came to

¹ Collected Letters, Vol. II, p.15

This was a "highly developed organisation, first centered round the land purchase issue." It had 100,000 members and 1,000 branches by 1901, and was subsumed into the reunited Irish Parliamentary Party from 1900. Foster R.F., Modern Ireland 1600 – 1972, p.432

³ Foster R.F., Paddy and Mr. Punch, p.264

prominence, and at the end of the decade the foundation of the Irish Literary Theatre was to bring Yeats's name into greater prominence and influence his reception in Ireland in a more fundamental manner than he had previously experienced. The complexity of the nationalist cultural landscape that Yeats was addressing has been described by Joep Leerssen as follows:

The various initiatives in cultural nationalism of the 1890s were nothing if not diverse, involving literary, dramatic, linguistic, sporting, and journalistic elements with different sympathies, different social roots and different gradations of separatism.⁴

Yeats, through his frequent writings in <u>United Ireland</u> had established an identity at the more extreme end of the spectrum of nationalism by the mid 1890s, a Republican identity which was to be further consolidated by his membership of the Young Ireland League and in particular by his involvement in the 1798 centenary commemorations, as we will see.⁵

One of the new journals which reflected the diversity of the nationalist community was the New Ireland Review, founded in 1894 as a successor to The Lyceum and edited, as The Lyceum had been, by the Jesuit priest Father Thomas Finlay with another Jesuit, Father George O'Neill as literary editor. The New Ireland Review continued the Catholic ethos of its predecessor but extended the range of its topics to meet the demands of the time and a reading of its pages gives some insight into the differing views within the Catholic and nationalist communities in Ireland as the century drew to a close. An editorial in its first number described in very positive terms the changes, which, in the editor's view, had taken place in Irish society in the previous twenty years. These included improvement in the status of farmers through tenancy agreements, the enfranchising of artisans and labourers, and a "fully developed system of Intermediate Education, and the beginning of a university system for the whole people [which] have been added to the already existing system of primary education."

This viewpoint reflects an element of satisfaction within the Catholic Church with the progress that had been made in a number of areas of concern to the Catholic community

⁴ Leerssen, Joep, <u>Remembrance and Imagination</u>, p.208

⁵ The issue of whether Yeats was ever a formal member of the IRB has been much discussed, but no doubt his association with John O'Leary and Maud Gonne in the 1890s would have placed him, in Irish opinion, as at least a fellow-traveler. See Foster, R.F., W. B. Yeats: A Life, p.112

⁶ New Ireland Review, March 1894, p.2

even without the advent of Home-Rule. The editorial also demonstrated the Church's wish for control in calling for "temperate discussion" on the issues of the day but "within the limits which a rigorous respect for the religious faith of our countrymen imposes."⁷

Subsequently, Fr. Finlay was to publish a very different vision of contemporary Ireland in a series of essays by a man whose name will feature frequently in the pages that follow: D. P. Moran, later editor of The Leader and a trenchant critic of Yeats over the years. Moran's image of Ireland was expressed in essays such as "Is the Irish Nation Dying?" "The Future of the Irish Nation" and "The Battle of Two Civilisations," which were published in the New Ireland Review between December1898 and August 1900 and then republished together in1905 under the title The Philosophy of Irish Ireland. Moran saw contemporary Ireland as a country completely dominated by English influence in its "arts, industries, literature, social habits, points of view, music, amusements and so on," all of which he regarded as essential characteristics of a nation. He set out his proposed solution:

We must retrace our steps, and take as much of our inspiration as possible from our own country and its history. We must be original Irish and not imitation English.

Above all, we must re-learn our language, and become a bi-lingual people. ¹⁰ As far as literature was concerned, Moran's view was: "There is manifestly no essential difference between first-class literary work executed by an English-speaking man born in Ireland, and that executed by an English-speaking man born in England." ¹¹ Irish literature, according to Moran, had to be in the Irish language, a language in which, ironically, Moran himself was no expert. ¹²

These contrasting viewpoints - one satisfied to make steady progress under the Catholic Church's control, and the other wishing to make a radical break with the past, promoting the Irish language and the concept of what Moran called the Irish Irelander - represented two major cultural forces within the broad nationalist community which were to be an

⁷ Ibid. p.3

⁸ David Patrick Moran (1869 – 1936) was born in Waterford and educated at Castleknock College. He worked as a journalist in London before returning to Dublin where he wrote for <u>The New Ireland Review</u> before founding <u>The Leader</u> in1900 and editing this influential journal until his death in 1936. He developed a life-long antagonism to Yeats, George Russell and the Anglo- Irish literary movement.

⁹ Moran D. P., <u>The Philosophy of Irish Ireland</u>, p.1

¹⁰ op. cit. p.26

¹¹ op. cit. p.103

¹² In his biography of Moran, Patrick Maume tells us that Moran made just one visit to the *Gaeltacht* and though he "eventually read modern Irish fluently, . . . he never spoke it well." D. P. Moran, p.10

important influence on the reception by his "own people" of Yeats's work in the years ahead.

Unionist publications in Ireland did their utmost to ignore the ferment of debate regarding political and cultural nationalism underway in the nationalist press. As Roy Foster tells us, the Protestant unionist community had its own version of Irishness:

They had their own psychological identification with Ireland, which was not threatened by an interest and a pride in the evidently ancient origins of Irish settlement and Irish culture. 'Victorian Ireland' could be middle-class, English-speaking and non-separatist in its politics, but no less 'Irish' for that.¹³

One particular unionist attitude to the new literary movement was demonstrated in an review in the Dublin Evening Mail in February 1894 of The Revival of Irish Literature, a recently published collection of addresses by Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Dr George Sigerson and Douglas Hyde. The review stated that

the idea that Irishmen are to devote special attention to the study of Irish literature is absurd. The glory of Ireland lies in her alliance with England, and the very Irish whom Sir Charles addresses derive their best qualities from the fact that Ireland has been protected and helped by England for centuries. . . . It would be well, if Irishmen are to be guided in their reading by Messrs. Hyde and Rollerston, that their teachers should impress on them the value of the writings of Burke rather than of Davis, and of Goldsmith rather than of such fanatics as the writers of The Nation. ¹⁴

As previously noted, ¹⁵ when Professor Edward Dowden, whom Yeats, in his <u>Reveries over Childhood and Youth</u>, chose as "the representative Irish Victorian among . . . the Fellows and professors of Trinity College" ¹⁶ spoke at the Trinity College Historical Society in February 1895, he had epitomised the educated Unionist view of the movement to

¹³ Foster R. F., Paddy and Mr. Punch, p.26

¹⁴Evening Mail, 28 February 1894, p.4 It is interesting to note that in later years Yeats was promoting the writings of Burke and Goldsmith rather than those of Davis and the writers of <u>The Spirit of the Nation</u>.

¹⁶ Brown, Terence, <u>Ireland's Literature</u>, p.31

revive Irish literature by stating that "whatever is written in English by Irishmen is English literature"¹⁷- an opinion with which, interestingly, D. P. Moran would have agreed.

The Catholic and nationalist community in Ireland that Yeats was addressing was a complex one, in part formed and addressed by a plethora of newspapers and journals ranging across the spectrum of nationalist opinion. These included the broadly nationalist but somewhat conservative Dublin daily papers such as The Freeman's Journal in particular, the Irish Daily Independent and its successor The Irish Independent, and the Evening Telegraph, and such journals as The Irish Monthly. At the opposite end of the spectrum were the journals of advanced nationalism such as United Ireland and its successor The United Irishman, which commenced publication in March1899. Special interests within the nationalist community were addressed by *An Claidheamh Soluis* the journal of the Gaelic League founded in March 1899, and the Irish Irelander publication The Leader founded in September 1900.

The Protestant and unionist community looked to late-Victorian England for its standards in literature and the arts in general. This community was in part formed by, and addressed by, The Irish Times, the Daily Express, and the Evening Mail. The Church of Ireland Gazette would also have wielded some influence. English journals such as Macmillan's Magazine or The Contemporary Review would have appealed to the more highly educated members of the community, while the popularity of English magazines such as Tit-Bits or Answers or The Lady's Pictorial underlined the cultural dominance of late-Victorian England among the less educated, particularly in the Dublin area, much to the disgust of the Church of Ireland. In fact the cultural influence of these popular English periodicals was extended to the least educated of all communities whether Catholic or Protestant among whom they had a substantial readership. In 1904, as James Joyce demonstrated, this readership in Dublin would have included Leopold and Molly Bloom and Gerty MacDowell.

It is however important to note that the readership of both newspapers and journals, particularly those with pretensions to literary merit, would have been quite limited in a

¹⁷ Evening Herald, 2 March 1895, p.4

¹⁸ See <u>The Church of Ireland Gazette</u>, 29 June 1900, p.508 for an attack on such magazines. "Such reading is wholly evil."

country where education levels, although rising swiftly, were still relatively low. There was undoubtedly a large percentage of the population who would never have heard of the so-called literary revival, and while the controversies and arguments over literary or cultural matters may have seemed of great moment to Yeats and his colleagues the mass of the population were living out their lives unaware of, and indifferent to, the concerns of the leaders of this new movement. This was to change somewhat with the advent of the Irish Literary Theatre, which could appeal to greater numbers of the ordinary people in Dublin where an established tradition of theatre-going existed.

The population of Dublin where the main readership of national newspapers and journals resided was 245,000 in 1901, of which Catholics numbered 201,000 but of this Catholic population only 132,000 or approximately 63 % claimed they could read and write. The comparable percentage for the Protestant population was over 82 %. ¹⁹ The overall literacy level in the country was indeed rising rapidly, it had reached 87% by 1911 from approximately 60% in 1881 but higher education was still available to a very small percentage of the population. The national school system that had been established in 1831 was, according to Joseph Lee, serving 500,000 pupils by 1848 and 1,000,000 by 1914 but absentee levels were very high, so that "the majority of children before 1918 received only 4 -5 years schooling."²⁰ The numbers in secondary education were only 10,000 in 1878 and had risen to just 20,000 by 1911 when just 10% of the 15-18 age group were receiving secondary education. University education was provided for only 3,000 students in 1871 rising to 4,000 in 1911. With these statistics it is not surprising that readers of poetry in Ireland in the 1890s would be few, and that those of the nationalist tradition who did read poetry, would favour the simple nationalistic verses of the Young Ireland poets or the accessible and religious verse of poets such as Katherine Tynan or Aubrey De Vere, and when they read Yeats, would respond more readily to poems such as "The Lake Isle of Inisfree" or "The Stolen Child" rather than the more complex, symbolist and occult poetry which he was also writing at this time.

Circulation figures for the newspapers published in Dublin at that time are difficult to discover but L. M. Cullen's <u>Eason and Son</u> indicates that the total number of daily newspapers per week supplied through that company, which dominated the wholesale

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Thom's Directory, 1901

Lee, Joseph, The Modernisation of Irish Society, p.28

market in 1894, was 136,000 of which 16,000 were English papers. In 1885 the circulation through W. H. Smith, the forerunner of Easons, was 7,360 for <u>The Irish Times</u> and a somewhat overstated 10,904 for <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>.²¹ A circulation figure of "about 11,000" in April 1898 has been estimated for the <u>Daily Express</u>.²² Cullen also noted that "very widespread sale of daily papers was not attained until the 1920s."

At this stage it is appropriate to look more closely at the numerous newspapers and journals being published in Ireland in the latter years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth and to note their interest in and involvement with the remarkable growth in new writing being produced by Irish writers, focusing as always on their response to Yeats.

The Irish Times was the daily newspaper of choice for the vast majority of the unionist community. Founded in 1859 it had achieved the largest circulation of any daily in the Dublin area by 1860, a position which it retained throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, following its purchase by Sir John Arnott in 1873.²⁴ Its politics were conservative and it paid limited attention to literary matters. It had reviewed Yeats's The Wanderings of Oisin in 1889, but its reviews in subsequent years were limited to military or church history, political memoirs and the occasional English novel. It also took an interest in European journals, reviewing them frequently in a special column. It reviewed performances at the popular theatres such as the Gaiety, the Queen's Royal Theatre, the Theatre Royal, and The Empire Palace, which were offering similar fare to that provided by theatres in England. It did, however, note the performances of the Irish Literary Theatre, and contributed to the controversy over The Countess Cathleen in 1899. In the early years of the twentieth century its interest in literature increased; in1903 it reviewed Yeats's <u>Ideas</u> of Good and Evil and from 1916, when Yeats's books were again being sent to the Irish press for review, it became a frequent commentator on Yeats's political and literary activities.

The other unionist daily newspaper, The <u>Daily Express</u> which, with its sister evening paper the <u>Evening Mail</u> was also conservative in its politics, demonstrated a greater interest in

²¹ Cullen L.M., <u>Eason and Son</u>, p. 76

²² Collected Letters, Vol. II, p.267

²³ Cullen, L.M., Eason and Son, p.47

Irish literature than The Irish Times. In particular from May 1898 when the paper was taken over by a syndicate under the control of Horace Plunkett²⁵ and with the appointment of T. P. Gill²⁶ as editor, its interest in Yeats and literary matters generally was extensive. For the period of Gill's editorship (from August 1898 to November 1899) and for some time afterwards the paper commented frequently on the progress of the new Irish literary movement. It published poems by Yeats, Katherine Tynan, Emily Lawless, Standish O'Grady and others and possibly brought those names to the attention of its unionist readership for the first time. (In his story "The Dead", Joyce imagines Gabriel Conroy as a reviewer for it.) The paper was purchased in November 1899 by a syndicate that included Lord Ardilaun of the Guinness family, and over a period of time its interest in literary matters declined. It never achieved a comparable circulation to The Irish Times, and ceased publication in 1922.

The unionist community never produced anything to compare with the quantity of weekly and monthly journals, both literary and political, which became such a feature of Irish nationalist publishing at the end of the 1890s. The Irish Times did publish a weekly edition from 1875 to 1941 that included popular series and stories, mainly by English writers such as Marie Corelli, but paid little attention to Irish writing. It is likely, however, that some unionists, particularly those interested in literary matters, would have subscribed to English magazines in which Yeats's work was being published or reviewed such as The Savoy, The National Observer or The Bookman. These were certainly read by Irish literary editors such as John McGrath of United Ireland, who liked to quote from them when they looked favourably on Irish writers.

Among the journals published in Dublin appealing to unionist readers were the satirical Irish Figaro which, as we have noted, paid some attention to literary matters, and the social journal Irish Society which, as also noted, published a specially written complimentary

²⁴ Farrell, Brian, (ed.) Communications and Community in Ireland, p.25

²⁶ Thomas Patrick Gill ((1858 – 1931) a nationalist and journalist, was a Parnellite M.P. from 1885 – 1892 and during his editorship of the <u>Daily Express</u> was very supportive of Yeats and the new literary

movement.

²⁵ Sir Horace Plunkett (1854 – 1932) was the son of Lord Dunsany whose plays were produced at the Abbey. He was born in England, educated at Eton and Oxford and came to live in Ireland in 1889. He set up the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society and appointed George Russell as editor of its journal The Irish Homestead and subsequently The Irish Statesman. He was a Unionist M.P. vice-president of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland and, after independence, for a brief period a Senator of the Irish Free State.

review of Yeats's The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics by Louis H. Victory in October 1892. Another journal aimed at the Protestant unionist community was The Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette, founded in 1855 and renamed in January 1900 as the Church of Ireland Gazette. It described itself as "A Church Paper for Church People" and focussed its attention on "all that concerns the welfare of that church." In a manner that echoed the previously noted approach of the Catholic journals, The Lyceum and its successor New Ireland Review, it laid down that "the whole tone of the Gazette has been carefully moulded on the teachings and doctrines of the Church of Ireland."²⁷ The Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette, as would be expected, paid considerable attention to the activities of Trinity College, approving of the first numbers of Dublin University Review, but then, not surprisingly, as the review began to develop "an Irish national spirit," failing to mention it again. It did make the occasional foray into more controversial matters, commenting on the first production of The Countess Cathleen in May 1899 and reviewing Ideals in Ireland edited by Lady Gregory in March 1901, but in the main it attended to the output of such English journals as The Nineteenth Century, Macmillan's Magazine and The Contemporary Review.

One particular review in the <u>Church of Ireland Gazette</u> in August 1900 gives an interesting insight into relationships between the Catholic and Protestant communities of the time. The review described the recently published <u>My New Curate</u> by Canon Sheehan as

a book which every thoughtful and well-instructed Irish Churchman, and certainly every Irish clergyman, might read with profit and pleasure. . . .

But what makes the book so important and interesting to Irish Churchmen is the fact that it is the work of a priest of the Roman Mission in Ireland, and therefore may be taken to be a fair and candid picture of the habits and thoughts of the majority of the population of this country, of which culpably little is known by their Protestant compatriots.²⁸

The complexities of the Irish political situation after the death of Parnell affected the structure of the nationalist press. The most popular daily had been <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>

²⁷ The Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette, 6 January 1899 p.5

The Church of Ireland Gazette, 10 August 1900, p.633. The book concerns the observations by a humane, learned parish priest on the enthusiastic activities of his new curate to improve the lot of his parishioners during a year spent in a small parish in Co. Cork in the late years of the nineteenth century.

described by Patrick Maume as the "organ of moderate upper-class nationalism." It had originally supported Parnell, but turned against him in 1891 and then amalgamated with an other anti-Parnell daily, the National Press, which had been financed by William Martin Murphy. A power struggle developed for control of the combined paper, the Freeman's Journal and National Press, and Murphy was ousted by John Dillon, the leader of the reunited Irish Parliamentary Party of 1900. Murphy then set up the Daily Nation in 1896. Meanwhile the pro-Parnell side, under John Redmond, had set up the Irish Daily Independent. The situation is well described by Donal McCartney:

The hopeless divisions and personality squabbles in the Irish party during the 1890s were reflected in the bitter rivalries of the three nationalist dailies, *Freeman's Journal* controlled by Dillon, the *Independent* by Redmond, and the *Daily Nation* by Murphy.³¹

Murphy eventually bought out <u>The Independent</u> which he merged with <u>The Daily Nation</u> in September 1900; and finally, in 1905 under the new title <u>The Irish Independent</u>, he set up the paper which still exists today and which rapidly overtook <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> as the most popular nationalist daily paper. Both papers were moderately nationalist in politics, supportive of the Irish Parliamentary party and appealing to main-stream conservative middle-class nationalism. Both also published weekly editions <u>The Weekly Freeman</u> and <u>The Weekly Independent</u> in which, among the popular romances and articles on fashion, some attention was paid to the new national literary movement. These weekly editions easily outsold the daily editions of these papers. L.M.Cullen gives a figure of 151,00 copies of weekly papers being sold through Eason and Son in 1880.³²

The nationalist daily papers, focussed as they were on their internal rivalries and representing the moderate nationalist politics of the day, were subjected to considerable competition from the weekly and monthly journals that became such a feature of the more extreme nationalist press towards the end of the century. It was in these journals, many of which gave substantial attention to the progress of the literary revival, that Yeats's Irish

²⁹ Maume, Patrick, <u>The Long Gestation</u>, p.8

32 Cullen, L. M., in op. cit. p.26.

³⁰William Martin Murphy (1844-1919)was born in Bantry, Co. Cork and became one of the most successful Irish businessmen of his time. He was a nationalist M.P. from 1885 –1892 and owned both <u>The Irish Independent</u> and <u>The Sunday Independent</u>. He was a trenchant adversary of Yeats's particularly over the Dublin lockout of 1913 and the controversy regarding the building of a gallery for Hugh Lane's pictures.

³¹ McCartney, Donal, in Farrell Brian, (ed.) <u>Communications and Community in Ireland</u>, pp.33-34.

literary reputation was primarily being developed. However considerable attention will, of necessity, be paid to the daily press later in this chapter as they take up the <u>Countess</u> <u>Cathleen</u> controversy.

<u>United Ireland</u> continued to support and promote Yeats and his work until its demise in September 1898. This was particularly true, as has been noted, of the period following the Parnell split and the accession of Edmund Leamy as editor and John McGrath as literary editor. Its successor <u>The United Irishman</u>, was edited by Arthur Griffith³³, a more militant nationalist, who used the journal to support his republican ambitions. It began weekly publication in March 1899 and was initially supportive of Yeats although with some reservations, being critical of what it saw as the unnecessary complexity of his work This support did not last and, as we will see, Griffith eventually became one of Yeats's most vociferous critics, particularly with respect to his support of Synge. <u>The United Irishman</u> never achieved a wide circulation and was constantly in financial difficulties, on occasions relying on support from Maud Gonne who had private means. It finally ceased publication in 1906. One interested reader was James Joyce, who, as his brother Stanislaus has told us, "said that the *United Irishman* was the only paper in Dublin worth reading, and in fact, he used to read it every week."³⁴

There were two further journals which achieved a substantial readership and which were extremely important in influencing the reception that Yeats was accorded in the nationalist community. These were *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the official journal of the Gaelic League, edited originally by Eoin MacNeill and later by Patrick Pearse, which published its first number in March 1899, and <u>The Leader</u>, edited by D.P.Moran, which first appeared in September 1900 and was to be a thorn in Yeats's side for many years. While none of these three journals may have sold in large numbers, it is likely that they were quite widely read. The <u>New Ireland Review</u> commented in January 1905: "A very large number of people read the *Leader*, or the *United Irishman*, or both, every week. They are a pleasant change

³⁴ Joyce, Stanislaus, My Brother's Keeper, p.169

³³ Arthur Griffith (1871 – 1922) was born in Dublin and trained as a printer. After a period in South Africa, he returned to Dublin where he edited <u>The United Irishman</u> and its successor *Sinn Féin*. He was a member of the IRB and after the Easter rising, in which he did not take part, became vice-president of *Sinn Fein*, the political wing of the republican movement. He was acting president of Dáil Eireann and led the truce negotiations after the war of independence. He was elected President of the Dáil before the civil war, and died before it ended. An early supporter of Yeats, he later became antagonistic to Yeats and Synge taking particular objection to Synge's "In the Shadow of the Glen".

from the orthodox unrighteousness of the daily Press." ³⁵ An Claidheamh Soluis circulated among members of the Gaelic League and was read in clubs, at meetings, and at Irish language classes. It is estimated, for example, that by 1906 the Gaelic League had a membership of over 75,000 in 900 branches throughout the country, so the views of its official organ would have been widely disseminated. D. P Moran's The Leader, which had the early backing of the Catholic Church, has been described as "the paper of choice for Irish Irelanders looking for Irish goods and Irish manufacturers looking for customers. Within a few months *The Leader* regularly contained eight pages of advertisements." ³⁶ Such a quantity of advertising would indicate a substantial circulation.

The previously mentioned Catholic journal the <u>New Ireland Review</u> continued to follow the fortunes of the literary revival until its demise in 1908 and was generally supportive though for picturesque descriptive power it found it difficult to match the heights of its profile of the young Yeats in its December 1894 number when it described him as follows:

He was an original, quaintly-extravagant youth whom the fanciful might be pardoned for describing as an utterly overgrown faery who had wandered by some mischance into the prosaic world.³⁷

Another journal worthy of mention is the <u>All Ireland Review</u>. Founded and edited by Standish O'Grady in 1900 and published in Kilkenny it made a brave attempt to straddle the political and cultural divide. Although himself a unionist, O'Grady wrote in its first edition "it is my intention to promote to the utmost a general mutual tolerance, regard, and respect, for the achievement of greater national solidarity and the concentration of power." An example of the "mutual tolerance, regard and respect" to which O'Grady aspired was demonstrated when his journal welcomed Queen Victoria's visit to Ireland in March 1900 with the line "Céad Mile Fáilte rómath a Ríoghain." The <u>All-Ireland Review</u> took an interest in literary matters and published a number of contributions from Yeats, AE, and Lady Gregory.

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³⁵ New Ireland Review, January 1905, p.275

Maume, Patrick, D. P. Moran, p.13

³⁷ New Ireland Review, December 1894, p.649

All Ireland Review, 6 January 1900, p.1. This comment echoes O'Grady's call in the <u>DUR</u> in August 1885 on the landlord class in Ireland to give the country the leadership it required. See p.19

The Irish Ecclesiastical Record was a "monthly journal under Episcopal sanction" and as such concentrated on matters of interest to the Catholic clergy. It did, however, publish a long article on "The Celtic Revival of Today" written by a Catholic priest, Rev. J O'Donovan, in March 1899 which is worth consideration. It described Yeats and George Russell (AE) as "full of the Celtic spirit" and praised Yeats's "The Rose of the World", "The Ballad of Father Gilligan", "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", and "The Stolen Child". The article then continued:

The Land of Heart's Desire is one of the most perfect little plays that has been written in modern verse. It is simple, yet of rare distinction and dignity; full of a pathos that never degenerates into sentiment. The Countess Kathleen has much feeling for the sorrows that lie heavy on the hearts of men. It has action too, and gives hope that the Celtic literary drama will do much for modern literature and modern life.

. . . Mr. Yeats asks a place among the noble company "who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong." We gladly give it to him, with Davis, and Mangan, and Ferguson, and the others whose love of Ireland is distinctive in their lives and in their works. Indeed, as a poet who has reached perfection of literary form, he even now ranks above them all."³⁹

This was remarkable praise, written by a Catholic priest and published in a Catholic journal bearing the formal episcopal approval of William Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin, particularly as it included in its encomium a play which within a matter of two months was to be denounced by the highest authority of the Catholic Church in Ireland represented by Cardinal Logue.

While the readership of newspapers and journals in Ireland may have been limited, the readership of books was even more so. An article in September 1898 in the <u>Daily Express's</u> literary page bemoaned the low level of book sales in Dublin. One bookseller blaming it to a great extent on "the increasing excellence of the weekly journals and the variety and interest of the contents of the daily newspaper," while another noted that "travels, history and poetry we rarely take them from the shelves." This reinforces the point that the receptive community for Yeats's work in these early years was primarily to be found among the readers of newspapers and magazines and, as it was primarily in the

⁴⁰ Daily Express, 17 September 1898, p.3

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³⁹ The Irish Ecclesiastical Record, March 1899, pp.253 - 254

nationalist press that his work was either reproduced or reviewed, (apart from the <u>Daily Express</u>, during and shortly after Gill's period as editor), it was as a nationalist writer that he was interpreted and evaluated. This was to be of increasing significance as his work began to challenge some of the shibboleths of Irish nationalism.

<u>United Ireland's</u> literary editor John McGrath continued to bring Yeats's contributions to London-based journals such as <u>The Savoy</u> and <u>The Bookman</u> to the attention of his Irish readers. In January 1896 he noted Yeats's story, "Rosa Alchemica" which had been published in <u>The Savoy</u> comparing it favourably with the work of Edgar Allan Poe. Other sections of the nationalist press, however, were not so consistently supportive. At a meeting of the National Literary Society in London, Yeats had made a comment about putting on Irish plays in London which led to a vigorous response in the 20 March edition of the <u>Irish Weekly Independent</u> invoking Gulliver's adventures in Lagado and concluding:

But Dean Swift, even in his maddest mood, would never have suggested that the genius of Irish literature could flourish in the impure air of London or could be understood by the sensual and soulless Cockney. The habitat of Irish literature, like that of our own shamrock, is here on the green bosom of the old land.⁴²

This was a sensitive issue for Yeats and one that he had to address. He did come to the later conclusion, possibly influenced, as has been noted, by the mixed reception accorded to his "The Land of Heart's Desire" when it was produced in London in April 1894, that for his plays to be successful, he should have them performed in Dublin and, following his experience with "The Countess Cathleen", that they should be performed with Irish actors.

In April 1897 Yeats's book <u>The Secret Rose</u> was published. It again received considerable attention in Ireland, but only in the nationalist or Catholic press. Reviews were published in <u>United Ireland</u> and <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> and <u>The New Ireland Review</u>. Mathew Arnold was invoked by two of the reviewers. <u>The New Ireland Review</u> identified in the book those "qualities of 'natural magic' and 'preoccupation with the things of the mind' which at least two famous critics Arnold and Renan, have assigned to the Celtic genius as its distinguishing characteristics." <u>United Ireland's</u> review quoted from Arnold's <u>On the Study of Celtic Literature</u> and then went on to compare Yeats's stories to the work of Poe

⁴¹ United Ireland, 6 June 1896, p.1

 ⁴² <u>Irish Weekly Independent</u>, 20 March 1897, p.1
 ⁴³ <u>The New Ireland Review</u>, May 1897, p.182

or Hawthorne rather than to any English writer. The reviewer in <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> felt that the "sorrows and the ecstasies' which shadow personages in 'The Secret Rose' will lack a general sympathy, precisely because they lack a human interest or an intelligible and ordered relation either with the direction or frustration of human lives." This echoed, to some extent, the views of the other two reviews that also had reservations about the popularity of the book because, as <u>The New Ireland Review</u> had suggested: "The general reading public will, in our opinion, miss the significance and power of the book," and it will "fail of the full popularity to which, when all is said, its great merits entitle it."

Some months later the issue of esotericism in Yeats's poetry was amusingly dealt with in the <u>Irish Weekly Independent</u>, when the following appeared on 7 August 1897:

Mr. Yeats is an exceedingly clever young man, and what is more, he is a composer of musical lyrics. But a mystical cloud has fallen on this young Dubliner; every day he is becoming more obscure, more intensely shadowy and unreal. The following poem appeared in the current issue of *The Sketch*. We now offer a prize of a volume of Tennyson, Moore, Shelley, Keats or Byron to the enterprising and sane reader who can best interpret the secret meaning of this gem.⁴⁵

Then followed the first printing in Ireland of "The Song of Wandering Aengus" just three days after it had been published in <u>The Sketch</u> in London. This poem, which was to become, after "The Lake Isle of Inisfree," possibly the most enduringly popular of Yeats's early lyrics, appeared under its original title "A Mad Song".

The public controversies with which Yeats had been involved to this time were all connected in one way or another with his literary work. However he now became involved in a purely political issue, the preparations for the celebration of the centenary of the 1798 uprising. He Yeats's credentials for involvement in these centenary celebrations may have sprung from the publication of his poem on Parnell's death in <u>United Ireland</u> and his prior issuing of a manifesto for the newly formed Young Ireland League which took a leading hand in organising the celebrations. From the beginning, however, there had been divisions

⁴⁴ The Freeman's Journal, 10 April 1897, p.5

⁴⁵ <u>Irish Weekly Independent</u>, 7 August 1897, p.1. Many years later <u>The Irish Book Lover</u> referred to this event announcing that "the prize (a volume of Tennyson) was won by a person who interpreted the poem as a political allegory." April 1925, p.20

⁴⁶ Described in some detail in the appendix to Collected Letters, Vol. II, pp. 695 - 707

among the organisers. In January 1897 the Young Ireland League⁴⁷ with John O'Leary as president set up a committee in Dublin, but this committee specifically excluded M.P.s and the clergy from its executive. A separate committee, with Yeats as president, was then set up in London in February 1897 by the London branch of the Young Ireland League.⁴⁸ The exclusiveness of the Dublin committee was heavily criticised in some sections of the Irish press, particularly in <u>United Ireland</u>.⁴⁹ Yeats made strenuous efforts to heal divisions, an activity recognised by <u>United Ireland</u> when it reported on a Convention held in Manchester in October 1897 at which Yeats presided. The report quoted Yeats's well-received appeal that "all should somehow work together and give up the desire for party advantage, and make some sacrifice in the cause of unity." Another speech by Yeats, at the public meeting that followed the Convention, was quoted in the <u>Irish Weekly Independent:</u>

Mr. W.B.Yeats said the Unionists were mistaken in supposing that all Irishmen now wanted was a royal residence. Next year there would be a strange awakening, and they would be very angry and very puzzled. Next year they would celebrate the glories of defeated causes, causes which rose afresh on their great pilgrimage knowing that their final triumph was inevitable. (applause)⁵¹

At this convention Yeats was elected President of a new organisation called "The '98 Centennial Association of Great Britain and France," and in this capacity he presided frequently over the weekly meetings held in London as preparations for the Centennial Celebrations continued. These meetings were regularly noted in <u>United Ireland</u> and Yeats's presence and comments reported, all of which was enhancing his nationalist reputation. His presence was also widely reported at the major event of the celebrations which was the laying of the foundation stone for a statue of Wolfe Tone in St. Stephen's Green at the top of Grafton Street on 15 August, the day before the opening of the Dublin Horse Show. Yeats was on the platform with John O'Leary, Maud Gonne, and senior political figures such as John Dillon M.P., John Redmond M.P., and many others. Full reports of the many speeches were carried in the nationalist press, including that of Yeats, who was greeted with cheers as he announced that he was speaking "on behalf of the Irishmen in

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⁴⁷ This organisation was "heavily infiltrated by the IRB". Collected Letters, Vol. II p.696

⁴⁸ United Ireland,27 February 1897, p.11

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 23 October, 1897

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 9 October 1897, p.3

⁵¹ Irish Weekly Independent, 9 October 1897, p.18

⁵² United Ireland, 4 February 1898, p.3, 26 February 1898, p.3, 2 April 1898, p.3

England."⁵³ The unionist <u>Irish Times</u> and <u>Daily Express</u> also reported on the celebrations, in a manner which clearly identified these organs with their own communities of readers. The former remarked on the good order of the parade which "even those who could not sympathise with its purpose were ready to admit,"⁵⁴ while the latter noted the speeches "with a great many of whose sentiments we are unable to agree."⁵⁵ Yeats's speech from the platform was noted in both papers, but much more briefly than in either <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>, <u>United Ireland</u> or the <u>Irish Weekly Independent</u> and no doubt, in the eyes of the unionist press Yeats's sentiments would have been among those with which they would not have agreed.

This major incursion by Yeats into nationalist politics, driven no doubt in part by his wish to please Maud Gonne who was frequently by his side at meetings and rallies, marked the summit, in the eyes of the Irish public, of his association with the advanced nationalist movement with its republican physical force agenda as favoured by Maud Gonne. This association was to have to implications for his literary reputation in the future when he began to express views at variance with the more propagandist role desired of him.

For the moment his new heightened profile was proving useful in promoting the soon to be announced Irish Literary Theatre. On 18 September 1898 John Eglington⁵⁶ contributed an article to the <u>Daily Express</u> entitled "What should be the Subjects of a National Drama" in which he rejected the use of ancient Irish myths as proper subjects for an Irish school of drama. Yeats responded and a series of letters ensued which demonstrated Yeats's developing ability to manipulate the media. He wrote to Lady Gregory: "I am going to try & widen the contraversy (sic) if I can into a discussion of the spiritual origin of the arts. In this way we will keep people awake until we announce 'the Irish Literary Theatre' in December & discuss that."⁵⁷ The correspondence was joined by A.E. and William Larminie⁵⁸ and continued until December. The contributions were eventually included with

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The Freeman's Journal, 16 August 1898, p.5

The Irish Times, 16 August 1898, p.4
Daily Express, 16 August 1898, p.4

The pseudonym of W.K. Magee (1868 – 1961) who was born in Dublin, educated at TCD, and became an influential figure in the Dublin literary scene. He worked as an assistant at the National Library from 1895 to 1921 where he appears under his pseudonym in the Scylla and Charybdis chapter of Joyce's <u>Ulysses</u>.

 ⁵⁷ Collected Letters Vol. II, p.289
 58 William Larminie (1849 – 1900) was born in Castlebar, educated at TCD and worked as a civil servant in London. He returned to Ireland in 1887 where he published poetry, collections of folklore, and newspaper articles including his contribution to Literary Ideals in Ireland.

other essays in a pamphlet published by the <u>Daily Express</u> under the title <u>Literary Ideals in Ireland</u> in May 1899 at a time when Yeats was involved in a far more serious controversy with his play <u>The Countess Cathleen</u>.

By the end of 1898 Yeats's name was well known to the readers of both the nationalist press, and of the unionist <u>Daily Express</u>. His allegiance to the nationalist and increasingly the republican cause was clearly understood. He had proclaimed his Irish nationality in committee rooms, in the newspapers and at public meetings. Although from a Protestant background, he was identified at this stage of his career neither with the intellectual Trinity coterie nor with the Dublin professional world or the Anglo-Irish gentry. These communities recognised and admired the quality of his work but, as their newspapers' response to the 1798 celebrations indicated, would have had little admiration for his political activities.

A new and non-political phase in Yeats's reception in Ireland was first introduced on 10 January 1899 when the readers of the <u>Daily Express</u> and of its sister evening paper the <u>Evening Mail</u> read a report of a speech by Yeats at an "At Home" held by the National Literary Society in Leinster Hall, Molesworth Street, Dublin. ⁵⁹ This was the first public announcement of the foundation of the Irish Literary Theatre, which as Yeats explained was "to be conducted under the auspices of the society". The plan was to have a Dramatic Festival every Spring with plays which would be literary and national. The report continued:

The title of our venture is to be The Irish Literary Theatre. And now let me add a word on the sense in which I use the word "national". There is undoubtedly a most interesting awakening of national life in Ireland (applause). It consists in a drawing together of men of all creeds and parties in the service of the idea in Ireland. This gathering, the most successful ever held by the National Literary Society, is evidence of this. But this movement needs not merely enthusiasm, but definite intellectual ideas, universal ideas, and perhaps the creation or introduction of new forms of expression. I noticed recently an article in a Dublin newspaper contending that great art is not national. This I absolutely disbelieve. All imaginative art is national; it may be merely in its expression of the sentiments and thoughts of a

His speech was also published in <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> on 11 January and in <u>The Weekly Nation</u> three days later.

certain people, or, more often, in the choice of its actual theme. . . . It is no sign of advance in thought to turn away from the problems immediately at our doors (applause). It is the first business of Irish writers to deal with and throw light on those problems as they exist in Ireland, and this is what the Irish Literary Theatre will attempt to do in its performances next May. 60

Joseph Holloway⁶¹ who attended the meeting was impressed: "If enthusiasm can command success, then it is assured, as nothing could be more enthusiastic than the manner in which Mr. Yeats has taken up the idea."

Yeats's speech was followed on 12 January by a letter published in the <u>Daily Express</u>, <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> and the <u>Irish Daily Independent</u>, formally announcing the foundation of the Irish Literary Theatre. Two days later Yeats's essay on "The Irish Literary Theatre" in which he again set out the objectives new Irish Literary Theatre was published in the <u>Daily Express</u>. A letter in the same edition of the paper signed *Celto-Dramaticus* expressed a concern with the proposed "literary" approach of the new theatre, writing: "The first essential of a play is that it should be 'actable'." This criticism of Yeats's plays later became widespread, but it was Yeats's statement that the Irish Literary Theatre would deal with life in its own country that was a hostage to fortune as, when <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> was performed, it was the accuracy of the play's representation of Irish life and Irish people that was the primary issue in the ensuing controversy.

Before the opening of the Irish Literary Theatre on 9 May 1899, Yeats had offended the Irish nationalist community when at a London meeting of the Irish Literary Society he criticised Thomas Davis's ballad "Fontenoy", saying, as reported in the <u>Daily Express</u>, that "he thought very little of it and that it was more an imitation of Macaulay and the work of a journalist." The <u>Evening Telegraph</u> took up the issue and published a number of letters

65 Ibid. 21 February 1899, p. 6

⁶⁰ Daily Express, 10 January 1889, p.6

of Joseph Holloway (1861 – 1944) was a Dublin architect and inveterate playgoer. He left his diary of over 100,000 pages entitled Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer to the National Library of Ireland. Sections of the diary edited by Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill have been published, and, as they represent one man's contemporary impression of Yeats whom he knew and met occasionally, will be referred to frequently in this thesis.

⁶² Hogan, Joseph, and O'Neill, Michael J., (ed.) <u>Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre</u>, p.5

⁶³ It is also included in Frayne, John P., and Johnston, Colton, (ed.) <u>Uncollected Prose of W. B. Yeats Vol. II</u>, p. 139

p.139.
⁶⁴ <u>Daily Express</u>, 14 January 1889, p.2

in February and March, which were generally critical of Yeats. For example, one correspondent, a P.A. Scillard, expressed a particular view:

If the Irish Literary Society of London can find no better occupation than getting individuals of Mr. W. B. Yeats's calibre to endeavour to decry the works of the brilliant writers of the country to which they belong, do you not think, Mr. Editor, that it is time that the adjective 'Irish' were eliminated from the description of that society?⁶⁶

Another correspondent felt that

if Mr. W. B. Yeates (sic) in his literary efforts, confined himself within certain limits, he would charitably be suffered to indulge in his whims and fancies, but when he attempts to criticise the works of genuine Irish writers he cannot expect much consideration.⁶⁷

Yeats's public criticism of Davis was followed by a public argument of a very different kind with Dr. Robert Atkinson, Professor of Romance Languages, Sanskrit and Comparative Philology at Trinity College. Dr. Atkinson, speaking before a Commission which had been appointed "to enquire into and report upon the system of Intermediate education in Ireland as established by the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act, 1879, and into its practical working," was very critical of the Irish language, primarily because of its unsettled state, and spoke disparagingly of the ancient Irish stories saying that "All folklore is essentially abominable." Such comments were too much for Yeats to ignore and in an article published in the <u>Daily Express</u> on 11 March under the title "The Academic Class and the Agrarian Revolution" he took Dr. Atkinson and his Trinity colleagues to task, writing that the "atmosphere of what is called educated Dublin is an atmosphere of cynicism – a cynicism of ideas which expresses itself at the best in a wit without charm."

This further public disparagement of Trinity College did nothing to improve Yeats's relationship with the College, but it did no harm, for the moment, to his standing with those who were engaged in efforts to restore the Irish language. It also helped to negate

⁶⁶ Evening Telegraph, 22 February 1899, p.4

⁶⁷ Ibid. 24 February 1899, p.4

⁶⁸ Ibid. 26 January 1899, p.4

⁶⁹ Daily Express, 23 February 1899, p.2

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 11 March 1899, p. 3

whatever offence was taken by the Irish nationalist community for his criticism of Thomas Davis. This was one of many occasions when Yeats managed to rapidly counter an offensive comment with a positive gesture – a further example of his adroit political instincts that have previously been noted.

The possibility of reviving the Irish language had been receiving considerable attention for some years. A "Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language" had been founded as early as 1873 with Isaac Butt as a vice-president. Another organisation "The Gaelic Union" with its publication The Gaelic Journal was formed in 1880 and then, stimulated by Douglas Hyde's lecture "The Necessity of De-Anglicising Ireland" which was delivered to the National Literary Society in Dublin on 25 November 1892, and the enthusiasm for the language of Eoin MacNeill, the Gaelic League was founded in July 1893 "with Hyde, MacNeill, and the professor of Irish at Maynooth, Father Eugene O'Growney, at its head." The League was designed "to maintain and promote the use of Gaelic as a spoken language in Ireland," and in March 1899 it launched its own weekly journal An Claidheamh Soluis. Yeats was himself to become tangentially involved with the movement to restore the language, but while he received praise for his support of the concept, he freely admitted that he never managed to learn the language himself.

In the midst of his efforts to promote the new literary theatre, two new books of Yeats's poems were published. The Wind among the Reeds was published in April 1899 by Elkin Mathews and was positively reviewed in the <u>Daily Express</u>, <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> and the <u>Irish Weekly Independent</u>. In the following month a new, revised, edition of his <u>Poems</u> was published by T. Fisher Unwin and was reviewed in the <u>Irish Weekly Independent</u>.

The <u>Daily Express's</u> review of The <u>Wind among the Reeds</u> was written by William Sharp, under the persona of Fiona MacLeod, ⁷³ whom Yeats had known since 1889 and with whom his relationship was at this time relatively close ⁷⁴ (in fact it could have been at his suggestion that Sharp was asked by T.P.Gill to review the book). The review admired what it called the poems' "delicate music," and described Yeats as one of

72 Dunleavy, J. and G., Douglas Hyde, p.189

⁷¹ Jackson, Alvin, <u>Ireland 1798 – 1998</u>, p.178

⁷³ The Scottish writer William Sharp, an enthusiastic promoter of Pan – Celticism, wrote as Fiona MacLeod throughout his life. The fact that Fiona MacLeod was not a real person only became generally known after Sharp's death.

that small band of poets and dreamers who write from no other impulse than because they see and dream in a reality so vivid that it is called imagination. With him the imagination is in truth the second-sight of the inward life. Thus it is that he lives with symbols, as an unimaginative nature might live with barren facts."⁷⁵

Recognising that the poems were obscure to the "reader unfamiliar with the signature of symbol," the review pointed out that Yeats had added copious notes which, as well as being interesting in themselves, also had "something of the charm of the poems to which they stand interpreter". Finally the reviewer stated that

no lovelier, more convincing poetic verse has been given to us of late than these light, yet strenuous, airs of a wind that is forever mysterious, though we hold it more familiar when it blows across the mind of some poet such as Mr. Yeats, whom we know, and to whom we look.

This review is interesting in that, although published in an Irish paper which at this stage was supportive of the new literary movement, and gave a degree of support to the Irish nationalist cause, being written by a Scot, it displayed none of the proud nationalism typical of the traditional Irish review of Yeats's work at this time. But as noted previously if it did not actually attack the paper's basic editorial line it would have received editorial approval.

Other reviews also remarked on Yeats's difficult symbolism, but saw it rooted in Gaelic or Celtic tradition and emphasised the author's Irishness. The Weekly Independent described the poems as wrapped in the "mystery of the Celtic Twilight" and difficult to understand for the reader who had no knowledge of "what Mr. Yeats called 'the magical tradition,' and to whom the symbolism of which he was so fond is utterly perplexing." In the reviewer's opinion:

If it were not for this faith, conviction, or superstition, or whatever we may chose to call it, we should probably never have poems like these, and who can deny that Irish literature would be ever so much the poorer wanting them.⁷⁶

The Freeman's Journal emphasised the rootedness of the poems in Irish folklore and

⁷⁴ Foster R.F., <u>W. B. Yeats: A Life</u>, p.196

⁷⁵ Daily Express, 22 April 1899, p.3

⁷⁶ Irish Weekly Independent, 6 May 1899, p.15

quoted "The Fiddler of Dooney" in its entirety. Then, in its final paragraph, it referred obliquely to the controversy over the first production of <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> which was to dominate the Dublin newspapers through the following month and which was to signal a radical change in the Irish public's perception of Yeats:

It is to be hoped now that some lack wit will not on the score of this humorous tribute to the virtue of innocent joy, charge Mr. Yeats with deprecating prayer in favour of dancing. Such malicious misunderstanding is not, however, likely to be widespread in the land of the Gael; where Mr. Yeats's essential idealism and spirituality are sure to find fair and sympathetic interpretation.⁷⁷

Unfortunately "malicious misunderstanding" was to be widespread very shortly in "the land of the Gael" as Yeats's <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> received its first performance in the Antient Concert Rooms in Dublin on the evening of Monday 8 May 1899. The story of the reception of the first performances of The <u>Countess Cathleen</u> has been told many times. But as it was a controversy that was to have a considerable influence on Yeats's early reception in Ireland and was a forerunner of subsequent controversies regarding Synge's <u>The Playboy of the Western World</u> and O'Casey's <u>The Plough and the Stars</u>, it is necessary to deal with it again in some detail. However, before discussing the events of May 1899, it is necessary to look briefly at what sort of receptive audience Yeats could have expected for his first play to be presented in Dublin.

In Dublin in mid 1899 there were three commercial theatres: the Gaiety, the Theatre Royal and the Queen's Royal Theatre. The Gaiety theatre featured English touring companies such as H. Beerbohm Tree or Osmond Tearle producing plays by Shakespeare, Sheridan, Goldsmith and others; English opera companies performing grand operas by such composers as Verdi, Wagner or Gounod; companies such as the D'Oyly Carte playing light opera, which would include Irish favourites such as "Maritana" or "The Bohemian Girl". The Gaiety also presented English or American comedies and melodramas from the London theatres. Such productions were the primary fare presented in the Theatre Royal, interspersed with the occasional Irish play from Boucicault. It also presented opera and

⁷⁷ The Freeman's Journal, 28 April 1899, p.2

⁷⁸ Robert Hogan and James Kilroy treat it in some detail in their <u>The Irish Literary Theatre 1899 –1901</u>. It has also been addressed in detail in James Pethica's edition of <u>Lady Gregory's Diaries 1892-1902</u>, in Roy Foster's <u>W.B. Yeats</u>: A <u>Life</u>, and in the biographical and historical appendix to <u>Collected Letters</u>, <u>Vol.II</u> as well as in histories of the Abbey theatre such as Adrian Frazier's <u>Behind the Scenes</u>. Joseph Holloway

musical comedies from London. The Queen's Royal Theatre presented more Irish plays than the others, these included Boucicault's perennial favourites; "The Colleen Bawn", "The Shaughran" and "Arrah-na –Pogue", and Irish melodramas by the theatre's manager J.W. Whitbread such as "Lord Edward, or'98", "Wolfe Tone" and "A True Son of Erin", Irish plays by Hubert O'Gorman such as "The Famine" and "Emigration" or P.J. Bourke's "When Wexford Rose" or "For the Land She Loved".

On the evening in January 1899 when Yeats made his speech to the National Literary Society announcing the foundation of the Irish Literary Theatre the choice for the Dublin playgoer was "Cavalleria Rusticana" and "Hansel and Gretel" at the Gaiety, the pantomime "Cinderella" at the Theatre Royal and Whitbread's "Wolfe Tone" at the Queen's. On the evening of the first performance of "The Countess Cathleen" at the Antient Concert Rooms the alternative choices were "What Happened to Jones" an American farce at the Gaiety, "The Man in the Iron Mask" at the Queen's, and "A Pantomime Rehearsal" at the Theatre Royal. It should also be noted in considering the response to "The Countess Cathleen" that, exposed to a frequent diet of theatrical melodrama, the Dublin audience, particularly those who attended the Theatre Royal was a very vocal one, accustomed to hiss the villain, cheer the hero, demand encores and generally announce its approval or disapproval in the most positive and noisy terms. Christopher Morash has described the traditional behavour of a Dublin audience as

talking to other people, smoking, commenting on the play, applauding or hissing the characters, eating oranges, calling out witty responses to the action on the stage, and getting up for a drink when the action hit a dull spot.⁸⁰

Before "The Countess Cathleen" reached the stage, controversy was initiated when a letter was published in <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> on 1 April 1899 under the heading "Celtic Drama in Dublin: Mr. Frank Hugh O'Donnell asks – Is this Celtic?" O'Donnell subsequently

was, naturally, in attendance on the first night and described the performance in his diary.

⁷⁹ The names of the latter plays give a good sense of their content. The first two of Whitehead's plays mentioned and both of Burke's were published in 1991 in Herr, Cheryl, <u>For the Land They Loved</u>.

⁸⁰ Morash, Christopher, A History of Irish Theatre 1601 - 2000 p.131

⁸¹ Frank Hugh O'Donnell (1848 – 1916) was born in Donegal and educated at Queen's College, Galway. He had been a Nationalist MP before he first met Yeats through the Young Ireland League in Dublin in the mid 1890s. He was involved with Yeats in the 1798 Celebrations. Yeats described him as "an exceedingly able and unscrupulous adventurer". See Collected Letters, Vol. II, p.709. He may well have known of Yeats's interests.

published this letter, with another which had been refused publication, in a pamphlet <u>Souls</u> for Gold! A Pseudo-Celtic Drama for <u>Dublin</u> which was distributed widely in <u>Dublin</u>.⁸²

In the first letter O'Donnell selected two scenes from the published play, having craved "the pardon of my readers" for quotation and special criticism; one where Shemus Rua kicks the shrine of the Virgin Mary to pieces in Act 1, and the other in Act II when one of the demons describes how he overcame the prayers of Father John to capture his soul. (The first of these scenes was, in fact, removed before the first performance.) O'Donnell conceded that Yeats was "entitled to construct any 'drama' he pleases," but asserted:

He has no right to outrage reason and conscience alike by bringing his degraded idiots to receive the kiss of the Mother of God before the whole host of Heaven as reward for having preferred the gold of the devil to the providence of the All-Father.

The second letter showed O'Donnell's knowledge of Yeats's interest in the occult by asking the question "has he any good taste, any sense of the becoming and the decent? The veriest spirit-rapper or table-turner might shrink from impropriety so vile." ⁸⁴

O'Donnell's pamphlet was just the first shot in a controversy that was to divide educated and literary Dublin opinion. On the one side was the Catholic, conservative wing represented primarily by William Martin Murphy's anti-Parnellite and pro-clerical <u>The Daily Nation</u> which, having published an advertisement for the play in its edition of 6 May 1899, then had second thoughts and in an editorial on that day wrote that it had "accepted the advertisement in ignorance of the nature of the drama", and protested "in the names of morality and religion, and Irish nationality, against its performance". In its view the production of the play "on the occasion of the inauguration of what was intended to be a distinctively national institution, is nothing short of an outrage". It concluded:

The absolute contempt which has been displayed by the promoters and managers of the Irish Literary Theatre for the discrimination, good taste, and self-respect of the citizens of Dublin, is insulting in the last degree.⁸⁵

⁸² It is published in full in <u>Collected Letters, Vol. II</u>, pp. 674 - 680

The Freeman's Journal, 1 April 1899, p. 6

^{84 &}quot;Souls for Gold!" in Collected Letters, Vol. II, p.679.

⁸⁵ The Daily Nation, 6 May 1899, p.4

This outburst was supported by a number of letters published, again in <u>The Daily Nation</u>, on the following Monday, the day of the opening performance, as well as by another editorial which objected to "the enunciation of the shocking, false and pernicious doctrine that, under any circumstances, the sale of a human soul to the devil can assume such a form of spiritual self-sacrifice as to become pleasing in the sight of All-Mighty God." A correspondent, with the initials MGC, referred to extracts from the play quoted in the editorial of 6 May: "The extracts you have given are brimful of iniquitous suggestion and they outrage the highest and holiest instinct of our religion and race." Another correspondent, having dismissed Yeats's defense that words spoken by characters in his play should not be regarded as his words, concluded:

Taking all in all I do not think that the bitterest enemy of our Faith and Country could have drawn a less flattering picture of Irish Catholicism than Mr. Yeats has drawn in *The Countess Cathleen*. None, I feel, could have drawn a picture more utterly untrue. Few other authors, I am convinced, would dare invite an audience to witness such a lampoon upon their country, and such an outrage on their Faith. 88

Yeats and the Irish Literary Theatre had now become a symbolic battlefield on which the political rivalries of the different Dublin newspapers could be played out. If the anti-Parnellite The Daily Nation disapproved of the play one could be reasonably sure that the Parnellite Irish Daily Independent, would take the opposing view, and so it did in its editorial on 6 May 1899, welcoming "Mr. Yeates (sic) and those who labour with him" in glowing but general terms:

They aim at founding drama which shall worthily express the thoughts, the feelings, the romance, the poesy which touch the spirit of the Irish race. . . . How vast, how noble, then is the prospect, which the Literary Theatre opens up! Not the mere elevation of the drama, but the sowing of the seeds of immortality is its chief end. 89

The Freeman's Journal, although at this stage supportive of the anti-Parnellite position, was primarily concerned to distance itself from any views expressed by Murphy's <u>The Daily Nation</u>. It supported the aim of the new movement to "furnish a vehicle for the

⁸⁶ Ibid. 8 May 1899, p.4

⁸⁷ Ibid. 8 May 1899, p.5

⁸⁸ Ibid. 8 May 1899, p.5

literary expression of the national thought and ideals of Ireland such as has not hitherto been in existence." It praised the two plays remarking: "As literature they are both performances of remarkable distinction, and "The Countess Cathleen", especially, is a work of rare and moving beauty."90

On Saturday afternoon, two days before the inaugural performance, Yeats gave a lecture at 6 St Stephen's Green under the title "Dramatic Ideals and the Irish Literary Theatre," which was reported in some detail by The Freeman's Journal. He began by defending his play, saying that, "Dramatic utterances and sayings which he had put into the mouths of characters in his plays had been quoted against him without its being stated that they were the words of evil characters."91 Using selected quotations from the works of Milton or Dante in such a manner could prove one to be "no Christian and the other no Catholic." Yeats then said that he had sent his play with Edward Martyn's The Heather Field to "two Catholic divines" for an opinion, and, "One wrote saying that there was nothing in the plays that any Catholic could object to; and the other said their plays were beautiful and touching, that no change in the details should be made, and that idle talk should not be listened to." His lecture, which was generously applauded, went on to deal with the Irish Literary Theatre in more general terms, drawing particular attention to a similar movement in Norway. The lecture, however, did little to settle the storm of controversy that erupted on the morning after the first performance of <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> on 8 May.

The Dublin papers, immersed, as we have seen, in their own internal rivalries, responded to the play in a manner that in some respects was surprising. For example, the extreme Catholic and nationalist paper, The Daily Nation, found itself in agreement with the extreme Protestant and unionist paper, The Irish Times, while other papers developed different elements of the argument for and against the play to suit their own particular "cultural code". In effect Yeats was incorporated into an on-going battle for supremacy between an ideologically conservative view of literature, whether the ideology was political or religious, and a more liberal attitude which took a less ideologically conservative stance. The liberal approach was prepared to accept that a literary work did

91 *Ibid.* 8 May 1899, p.6

 ⁸⁹ Irish Daily Independent 6 May 1899, p.4
 ⁹⁰ The Freeman's Journal 6 May 1899, p.4

not necessarily have to represent a particular communities' desired world view, but could challenge that view and be judged on literary rather than on literal grounds.

The <u>Irish Daily Independent</u> was the most representative of this attitude and was fulsome in its praise of the play, which it termed "an artistic triumph" and considered that "no finer work could have been chosen for the opening of a stage reform crusade."

The Daily Nation took the opposite view, but was not so vehemently negative as would have been expected following its outburst on 6 May. It affirmed its support for the aims of the Irish Literary Theatre but doubted the appropriateness of the selection of "such a manifestly un-Irish play as *The Countess Cathleen* for their inaugural performance." The play, in its opinion,

can scarcely pretend to be based, even in the most remote degree, on any Irish legend or romance, and it cannot be regarded as portraying with any degree of fidelity, truth, the natural sentiments, the habits of thought or the probable behavior of the Irish peasantry under certain imaginary conditions in the 'latter part of the sixteenth century' or at any other period in their history.⁹³

The Freeman's Journal, where Frank Hugh O'Donnell's first attack on the play had been published on 1April 1899, found the play lacking in "some of the ordinary elements of dramatic success," but considered that

there is no confusion of the moral standards in the play, no calling of bad good or of good bad. . . . In reality it is a spirit-drama of the "Faust" type, but with a motive far removed from the essentially sensuous motive of that much played theme."

The play was considered to be a great "innovation on the ordinary playgoer's expectations" and this made "success all the more difficult."

Also supportive, with reservations, was the <u>Daily Express</u> in a review that was reprinted in the <u>Evening Mail</u>. The reviewer admired "the poetic beauty" of the play, but found it

⁹² Irish Daily Independent, 9 May 1899, p.4

⁹³ The Daily Nation, 9 May 1899, p.5

⁹⁴ The Freeman's Journal, 9 May 1899, p.5

dramatically unsatisfactory. It then addressed the theme of the play in a manner that was central to subsequent arguments:

Mr. Yeats would do well to leave the presentation of the Irish peasantry and their religious atmosphere to those who know them intimately. Mr. Yeats is a king in fairyland – in the world of imaginative symbol and spiritual thought – but he does not know the Irish peasant and what he believes and feels, and the Irish peasantry in this play are, and always were, totally incapable of the acts and sayings attributed to them. We do not say that they are too good or too wise or too religious, but merely that their minds are not made that way.⁹⁵

The Irish Times, the most unionist of the Dublin dailies was, for its own reasons as stated below, also critical of the play's depiction of the Irish peasant which, in its view, "offends, and most unnecessarily, very great susceptibilities in the ordinary play-going Irish man or Irish woman." It pointed out:

If there is one thing more clearly crystalised in the history of Ireland and of the entire Celtic nation it is that physical pain never yet cost the damnation of a spiritual idea, so far as the Irish peasant was concerned. ⁹⁶

This comment indicated that to readers of <u>The Irish Times</u> the setting up of soup-kitchens, particularly in the west of Ireland during and after the famine, by ultra-Protestant societies such as the "Irish Church Missions to the Roman Catholics" which were reputed to be have been used for proselytizing, was still a sensitive issue, ⁹⁷ and therefore, these readers was not disposed to be reminded in the play that the use of such soup kitchens could have had the effect of persuading Irish Catholics to accept the Protestant faith. Vivian Mercier has written on this point:

Only those who are aware of the history and mythology of souperism can grasp the full significance of the fact that W. B. Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* was the very first play presented by the Irish Literary Theatre (8 May 1899). Only they, too, can appreciate the full irony of the fact that this play about devils buying Irish souls for gold should have been denounced as anti-Catholic. ⁹⁸

⁹⁶ The Irish Times, 9 May 1899, p.5

97 Bowen, Desmond, Souperism: Myth or Reality, p. 215

⁹⁵ Daily Express, 9 May 1899, p.5

Mercier, Vivian, "Victorian Evangelicanism and the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival" in Connolly, Peter, (ed)
<u>Literature and the Changing Ireland</u>, p.74

The Irish Times review concluded by enunciating one of the most trenchant pieces of literary criticism of the play published in the Irish press: "It is without action, without definiteness in the characterisation, without consistency in the dramatic development, without truth in its reflection of Celtic temperament or life, and, like all inferior plays, it fails to excite the smallest genuine interest."

In the days immediately following the first production other opinions were heard. <u>The Daily Nation</u> was predictably to the fore, even publishing a letter on 9 May from "An Irish Catholic" objecting to the review of the play printed in <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> that very morning and ending with a compliment: "It is well for Catholic Ireland that she possesses a journal such as *The Daily Nation*, and an editor as fearless in her cause as yourself." ⁹⁹

Further letters were published on 10 May, including one from Cardinal Logue, which had been solicited by the paper's editor. The Cardinal, having admitted that he had not read the play, but only the extracts in O'Donnell's pamphlet, still pronounced that "an Irish Catholic audience which could patiently sit out such a play must have sadly degenerated, both in religion and patriotism." This letter, which was reprinted in The Irish Catholic in one of its very rare incursions into matters literary, drew the fire of the Evening Herald which, while pointing out that "we do not hold a brief for Mr. Yeats," noted that the Cardinal had not read the play and therefore, "we must respectfully say that his Eminence occupies, to say the least of it, a somewhat illogical position." In a further paragraph the paper then made a telling point, which must be considered very unusual for its time:

So far as we know, the Archbishop of Dublin or the ecclesiastical authorities here have not said one word against the play. If anything were wrong, it is natural that they would be the very first persons to speak. It is somewhat strange, then, to find Cardinal Logue making an incursion into the Archdiocese of Dublin and attacking as degenerate both in religion and patriotism an audience composed of some of the best and most cultured Catholics in Ireland. ¹⁰¹

Here again is a Parnellite paper openly criticising the Catholic church, an action driven, one feels, was more by its historical anti-clericalism than for any particular wish to defend Yeats, for whom, as it said, it did not "hold a brief". Yeats did respond to Cardinal Logue

⁹⁹ The Daily Nation, 9 May 1899, p.5

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 10 May 1899, p.5

¹⁰¹ Evening Herald, 10 May 1899, p.2

in a letter to the English paper the Morning Leader on 13 May in which he argued that the play "is symbolic" and "is a spiritual drama". The letter which was also printed, with an acknowledgement to the Morning Leader, in the Irish Daily Independent on the same morning drew no response from the Cardinal.

The controversy was joined, but from a different perspective by The <u>United Irishman</u>, which begun weekly publication in March 1899 hoping no doubt to capture the remnants of the readership of <u>United Ireland</u> which had ceased publication in September 1898. The new weekly, edited by Arthur Griffith, modified the almost unquestioning support given to Yeats by its predecessor, being initially concerned to counter an air of elitism that it had detected in the objectives of the Irish Literary Theatre. In its first number it commented on the new venture:

Mr. Yeats' project, of course, is an attempt to produce a really high-class Anglo-Irish drama, but such plays as he meditates can never be popular. They are too far above the people's heads. . . . We want something palpable to grasp the Ireland that has been, for two or three generations of contact with English thought have shorn us of much of our olden imaginative power. ¹⁰³

The United Irishman initially supported O'Donnell's attack but this support was later withdrawn and the paper responded positively to Yeats's objective in setting up an Irish Literary Theatre, affirming that "we are with him as to the necessity for establishing here in our midst something of a dramatic nature that shall take its ideas from an Irish source." However it opposed The Countess Cathleen on the basis that the Irish playgoer would not understand it, in its view what was required was "something that would have an abiding popularity, not a work that would be sought after merely from curiosity and then consigned to the limbo of forgotten things." 105

Argument over the play continued in the letters pages of <u>The Daily Nation</u>, the <u>Daily Express</u>, and the <u>Irish Daily Independent</u>. It was joined by *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the Gaelic League weekly, which had begun publication in March 1899. Accusations of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic sentiments were countered with a demand for intellectual liberty

¹⁰² Irish Daily Independent, 13 May 1899, p.5

The United Irishman, 11 March 1899, p.1

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 29 April 1899, p.1

and a claim that Yeats was entitled to the "right to express his thought." The arguments rumbled on for some months. Among the letters addressing the initial impact of the play one different view stood out. This was in a letter to the <u>Evening Mail</u> on 11 May, from Arthur Clery who suggested that "the natural conclusion of the drama should be the death of the heroine." In Clery's opinion

ordinary tragedy is content with the death of its protagonist; had our author been consistent Lady Cathleen must have met with a still worse misfortune. The kindly nature of Mr. Yeats, however, led him to shrink from this conclusion. To avoid it he introduced a "Deus ex machina". 107

In his letter Clery had introduced himself as "an old theatre-goer and Catholic student." In fact he was that colleague of James Joyce, who, as Richard Ellmann tells us, was auditor of the Literary and Historical Society at University College, Dublin in January 1900 when James Joyce presented his paper on "Drama and Life". Clery became a regular contributor under the pseudonym "Chanel" to <u>The Leader</u>, the journal edited by D.P.Moran, which commenced publication in September 1900 and with which Yeats was frequently to be in conflict. Many of these articles were subsequently published in his <u>The Idea of a Nation</u> in 1907.

On 20 May the <u>Irish Weekly Independent</u>, Yeats's greatest champion among the Dublin papers, published his reply to his critics with a very colourful report of his speech at The Countess Cathleen Banquet which was held on the evening of 11 May in the Shelbourne Hotel. The report gives a dramatic picture of Yeats's appearance at this time:

Mr. W. B. Yeats made his reply a defense of his "Countess Cathleen", the poemplay which has stirred up so much controversy. The most striking quality of Yeats is his wonderful impressiveness. . . . Standing tall and thin, with his black hair running riot over his pallid forehead, gaunt and spiritual, un-outlined against a dark background, Yeats looked like some old-time prophet telling wonderful truths to people who but half comprehended. With upraised hand and a voice that sung soft and low, he thus concluded a wonderful string of phrases.

¹⁰⁶ Irish Daily Independent, 11 May 1899, p.3

Evening Mail, 11 May 1899, p.1 Ellmann, Richard, James Joyce, p. 70

Yeats's argument that his play "was purely symbolic" and that "literature was the expression of universal truths by the medium of particular symbols" was then summarised and the report concluded with the comment:

The effect of this was eerie beyond measure, the white face and the white dress-shirt, the only show of contrast against the dark background and the earnest convincing voice. 109

An Claidheamh Soluis brought a new perspective to bear on Yeats's play and on the Irish Literary Theatre in its 13 May edition. Concerned primarily with the objective of the Gaelic League to revive the Irish language it absolutely denied "the right of the new venture to be called either to 'Irish' or 'National'. The plays are to all intents and purposes English."110 The journal also gave support to the group of students from University College, Dublin, whose letter on The Countess Cathleen, which James Joyce famously refused to sign, had been published on 10 May in a number of Irish papers including The Irish Times, The Freeman's Journal and The Daily Nation. It was reprinted in The Irish <u>Catholic</u>, which also reprinted <u>The Daily Nation's</u> criticism of the play verbatim. The letter had accused Yeats of "presenting this slanderous caricature of the Irish peasant" and having characterised him "as one endowed with the rare gift of extending an infinitesimal quantity of the gold of thought in a seemingly infinite area of the tinsel of melodiously meaningless verse," considered it their duty "in the name and for the honour of Dublin Catholic students of the Royal University to protest against an art, even a dispassionate art, which offers as a type of our people a loathsome brood of apostates." ¹¹¹ An Claidheamh Soluis described the letter writers as

clean, sane, cultured young Irishmen, standing steady to Irish tradition, refusing to accept this school as the leaders in the modern Irish intellectual movement. . . . The Irish Literary Theatre is unconsciously in direct opposition to the movement, of which it professes to be the perfected result. 112

This argument was further extended in the same issue of *An Claidheamh Soluis* in a letter written by Patrick Pearse, whom Yeats was later to include in his pantheon of heroes of "Easter 1916". The letter read in part:

The Freeman's Journal, 10 May 1899, p.6

110

¹⁰⁹ Irish Weekly Independent, 20 May 1899, p.10

An Claidheamh Soluis, 13 May 1899, p.137

The "Irish" Literary Theatre is, in my opinion, more dangerous, because less glaringly anti-national than Trinity College. If we once admit the Irish literature in English idea, then the language movement is a mistake. Mr. Yeats' precious "Irish" Literary Theatre may, if it develops, give the Gaelic League more trouble than the Atkinson - Mahaffy combination. Let us strangle it at its birth. Against Mr. Yeats personally we have nothing to object. He is a mere English poet of the third or fourth rank, and as such he is harmless. But when he attempts to run an "Irish" Literary Theatre it is time for him to be crushed. 113

This tone continued in *An Claidheamh Soluis* in a report on Yeats's address to a meeting of the Trinity College Historical Society at which he presided on 10 June: "Here is the heretical idea again that a country with a distinct national history, distinct traditions, and distinct ideals can possess a national literature in another language. . . . The so-called Irish Literary movement is a hindrance and not a help to a genuine revival." There was some support for Yeats from the playwright T. C. Murray who wrote to *An Claidheamh Soluis* from Co.Cork, pointing out that if Irish literature had to be in the Irish language then it would have to "exclude the glorious ballads of The Nation, and the half-inspired utterances of Davis himself" as well as "Mangan, Ferguson, Griffin, Kickham and a host of others."

A useful overview of the attacks on <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> written by a Jesuit priest Father George O'Neill was published in the June 1899 issue of <u>The New Ireland Review</u>. O'Neill identified three grounds on which the play had been attacked – "that it is immoral and irreligious, un-Irish and anti-Irish, and, finally, undramatic" ¹¹⁷ and then dealt with each of these in turn. He identified the leading objection to the morality of the play as "the heroine's compact with the evil spirits, whereby her soul is given over to them, in return for the deliverance of the souls of her people" but he is "unwilling to base a grave complaint upon this the central subject of the drama." He does, however, find grounds for considering the play irreligious as the "profanity and impiety of Shemus Rua might

¹¹² An Claidheamh Soluis, 20 May 1899, p. 153

¹¹³ Ibid. p.157

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 10 June 1899, p. 200

T. C Murray(1873 – 1959) was born in Cork, trained as a teacher in Dublin, and taught in Cork and Dublin. He was a prolific playwright of the realistic school and many of his plays were produced in the Abbey Theatre, the best known being Maurice Harte (1912) and Autumn Fire (1924).

¹¹⁶ An Claidheamh Soluis, 24 June 1899, p.229

conceivably be an effective foil to something more agreeable as well more characteristic; but we wait in vain for that something. . . . The author forgets either to criticise or to chastise him." An interesting comparison is made with Shakespeare's villains Richard III, Lady Macbeth, or Regan and Goneril. In all these cases our "moral sense is not hurt" by them because the author is prepared, in O'Neill's words, "to chastise them." This was mild criticism which is particularly interesting coming from a Jesuit priest and should be kept in mind when that other Jesuit priest Father Timothy Corcoran continued to invoke Yeats's play as a measure of his paganism over twenty years later. 118 O'Neill did agree with many of the play's more vociferous critics in condemning the representation of the Irish peasants in the play, writing that "it does seem cruel that a theatre professing to be above all things sympathetically national should at its first performance show them forth as demoralized poltroons, starvelings in soul as well as in body." He was, finally, in agreement with those who considered the play to be undramatic, as he would not accept Yeats's theory of the "supremacy of the word." 119

The controversy over the orthodoxy of The Countess Cathleen was undoubtedly a turning point in Yeats's relationship with large sections of his Irish community of readers and for that reason has been treated here at some length. It has also been subject to much subsequent analysis, but it is remarkable that contemporary interest in the issue died down rapidly notwithstanding the efforts of Frank Hugh O'Donnell to sustain it. It is also notable that contemporary criticism focussed almost uniquely on the issue of the peasants selling their souls. Little was made of such issues as the class distinctions between Cathleen and the peasants, or of reading Cathleen as representative of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, issues that have interested later critics. ¹²⁰ In dealing as above with the contemporary reception of the play by Dublin's communities it is important to keep in mind the comments made about the Dublin theatre scene earlier. A Dublin audience attending an Irish play set in Ireland would have expected to see the play represent an Ireland with which they were familiar either in real life or on the stage. As the mediaeval world of The Countess Cathleen was well removed from Dublin in 1899 and as the play contained peasants, a

¹¹⁷ The New Ireland Review, June 1899, p.246

One should note, of course, that Father O'Neill's article was published in The New Ireland Review which was edited by Father Thomas Finlay who had been one of "the two divines" who had approved of the play before its production. Father Timothy Corcoran was to become a fierce critic of Yeats in later years as will be discussed in chapter 8.

The New Ireland Review, June 1899, p.250

See Howes, Marjorie, Yeats's Nations, p. 50, and Frazier, Adrian, Behind the Scenes. p.19.

heroine, villains, and was clearly set in Ireland, the only reference point the audience would have had was the popular Irish melodrama where the hero or heroine is finally victorious while the evil doers are punished. In <u>The Countess Cathleen</u>, however, the audience at that first production was left with a confusing message, with the heroine dying but being forgiven for her evil deed as her motive was pure, while the peasants whose souls she has saved are remonstrated with for keening her.

The bitterness created by The Countess Cathleen controversy was to lie dormant for some time as it was the more general question of the use of the English language to create an Irish literature that was to dominate future discussion on the Irish Literary Theatre. However the controversy had brought Yeats's Theatre into considerable national prominence. Important issues had been raised, not least the influence of the Catholic Church on the cultural life of Ireland and the role of this cultural life in furthering the separatist cause. It also marked the hardening of attitudes to Yeats in certain sections of the Irish press, particularly the journals of advanced nationalists such as Pearse and Moran which would develop in the early years of the new century, as his books and his literary activities began to receive harsher treatment. The move into drama also introduced Yeats to a larger and a different audience in Dublin as a sixpenny seat at the theatre was within the range of many who could not afford the expensively produced books in which these plays were published. ¹²¹ Because of the Irish Literary Theatre's focus on Irish drama, it is likely that this audience would have been largely Catholic and nationalist and quick to take offence at any slights cast at its nation or its religion.

As criticism was primarily focussed on the "Irish" element in his work, Yeats was aware of the danger of losing favour with a large constituency of his readers, and, as has been noted previously, was immediately concerned to counteract the impact of this criticism by some action to appease it. After a lecture on 27 July at Gort given by Douglas Hyde on the Irish Language Movement, Yeats's response was reported at some length in the Irish Daily Independent and in An Claidheamh Soluis. It was a remarkable speech, which gave due praise and encouragement to the Irish language revival movement, but by introducing the

^{121 &}quot;The Countess Cathleen" was first published by T. Fisher Unwin in Poems in 1895, with further editions in 1899, 1901, 1904, and further revised editions up to 1923. The 1899 edition sold for 7s 6d. By comparison the New Irish Library books edited by Gavan Duffy sold in paper covers for 1s. Acting versions of many of Yeats's plays were later published and sold for 6d.

names of great English-speaking Irishman such as Emmet and Davis it also promoted Yeats's objective of creating an Irish literature in the English language, and undoubtedly went some way in repairing the damage to his reputation among his nationalist readers. Yeats was reported as saying:

For good or for evil, he had to write his own books in English, and to content himself with filling them with as much Irish thought and emotion as he could, for no man can get a literary mastery of two languages in one lifetime, but he foresaw without regret a time when what was the work of his life would be in a foreign language to a great part of the people of this country. Ireland would some day have a living literature in the Irish language, and then they would be able to say they had the longest literary history of any country in Europe, except Greece. . . . The nationhood of Ireland had been committed to their care by the saints and martyrs of the generations that had gone before them, and the language of Ireland was necessary to its preservation. Even those Irishmen who were forced by the circumstances of their lives to talk and think in English, would be the poorer if their fellows were not to talk and think in the language in which the most that Ireland had of greatness was remembered. Irish nationhood was like some holy sacrificial fire, and where we stood watching, O'Neill and Sarsfield, and Emmet and Davis, had watched before. If we allowed the fire to be extinguished by craft or by apathy, we would commit the greatest of all sins against humanity and against the progress of the world – the sin against the dead and against the work of their hands. Let us see to it, however little might be our part in life, that no man would ever say that any ember or any flame of that holy and sacrificial fire had been extinguished because of our fault. 122

This speech certainly made an impact on Arthur Griffith, as he made clear in an editorial in The United Irishman on 5 August:

Mr. Yeats's speech was a really fine one, and should be carefully examined by the hypercritical people who are endeavoring to convince themselves that writers like Davis, Mitchel, Mangan, Casey and Kickham are not Irish, or likely to influence Irish minds in an Irish direction.¹²³

 ^{122 &}lt;u>Irish Daily Independent</u>, 31 July 1899, p.6
 123 <u>The United Irishman</u>, 5 August 1899, p.1

D. P. Moran interpreted Yeats's speech differently. In his essay "The Battle of Two Civilizations" published in <u>The New Ireland Review</u> in August of the following year, Moran, rather prematurely, considered the issue settled when, responded to the question "What is Irish Literature"? He pointing out:

The Gaelic League took up a logical and uncompromising position, fought a sharp and, as it proved, a decisive campaign, and last summer Mr. W. B. Yeats, – though he has since wobbled, formally surrendered his sword, and Irish literature henceforward was not to be thought of outside the Irish language. 124

As the year and the century drew to a close Yeats's controversies had been crowded out of the Irish press by news of progress in the Boer War, in which considerable numbers of Irishmen, including Major John MacBride, were fighting. While Maud Gonne, John O'Leary and the nationalist press were actively engaged in canvassing support for the Transvaal cause and opposing recruitment to the British army, Yeats did not become seriously involved although he wrote to Lady Gregory that he was to attend a "Transvaal Meeting" in Dublin on 1 October. 125

By the turn of the century Yeats was now a well-known figure in the literary and political life of the country. Through his involvement with the 1798 Centennial Movement he had established a reputation as a supporter of the nationalist cause, and while the controversy over The Countess Cathleen had somewhat tarnished this reputation, his literary work was still seen in a propagandist mode as furthering the reputation of Ireland and recalling its "glorious past". For the moment he had also retained the admiration of the unionist publications for the quality of his poetry and at this stage of his career, notwithstanding the controversies with which he had been engaged, his work, and particularly his poetry, was still held in high esteem by those of both the nationalist and unionist communities who took an interest in literature. It must be constantly kept in mind that the exposure this poetry received in Ireland, particularly in the nationalist community which did not subscribe to English literary journals, was primarily through the verses printed in the Irish weekly or daily press, whether as individual printed poems, which were few in number, or included in the reviews of his books. The term "Anglo-Irish" which was to become the most frequently used expression to describe Yeats and the other figures with whom he was

¹²⁴ New Ireland Review, August 1900, p.323

associated in the new century, such as Lady Gregory, and J. M. Synge, was not yet much in evidence, ¹²⁶ although the criticisms of Pearse and Moran were certainly preparing the way in developing a new "cultural code" by which the emerging Irish literary movement would be described and categorised.

Anglo – Irish has been defined as a term "applied increasingly by 19th cent. historians of the Protestant ascendancy to register growing awareness of the complex cultural, political, and social circumstances of British settlers in Ireland and their descendants." However, it "came into general use as term to describe Irish writing in English" only in the early years of the 20th century. See Welch, Robert, (ed.) The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature, p. 13.

Chapter 4 1900 - 1904

On 3 January 1900 Yeats's mother died in London after a long illness. The two Sligo weekly newspapers, <u>The Sligo Independent</u> and <u>The Sligo Champion</u> published the same death notice in their obituary columns on 6 January and 13 January respectively:

Yeats – On 3rd inst, at Bedford Park, London, Susan Mary wife of John B. Yeats, and daughter of the late William Pollexfen, Sligo.¹

Similar notices were published in <u>The Irish Times</u> and <u>The Daily Express</u> in Dublin but not in any of the nationalist papers, even the moderate <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>, indicating that, notwithstanding Yeats's support, at this stage of his career, for the nationalist cause in his writing and political activities, his family, particularly the Pollexfen element of it, still saw themselves, and were regarded both in their own community and in the nationalist community, as members of the Protestant caste in Ireland.

Also in January a new edition of <u>A Book of Irish Verse</u> edited by Yeats, and with a new and much revised introduction, was published and received a long and favourable review in <u>The United Irishman</u> which admired "its intensely Irish character" regretting only Yeats's "verdict on Moore" and his own absence from its selection. The new introduction was commended, particularly "its epigrammatic criticism" of Mangan, Ferguson, Allingham, and de Vere, and "its demand for a national tone in literature as the essential characteristic and its wholesome and wholesale exposure of the intellectual methods of Trinity College." <u>The United Irishman</u> continued to insist that the primary function of Irish literature was the promotion of the nationalist cause.

The new season of the Irish Literary Theatre took place in the Gaiety Theatre in February 1900. The plays chosen were <u>Maeve</u> by Edward Martyn³ whose play <u>The Heather Field</u> had shared the previous year's season with <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> and was overshadowed

¹ The Sligo Independent, 6 January 1900, p.2 and The Sligo Champion, 13 January 1900, p.4

² The United Irishman, 10 March 1900, p.5

³ Edward Martyn (1859 – 1923) was born in Co. Galway into a wealthy Catholic family and with Yeats and Lady Gregory was one of the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre, which he generously funded. He was an Irish nationalist, a Gaelic speaker, and president of Sinn F⊙in from 1904 to 1908. His differences with Yeats

and Moore caused him to set up an alternative theatre, which in different forms survived to 1920.

in the process, Alice Milligan's ⁴ The Last Feast of the Fianna, and The Bending of the Bough by George Moore. ⁵ There was an interesting comment in a new but short lived Irish theatre journal, The Irish Playgoer, ⁶ which indicated how the Irish Literary Theatre was seen by one element of the Dublin theatrical community. Describing how a representative of the journal had been unable to get information on this new season of plays, being rehearsed in London, The Irish Playgoer's contributor, "The Stroller," wrote in an obvious Masonic reference: "maybe I didn't give them the right grip."

At a lunch held at the Gresham Hotel on 22 February to celebrate the opening of the new theatre season George Moore had recommended in the strongest possible terms, the restoration of the Irish language to replace English, which, in his view, would in fifty years be corrupt, fit only for use "in the counting-house and the newspaper office." Yeats supported Moore and then took the opportunity for another attack on Trinity College. The Irish Times, The Freeman's Journal, and The Daily Nation all reported on the occasion with The Freeman's Journal reprinting Moore's speech in full and all noted Yeats's comments on Trinity College, with The Daily Nation quoting him as follows:

The enemy in Ireland was that English party which was perpetually labouring for the provincialising and vulgarising of Ireland (applause). The Irish peasant was not provincial. This society and the Gaelic League were not provincial. Trinity College was provincial. That was the reason why it had not produced during these past years a creative or abundant mind (hear, hear). ¹⁰

Ramsey Colles's satirical journal <u>The Irish Figaro</u>, had, as usual, its own particular perspective, describing Moore's speech, as "somewhat ludicrous for a man, thus solemnly and urgently, to recommend a language that he does not know himself and will not

⁴ Alice Milligan (1866 – 1953) was born in Omagh, educated in Belfast and at London University. She was a committed Nationalist, lectured on Irish history, edited *An Shan Van Vocht* with Ethna Carbery and wrote plays, biography and poetry.

⁵ George Moore (1852 – 1933) was born in Co. Mayo. Spent time in Paris and London studying art and publishing successful novels (Esther Waters, 1894 being probably the best known) before returning to Dublin from 1901 to 1911where he worked with Martyn and Yeats for a while in the theatre and antagonised almost everybody in literary Dublin. His <u>Hail and Fairwell</u> is essential reading for his time in Dublin. See also the recent biography by Adrian Frazier.

⁶ Published from November 1899 to May 1900.

⁷ The Irish Playgoer, 23 November, 1899, p.6

⁸ See Frazier, Adrian, George Moore 1852 – 1933, p.289.

⁹ The Freeman's Journal, 23 February 1900, p.6

learn!"¹¹ It also took umbrage at Yeats's criticism of Trinity College, writing: "Will Mr. Yeats tell me what creative or literary Irishmen there are whom Trinity College has not educated, both in this century and in the last? Scarcely one of any permanent value could be named."

When Queen Victoria visited Dublin in April 1900, Yeats allied himself again with the republican movement, writing a hard-hitting letter condemning the visit to <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> which was also published with slight variations in the <u>Irish Daily Independent</u> and in <u>The United Irishman</u>. In this letter he proposed that a great protest meeting be held at the Rotunda on 2 June, "for on that day a hundred years ago the Act of Union, having been pushed through the Irish Parliament by bribery, was introduced into the English Parliament." Nothing came of this proposal, as many in the broader nationalist community in fact welcomed the queen's visit, but it certainly confirmed Yeats's advanced nationalist reputation and gave ammunition to his critics in the unionist press for a further attack.

The initiative was taken by <u>The Irish Figaro</u>, which, following on its criticism of Yeats's speech to The Irish Literary Theatre, did so with relish, using language even more intemperate than had been used by the nationalist press in <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> controversy. In its edition of 31 March, Ramsey Colles issued a broadside:

That most persistent and assiduous of self-advertisers, Mr. W.B. Yeats is once more at work. Fearing that the visit of Her Majesty to Ireland might for even a short period divert the attention of his admirers from the study of his oracular utterances, and tend to their momentary forgetfulness of Ireland's greatest living poet (whose immortal poems have made even admirers of Shakespeare tremble for the Elizabethan poet's fame), he has seized the opportunity to once more thrust himself upon public attention by calling upon such as peruse his lucubrations to hold a "great meeting" in the Rotunda "to protest against the Union and to dissociate Ireland from any welcome that the Unionist or the time-server may offer to the official head of that Empire in whose name liberty is being suppressed in South Africa as it was suppressed in Ireland a hundred years ago." Now if this means

¹⁰ The Daily Nation, 23 February 1900, p.7

The Irish Figaro, 3 March 1900, p.131 The Freeman's Journal, 20 March 1900, p.6

anything, it simply means that Yeats – the immortal Yeats – deems this a very good chance to direct a little public attention to himself. No one is going to follow the advice thus liberally given. No one wants this "great meeting" in the Rotunda or anywhere else, but as a few people have in the past laid some stress on the mystical writings of this self constituted premier poet of Ireland, having probably been impressed by his airs and his attitudinising, the cut of his hair and the profound obscurity of his style, it may perhaps clear the air a little if I dwell for a moment on Mr. Yeats and his immortal works. ¹³

The writer then admitted that when <u>Mosada</u> was first published he felt "we had a true poet," but subsequent work disappointed him. <u>The Wanderings of Oisin</u>, he describes as "a book full of gross errors, comic mistakes and replete with commonplaces" and then he concluded:

As for Mr. Yeats he is simply the most palpable humbug that ever foisted himself on the public under the disguise of a poet. Oscar Wilde whom he closely resembles as a poser, was not a more thorough charlatan than he, for Wilde has dramatic genius and a ready wit while Yeats has neither. He knows as little of prosidy (sic) as he does of orthography, and his knowledge of the latter is limited to words of one syllable as his private letters amply prove. To be identified with Mr. Moore and Mr. Yeats can do no "distinguished man of letters" any good, and may do much harm.

This was a remarkable outburst from a man who was, as we have noted, friendly with both Edward Dowden and Katherine Tynan and had met Yeats at both their homes in Dublin.

The <u>Daily Express</u> was also critical of Yeats's opposition to the Queen's visit, quoting inaccurately from his letter to "the nationalist papers" and publishing a letter from a correspondent condemning "Mr. W. B. Yeats's outrageous and utterly un-Irish suggestion of an organised national insult to the illustrious lady who is to become the guest of this country next month." ¹⁵ Further correspondence ensued with Yeats, in a letter of 3April to <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>, describing the Queen as "the official head and symbol of an Empire that is robbing the South African Republics of their liberty, as it has robbed Ireland of hers," and then asserting, "Whoever stands by the roadway cheering for Queen Victoria

¹³ The Irish Figaro, 31 March 1900, p.195

Collected Letters, Vol.11, p.502
 Daily Express, 24 March 1900, p.6

cheers for that Empire, dishonours Ireland, and condones a crime." Yeats's stance, and that of George Moore, with respect to the Royal visit, had the effect of causing Professor Lecky of Trinity College to withdraw his support from the Irish Literary Theatre. Yeats followed his opposition to the Queen Victoria's visit with an article entitled "Noble and Ignoble Loyalties" in <u>The United Irishman</u> on 21 April in which he described the reception which the queen had received in Dublin as "the bought service of intellectual sloth and self-applauding egotism" and then, in a comment that looked forward to a play yet to be written, he concluded:

What can these Royal Processions mean to those who walk in the procession of heroic and enduring hearts that has followed Kathleen Ny Hoolihan through the ages? Have they not given her their wills and their hearts and their dreams? What have they left for any less noble Royalty?¹⁸

On 1 September 1900 D. P. Moran, who, as previously recounted, had been very critical of Yeats in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, in May 1899, published the first number of The Leader, his new weekly journal, which became the very successful mouthpiece of what Moran called the Irish Irelander movement and a leading critic of Yeats and the Irish National Theatre. In this first number he published letters of support which he had requested from Yeats and from a number of other people of influence including J.P. Mahaffy¹⁹, Edward Martyn, Douglas Hyde and the Jesuit priest, Father Thomas Finlay. Yeats's letter again affirmed his belief in the possibility of having an Irish literature in the English language, but accepted that it was an issue about which he and Moran might not agree, for he considered, "it may be wholesome to dispute about a real issue." Moran, in his response, agreed that their differences would "lend zest, perhaps, to many a future exchange" which indeed they did.

While Yeats was adopting a conciliatory tone with Moran, the Irish Literary Theatre was also making efforts to maintain the support of the Irish language enthusiasts for the new

¹⁶ The Freeman's Journal, 3 April 1900, p.4

in the friendship between Yeats and George Moore.

The United Irishman, 21 April 1900, p.5

The Leader, 1 September 1900, pp.13-14

¹⁷ Frazier, Adrian, George Moore, 1852 – 1933, p.290. Frazier describes this controversy as "one of the peaks" in the friendship between Yeats and George Moore.

¹⁹ J.P. Mahaffy ((1839 – 1919) was born in Switzerland and educated at his home in Donegal and at TCD. He was appointed Professor of Ancient History at TCD in 1869 and Provost in 1914.

²¹ *Ibid.* 8 September 1900, p.28

literary movement. In September Lady Gregory wrote in *An Claidheamh Soluis* under the heading of "Raftery's Grave" that she had visited the grave on the previous Sunday when a stone had been placed over it and that *An Craoibhin* had come and "that other poet Yeats who has lately written of Raftery and helped to make his fame." Yeats himself spoke at the Central Branch of the Gaelic League's first *Sgoruigheacht* of the season at the Gresham Hotel in Dublin on 17 October. He talked of hearing fishermen singing music hall songs in west Mayo thinking them "a sign of higher civilisation." But he "designated these songs as modern vulgarities" and considered that "if they wanted a higher civilisation they should study the Irish language, and become acquainted with its literature." He then continued:

In England, education, art, literature, all these things were the possession of the more leisured class. In Ireland, where the Irish language still existed, they had a literature which was the possession of all the people. ²³

He also spoke of the possibility of putting on plays in the Irish language that could be played in small theatres around the country and finished by saying that he "thought there was great hope for the language movement and the drama in Ireland."

In December 1900 Yeats's play <u>The Shadowy Waters</u> was published in London. By comparison with <u>The Wind Among the Reeds</u> it received very little critical attention in Ireland. In his column "Literary London" in <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> on 1 January, W. P. Ryan, whose book on the Literary Revival was discussed in Chapter 2, wrote of the play:

It is sometimes beautiful, sometimes vague, sometimes structurally irregular, of set purpose, and the symbolism is as arbitrary as ever. It must be studied and pondered over as a whole, but one somehow doubts that the intellectual quest is refreshingly rewarded.²⁴

The Irish Figaro, surprisingly, had a more positive view. The writer of "The Bookworm" column, "not one of the most ardent of Mr. W.B.Yeats' admirers," described how he had been offered The Shadowy Waters to take away as holiday reading: "I did not expect too much, and hence perhaps have received the greater pleasure. It strikes me as containing much beauty and as being one of the most coherent satisfactory things Mr. Yeats has done." The same journal, when reviewing A Treasury of Irish Poetry, an anthology edited

²² An Claidheamh Soluis, 8 September 1900, p.406

²³ Ibid. 27 October 1900, p.517

²⁴ The Freeman's Journal, 1 January 1901, p.7

by Stopford Brooke and T.W. Rolleston, earlier in the year, was more predictable in its views on Yeats, commenting that, "When Mr. Rolleston, after much extravagance, tells us that he considers Mr. Yeats 'the first of living writers in the English language,' we can only feel that if this be true, we need not be astonished at the gloomy articles that have appeared on the state of English literature at the end of the century."²⁶

An article in <u>The Leader</u> entitled "Literary Expression" published on 19 January 1901 projected the denigration of what it called "the vulgarity of affectation and symbols" in contemporary Anglo-Irish poetry. The "new school of Anglo-Irish literature," the article stated, was a "breeding a school of cant and humbug." Without naming Yeats or any other writer the message was clear, as

what the country requires, if it is to be moved by poetry and ballads, is an Anglo-Irish Burns, and not an Anglo-Irish mystic. We have enough and to spare of false gods and shams without putting up a spurious symbolism, that never emanated from us, that is not of us, that what is honest in us repudiates, and only what is affected and simpering pretends to admire.²⁸

In a subsequent issue <u>The Leader's</u> editor, D. P. Moran, demonstrated an early example of the "zest" promised in his exchange of letters with Yeats in the first numbers of his journal, when he responded to a letter of support for the poet from an old school fellow, T. P. Stuart. Stuart had "regretted Mr. Yeats's love of the Rosicrucian cult," but felt the it was "ingrained in him, for I remember well that at school he was always dreamy, absorbed and introspective." Moran would have none of this, complaining that "the school of poetry of which Mr. Yeats is the distinguished leader" was "all too 'quaint, airy and artful'".²⁹

While Moran's <u>The Leader</u> was critical of Yeats and would continue to be so, Arthur Griffith's <u>The United Irishman</u> was, at this stage, supportive of the poet, and was prepared, unlike most of the other Irish papers and journals, to give considerable space to literary matters. When <u>Ideals in Ireland</u>, a book of previously published essays written by Yeats, D. P. Moran, AE, Hyde, Moore, and Standish O'Grady, and edited by Lady Gregory, was published in January 1901, the paper devoted three full columns to it including extensive

²⁸ The Leader, 19 January 1901, p. 335

²⁶ *Ibid.* 12 January 1901, p.30

An early use of the term "Anglo- Irish literature". See previous chapter, p.116.

quotation. The review considered Yeats's article "The Literary Movement in Ireland" to be "too obviously intended for an audience outside Ireland." This was indeed true for the article had first appeared in <u>The North American Review</u> in December 1899. However the "Postscript", which had appeared in <u>The All Ireland Review</u> in December 1900, was considered "admirable" and was quoted at length.

A very different view of the book was portrayed in <u>The Church of Ireland Gazette</u> which, having praised Yeats as being "extremely good while he discourses of Irish poetry, legends, and the like," considered that "the book as a whole is disfigured by the usual traits of grown-up childishness, vanity, attitudinising, and so on."

When the third English edition of Yeats's <u>Poems</u> was published in April 1901, Griffith was again supportive, writing in <u>The United Irishman:</u> "Mr. Yeats is the greatest of living poets and the greatest of Irish poets. He has interpreted the Celt to the world and to the Celt himself, and the Celt is exceeding fortunate in having a great artist for his interpreter." In the following number of Griffith's journal, Frank Fay³³, who was later to become heavily involved in the Abbey Theatre, also commended the book, focusing in particular on the preface and on the plays. Under the title "Mr. Yeats and the Stage," Fay wrote that in the preface to the book, "this gifted word-musician again makes it clear what a fascination the Theatre has for him; not the Theatre as it is in English-speaking countries, but as it ought to be, and is, in many countries on the Continent." As for the plays, Fay was of the view that they "should be so written as to appeal to as large a section of his countrymen as possible; otherwise no good can result to us from their production." A view of the sort of plays that Fay wished for is evident in the closing lines of his article:

Let Mr. Yeats give us a play in verse or prose that will rouse this sleeping land. There is a herd of Saxon and other swine fattening on us. They must be swept into the sea along with the pestilent breed of West-Britons with which we are troubled, or they will sweep us there. This land is ours, but we have ceased to realise the fact.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 26 January 1901, p.352

³⁰ The United Irishman, 23 February 1901, p.2

The Church of Ireland Gazette, 29 March 1901, p.253

The United Irishman, 27 April 1901, p.3

Frank Fay (1871 – 1931) was born in Dublin and became one of the country's finest actors. He was drama critic for The United Irishman from 1899 – 1902 and a strong supported of Yeats. However after playing at the Abbey for some years he left with his brother W. G Fay (1872 – 1947) who was also a fine actor and director, following disagreements with Yeats and both subsequently worked in America and England.

³⁴ The United Irishman, 4 May 1901, p.6

We want a drama that will make us realise it. We have closed our ears to the piercing wail that rises from the past; we want a drama that will open them, and in no uncertain words point out the reason for our failure in the past and the road to success in the future.

In less than a year such a play as Fay wished for would be staged in Dublin when Yeats's <u>Cathleen Ni Houlihan</u> was first produced by Frank Fay's brother W.G. Fay's Irish National Dramatic Co. in St. Teresa's Abstinence Association Hall, Clarendon Street, Dublin on 2 April 1902.

In <u>The Leader</u> a new voice was heard in May when Robert Elliott, an English art critic who was to become involved in controversy with the poet's father in the following year, and indeed became a frequent contributor on art to the Irish press, contributed an article on "the Neo-Celtic school of poetry." Elliott saw Yeats as a successor to Keats and Tennyson rather than to anything Celtic or Gaelic as he wrote, "Mr. Yeats' poems have often Celtic myths and stories for subjects, but they do not seem to be at all strange to my English taste." In Elliott's view, "Mr. Yeats and his comrades in Art will give intellectual Anglo-Ireland a valuable and enduring souvenir of their love. But I doubt if it will enthrone them in the heart of the Gael." 35

Yeats was well aware at this time that he was not enthroned "in the heart of the Gael" as a letter written to Lady Gregory just a few days before Elliott's article was published shows. Yeats described the experience of his publisher, A. H. Bullen, on a recent visit to Dublin:

He told me that he was amazed to find the hostility to me of the booksellers. Gill, he declared, seemed to hardly like to speak my name. I am looked upon as hetredox it seems. 'The Secret Rose' was strange to say particularly dissaproved of, but they spoke with hostility of even 'The Shadowy Waters'. Russell told me before I saw Bullen that clerical influence was he believed working against me because of my mysticism. He accuses Father Finlay & his jesuits of working behind Moran. Memory of 'The Countess Cathleen' dispute accounts for a good deal. Bullen found the protestant booksellers little better & asked me if TCD disliked me. . . .

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³⁵ The Leader, 25 May 1901, p.204 -205

I imagine that as I withdraw from politics my friends among the nationalists will grow less, at first at any rate, & my foes more numerous. What I hear from Bullen only confirms the idea that I had at the time of 'the Countess Cathleen' row that it would make a very serious difference in my position out side the small cultivated class.³⁶

This was a perceptive reading of Yeats's current reception in Ireland as indeed periodicals such as The Leader and An Claidheamh Soluis were becoming more confident in promoting things Irish and more strident in their opposition to the new literary work being produced in the English language which they insisted was not Irish literature. Yeats, as ever, tried to combat this growing disaffection by demonstrating support for the Irish language movement as his essay "By the Roadside" published in July in An Claidheamh Soluis makes clear. He wrote of listening in Kiltartan to the singing of Irish songs such as "Póraidh Glégeal," "Sa Mhuirnin Dílis," and "Eibhlín a Rúin," and then went on to praise folk art as "the oldest of the aristocracies of thought." He then concluded:

And so it has always seemed to me that we, who would re-awaken imaginative tradition by making old songs live again, or by gathering old stories into books, or by learning Irish, take part in the quarrel of Galilee. Those who are Irish and would spread English ways, which, for all but a few, are ways of vulgarity, take part also. Their part is with those who were of Jewry, and yet cried out, "If thou let this man go thou art not Caesar's friend."³⁷

It was noted that Yeats did not make the learning of Irish the *sine qua non* of "reawakening imaginative tradition" and some contemporary Irish commentators, particularly those associated with <u>The United Irishman</u>, recognised that his work, even though written in English, was a valuable asset to the national cause. This view was expressed in an article published on 27 July on the American reception of <u>The Land of Heart's Desire</u>:

Personally, I should prefer to see Irish only used in plays dealing with Ireland; but this will not be possible for some years, and in Mr. Yeats' case I suppose that will never come to pass.³⁸

³⁸ The United Irishman, 27 July 1901, p.3

³⁶ Kelly, John, and Schuchard, Ronald, (ed.) <u>The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats, Vol. III</u>, p.71 (Henceforth Collected Letters, Vol. III)

³⁷ An Claidheamh Soluis, 13 July 1901, p. 281

Having accepted that the exclusive use of the Irish language in the theatre was still some way off, the emphasis now changed to the desire to use Irish actors and to set up a permanent National Theatre. Even <u>The Leader</u> agreed that Yeats could play a part on this issue and an article on 26 October entitled "A National Theatre" said as much:

The question of a national theatre is a living question now: so living indeed that it has begun to settle itself; and the season of the Irish Literary Theatre, and the appearance of its quaint but most interesting organ *Bealtaine*, ³⁹ that was, and *Samhain*, that is, edited by Mr. Yeats, precipitates it forcibly on the public attention at the present moment. Mr Yeates (sic) writes in a most charming and interesting manner *about* the subject in Samhain and Mr. Martyn makes a plea for a national theatre. All that is to the good, as it excites interest and stimulates speculation about the subject; but the great need in Ireland is to *do* things. ⁴⁰

On the previous Monday evening, 21 October, The Irish Literary Theatre had presented Douglas Hyde's *Casagh an tSugáin* and <u>Diarmuid and Grania</u>, a collaboration between Yeats and George Moore, in the Gaiety Theatre. Hyde's play was entirely in Irish, while the Yeats-Moore collaboration was, as Hogan and Kilroy tell us, "the first of the theatre's plays to use music in any integral fashion" and also the "first music for the stage" ⁴¹ composed by the English composer Edward Elgar. Frank Fay writing in <u>United Ireland</u> was almost overcome with enthusiasm:

Monday evening was a memorable one for Dublin and for Ireland. The Irish language has been heard on the stage of the principal metropolitan theatre, and "A Nation Once Again" has been sung within its walls, and hope is strong within us once more. The Gaiety Theatre was crowded in all its parts, and Ireland's greatest daughter, Miss Maud Gonne, sat beside Ireland's greatest poet, Mr. W.B. Yeats. 42

Fay's greatest criticism of Yeats's play concerned, unsurprisingly, the "vulgar acting" of the English actors: "The play was received with great enthusiasm, but one felt that this was

⁴² The United Irishman, 26 October 1901, p.2

³⁹ Bealtaine, Samhain and <u>The Arrow</u> were occasional publications of the Irish Literary Theatre and later the Abbey Theatre edited by Yeats. They publicised the theatre's activities and published a number of plays and general articles on drama. They were published between May 1899 and August 1909.

⁴⁰ The Leader, 26 October 1901, p.138

⁴¹ Hogan, Robert and Kilroy, James, The Irish Literary Theatre 1899 –1901, p.115

intended for the authors, not for the actors." Fay considered Hyde's play to be "wonderfully well acted, considering that those who played in it had never been at such work before." This was the general tenor of a companion piece in The United Irishman in which Fay praised Samhain, the first number of the new journal of The Irish Literary Theatre, which was published in October. Fay considered that "Mr. Yeats is quite justified in claiming the Irish Literary Theatre has started a dramatic movement which will not die out. Some of us at any rate are going to try to keep alight the fire which he has kindled." He then went on to make a case for using Irish actors in Irish plays, agreeing with Yeats on the need for those who intend to write plays to study "the master dramatists" and in particular Ibsen. Further favourable reviews of the plays were published in The Freeman's Journal, The Irish Times, and The Irish Independent and Nation, while The Evening Herald's reviewer was very disappointed with Diarmuid and Grania due to "a wearisome repetition of sentiment in long dialogues and irritating speeches, and a startling absence of any Celtic atmosphere."

This initial praise for Yeats and Moore's play soon turned sour and criticism began to be raised against some moral issues in the play. The opinion of <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> presaged the controversy that would engulf the theatre in a future year:

There is in particular one general proposition concerning women which, however archaic in form, is an unmistakable echo of the Paris boulevards. It comes with a shock on the audience, and is an offence from which even the most audacious of latter-day problem play-writers would shrink. It will not bear quotation in a newspaper.⁴⁵

<u>The Irish Figaro</u> took the opportunity to produce another example of its own special brand of critical comment:

Such specimens of Puff-created Mushroom Men of Letters as Mr. George Moore and Mr. William Butler Yeats find congenial soil in the ignorance of their followers in which to flourish and make the most of their poor achievements, for amongst the

⁴³ The United Irishman, 26 October 1901, p.2.

The Evening Herald, 22 October 1901, p.2
The Freeman's Journal, 24 October 1901, p. 4

better-educated and discerning the true value of these literary fungi is seen at its true value.⁴⁶

The article then accused Yeats of a "Perfect absence of any knowledge of the most elementary acquaintance with grammar" in his article in *Samhain* which, according to the writer, should be called "Chaff" rather than "Windle-straws" and then concluded:

This is the highly educated self-elected greatest living Irish poet who would have his countrymen waste the time and dwarf the lives of their children by having them taught Irish. If Mr. Yeats knows as little Irish as he evidently does English, he had better acquire some slight acquaintance with Syntax and Orthography – both of which I have ample evidence, are still mysteries to him – before he ventures to pose as a guide to those who sit in darkness.

The Leader was also its usual critical self in a review entitled "An Irish Play and an English Afterpiece." Having praised Hyde's Irish play which "reflected naturally and forcibly the phase of Irish life that it dealt with," the review was caustic in its comments on the Yeats- Moore collaboration. The two writers had, according to the reviewer, twisted the Irish tale "beyond recognition, and have changed Diarmuid from a Fenian chief into a modern degenerate." After further deprecations of the changes made by the authors to the original traditional Irish story, the review gave as its final opinion that "we are convinced that objectionable English plays like that of *Diarmuid and Grania* will injure the cause of Irish Ireland." A separate piece in the same edition of The Leader was even more critical, calling the play "an English travesty" 48 of the original Irish legend.

On the same day as <u>The Leader's</u> attack, Frank Fay writing in <u>The United Irishman</u> continued his argument for the introduction of Irish actors into the Irish theatre and at the end of his piece on the theatre, referred to a pamphlet entitled "The Day of the Rabblement" which he had just read, and which he considered "makes some grossly unjust assertions about the Irish Literary Theatre." Having accused the writer, James Joyce, of adopting "a rather superior attitude," he criticised him for "sneering" at Yeats, Moore and Martyn and recommended that he read *Samhain* where "he will see what the Irish Literary

The Irish Figaro, 23 November 1901, p.785

⁴⁷ The Leader, 2 November 1901, pp.155 -156

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.158

Theatre still hopes to do." He then concluded: "Patience, good Mr. Joyce, and your desires for the masterpieces may have fulfilment."

In fact Joyce's opinion of Yeats as set out in his pamphlet gives a very interesting and perspicacious insight into how the poet was perceived by this very particular representative of the independently minded Catholic community in Dublin:

It is equally unsafe at present to say of Mr. Yeats that he has or has not genius. In aim and form *The Wind Among the Reeds* is poetry of the highest order, and *The Adoration of the Magi* (a story which one of the great Russians might have written) shows what Mr. Yeats can do when he breaks with the half-gods. But an aesthete has a floating will, and Mr. Yeats's treacherous instinct of adaptability must be blamed for his recent association with a platform from which even self-respect should have urged him to refrain. ⁵⁰

This opinion demonstrates an interesting distinction between the political Yeats, who was at this stage doing his best to maintain a good relationship with the growing nationalist movement and who recognised the need for the support of advanced nationalists such as Arthur Griffith if his theatre was to prosper, and the, at that stage, non-political Joyce who refused to make any compromises in support of his literary ambitions, and instead of working to change the literary preferences of the local community as Yeats was, would "fly the nets" and fulfil his literary ambitions outside Ireland. However, as previously remarked, Joyce's phrase "treacherous instinct of adaptability" seems somewhat severe in describing the political shrewdness that Yeats had demonstrated and would continue to demonstrate in his dealings with the different interpretative communities for his work in Ireland. Indeed, as we shall see, when he lost patience with the reception that his work was receiving in Ireland he withdrew rather than adapt to what seemed to be required of him.

For the moment he was prepared, with Lady Gregory's help, to apply himself to maintaining his nationalist credentials and to promoting interest in a national literature. A report in *An Claidheamh Soluis* of a meeting organised by Lady Gregory in November 1901 in Merrion Row, Dublin shows Yeats doing just that:

⁵⁰ Ellmann, Richard, and Mason, Ellsworth, (ed.) The Critical Writings of James Joyce, p.71

⁴⁹ The United Irishman, 2 November 1901, p.2

There were several Gaelic Leaguers present, many members of the National Literary Society – the pioneers of the Irish Literary Theatre – and seven or eight Trinity College students.

Mr. W. B. Yeats opened the proceedings with a very noble plea for the nationalisation of art. He said that to be a true artist a man must first be a good citizen: and to be a good citizen means to be a patriot inspired by native traditions and endowed with native culture. The cosmopolitan spirit was shallow and unproductive. All the greatest work was the product of those who had been imbued with a strong national spirit, and who were steeped in native traditions.⁵¹

We were then told that though Yeats "did not mention the Gaelic League he spoke in the Gaelic League spirit." In the subsequent debate some of the Trinity students spoke "of cosmopolitanism and of broadness of view" and complained of "the exclusiveness of the revivalists," and showed, as the reporter, Eamonn O'Neill, wrote, "they need a great deal of converting."52

One man who certainly would need a lot of converting, not to the revivalist movement of which he was an ardent supporter, but to be a supporter of Yeats, was D. P. Moran. On 23 November he launched yet another attack on Yeats, on this occasion regarding a letter which Yeats had written to The Freeman's Journal about censorship in the theatre. The Leader quoted a sentence from that letter which it gave as an example of "Mr. Yeats in his 'superior mood.'" Yeats had written "I believe that literature is the principal voice of the conscience, and that it is its duty age after age to affirm its morality against the special moralities of clergymen and churches, and of kings and parliaments and peoples."53 The Leader noted that Yeats "will have no Church censorship. Mr. Yeats is not only above the Church, but above all Churches an' it please you. . . . His symbolism one need not bother about, but bumptiousness is ever trying on the nerves."54 A further sentence in Yeats's letter gives an early indication of how this issue of censorship was to influence his thinking in the future:

I have no doubt that a wise ecclesiastic, if his courage equalled his wisdom, would be a better censor than the mob, but I think it better to fight the mob alone than to seek for a support one could only get by what would seem to me a compromise of principle.

⁵¹ An Claidheamh Soluis, 9 November 1901, p.555

The Freeman's Journal, 14 November 1901, p.4

Frederick Ryan, 55 writing in The United Irishman under the pseudonym "Irial", gave Yeats some support in an article entitled "Censorship and Independence" published on the same day as The Leader's attack. Censorship, according to Ryan, "is only another name for despotism" to which "no thinker or artist, with a spot of independence, has ever submitted without protest." Yeats was wrong in basing his claim for independence by declaring that "literature is the principal voice of the conscience." "Fine writing," according to Ryan, "is not by any means always on the side of the true and the just." Yeats was criticised for calling on "some priests" in The Countess Cathleen controversy, and urged to "take the highest ground" and to claim independence "as a right and not as a concession." 56 In a response published in The United Irishman on 7 December, Yeats took Ryan to task, arguing that "even lyric poetry is the voice of what metaphysicians call innate knowledge, that is to say, of conscience, for it expresses the relation of the soul to eternal beauty and truth as no other writing can express it."57 Ryan's response was that the difference between his view of literature and that held by Yeats was a matter of definition in that Yeats held literature to be "the voice of the conscience, proclaiming its morality independent of the special moralities of Churches and Parliaments," whereas, in his view, literature could not be "something distinct from the rest of society, independent of society, and with a special message to communicate."58 As Ryan, considered it "the height of presumption . . . to get into discussion with Mr. Yeats on a question of literature," he closed his article by restating his original opposition to literary censorship.

After a few quiet months with Yeats's name absent from the Irish press, a new flurry of activity commenced in April 1902 with an announcement in <u>The United Irishman</u> on 29 March:

This year the Irish Literary Theatre as such disappears, and the two greatest, perhaps, of Irish literary men have handed their new plays to Inghinidhe for production. On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of next week "A.E.'s" Deirdre

⁵⁴ The Leader, 23 November 1901, p.197

Fredrick Ryan (1876- 1913) was the first secretary of the Irish National Theatre Society before it became the Abbey Theatre. He edited the journal <u>Dana</u> with John Eglinton from 1904-5, and later edited other journals in Egypt and London where he died.

⁵⁶ The United Irishman, 23 November 1901, p.3

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 7 December 1901, p.3

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 14 December 1901, p.5

and W. B. Yeats' "Kathleen Ni Hoolihan" will be produced in the St. Teresa's Total Abstinence Hall, in Clarendon Street, Dublin. . . . Of the many simple and beautiful things Mr. Yeats has given the world there is none simpler or more beautiful than the "Kathleen Ni Hoolihan" Dublin will witness next week with its noble and hopeful Nationalism - "Young she is, and fair she is, and she shall be a Queen."

Both plays received considerable coverage from the Dublin press with AE.'s only play, surprisingly, getting the greater attention. The <u>Irish Daily Independent and Daily Nation</u>, to give the Redmondite paper its current full title, wrote that the production of both plays "was attended with brilliant success" and then said little more except to summarise the plots. <u>Kathleen Ni Houlihan</u> was described as "a play of a symbolic character" and we are told that "Kathleen who typifies Ireland, stricken with sorrow and seeking a deliverer, was admirably represented by Miss Maud Gonne."

The <u>Daily Express</u>, which reviewed the plays under the heading "Deirdre" also gave more attention to AE's play, and its short note on Yeats's play also focussed its attention on Maud Gonne who "seems to have at last struck her vocation; a lively imagination and exaggerated emotions, however out of place in politics, are all right in connection with the footlights." ⁶² Her performance was also praised, with her "voice and manner being well suited to a rather doleful part."

The Freeman's Journal described the occasion: "a crowded house – too crowded for comfort – an audience vibrating with enthusiasm, and quick to seize every point and to grasp every situation." However it felt that Yeats's play "suffered by being played last: The audience, tense with the excitement of the tragic situations of 'Deirdre,' relaxed in the

⁵⁹ As James Pethica has pointed out the play was written in collaboration with Lady Gregory. See "Our Kathleen" in Toomey, Deirdre, (ed.) <u>Yeats and Women</u>, pp.205 – 222. In <u>The Politics of Irish Drama</u>, p.69, Nicholas Grene has written that the play "may be accounted a product of Gregory's rather than Yeats's imagination."

The United Irishman, 29 March 1902, p.1. In all published versions of the play the spelling "Cathleen" was used. However the more popular Irish spelling "Kathleen" was used in the Irish press and indeed by Yeats himself in his correspondence. Early printings of the play had "Cathleen Ni Hoolihan".

⁶¹ Irish Daily Independent and Nation, 3 April 1902, p.5

Daily Express, 3 April 1902, p.5

⁶³ The Freeman's Journal, 3 April 1902, p.3 Hogan and Kilroy estimated an audience "of about 300." Laying the Foundations, p.12

humour of Mr. Yeats's opening scene, and were evidently unprepared for the deeper note which is struck when Kathleen Ni Houlihan enters." A further problem on the opening night was identified in that the hall, as well as the stage, remained fully lighted during the performance. Of the play itself "it would be difficult to speak too highly. While there is about it a haunting sense of tragedy, it is flooded with the beauty of 'old forgotten far-off things,' and of ideals that are never quite lost." Maud Gonne's performance as Kathleen was particularly admired:

Her interpretation of the part was marked by a very high degree of histrionic power; and her beautiful voice was heard to advantage in the snatches of folk songs with which her speeches were interspersed.

The Irish Times also reviewed the plays, and in fact came closer than the other reviews to describing <u>Cathleen Ni Houlihan</u> in terms which have become familiar since. It described "Deirdre" as the "more ambitious" of the two plays, but then focussed considerable attention on Yeats's play:

"Kathleen Ni Houlihan" is a shorter work, developing events which appeal to, and arouse patriotic feeling. Kathleen, in reality, represents Ireland, and dealing with such a subject a dramatist less skilful than Mr. Yeats might be tempted to abandon the role of the thinker for that of the dreamer, a weakness which, however, has not left its mark on the play which a crowded house saw and admired last evening. In "Kathleen Ni Houlihan" the author portrays with dramatic intensity the Irishman's love of country, and this aspect of native character is delineated with keen insight and an evident desire to avoid exaggeration.⁶⁴

<u>The United Irishman</u>, predictably, gave Yeats's play the most extensive coverage in an article entitled "Mr. Yeats' New Play". Mr. Yeats, the article announced, had given the following response to some questions that the paper had submitted to him:

My subject is Ireland and its struggle for independence. The scene is laid in the West of Ireland at the time of the French landing. . . . It is the perpetual struggle of the cause of Ireland and every other ideal cause against private hopes and dreams, against all that we mean when we say the world. I have put into the mouth

⁶⁴ The Irish Times, 3 April 1902, p.5

of Kathleen Ni Houlihan verses about those who have died or are about to die for her, and these verses are the key of the rest.⁶⁵

However it was the final verse spoken by the Old Woman, and quoted in <u>The United Irishman's</u> article, combined with the final line of the young boy Patrick, that certainly echoed in the minds of the audience as they left the theatre on those evenings in April 1902:

They shall be remembered for ever; The people shall hear them for ever.

PETER: Did you see an old woman going down the path?

PATRICK: I did not; but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen. 66

In its issue of 12 April <u>The Leader</u> included an article by "Chanel" who, having had some strong words of criticism for A.E.'s play, was impressed with Yeats's <u>Cathleen Ni Houlihan</u>:

Mr. Yeats, on the contrary, would appear to have begun to see the light. "Kathleen" was a true play. The action was sufficient for its small proportions. Its sudden change from the joy of the marriage eve to the sadness of war and sacrifice gave it a true tragic plot. The feelings had full play throughout. It was, indeed, a work of the greatest promise. As a study in the contrasts of Irish life it was particularly interesting. It brought the humdrum and the ideallic (sic), the funny and the poetic sides of Irish life together, and showed their interrelation; a topic which has hitherto been much neglected. In fine, it was a play such as the people could enjoy. Let us hope we find in it the type of the drama that is to come. ⁶⁸

It is notable that the extreme nationalist message that has been associated with the play subsequently was not strongly emphasised in any of the contemporary reviews. It was in 1936, many years later, that Stephen Gwynn published his well known words: "I went home that night asking myself if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared

66 Samhain, October 1902, p.30-31

⁶⁸ The Leader, 12 April 1902, p.106

⁶⁵ The United Irishman, 5 April 1902, p.5

The pseudonym of Arthur Clery (1879 –1932) one-time colleague of James Joyce at University College, Dublin. He was called to the Irish Bar in 1902 and in 1910 was appointed Professor of Real Property and the Law of Contracts at the newly formed National University. He was a frequent contributor to <u>The</u> Leader. He was also known as an early advocate of the concept of partition in 1905.

for people to go out to shoot and be shot."⁶⁹ The opinion of Joseph Holloway, who attended on the second evening, is more in line with that of Stephen Gwynn, and of the reported reception of later productions of the play. The reception of the play, which made "a deep impression" on him, was described by Joseph Holloway:

Most of the sayings of the mysterious 'Cathleen'... found a ready and apt interpretation from the audience who understood that Erin spoke in 'Cathleen,' and they applauded each red-hot patriotic sentiment right heartily, and enthusiastically called for the author at the end, and had their wish gratified.⁷⁰

The Irish newspapers quickly forgot about the "patriotic sentiment" in <u>Cathleen Ni</u>

<u>Houlihan</u> and it was the quality of the acting by Frank Fay and his company that was discussed in the pages of <u>The United Irishman</u> over the next few weeks. Yeats began the debate with an article on 12 April in which he praised the acting of <u>Deirdre</u>, which left him with "a memory of simplicity and gravity and quietness." In the following week's edition, Edward Martyn wrote that, in his opinion, the acting in <u>Deirdre</u> was "ineffective" and lacking in "intensity", while it was only Maud Gonne's intense and poetical performance which saved the Yeats's play from disaster "by reason of the low comedyman air adopted by another actor." A week later, Yeats defended the acting of Willie Fay in a response to Martyn, pointing out that the audience were accustomed to seeing him in humorous parts and so were predisposed to laughter when he appeared on stage.

While <u>The Leader</u> had been supportive of Yeats's <u>Cathleen Ni Houlihan</u>, it reverted to its normal critical attitude towards the poet when it reviewed Lady Gregory's <u>Cuchulain of Muirthemne</u>, which, with Yeats's introduction, was published at the end of April 1902. Yeats's comment about this book being "the best that has come out of Ireland in my time" was dismissed as almost taking "one's breath away." His introduction showed "that he has not grasped the Irish Ireland ideal" and in the reviewer, W.P Ryan's, view, "were the work, and certain theories advanced by Mr. Yeats, to be permanent, then indeed Ireland's

Hogan, Robert, and O'Neill, Michael J., <u>Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre</u>, p.17 (Hereafter referred to as Holloway.)

⁷³ *Ibid.* 19 April 1902, p.1

⁶⁹ Gwynn, Stephen, <u>Irish Drama</u>, p. 158 Gwynn (1864 – 1950) was a Protestant writer, Nationalist M.P. soldier, and critic. He was one of the founders, with J. M. Hone, of the Dublin publishing house Maunsel.

Not particularly surprising as Frank Fay, was, as noted, the drama critic of that journal.

⁷² The United Irishman, 12 April 1902, p.3

case were melancholy."⁷⁴ Further reviews of the book were published in <u>The Freeman's</u> Journal, The Irish Daily Independent and Daily Nation, The United Irishman and New Ireland Review all of which expressed some criticism of Yeats's introduction. The <u>Freeman's Journal</u> was particularly critical, taking objection to Yeats's statement: "If we will but tell these stories to our children the Land will begin again to be a Holy Land, as it was before men gave their hearts to Greece and Rome and Judea." ⁷⁵ The paper called this "literary blaspheming" which was "not only repulsive but silly," and credited it to what it called "Anglo-Irish blindness". A further sentence of the review pronounced: "Mr. Yeats, who sees all things through a pair of esoteric spectacles, borrowed from the Englishman Blake, ⁷⁶ has rather seriously injured the Irish revival by these attempts at a foreign grafture." The Irish Daily Independent wrote that Yeats's "fantastical praise" had done harm to Lady Gregory's book, but it also pointed out, in line with its Catholic cultural code: "These stories must not be told with the purpose of putting Cuchulain in the place which Christ holds in the minds of the people."

It is not surprising that following these comments Lady Gregory wrote to Yeats:

you ought not to send yr own books for review to Irish papers in future. They have evidently an idea they shd be a sort of truffle dog where you are concerned, to scent out heresy however concealed.⁷⁸

This advice he accepted and advised his publishers accordingly, a fact which was to limit published comment in Ireland primarily to the performances of his plays or to his involvement in political events over the next number of years. A letter which he wrote in the following April to his publisher A.H.Bullen reinforces the point:

I write to remind you of our rule to send no copies of my books to Dublin papers. You did not send 'Celtic Twilight' & it is still more desirable not to send 'Ideas of Good & Evil'. Reviews in Dublin papers sell no copies & I don't see why I should give them the oppertunity of attacking me.⁷⁹

He did make one exception: "I will ask you to send a copy to the editor of one friendly paper but to him personally." This was Arthur Griffith whose friendly paper at this stage was The United Irishman.

The Freeman's Journal, 2 May 1902, p.5

⁷⁴ The Leader, 5 July 1902, p.298

⁷⁶ Yeats's previous claim that Blake was an Irishman was obviously not taken seriously.

⁷⁷ Irish Daily Independent, 12 May 1902, p.2

⁷⁸Footnote in Collected Letters Vol.III, p.342.

Following the success of the April 1902 productions, the Fay brothers and their associated actors and writers came together to form the Irish National Theatre Society, this name, as Hogan and Kilroy tell us, being adopted in 1903. The group then approached Yeats with the offer of the role of President, which he accepted. A new "Samhain" season of plays was planned to run from 28 October to 1 November which included Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan, with Maud Gonne again in the leading part, as well as Yeats's Pot of Broth, another collaboration with Lady Gregory, which was to open the festival at a new little hall in Camden Street. The United Irishman was again supportive, while showing clearly what it saw as the primary function of the new theatre:

We look to the Irish National Theatre primarily as a means of regenerating the country. The Theatre is a powerful agent in the building up of a nation. When it is in foreign and hostile hands, it is a deadly danger to the country. When it is controlled by native and friendly hands it is a bulwark and a protection.⁸¹

Such words would reverberate in the years to come as the new theatre, more and more under Yeats's control, began to move away from its nationalist beginnings when the plays of John Millington Synge came to be produced.

Arthur Grffith, under the pseudonym "Cugain" gave <u>A Pot of Broth</u> a short review in <u>The United Irishman</u> in which he called the play a revelation in that it showed Yeats as "a rollicking humorist" and described the actor playing the husband in the play as "a perfect Jack B. Yeats' Irishman," In reference to the now popular Jack Yeats drawings of west of Ireland country characters. In the same issue Frank Fay wrote on the lecture "Speaking to the Psaltery" which Yeats had given in the previous week. Fay was understandably circumspect, being "not quite convinced yet" of the effectiveness of the technique in the theatre. Another contributor writing under the initials XYZ was not so kind: "To some who were present, Mr. Yeats' address and the chanting of Miss Farr may have been interesting; but to anyone who had not come within the glamour of Mr. Yeats' personality,

⁷⁹ Collected Letters Vol.III, p.341

⁸⁰ Hogan and Kilroy, Laying the Foundations 1902-1904, p.28

⁸¹ The United Irishman, 8 November 1902, p.1

⁸² *Ibid.* p.3

⁸³ Jack Yeats's exhibition in March 1901 entitled "Sketches of Life in the West of Ireland" had been praised by Griffith.

⁸⁴ The United Irishman, 8 November 1902, p.3

⁸⁵ Florence Farr (1860 – 1917)was born in England and became a successful actress, acting frequently in Shaw's plays. She played in the "The Land of Heart's Desire" the first production of a Yeats's play. Like

both speech and song, bordered perilously on the ludicrous." In parallel with this exchange on the Psaltery, another debate was also underway in the pages of The United Irishman in response to Yeats's article "The Freedom of the Theatre," which had been published on 1 November. In this same issue The United Irishman had demonstrated its continuing support for Yeats by proudly announcing on its front page the publication of Yeats's new play Where There is Nothing in a special supplement with the comment: "No such valuable presentation has ever been made to the readers of any journal, as that which we make with our present issue." In his article "The Freedom of the Theatre," Yeats referred to the controversies raised by The Countess Cathleen but, as he wrote, "the drama has always been a disturber" and he anticipated that his new play, Where There is Nothing, would also disturb some people. To call a play immoral was, in his view, "a dangerous cry" as the "reign of the moralist is the reign of the mob, or of some Jack-in-office." ⁸⁸

A number of responses to this article were printed in <u>The United Irishman</u> in subsequent weeks. On 15 November Thomas Kettle⁸⁹ defended his original view of <u>The Countess</u> <u>Cathleen</u> which, he wrote, was untrue to the "determinate historical value" of the Irish Catholic. Yeats did not understand "the sanctity and compulsion with which the Catholic religion has established itself in the imagination of Ireland." On the broader question, he stated that Yeats could not reject moral drama since

drama is implicitly moral, for it deals with conduct, and conduct has for its very essence morality. And this being so, may we not demand that a writer shall show things in their true relations, and leave our love and sympathy at the end of his work on the side of the true and good?⁹⁰

M. C. Joy, writing the following week, took issue with Kettle's view of <u>The Countess</u> <u>Cathleen</u>, which, he pointed out, was "a dramatisation of a legend", not a "portrayal of Irish life." Joy's view of the issue of morality in drama is that "most 'moral' drama is

Yeats she was a member of the Golden Dawn and the Theosophical Society. She worked with Yeats in his experiments on speaking verse to the psaltery. In 1912 she suddenly emigrated to Ceylon where she died five years later.

⁸⁶ The United Irishman, 22 November 1902, p.3

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 1November 1902, p.1

⁸⁸ Ibid. p.5

⁸⁹ Thomas Kettle (1880-1916) was one of the Dublin Catholic students of University College Dublin who had written to the press complaining about The <u>Countess Cathleen</u> in May 1899. He became a lawyer, a Nationalist M.P. in 1906 and Professor of National Economics at UCD in 1909. A friend of James Joyce, he enlisted in the British army during the Great War and was killed at the Somme in 1916.

⁹⁰ The United Irishman, 15 November 1902, p.3

dishonest" as we cannot see beyond the grave to learn the ultimate fate of the character. Paul Ruttledge, the hero of Where There is Nothing, had rejected his home and family and joined a band of tinkers. Then, leaving them, he entered a monastery where he remained for five years before being expelled and was finally killed by a mob who accused him of bringing "witchcraft and ill-luck on the place." According to Joy, Paul Ruttledge died too soon, we did not know him long enough to "convince ourselves that he was a real truth-seeker, who loved truth for itself, and not a self-conceited though self-honest crank who despised the world for its artificiality and its inferiority to himself. Mr. Yeats killed him too soon." The quality of this debate on Where There is Nothing indicated that a new community of readers of Yeats was beginning to make its presence felt more strongly in Ireland. An educated Catholic middle class was now prepared to take issue with him, not in a simplistic rejection of his mysticism or obscurity, or in demanding that his work should be primarily written as propaganda for the nationalist cause, but in a more sophisticated and considered engagement with his writings, albeit from a Catholic and nationalist perspective.

This more measured Irish criticism of his work was also making Yeats more sensitive to the unauthorised reprinting of some of his early poems which he had not collected in book form and therefore were not covered by copyright. This had occurred in The Irish
Homestead, the organ of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, founded by Horace Plunkett, who will feature later in this work, in 1894. The Irish Homestead, which was edited by George Russell, had published Yeats's "The Madness of King Goll" in its Christmas number in 1897, and some lyrics from The Island of Statues in the 1899 Christmas number, presumably with Yeats's permission, as these would have been covered by copyright. Then in the 1900 Christmas number it printed "How Ferenz Renyi kept Silent", in 1901 "The Solitary Fairy" (previously "The Fairy Pedant"), and in 1902 "She Dwelt among the Sycamores". Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory in December 1902:

I...am going to write to Russell to say that the Homestead mustn't do this kind of thing any more. I was furious last year when they revived some rambling old verses of mine but forgot about it. I wouldn't so much mind if they said they were early verses but they print them as if they were new work.⁹³

Alspach, Russell, K. (ed.) <u>The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats</u>. p.1159
 The United Irishman, 29 November 1902, p.3

Ollected Letters, Vol. III, p.274. He did write to Russell who apologised. The Irish Homestead published

In March 1903 the Irish National Theatre Society produced Yeats's <u>The Hour-Glass</u> in a programme with Lady Gregory's <u>Twenty-Five</u> and notices were published in <u>The United Irishman</u>, <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>, and <u>The Leader</u>. Of these, only the former dealt with Yeats's play, seeing it as a morality play that was "a fine piece of dramatic construction." The other two notices concentrated more on a lecture on "The Reform of the Theatre" which Yeats delivered in the interval. The Freeman's Journal simply paraphrased Yeats's lecture without comment, including one particular passage that re-echoed previously expressed sentiments:

He wrote in English, for we must speak in the language we think in, and write in the language we speak in. And more important than questions of politics or language, it was to give new artistic form to beauty and truth, and when that command came to a man he must leave many things to follow it. ⁹⁶

The Leader's notice written by Arthur Clery, and also concentrating on Yeats's lecture, disagreed with his concept of the dramatist seeking "the applause of the cultured few." Clery's view was: "If a true vigorous drama is to be produced in Ireland, it will result not from the critical palates of dramatic epicures, but from the healthy approval of the ordinary Irishman, healthily sought by natural means." This was an interesting comment given that John Synge's first play, In the Shadow of the Glen was to be produced by the Society in the following October.

Yeats received further praise from Arthur Griffith for his letter to <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> in support of Edward Martyn's objection to the proposed visit to Ireland of King Edward VII in July 1903. Yeats had written: "Royal visits, with their pageantry, their false rumours of concessions, their appeal to all that is superficial and trivial in society, are part of the hypnotic illusion by which England seeks to take captive the imagination of this country." Griffith described Yeats, with Edward Martyn and John Sweetman who had also opposed the visit, as Irishmen "whose views and opinions on Irish matters are of

nothing further by Yeats, although his brother Jack was a frequent contributor.

⁹⁴ The United Irishman, 21 March 1903, p.3

Yeats contributed a summary of the lecture to <u>The United Irishman</u> of 3 April and reprinted it with additions in the September 1903 edition of *Samhain*, the occasional review of the Irish Literary Theatre.

⁹⁶ The Freeman's Journal, 16 March 1903, p.6

⁹⁷ The Leader, 28 March 1903, p.72

⁹⁸ The Freeman's Journal, 9 April 1903, p.5

importance to the community."⁹⁹ On 30 May a further letter from The National Council¹⁰⁰objecting to the Royal visit was published in <u>The United Irishman</u> and among the 38 names appended to this letter were Edward Martyn, Yeats, Maud Gonne MacBride, ¹⁰¹ and Arthur Griffith himself.

Ideas of Good and Evil was reviewed in The United Irishman as expected, but it was also reviewed in The Irish Times whose reviewer considered that "Mr. Yeats is not at his happiest in this small volume of essays,"102 as the essay "is not a congenial form of expression for writers of his calibre." "Mr. Yeats's defects," in the reviewer's opinion, "are more noticeable in his prose than in his poetry." He was accused of a "want of sincerity", the reader not being quite sure that "Mr. Yeats really believes what he is preaching." The United Irishman's review, which was written by John Eglinton, who, as has been noted, had engaged in debate with Yeats in the pages of the Daily Express in the autumn of 1898 uncovered other problems. Under the title "The Philosophy of the Celtic Movement" Eglinton, having agreed that Yeats "has perhaps done as much as anyone at the present time to bring home to us the significance of folklore and primitive literature, before, it may be, they pass away forever," 103 took objection to Yeats's condemnation of the middle-classes, questioning Yeats's judgement that "city life, commerce, and 'middleclass' vulgarity kill out the visionary faculty." In Eglinton's opinion, the peasant who still believed in fairies suffered from a "lack of perspective - which makes his folklore worthless to thought either as art or as testimony" and it was within the major towns and cities "that magical and visionary practises" which Yeats described were most prevalent.

Neither review would have pleased Yeats nor would the article published on 26 September in <u>The Leader</u> under the title "A Rather Complex Personality". The article, over the pseudonym "Imaal", ¹⁰⁴described <u>Ideas of Good and Evil</u> as Yeats "dishing up his visions and similar etceteras in book form, after duly exploiting them beforehand as articles in the

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⁹⁹ The United Irishman, 2 May 1903, p.1

Described in a note in <u>Collected Letters Vol. III</u>, p.377 as having been formed by Maud Gonne at Yeats's suggestion in order to resist pressure on the working classes and on school children to join in the celebrations for the Royal visit.

¹⁰¹ Much to Yeats's chagrin Maud Gonne had married John MacBride in February 1903.

¹⁰² The Irish Times, 22 May 1903, P.7

The United Irishman, 27 June 1903, p.3

The pseudonym of J. J. O'Toole, a quiet, private, civil servant who wrote frequently for <u>The Leader</u> and whom D.P.Moran described, in an obituary notice in September 1927, as a personal friend for 26 years. The Leader, 3 September, 1927, p.103

London reviews."¹⁰⁵ Yeats's "vagaries" were only worth considering because he "passes beyond sea for a leading figure in literary Ireland." "Imaal's" own description of Yeats deserves quotation:

He is one of the most complex personalities we have. There is a touch of the real poet in him, and a spice of the amateur (but not insincere) politician. Added to those, he is a sort of quaintly-comic man, who confuses matters for us by letting on to let on that he takes himself seriously. Added to this again, he is as handy a man as any under the sun at successfully 'planting' his literary wares; 'no flies on him' *there!* As to the spook business and the seeing of visions, probably nobody but Mr. Yeats himself could tell how far he is in earnest. Indeed, he has been so long posing in that peculiar spiritual line now, that probably not even he himself could tell us if he really sees anything – and in any case it doesn't matter. 106

Stephen Gwynn responded to this criticism on 10 October, initially dismissing "Imaal's" objection to publishing books of essays that had previously appeared in Reviews and pointing out that

there is hardly a review or magazine of the first class that would not be glad to have his name: and he writes very little. But the central fact is this. There are not three men of the younger generation to whom a higher rank in contemporary letters is assigned by general consent of competent judges; there is probably no artist of at all equal reputation who has earned so little by his art. The attempt to represent this scrupulous artist as a prosperous charlatan does no credit to your pages. ¹⁰⁷

"Imaal's" response to the issue of republishing essays was clear: "Twice is too much to read any of Mr. Yeats's prose writings; once is too often to read most of them." He admired Yeats's poetry but took exception to "his prose efforts, his posturings, and his 'visions'" and then stated: "For Mr. Yeats's powers as a dramatist I have nothing but a melancholy opinion."

While this debate was underway in <u>The Leader</u>, Yeats was engaged in confronting the <u>Irish Daily Independent's</u> attack on the forthcoming season of plays including his <u>The King's Threshold</u> and J. M. Synge's In <u>the Shadow of the Glen</u> which were due to be to be

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 26 September 1903, p.71

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.72

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 10 October 1903, p.100

presented by the National Theatre Society. In an editorial on the morning of the first performance of the plays, the paper took objection to what it called "the eccentricities and extravagances, of Mr. Yeats and his friends." It rejected Yeats's wish, in the October issue of Samhain, for "an audience so tolerant that the half dozen minds who are likely to be the dramatic imagination of Ireland for this generation, may put their own thoughts and their own characters into their work," writing: "Sincerely we hope and believe that no such tolerance will be extended to Mr. Yeats and his friends." ¹⁰⁹ After the opening of the plays that evening, Yeats referred to this newspaper's attack when speaking from the stage. 110 He said, as reported by the paper on the following day, that The Daily Independent "had that morning written the most amazing attack which he had ever seen in any country upon an artistic conception," and his response was that "they were sincere men, working with a sense of responsibility. They sought to live in the light of the masterpieces of the art of the world, and they would live in no other light (applause)."111

Yeats continued to argue his case in an article entitled "An Irish National Theatre" published in The United Irishman on 10 October. He pointed out: "Literature is always personal, always one man's vision of the world, one man's experience, and it can only be popular when men are ready to welcome the visions of others."112 He was in favour of the use of incidents from Irish history, but the use of such incidents should not be enforced, and neither should plays be required to further the cause of Irish nationalism. Declaring "I am a Nationalist", he appealed for the freedom to be influenced by other literatures, and to "bring new kinds of subjects into the theatre." His appeal, however, fell upon deaf ears, for in the following number of The United Irishman, Arthur Griffith took him to task for his support of Synge's play which Griffith saw as "a lie" as its characters, "never existed in the flesh in Wicklow nor in any other of the thirty-two counties." This difference of opinion regarding Synge's play signalled the beginning of an estrangement between Yeats and Griffith.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 17 October 1903, p.122

¹⁰⁹ Irish Daily Independent, 8 October 1903, p.4

Holloway describes him holding forth "in his usual thumpy- thigh, monotonous, affected, preachy style." Holloway, p.27

¹¹¹ Irish Daily Independent, 9 October, p.6

The United Irishman, 10 October 1903, p.2

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 17 October 1903, p.1

In another article in <u>The United Irishman</u> on 24 October Yeats set out again his argument for intellectual freedom under the title "The Irish National Theatre and Three Sorts of Ignorance" These were enumerated as the

hatred of ideas of the more ignorant sort of Gaelic propagandist, who would have nothing said or thought that is not in country Gaelic.

obscurantism of the more ignorant sort of priest, who, forgetful of the great traditions of his Church, would deny all ideas that might perplex a parish of farmers or artisans or half-educated shopkeepers.

obscurantism of the politician, and not always of the more ignorant sort, who would reject every idea which is not of immediate service to his cause. 114

In this article Yeats was treading on dangerous ground but for the moment Griffith was mild in his response. Standing over his opinion that an unfaithful Irish wife was a rarity and Synge's play not true to Irish life, he wrote that he did not want to "cause personal pain to Mr. Yeats and those associated with him in the Irish National Theatre Society. We know them to be sincere, unselfish, and patriotic, but we do not believe them always to be wise." 115

Two letters on the controversy were published in the same number of <u>The United Irishman</u> from James Connolly ¹¹⁶ and Maud Gonne MacBride. Connolly appealed for a national drama that would restore "our proper national pride" and counselled Yeats to find encouragement "towards the perfection of his work in the fact his utterances on the drama have aroused the babbling voices of the Philistines and iconoclasts." Maud Gonne's view was that in the past "Ireland had a national literature as great as the literature of Greece or of any other country in the world," and modern writers "must free themselves from the influence of foreign and English education" to produce a true modern national literature for the common people:

The best and truest writings of our greatest living poet, W. B. Yeats, are understood and appreciated by the people; the poems and essays they do not understand are

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 24 October 1903, p.2

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*.

James Connolly (1868 – 1916) was born to Irish parents in Edinburgh. A committed socialist, he founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1898, before going to America in 1903. On his return in 1910 he was actively involved in promoting Trade unionism. He established the Citizen army in 1913 in response to the General Strike and Lock-Out of that year. He was a leader in the 1916 Rising and was subsequently executed.

¹¹⁷ The United Irishman, 24 October 1903, p.2

those touched by foreign influence, from which Mr. Yeats has not altogether escaped, having lived long out of Ireland. 118

"Chanel" in <u>The Leader</u> joined in the debate on 31 October, agreeing with Yeats's statement in *Samhain* that a dramatist "should have no propaganda but that of Art" but disagreeing with him that "a dramatist should not be confined to the accepted views of morality." "Chanel" considered that "the Irish people have a right to protest if they find a *National* theatre tending towards immoral or anti-Christian propaganda," and he and they are "justified in expressing our objection to 'In the Shadow of the Glen' if we find that it offends our moral sense." It was the general tone of Synge's play that "Chanel" objected to, for, although there were anti-Christian views expressed in Yeats's <u>The King's Threshold</u>, the passage in which they were expressed was "so much an excrescence on the plot, that it does not interfere with the natural beauty and elevation of the piece.

Fortunately, moreover, as Mr. Yeats grows anti-Christian, he generally grows incomprehensible also." There was some further comment in a similar vein over the next few weeks but, as Yeats had departed on his first American visit on 4 October, it soon died out.

Yeats made a long visit to North America from early November 1903 to the middle of March 1904 He spoke at "over sixty-four colleges and literary societies" to "between four thousand and four thousand five hundred people" from New York to California and from Chicago to Toronto. One effect of his lecture tour was to increase his confidence in dealing with the criticism he had been receiving in the Irish press. In a letter to Lady Gregory, from New York in January 1904 he demonstrated this new-found confidence, writing:

Did I tell you my idea of challenging Griffith to debate with me in public our two policies – his that literature should be subordinate to nationalism and mine that it must have its own ideal? I think that a challenge to him would be quite amusing, for his own party sent out so many that he would be a little embarrassed to refuse. 122

118 Ibid. p.3

¹¹⁹ The Leader, 31October 1903, p.154

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p.155

¹²¹ Collected Letters Vol. III, p.555

¹²² *Ibid.* p.508

Nothing came of this idea but it demonstrates a new attitude in dealing with his critics in Ireland inspired no doubt by the admiration and respect he had received in America and Canada and an awareness of a large new Irish-American audience, enthusiastic about his lectures and prepared to buy his books. Indeed, before he left New York in March 1904, he was busily engaged in rationalising his American publishing arrangements that were eventually settled with Macmillan. ¹²³

During his absence <u>The Shadowy Waters</u> had been produced in Dublin and reviewed by <u>The Irish Times</u>, <u>The Irish Daily Independent</u>, <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>, <u>The Leader</u> and <u>The United Irishman</u> none of whom considered the play satisfactory as drama. A better reception was afforded to the successful second visit of the Irish National Theatre Society to London at the end of March, shortly after Yeats's return from America. Yeats's <u>The King's Threshold</u> and <u>The Pot of Broth</u> as well as Synge's <u>Riders to the Sea</u> and <u>In the Shadow of the Glen</u> and Padraic Colum's <u>Broken Soil</u> were all performed to generally favourable reviews by the London critics.

This visit was also noted in a long article in <u>The United Irishman</u> by Maurice Joy who also reviewed the recently published Volumes II and III of <u>Plays for an Irish Theatre</u>. The best of these plays, according to Joy, "are little concerned with the life of action, the mere commonplace drama of existence, but rather have their sources in that deeper life within of which the external life is always a more or less incomplete expression." There was no "essential antagonism" Joy considered, between "the ultimate objects of Mr. Yeats and those of Ibsen," but their methods in "the lifting up of humanity to a higher plane" are different. Yeats enticed by "showing the beauty of the ideal life" while Ibsen coerced humanity "by mercilessly exploring and exposing the depths to which it is degraded." Joy considered it "painful" to read the leading English critics on the visit of the Irish National Theatre to London, as they praised the plays "as one would praise the charming and highly-interesting experiments of children, or as one would praise a beautiful but artificially grown hot-house plant." Yeats, "our greatest poet," was encouraged to have "faith in his own genius and in the judgement of those of his own people who will go to see his plays in Dublin." If he would do this he then "may chose his subjects where he will,

¹²³ Foster, R. F. W. B. Yeats: A Life, p.316 ¹²⁴ The United Irishman, 21 May 1904, p.3

and continue to endow us, through the creations of his genius, with that emotion of the beautiful wherein humanity, confident at last of itself, can stand naked and unashamed."

Another view on The Irish National Theatre was expressed in an article on "Celticism" published in <u>The Church of Ireland Gazette</u> in March 1904. As the article pointed out:

Few people read poetry; but many people go to the theatre. Mr. Yeats' Theatre has two sources of strength. He gives us good acting, and, whether we like his plays or are made uncomfortable by them, some of them do at least provide us with food for thought. They do not insult our intelligence with inanity or vulgarity. The acuteness of our occasional disagreement with their teaching is at least a tribute to their power of making us think.

Yeats's claim for freedom of expression in the theatre was supported and his theatre admired, and the article then gave its contemporary assessment of the reception being afforded to Yeats and his theatre in Ireland. His plays, the article suggested,

have declined to take their views on religious politics from the Roman Catholic Hierarchy, or their views on professional politics from the Irish Party. In their opinion, the problems of life are here to be examined, not to be ignored; and the answers which they have found for some of them have given little pleasure to a country which has long been trained in the habit of thinking to order. This is the reason why, since the days of "The Countess Cathleen," "authority" has constantly fallen foul of Mr. Yeats and his dramatic disciples. ¹²⁵

The independent position taken by "Mr. Yeats' Theatre" was furthermore seen by the writer as "a useful antidote to the narrowing and provincial influence of the Gaelic League."

Yeats was shortly to be in a position to further his views on an independent theatre when, after his return from America, he received some very good news in a letter from Annie Horniman:

I am taking the hall of the Mechanics Institute in Abbey Street and an adjoining building in Marlborough Street which I propose to turn into a small theatre with a proper entrance hall, green-room, and dressing rooms. . . . The company can

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¹²⁵ The Church of Ireland Gazette, 11 March 1904, p.211

have the building rent free whenever they want it for rehearsals and performances except when it is let.¹²⁶

The patent for the theatre had still to be obtained and, Roy Foster tells us, as Yeats was at this time "deliberately distancing himself from advanced nationalist propaganda," ¹²⁷ he prepared a memorandum for use in obtaining the patent for the new theatre which would "stress the non-political nature of the venture. The very name chosen was carefully neutral: 'The Abbey Theatre.' ¹²⁸ At the hearing before the Solicitor General, when Yeats was questioned about the political stance of the new theatre he responded: "We have no propaganda except that of good art." ¹²⁹ The patent for the new theatre was granted on 20 August in Lady Gregory's name, notwithstanding the opposition of the other Dublin theatres, for the production of "plays in the Irish or English language written by Irish writers on Irish subjects, or such dramatic works of foreign authors as would tend to interest the public in the higher works of dramatic art." ¹³⁰ A new chapter in Yeats's reception by his own people was about to begin.

On 27 December 1904 the Abbey Theatre gave its first performance. The plays chosen were Yeats's On Baile's Strand and Cathleen Ni Houlihan and Lady Gregory's Spreading the News. All the Dublin daily papers responded positively; The Freeman's Journal was particularly impressed. In On Baile's Strand it announced "the poet has emerged somewhat from the shadows. There is less of the mystical and more of the human element in the composition than in most of Mr. Yeats's dramas." However D. P. Moran in The Leader was his usual critical self. Of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, which he was seeing for the first time, he wrote:

The 'poor old woman' symbol for Ireland is too greenly sentimental for us. Vigorous Ireland has told the old weeping, wailing creature to move out of its way; but the 'poor old woman' has gained admittance to the scented drawing-rooms where they take a little green sentimentality with their coffee and gossip. ¹³²

His opinion of <u>On Baile's Strand</u> was that it "made no particular impression on us, but we think that the chanting was up to the usual mark." He objected to the fact that there were

¹²⁶ Collected Letters Vol. III, p.572-3

Foster R.F., W.B. Yeats: A Life, p.322

¹²⁸ Terence Brown has suggested that this was to placate Annie Horniman.

The Irish Times, 5 August 1904, p.3

¹³⁰ Hogan, Robert, and Kilroy, James, <u>Laying the Foundations 1902 – 1904</u>, p.108

¹³¹ The Freeman's Journal, 28 December 1904, p.5

¹³² The Leader, 7 January 1905, p.330

no sixpenny seats provided in the new theatre, considering that the minimum price of one shilling "places the Abbey Theatre practically outside the sphere of utility as far as Gaelic League branches, that have Irish plays to stage, are concerned."

Arthur Griffith in The United Irishman also had some reservations. On Baile's Strand, which he felt, "shows Mr. Yeats in a new light. In leaving the play, we do not feel that sense of having watched a beautiful thing we feel in the "King's Threshold": the former's strength is not sufficient to make up for the verse of the latter." 133 His article ended with a brief reminder that Yeats's battles with the nationalist press were not over: "We congratulate him and his company on the opening of their theatre, but we feel convinced if it is to live, it must also 'be moulded by the influences which are moulding National life at present."

What these influences were we will consider in the next chapter.

¹³³ The United Irishman, 31 December 1904, p.1

Chapter 5 1905 - 1910

At the end of 1904 the prospect of achieving Home-Rule for Ireland seemed as far away as ever. However the position of the Conservative government at Westminster was becoming more precarious, being "torn apart by the efforts of Chamberlain to offset the perceived weakness of its aristocratic leadership by mobilising popular enthusiasm for 'national efficiency' based around protection and imperial preference." The Irish Party under John Redmond hoped that when a general election would eventually occur (as it did in January 1906) it would hold the balance of power, and by supporting a revitalised Liberal party, it would be able to progress its Home-Rule objective. However when the Liberal Party won a landslide victory in the January 1906 election it no longer needed the Irish Party's support and it "expressly ruled out the introduction of home-rule in the new Parliament while pledging themselves to a limited measure of devolution, presented as 'administrative reform'." In fulfilling this pledge the Liberals introduced an Irish Council Bill which "was rejected after a grass-roots upsurge of hostility among Irish Party members." The Irish Party won some concessions that allowed it to retain and build on its electoral strength including the establishment of a National University of Ireland on 1 August 1908.

Opposition in Ireland to the Irish Party had been organised in a new political initiative advanced by Arthur Griffith, whose pamphlet The Resurrection of Hungary, published in 1904 promoted what would become Sinn Féin policy of "an autonomous, economically protected Ireland, bound to Britain only by the institution of the monarchy." In November 1905, Griffith's policy was launched at a convention of the National Council which, as we have noted, had been set up to oppose the visit of King Edward to Ireland in 1903, and of which Yeats was an early member. But Yeats by this time was becoming more distant from the political activities of his earlier years and was no longer involved as the Council met, under the chairmanship of Edward Martyn, to enunciate the new Sinn Féin policy of "national self-development" and elected Griffith as a vice-president. Three years later the

¹ Maume, Patrick, The Long Gestation, p.71

² op. cit. p.78

³ op. cit. p.78

⁴ Jackson, Alvin, Ireland 1798 – 1998, p.185

⁵ See p.140.

National Council amalgamated with other nationalist bodies such as Cumann na nGaedheal and the Dungannon Clubs to form a new organisation called Sinn Féin.

While these political activities were underway, the cultural nationalist movement and particularly the language revival movement were growing strongly. In November 1904, *An Claidheamh Soluis* announced that there were now 750 branches of the Gaelic League with an average of seventy members in each, giving an overall membership of over 50,000 enrolled Gaelic Leaguers in Ireland and Britain. Yeats's status within the Gaelic revival movement was enhanced when over a period of four weeks, from 18 February to 11 March 1905, his <u>Cathleen Ni Houlihan</u> was serialised in <u>The United Irishman</u> in an Irish translation by Fr. Tomas O Ceallaig, confirming the play's status as an icon of cultural nationalism. This Irish version of the play was produced in the Round Room of the Rotunda for the *Oireachtas* in August and, while the acting was not up the standard of "Fay's company" in the opinion of *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the play itself did "not suffer considerably by comparison with Mr. Yeats' beautiful original."

Synge's In the Shadow of the Glen was still attracting the ire of The United Irishman, which called the play an Irish version of The Widow of Ephesus from which "the reputation of womankind had suffered in every century." A letter from Yeats, published in the 28 January issue, responded to this criticism by pointing out that there was no evidence regarding what country Synge's story came from or "whether it may not have had an independent origin in half-a dozen countries." Griffith did not agree, writing that neither Yeats nor Synge "or any other human being ever met in Ireland a peasant-woman of the type of Norah Burke —a woman void of all conception of morality, decency and religion." Yeats again responded on 4 February recounting a time-wasting search he had made to check the source of the story suggested by Griffith to no avail and again affirming that it was a story from Aran:

In everything but the end of the play Mr. Synge has followed very closely the Aran story, which he has, I believe, sent to you; but it is precisely the end of the play that

⁸ *Ibid.* 28 January 1905, p.1

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⁶ An Claidheamh Soluis 19 August 1905, p.7

⁷ The United Irishman, 7 January 1905, p.1

puts him at once among men of genius. For this there is no parallel in any story that I know of.⁹

Griffith's refusal to accept this source for the play attracted a further response from Yeats on 11 February asking Griffith to print Synge's letter, which he did, and the correspondence ended with a final word from Griffith drawing attention to Yeats's assertion that he had mentioned "neither Dublin Castle nor politics of any kind" on his American lecture tour. 10 Griffith considered this remarkable, referring to Yeats's lecture on Robert Emmet: "An address on Robert Emmet with all reference to the Castle and politics left out eclipses the record of the stage-manager who successfully produced 'Hamlet' with the part of the Prince of Denmark omitted." 11 This interchange, which Yeats in a letter to John Quinn, called "my squabble with Arthur Griffith," was but a prelude to that which would break out over The Playboy of the Western World two years later, but it shows that Yeats, notwithstanding his growing reputation in England and America, was still very sensitive to what was been written about him and his work in Ireland and was prepared to go to considerable lengths to defend his opinions, whether of his own work or that of his colleague J. M. Synge.

Joep Leerssen has suggested in <u>Remembrance and Imagination</u> that this "squabble" between Yeats and Griffith

"brings out the opposing notions of Irish nationality that were being invoked at the time. For Griffith and his nativist *Sinn Fein* attitude, national was the opposite of *foreign*; for Yeats and his group, it was the opposite of *provincial*." ¹³

Leerssen sees this "pattern of conflicting ideas, the clash between national exclusivism and national enrichment" which was even more strenuously argued over "The Playboy of the Western World" as being "of momentous importance in Irish developments." The basic argument which continued into the early decades of the life of the new Irish Free State being "whether or not Irish nationality is to be defined specifically by its differences from the rest of the world, by its particular otherness."

⁹ *Ibid.* 4 February 1905 p.1

Yeats's assertion was clearly untrue as his lecture on Robert Emmet at the Academy of Music in New York on 28 February 1904 was unquestionably political. See Frayne, John, and Johnson, Colton, (ed.) Uncollected Prose of W. B. Yeats, vol.II pp.310 – 327.

¹¹ The United Irishman, 11 February 1905, p.1

Wade, Allan, (ed.) The Letters of W.B. Yeats, p.448. Henceforth Wade Letters.

As well as defending Synge, Yeats was also involved in supporting Hugh Lane, Lady Gregory's nephew, who was attempting to set up a Modern Art Gallery in Dublin and to purchase a number of paintings for this Gallery from an exhibition of modern French art which he had arranged at the RHA. A letter to the <u>Daily Express</u> in January 1905 appealing for money to purchase these paintings carried Yeats's signature as well as those of Lady Gregory, Douglas Hyde, George Russell, Emily Lawless and, rather interestingly, those of Edith Somerville and Martin Ross. This was Yeats's first involvement with the campaign for a Modern Art Gallery that was to bring his name into increasing prominence in the future.

In March 1905 when Yeats's <u>Cathleen Ni Houlihan</u> was played in Cork, "Chanel" of <u>The Leader</u> was in attendance and his review of the play on 18 March demonstrated how the play's reputation was growing:

I have seen "Kathleen Ni Houlihan" three times. . . . Each time that I have seen it my appreciation has increased. I think that, except the "Heather Field" and the "Bending of the Bough", it is the best thing our Irish dramatists have done. A strong political interest for once brought Mr. Yeates (sic.) down from the clouds and made him speak in a symbolism that is intelligible. 14

In September 1905 <u>The United Irishman</u> reviewed what was the first book to be written on Yeats, <u>William Butler Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival</u> by Horatio Sheafe Krans which was published in London by Heinemann. The review makes an interesting distinction between Yeats's qualities as a poet and dramatist and his position in the Irish Literary Revival. Of the former it is positive:

About Mr. Yeats' work there can be no two opinions. He has written some of the finest poetry of modern English-speaking poets, and perhaps less inferior work than any other of the leading poets, while his dramatic, critical, and prose writings generally maintain a high level.¹⁵

However, Krans's views on the revival were not well received as they ran counter to those of <u>The United Irishman</u> which continued to insist that Irish literature's primary function

¹³ Leerssen, Joep, Remembrance and Imagination, p.219-220

¹⁴ The Leader, 18 March 1905, p.55

¹⁵ The United Irishman, 9 September 1905, p.6

was to promote Irish nationalism. Yeats, in its view, had deserted the nationalist cause to concentrate his attention on a non-political art. There was in fact some truth in this assertion as Yeats was sensitive to the need to be politically circumspect at this time in order not to offend Miss Horniman who was providing the funds to maintain the Abbey Theatre. The United Irishman took Krans to task for not understanding the change in Yeats and again showed the divergence that had developed between its nationalist views and those of Yeats. Krans, according to The United Irishman, did not "understand the revival" and was wrong in describing Yeats as "the representative man of the movement". While the revival owed Yeats much he was "the least representative of its well-known men." The review concluded:

The free Ireland of the future will probably think much more of Mr. Yeats' work than the generations of his own time; but the nearest to her heart of his contemporary poets will be Ethna Carbery¹⁷ and William Rooney.¹⁸

In October 1905 the status of the Irish National Theatre Society was changed to a Limited Liability Company. The United Irishman named the signatories who registered the new company as, Lady Gregory, Mr. W. B. Yeats J. M. Synge, Messrs. Fay, Miss Vera Esposito and Mr. Adolphus Wright, and gave prominence to an allegation that this Limited Liability Company had been founded without reference to the Society and had now "entrusted its conscience to Mr. Yeats." That Yeats was the main instigator of the change is clear from a letter that he wrote to John Quinn in September:

If all goes well, Synge and Lady Gregory and I will have everything in our hands; . . . It has been a long fight, but the change could not be made until the old method had discredited itself and until three or four people had got some sort of natural leadership. ²⁰

The change caused a split that was not brought to public attention until <u>The United</u>

<u>Irishman</u> printed a letter from a member of the Society in March 1906. The letter accused Yeats of "having abandoned the fundamental principle of the original society" which was

¹⁹ The United Irishman, 4 November 1905, p.5

¹⁶ See Frazier, Adrian, <u>Behind the Scenes</u>, p.77 for Horniman's admonition to Yeats - "<u>NO POLITICS</u>".

¹⁷ Ethna Carbery was the pseudonym of Anna MacManus née Johnson (1866-1902). She was born in Ballymena, Co. Antrim and wrote poetry and fiction. She founded the nationalist journal the Shan Van Vocht with Alice Milligan in 1896. Her best remembered ballad is "Roddy McCorly".

William Rooney (1873 – 1901) was born in Dublin. He was a journalist and poet and was closely associated with Arthur Griffith, setting up <u>The United Irishman</u> with him in 1899. Yeats dedicated the first edition of <u>Cathleen ni Houlihan</u> (1902) to his memory. <u>Collected Letters Vol.III</u>, p.72

defined as "producing good dramatic performances on broadly-defined national lines" and of now "trying to foist a purely literary movement upon the people of Ireland as a national one." Here again the conflating of literary with nationalistic ambitions showed that the spirit of "the poets of the Nation" was still to be reckoned with in nationalist Ireland. One particular effect of the split was the loss of a number of actors and of the writer Padraic Colum who founded a rival company the "Theatre of Ireland" in May 1906. ²²

A new short-lived nationalist journal made an appearance in September 1905. Founded by Thomas Kettle and Francis Sheehy Skeffington, ²³ The Nationist, set out to be "A Weekly Review of Irish Thought and Affairs" supportive of the Irish Parliamentary Party and of the Language movement and with the objective of fighting "the swamping of the Irish market by English periodicals."24 In its short life, (it survived for less than a year) it published poems by Padraic Colum and Oliver St. John Gogarty, articles by Maurice Joy and Robert Elliott and, rather surprisingly, a review of Yeats's The Secret Rose which had been republished in a Dublin Edition by the new Dublin publishing company Maunsel and Co. in August 1905. The reviewer was in doubt "whether to regard these tales of dhouls and thivishes as the ingenious impositions of a humorous peasantry on the candid mind of a poet or as spiritual experiences lived in London séances, and translated thence to the Sligo coast," but considered that the "book stifles. There is no nobility in these rural debauchees, soul-sick, if you will, for beauty who become the passive sport of creatures of another world that they themselves have summoned forth." The reviewer praised the "stylistic beauties" of the writing, but hoped that "it represents a phase in Mr. Yeats' development that is finally rounded off. After all, Mr. Yeats is over forty, and we are entitled to look for a little maturity and fullness in his thought."²⁵

An article on the Irish theatre in London, published in the same journal in December, had some interesting views on Yeats and Synge. Each of them "in his own work has been merely projecting his own self-consciousness against an Irish background" they "seem as a

²⁰ Wade, Letters, p.461

²¹ The United Irishman, 10 March 1906, p.1

The provisional committee of this new theatre company included Edward Martyn, Patrick Pearse, Seamus O'Sullivan, Maurice Joy and Padraic Colum. See Hogan, Robert, and Kilroy, James, <u>The Abbey Theatre:</u> The Years of Synge, p.102,

Francis Sheehy Skeffington (1878 –1916) Writer, Socialist, Pacifist and Feminist. He was arrested during Easter Week 1916 and shot without trial.

²⁴ The Nationist, 21 September 1905, p.3

first step to have imagined their characters in their own souls, and only afterwards to have fitted them with speech and garments suited to an Irish atmosphere." For this reason, "they have no necessary place in the direct line of evolution of Irish literature. . . . They are, rather, wonderful lonely figures, standing apart from their fellows. . . . As such, they must win the applause of the fastidious, but their work cannot be made a healthy basis for a school of literature in Ireland."²⁶

At the beginning of 1906 Yeats, with Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge, was firmly in control of the Abbey and was also prepared to express more general views on art and in particular on painting. At the RHA in January when he spoke on "The Ideal in Art" the chairman of the meeting R.C. Orpen²⁷ introduced him in words which demonstrate his burgeoning reputation:

They knew the high position he occupied in the world of poetry, and he felt sure that anything he had to say on the subject before them would be worth saying and, furthermore, that it would be well said.²⁸

His involvement with this world of art was enhanced when his name was associated with a campaign for funds for a presentation to be made to Hugh Lane in recognition of his work for the Dublin art scene. Even *An Claidheamh Soluis* was prepared to praise him, albeit as an English language poet, writing:

Unlike most Gaelic Leaguers, we have a sincere admiration for much of the work of Mr. Yeats, Mr. Russell, and the other poets and dramatists of what, without irrelevance, we may call the Celtic Twilight School. We believe that their work is the finest that is being done in our time in English.²⁹

In April 1906 a new revised version of <u>On Baile's Strand</u> was presented at the Abbey to poor houses. "Chanel", writing under the title "The Deserted Abbey"³⁰ in <u>The Leader</u> considered the play to be "weak and without real tragic strength. "The Irish Times also noted that "the general public have accorded scant support to the plays performed from

²⁵ *Ibid.* 16 November 1905, p.145

²⁶ *Ibid.* 21 December 1905, p.221

²⁷ Richard Caulfield Orpen (1863 – 1938) was born in Dublin, educated at St.Columba's College and Trinity College. He was the elder brother of the well-known artist Sir William Orpen. An architect by profession R. C. Orpen was also a successful painter, exhibiting regularly at the RHA.

²⁸ Daily Express, 26 January 1906, p.7

²⁹ An Claidheamh Soluis, 10 February 1906, p.7

³⁰ According to "Chanel" only 62 of the 562 seats were occupied.

³¹ The Leader, 28 April 1906, p.151

time to time by the National Theatre Society,"³² but thought the revised version an improvement on the original as "the action now moves smoothly and the dialogue is full of life and vigour."

While Yeats's plays were receiving "scant support" in Ireland, his books were receiving even less attention. This was compounded by the impact of his ban on having his books sent to Irish papers and journals for review which became very evident when his <u>Poems 1899-1905</u> was published by A. H. Bullen in London and by Maunsel and Co. in Dublin in October 1906. This book included the revised version of <u>On Baile's Strand</u>, along with revised versions of <u>The Shadowy Waters</u> and of <u>The King's Threshold</u>, along with the poems already published in 1903 by Dun Emer Press under the title <u>In the Seven Woods</u>. Poems 1899-1905 was quite successful in terms of sales, selling 800 copies by the end of the year, "the quickest sale I have had" as Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory.

In Ireland the only review published was in Arthur Griffith's renamed paper *Sinn Fein*, which had commenced publication in May 1906 in succession to The United Irishman when the latter had ceased publication in March 1906 following a libel action. Under the title "Yeats of the Dramas" the reviewer focussed attention wholly on the three plays in the book, ignoring the previously published poems. The reviewer considered that Yeats should not be using his plays as "Programmes for his Society" but should allow his work "rise and fall on its own merits." The language of the plays was beautiful but "Mr. Yeats' ideas about drama are of the most superficial and trivial nature possible" and in reference to the revisions from the original versions made by Yeats, the reviewer stated that "the plays under consideration have simply been expanded, and not developed in any way to make them more dramatically vital." Following a critical look at each of the three plays, the review concluded:

Meanwhile, what of Yeats of the lyrics? Alas! I fear he is dead, killed by the whimsical sprite who suggested the National Theatre Society, Limited. We can only bow to the inevitable, and hope that some day Mr. Yeats will return to the

³² The Irish Times, 17 April 1906, p.6

³⁴ Foster R.F., W.B. Yeats: A Life, p.346

³³ This was the first book published by Yeats's sister Elizabeth at the Dun Emer Press in August 1903.

³⁵ A County Limerick priest, Fr. Michael Donor, had taken a successful action against Griffith's paper on the basis of an article which had accused him of objecting to a Gaelic League *Feis* being held on a Sunday.

peaceful lyrical ways of his youth where the Theatre Societies and "Samhains" are not known.³⁶

Almost exactly two months later Yeats was even further distanced, in the eyes of the Dublin communities, from "the peaceful lyrical ways of his youth" when the first production of Synge's <u>The Playboy of the Western World</u> was presented at the Abbey Theatre on Saturday 26 January 1907. As with <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> the story of the reception of Synge's play has been often told³⁷ and many reasons have been given for the riots it caused³⁸, but for our purposes it is the effect that Yeats's defense of Synge had on his relationship with the different communities in Ireland that is important.

The press coverage of the violent reaction to the play was extensive with the Dublin papers and journals of all hues contributing. The Daily Express gave a comprehensive report on the first night of the play which Yeats did not attend as he was lecturing in Aberdeen, but its fairly mild criticism mentioning the "emphatic expression of dissent from the gallery, and which nobody could say was not justified," was far outdone by The Freeman's Journal which entered "a strong protest" against the play calling it "an unmitigated, protracted libel upon Irish peasant men and, worse still, upon Irish peasant girlhood. The Irish Times considered that "Synge had set himself the task of introducing his audience to a realistic picture of peasant life in the far west of Ireland. In an editorial two days later it admitted that Synge's play had "serious faults" in that "some of his language has the material fault of being indelicate and the artistic fault of obscuring the essential realities of the play." However it reserved its harshest words for the objectors writing that "the shriekings of an infuriated mob are not the proper method for rebuking it."

On Wednesday evening Yeats appeared on the stage of the Abbey after the curtain fell on Riders to the Sea, which was sharing the programme with The Playboy, and proposed an

³⁶ Sinn Fein, 24 November 1906, p.3

³⁷ See in particular Hogan and Kilroy's <u>The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge</u> which quotes in detail from contemporary newspaper reports. See also Morash, Christopher, <u>A History of Irish Theatre</u>, pp.130 – 138, and Grene, Nicholas, <u>The Politics of Irish Drama</u>, pp.77 - 109.

³⁸ Nicholas Grene has argued that it was "its refusal to observe the proper separateness" between its "sexual explicitness, its representation of violence and its location in the West of Ireland." *op. cit.* p.86

³⁹ <u>Daily Express</u>, 28 January 1907, p.6

⁴⁰ The Freeman's Journal, 28 January 1907 p.10

The Irish Times, 28 January 1907, p.7

⁴² *Ibid.* 30 January, p.6

open discussion on the play to be held at the theatre on the following Monday evening. During the week, although the disturbances lessened somewhat, further controversy was stoked by the introduction of the police and the trials of those arrested at the earlier evenings, which included Patrick Colum, the father of the poet and playwright, and Piaras Beaslai. Yeats appeared as a witness at the trials introducing himself as "the Managing Director of the Abbey Theatre," but when questioned regarding some words of Irish spoken by Beaslai had to admit, "I am sorry to say I understand no Irish."

Later in the week the newspapers began to give some support to Synge and it was Yeats who seemed to bear the brunt of the criticism over the play. For example The Irish Independent wrote of Synge: "As a dramatist, he is a discovery for which that rather tiresome chatterer and poseur, Mr. William Butler Yeats, takes credit." In criticising the play the paper stated: "The staging of the piece was an act of inexplicable stupidity on the part of the management, on whom the heaviest censure should fall," and that, "Mr. Yeats's vapid heroics notwithstanding," it should have been withdrawn after the first night.

The Monday evening debate was reported in detail in the Dublin papers, and by <u>The Daily Express</u> in particular. Yeats opened the discussion by referring to <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> controversy when "he had been attacked with great violence, and a newspaper then his friend was now his enemy, but no man should be cast down by the enmity of an Irish newspaper." Contributions were then made by a number of other speakers including Francis Sheehy- Skeffington, who principally condemned the introduction of police to quell the disturbances, and Francis Cruise-O'Brien⁴⁷ who "lost no time in letting his opinion be known as anti-Yeats." J.B. Yeats, the poet's father, defended the play as famously described many years later by his son:

My father upon the Abbey stage, before him a raging crowd:

'This Land of Saints,' and then as the applause died out,

'Of plaster Saints'; his beautiful mischievous head thrown back. 48

⁴³ Piaris Beaslai (1881 –1965) Although born and educated in England, he learned Irish on holiday in Kerry, fought in the Easter Rising, was elected an M.P. and subsequently a T.D. He published plays, poems and stories in Irish.

⁴⁴ Daily Express, 1 February 1907, p.7

The Irish Independent, 31 January 1907, p.4 (This paper's title had taken its final form in January 1905.)

⁴⁶ Daily Express, 5 February 1907, p.8

⁴⁷ A well known contemporary journalist and father of Conor Cruise O'Brien.

⁴⁸ From "Beautiful Lofty Things" Allt, Peter, and Alspach, Russell K., (ed.) The <u>Variorum Edition of the</u> Poems of W. B. Yeats, p.577 Henceforth Variorum Poems.

When Yeats replied to the discussion he did so in a forceful manner:

He did not regard himself as a mere entertainer of the public. He was there as a deliberate artist, setting before the public what he believed to be fine works of art, and insisting that they should receive a quiet and respectful reception. (A Voice: "They don't deserve it.") He had been charged with catering for the "garrison," but he reminded his audience that when many so-called Nationalists had their heads bowed in the dust at the time of the Royal visit, it was the author of *The Countess Cathleen* who spoke out against it when their patriots were silent.

Of this speech, which was reprinted in <u>The Arrow</u>, ⁴⁹ Roy Foster has written: "He had never been so deliberately offensive to a Dublin audience." ⁵⁰

While the daily papers were critical of Yeats for choosing to put on the play, and especially for the intervention of the police, it was in the nationalist journals, not surprisingly, that he was most severely criticised. *Sinn Fein* which had described Synge's play as "a vile and inhuman story told in the foulest language we have ever listened to from a public platform," turned, in its subsequent issue, to attack Yeats rather than Synge:

Mr. Yeats has struck a disastrous blow at the Freedom of the Theatre in Ireland.

. . . As to his country, Mr. Yeats claimed on Monday night that he had served it, and the claim is just. He served it unselfishly in the past. He has ceased to serve it now - to our regret. It is not the nation that has changed towards Mr. Yeats – it is Mr. Yeats who has changed towards the nation. ⁵²

An Claidheamh Soluis called the play "a brutal glorification of violence and grossness and the flesh." It then gave its view of the dramatic movement:

The Anglo-Irish dramatic movement has now been in existence for ten years. Its net result has been the spoiling of a noble poet in Mr. W. B. Yeats, and the generation of a sort of Evil Spirit in the shape of Mr. J. M. Synge ...

The author of "Cathleen Ni Houlahan" (sic) at the head of a column of D.M.P. men was a sight which will long haunt the memory with that mixture of the odious and

⁴⁹ This was the third magazine produced by the Irish Literary Theatre, the first number of which was published in 1906.

⁵⁰ Foster R. F., W.B. Yeats: A Life, p.365

⁵¹ Sinn Fein, 2 February 1907, p.2

⁵² Sinn Fein, 9 February 1907, p. 2

the ludicrous which clings to the recollection of the mean deeds of men made for finer things.

Mr. Yeats triumphs for the moment; but he has lost far more than he has gained. As for Anglo-Irish drama – it is the beginning of the end. 53

During the course of the run of <u>The Playboy of the Western World</u> and in its immediate aftermath Yeats's name was before the public as never before. All the Dublin papers, whether unionist or nationalist, as well as a number of the provincial papers carried detailed reports of his speeches from the Abbey stage, his performance as a witness in court at the trials of those accused of creating a disturbance in the theatre, and of the interviews he gave to the press. <u>The Irish Independent</u> even printed sketches of what it called a "Who's Who at the Abbey" including Synge, Yeats, the two Fay brothers, Annie Horniman and Sara Allgood who had played the Widow Quin in the production.

While *An Claidheamh Soluis* was wrong in stating that the production of <u>The Playboy</u> was "the beginning of the end" for Anglo-Irish drama, there is no doubt but that it was a critical point in the perception of Yeats among the Nationalist community in Ireland. His relationship with Arthur Griffith was now one of enmity, reinforced by Griffith's support for John MacBride in the divorce action against Maud Gonne, which was announced in the press on 28 February. In a letter to the Evening telegraph, Padraic Colum wrote that the Abbey management "made a grave tactical mistake in introducing police into the theatre. It was a mistake to associate a theatre whose effort it is to become a National Theatre with police protection." It was, indeed, the introduction of the police that was to be the focus of much of subsequent criticism of Yeats, particularly by D. P. Moran's <u>The Leader</u> which continued to refer to Yeats's action for many years to come. As Declan Kiberd has written:

The introduction by Yeats of the British-controlled police force into the National Theatre was, if anything, even more inflammatory of nationalist opinion than anything contained in Synge's play.⁵⁵

Many modern critics have expressed their views on the reasons for the initial reception afforded to <u>The Playboy</u>. Nicholas Grene has suggested that in the antagonism to Yeats

⁵³ An Claidheamh Soluis, 9 February 1907, p.7

⁵⁴ Evening Telegraph, 31 January 1907, p.2

⁵⁵ Kiberd, Declan, Synge and the Irish Language, p.251

and Synge there was "a subtext of sectarian suspicion" which came to a head in the reception which the "largely Catholic audiences of the Abbey" afforded to Synge as playwright and Yeats as his defender. Joep Leerson saw it as a culmination of the antagonism that had arisen over Synge's earlier play In the Shadow of the Glen caused by differences in the definition of Irish nationalism. The Audience and the Riot" in Interpreting Synge and in his A History of Irish Theatre 1601 - 2000, and points to the fact that the introduction of sixpenny seats in the Abbey in November 1906 had "changed the composition of the audience". The real confrontation, he suggests, was "not between the audience and the stage but between the lower-middle-class, predominantly Catholic nationalist, audience who sat in the sixpenny seats in the pit, and the upper middle-class, predominantly unionist, audience who sat in the three-shilling stalls." Shadow in the sixpenny seats in the pit, and the upper middle-class, predominantly unionist, audience who sat in the three-shilling stalls.

Whatever the causes there is no doubt that the reception of the play marked a key moment in Yeats's reception in Ireland and that Yeats saw the divisions which were now more evident between what he regarded as the nationalist and intellectual communities in Ireland as inevitable. In a letter to John Quinn in New York on 18 February he observed: "It has been for some time inevitable that the intellectual element here in Dublin should fall out with the more brainless patriotic element, and come into existence as a conscious force by doing so." ⁵⁹

In commenting on this letter in <u>Prodigal Father</u>, his biography of J.B.Yeats, William M. Murphy expressed the opinion that "there is no evidence that any new 'intellectual element' rose in Dublin and much that cooperation among groups desiring an 'Irish' drama had been drastically reduced." There was, however, in my view, some small indication that a new "intellectual element" might be on the rise as in February 1907 a very favourable article on Yeats, written by a student named Aedan Cox, was published in the first number of *Hermes*, a new student magazine published by University College, Dublin. The article entitled "A Weaver of Symbols" was written in a flowery undergraduate style but it did say of Yeats: "he is the first Anglo-Irish poet to combine with an imaginative

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⁵⁶ Grene, Nicholas, <u>The Politics of Irish Drama</u>, p.104

⁵⁷ See p. 153.

⁵⁸ Morash, Christopher, "The Audience and the Riot" in Grene, Nicholas, (ed.) <u>Interpreting Synge</u>, p.145

⁵⁹ Reid, B. L., The Man from New York: John Quinn and his Friends, p.48

⁶⁰ Murphy, William M., Prodigal Father, p.318

power of the highest degree a fluent and melodious command of English, as the English poets have used it." Many other writers were invoked in the article; "Blake, Verlaine and Regnier," "D'Annunzio and Verhaeren," "Malory and Spenser." But it was, the writer told us, "as a lyric poet that Mr. Yeats will endure."

Some ground was recovered by Yeats when, in the week following the production of <u>The Playboy</u>, his <u>Cathleen Ni Houlihan</u> was again included in the Abbey programme (not by chance one must assume). Both the theatre critic of the <u>Daily Express</u> and a substantial number of the audience were prepared to overlook the antagonism of the previous week as its review of the play makes clear:

Of the many brilliant gems which Mr. Yeats has presented to the public there are few equal to "Kathleen Ni Houlihan" which concluded the evening's entertainment. It is hard to describe it. It has to be seen and realised to be properly appreciated. It is thrilling, with a sadness throughout it, that grips the senses of the listener, and carries him away from his surroundings to the land of his imagination. . . . There was loud and continued applause at the fall of the curtain and many calls for the author, which Mr. Yeats acknowledged by coming forward and bowing. 62

<u>The Leader</u>, however, was not going to forgive or forget so readily and continued to emphasise how changed, in its view, was the Yeats who had written <u>Cathleen Ni Houlihan</u> and the man who had called the police into the Abbey:

But a country cannot take a criminal libel against Messrs. Synge and Yeats; and when, feeling its impotence before what it considers a painful slander, the country, or some of it howls, the author of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, with a yell of "freedom of judgement," calls in the police; the author of Cathleen Ni Houlihan does more; he points out Mr. Beaslaoi to one of the policeman and causes him to be arrested, and goes and gives evidence in the Court the following morning against the father of the author of "The Land". 63

⁶² Daily Express, 11 February 1907, p.6

⁶¹ Hermes, 4 February 1907, pp. 7-11

⁶³ The Leader, 9 February 1907, p.402 The play The Land written by Padraic Colm had been presented to considerable acclaim at the Abbey in June 1905.

Just a few days later when Yeats took the chair at a debate at the Trinity College Historical Society on the topic "That decadence is the prevailing characteristic of the Modern Stage", he made an appeal to his audience which indicated the trend of his thought following his bruising encounter with the "common people".

You here (added Mr. Yeats) who represent the educated and the cultured class, should support us artists in carrying out our work, and help us to guide the wild horse of the people by putting into the saddle education and culture.⁶⁴

At a lecture before the Trinity College Literary and Historical Society in April, Francis Sheehy- Skeffington, as quoted in *Sinn Fein*, gave a convincing description of one section of the Irish theatre audience's contemporary perception of the Abbey Theatre:

It appears to me that the misfortunes (!) of the Abbey Theatre Company arise from the fact that its leaders, and in particular Mr. W. B. Yeats, never made up their minds clearly whether to appeal to the Irish people in general or to a select few. It is curious to imagine Mr. Yeats or any of the N.T.S. stroking their chins, contemplatively, and wondering whether they should try to please a Dublin audience or their own ideas. It has never struck us that they tried to fulfil any requirement, save that of the artistic sense, although it is true that they have not invariably succeeded in accomplishing the latter, but that they attempt to do is patent. 65

Yeats may have considered that Griffith was now his "enemy" but in the pages of *Sinn Fein* there was still some support for him, particularly from its theatre critic W.E. Fay who wrote on 6 July that he had no hesitation in "affirming my belief that the spirit of Mr. W. B. Yeats is nearer the real heart of Ireland than all the Moores and Mangans, MacCarthys and Fergusons, who ever strutted their weary hour upon the stage." Another correspondent using the initials TGK disagreed. While admitting that Yeats "has in his lyrics touched and given expression to that which Mr. Fay indefinitely phrases as 'the real heart of Ireland," the correspondent continued: "There is no gainsaying the fact that Yeats

⁶⁴ Daily Express, 14 February 1907, p.2

⁶⁵ Sinn Fein, 6 April 1907, p.1

could never have done the work which he has done but for the efforts of his predecessors Moore, Mangan and Ferguson.⁶⁷

Yeats was continuing to project a nationalist image in his public appearances as he had for the previous twenty years, while at the same time, bolstered by his growing acceptance in England and in America, he was now outgrowing the limits being placed on him and his work by the propaganda driven vision of his nationalist compatriots.

It is ironic that on 16 March 1907, at this key point in Yeats's reception in Ireland, one of his original mentors in the ways of nationalism, John O'Leary, died at the age of seventyseven. That Yeats did not attend his funeral could be seen as a further distancing of the poet from the nationalism of his youth. Terence Brown comments on the significance of this non-attendance by quoting Yeats's own reason that he "shrank from seeing about his grave so many whose Nationalism was different from anything he had taught or that I could share" and commenting:

It is very clear from this pained reflection that Yeats believed that those who had attacked Synge and his drama were just the people who would publicly mourn O'Leary, while contravening in their lives and actions all the nobility of spirit and action he had espoused.

Yeats, according to Brown, was developing a new Irish sociology which, for the first time in his writings took account of a new class arising in Ireland "pragmatic, anxious, modern, informed by the easy suasions of vulgar propaganda . . . and an unheroic national feeling."68

One member of that class would have been D. P. Moran who objected to Yeats's presence at what The Leader called a "God save the King" dinner in Dublin in November of that year. ⁶⁹ Yeats wrote to the paper defending his attendance as his presence was an "accident". His letter concluded:

I have long since ceased to be an active politician, but that makes me the more anxious to follow with all loyalty the general principles defined by Mr. Parnell and never renounced by any Nationalist party. He directed Ireland on the occasion of a

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 6 July 1907, p.3

⁶⁸ Brown, Terence, The Life of W.B. Yeats, p.170

Royal visit in 1885 or 1886 to pay no official honour to any representative of English rule until a sufficient National independence had made possible a new treaty. I could have slipped away and so avoided attack, or won a little vain glory by making some protest, but I chose rather to follow those old rules of courtesy in which, as Balzac has said, we are all Conservatives.⁷⁰

Yeats received support in the following week when Moran, rather generously, printed a letter from a correspondent using the pseudonym "Idolator" who wrote:

I would quite absolve Mr. Yeats for not sitting down, and so raising a scene, or running out the back way. But what Mr. Yeats did - and what was most creditable, though he does not say so - was to introduce a claim for the crying necessity of a Catholic University, in his after-dinner speech, replying to the toast of "The Guests". This, we must admit, was a nervy proceeding. As a kind of apology Mr. Yeats claimed the irresponsibility of the true Bohemian and Artist, but poor Sir Charles Cameron⁷¹ spent the most agonising eight minutes of his life listening to Mr. Yeats' speech – wondering whether he ought to pull him up, as out of order, or let him go on – though many of the guests were annoyed and a few delighted.⁷²

The relationship between George Russell and Yeats had deteriorated since Russell had allied himself with the Theatre of Ireland, the group that had seceded from the Abbey in May 1906.⁷³ When Russell's <u>Deirdre</u> was staged by this group Yeats was quoted in *Sinn Fein* as saying of the play," I watched it with growing rage."⁷⁴ *Sinn Fein's* critic who described Yeats as "usually an acute enough critic in other respects" then gave what he considered to be Yeats's real reason for disliking Russell's play. It was because

AE has naturally and easily in his play "Deirdre" struck unmistakably that note of heroic simplicity which Mr. Yeats has been striving all his playwriting life to attain to, and has so far failed.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 30 November 1907, p.226

Sir Charles Cameron was born in Dublin in 1830 in a wealthy Protestant family He studied geology, chemistry and medicine and was chief medical officer of health to Dublin corporation as well as Professor in the Royal College of Surgeons. He was knighted in 1885 and made a freeman of Dublin city in 1911.

⁷² <u>The Leader</u>, 7 December 1907, p.244

The deterioration in their relationship was compounded by disagreements over Russell's book of poems By Still Waters which had been prepared for publication by Yeats's sisters' Cuala Press in August 1906 without Yeats's knowledge having previously vetoed their publication. See Murphy, William Martin, Prodigal Father, p.304.

⁷⁴ Sinn Fein 21 December 1907, p.3

At the beginning of 1908 Yeats's work in the theatre was under further scrutiny caused by the Fay brothers decision to leave the Abbey. On 13 January the Evening Mail reported under the heading "A Serious Rupture" that "the internal dissention produced by the staging of *The Playboy* has at length developed into what is described as a mutiny among the principal members of the historic company." The report continued: "It is understood that the final rupture was occasioned by the policy pursued by the directorate in shelving plays that drew audiences and in insisting upon the performance of others towards which the public evinced no great liking." Yeats responded by letter on the following evening enclosing, as he said, "a paragraph written for a forthcoming number of *Samhain*." The paragraph, which was published in the November 1908 edition of *Samhain*, pointed out that Fay was leaving to go "to some other country where his exquisite gift of comedy and his brain teeming with fancy will bring him an audience, fame, and a little money." Yeats then issued a challenge in response to the Evening Mail's accusation of plays being shelved:

I challenge you to appoint three persons chosen from the literary men of the city, who shall invite rejected dramatists to send them their plays. If they find amongst the plays rejected by the Abbey Theatre during the last twelve months any play which they consider worthy of production we will produce it for three nights at the Abbey Theatre and allow the public to judge.⁷⁷

The challenge was accepted and a reading committee of D.J.O'Donoghue, Dr. George Tyrrell from T.C.D. and Francis Sheehy-Skeffington was proposed. Yeats, however, had his own view and in a letter, again to the <u>Evening Mail</u>, wrote: "I have asked Dr. Sigerson President of the National Literary Society, if he will ask his Society to make the necessary arrangements for the judgement of the plays." At this a correspondent to the <u>Evening Mail</u> wrote of Yeats, "not content to be the challenger, he thinks he should have the right also to name the weapons." Yeats again replied: "I will object to no one and suggest no one." The <u>Evening Mail</u> had the final word on 20 January, writing that editorial discussion on the Fay's departure which was regretted, "is now useless."

⁷⁵ Maxwell, D.E.S. Modern Irish Drama, 1891-1980, p.61

⁷⁶ Evening Mail, 13 January 1908, p. 3

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 14 January 1908, p. 3 ⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 16 January 1908, p. 3

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 18 January 1908, p.3

On 21 January the <u>Irish Independent</u> published what it saw as the reasons for the secession of the Fays:

They asked that plays by new authors should be produced, that plays which had been pronounced unsuitable by people and Press should at once be withdrawn and shelved, that the procedure and rules which had governed the Society at its start should be maintained. These suggestions had not been acted on, and after long deliberation, reluctantly and sadly, they tendered their resignation.⁸¹

In support of this argument the <u>Irish Independent</u> gave some interesting statistics to show that the "Abbey Theatre as at present constituted, may be said to exist largely for the exploitation of the plays of Mr. W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory." The figures were:

Since its opening, just a little over three years ago, plays produced by the directors total 24 - Yeats 8, Lady Gregory 12, and Synge 4. Boyle is responsible for 3, Colum 1, Wilfrid Blunt 1, Maeterlinck, produced by Mr. John Payne, 1, and absolute outsiders, Miss. Letts⁸² and Mr. Fitzmaurice⁸³ one each.

The article then commended Yeats on the work he had done to date and appealed to him to reinstate the Fays and win back Boyle so that he would "have the gratification of seeing the great national movement in which he is so passionately concerned become a live force and a permanent institution in the land."

Some months later Yeats finally explained the reasons for the Fays departure in a letter to the Evening Mail in response to statement by Fay to the Chicago Tribune, and repeated in the Evening Mail, that he had left because "the directors had discouraged the work of young writers." Yeats's letter read in part:

Mr. Fay's reason for leaving us was precise and entirely different. Having quarreled with the company on tour, he wrote to us that he would resign if we did not dismiss the company, and tell its members to re-engage personally with him. Our refusal was the reason of his resignation.⁸⁴

Another letter, on the same page, supported this version of events, pointing out that

81 The Irish Independent, 21 January 1908, p.8

84 Evening Mail, 21 May 1908, p.5

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 20 January 1908, p.2

Winifred Letts (1882 – 1972) was born in Co. Wexford, educated in England and at Alexandra College, Dublin. She wrote plays for both the Abbey and the Gate theatres as well as poetry.

⁸³ George Fitzmaurice (1877 – 1963) was born near Listowel, Co. Kerry and lived in Dublin. He wrote short stories and numerous plays, only two of which were produced at the Abbey.

the directors have for the first time acquainted us with the true facts concerning the resignation of Mr. W.G. Fay, and allowed us to see the proposals made by him on the occasion. The acceptance of the proposals of Mr. W. G. Fay by the directors would have led to the dissolution of the company, and we, the undersigned, take this opportunity to say that we certainly would not have rejoined under Mr. Fay's proposed conditions.

Sara Allgood, Arthur Sinclair, J.M. Kerrigan, Maire O'Neill

Yeats was now in a very strong position at the Abbey and aware that the next play scheduled for production, Norreys Connell's <u>The Piper</u>, 85 had the potential to cause more audience trouble, went on the offensive. On 11 February he gave what <u>The Irish Times</u> described as "a somewhat remarkable speech", to a meeting of the National Literary Society using the occasion to vindicate his position and that of other authors connected with the Abbey Theatre. His plays, he said, were written to express his own feelings "without thought of anybody else". The *bourgeoisie* in Ireland which by comparison with the *bourgeoisie* of France "had no past, no discipline, no good qualities", were "undisciplined and untrained" and "were therefore essentially immoral". He continued:

At this moment this bourgeoisie were attacking every artist who was sincere, or who was doing unconventional work, and in doing that it was merely doing what everyone said it would do, and what every bourgeoisie had done in this world for the last 200 years.⁸⁶

This polemic engendered a surprisingly limited response. Two letters were printed on the following day; one complaining of Yeats using the term *bourgeoisie* without defining what he meant by it, and the other suggesting the Yeats should give up being a critic "He is not a critic. He does not know what the word means."

Norreys Connell's play did cause some disturbance in the theatre on 13 February, its first night. The <u>Irish Independent</u> appealed to Yeats to withdraw it, but he persevered and appeared on stage before a matinée performance on 15 February to describe the play as a

Norreys Connell was the pseudonym of Conal O'Riordan who became managing director of the Abbey in 1909. His play The Piper is concerned with a group of armed peasants and a piper who capture a British officer but are surprised and shot. The piper figure who is also shot as he waves a green flag is the hero. It was the depiction of the peasants as ignorant, argumentative and unheroic that was likely to cause offence to the audience.

⁸⁶ The Irish Times, 11 February, 1908, p.7

satire "upon the nine years of the Parnellite split, years of endless talk, endless rhetoric, and futile drifting; years which were taken out of the history of the nation and made nothing of." He then invoked Parnell, whom he saw in one of the characters in the play, seeing "that angry heroic man once again as he saw him in his boyhood, face to face with Irish futility." ⁸⁸ The applause which his remarks garnered saved the day and the play received "on the whole a favourable reception." According to Peter Kavanagh, writing in 1950: "This was the final defeat for the Abbey Theatre audience and for the Dublin press. Obviously Yeats could not be intimidated." ⁸⁹

A different contemporary view of the Abbey, and of the concept of "Art for Art's sake" was expressed in a letter on 22 February from a J. L. Fawsitt to <u>The Peasant</u>, ⁹⁰ requesting support for the foundation of a Waterford Literary Theatre Society. Fawsitt's letter demonstrated that the old argument that art should be propagandist was still alive:

The Yeats' school of writers has failed in Dublin, because it has not associated itself with the life of the people, instead, it has been busying itself about unicorns and stars, and preaching the, at present, illusive gospel of "Art for Art's own sake." . . . The failure of Mr. Yeats to reach the hearts of the people is one of the best arguments I can place before you to show that the movement, if it is to succeed and become an inspiration for the people must be propagandist at first . . . [plays should] preach to all Irishman the lessons of practical patriotism – of self-reliance – and arouse them to a due sense of the duties they owe to their race and land. 91

In the 22 February 1908 issue of *Sinn Fein* under the title "The Poet at the Looking Glass", a very critical review of Yeats's recently published small book of essays <u>Discoveries</u>, 92 which largely dealt with theatrical and dramatic matters, was written by Seamus O Conghaile. O'Conghaile was a frequent contributor on, and supporter of, Irish literature in

⁸⁸ The Freeman's Journal, 17 February 1908, p.9

⁸⁹ Cited in Hogan, Robert, and Kilroy, James, The Abbey Theatre, p. 216.

91 The Peasant, 22 February 1908, p.3

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 12 February 1908, p.5

The Peasant was a nationalist weekly which commenced publication as The Irish Peasant in February 1903 in Navan. It had been embroiled in controversy with the Catholic Church and had ceased publication in December 1906. It was revived under its new title The Peasant in February 1907.

⁹² It was unusual for books published by The Cuala Press, as this book was, to be reviewed in Ireland as the books were expensive and not sent out to Irish papers for review. O'Conghaile must have purchased his own copy.

Sinn Fein, but this was one of the most severe criticisms of Yeats's work to be published in the Irish press:

I have read this book with sorrowful anger. But that it bears the name of an author to whose literary eminence we have all done homage, I should be hard set to find a reason for its publication, it reads so like the trivial tattle of a soul, so self absorbed as to think the meanest of its thought-impulses worthy of record. . . . My irritation, my impatience with this stuff – I am compelled to use a vulgar word – arises from my appreciation of Mr. Yeats' beautiful prose in such works as "The Secret Rose", when the Hanrahan stories were as yet unspoiled by the half-door dialect of Kiltartan. . . .

My anger with this latest work of Mr. Yeats' is half a holy anger, as against such things as are said in the first essay, its despicable allusions and comparisons, and half a sorrow, that a writer of his genius is becoming so immersed in vain trivialities. His affectations of style, once so charming and impulsive and individual, are becoming stereotyped.⁹³

O Congaile then gave some examples of "one particular and over-harassed kind" of stereotype.

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"I think it was that day, but I am not sure . . . " (page 3.)
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"Is not," he continued, "that irritation of sense pardonable, which suffers so much in an evening's reading by Mr. Yeats' unfortunate defect of memory?"

When Yeats's The Golden Helmet was produced in March there was again some severe criticism from Sinn Fein which considered that the play "might perhaps be better described as a succession of spoken tableaux," and called Yeats's treatment of his subject "puerile". 94 By contrast The Freeman's Journal considered the play to be

extremely interesting, and, perhaps important, because it shows Mr. Yeats as a practical dramatist at last, telling a story in direct, plain language, presenting incident after incident, and leading up to a happy yet important climax; all the poetic mysticism has disappeared.⁹⁵

[&]quot;Somebody, not I think a priest . . ." (page 4.)

[&]quot;He gave me a little pellet, if I am not forgetting . . ." (page 25.)

 ⁹³ Sinn Fein, 22 February 1908, p.3
 94 Ibid. 28 March 1908, p.3

⁹⁵ The Freeman's Journal, 20 March 1908, p.10

Other papers were almost unanimously critical with The <u>Evening Mail</u> objecting to the language of the play being "turned into the strange sing-song of Kiltartan." ⁹⁶

Sinn Fein had yet another opportunity for attacking Yeats later in the year when it reported on an address entitled "The Abbey Theatre, its Aims and Work" given by Yeats to the British Association in Dublin on 4 September. The address, which was reported in detail in The Freeman's Journal on 5 September, described how the Abbey Theatre came into existence and the central role played by Yeats and Lady Gregory:

Presently with the help of a very able actor, who had lately left them, they got together a group of young men and young women here in Dublin who were prepared to give their entire leisure to the creation of an Irish Theatre. ⁹⁷

An article signed 'S' in *Sinn Fein* objected to this description of how the Abbey Theatre came into being stating that its immediate precursor the Irish National Theatre Society

was started, altogether without any assistance from Mr. Yeats, by the Messrs. Fay and a group of actors ... not one of whom are now members of the Abbey Theatre Company. When Mr. Yeats joined them, owing to his previous reputation as a Nationalist, and his position as a man of letters, they felt highly honoured, and very foolishly, as subsequent events proved, elected him President of their Society. Then commenced his "glorious" career, during which he has succeeded in driving out, one after the other, all the most talented members of the original group. And he was enabled to do this simply and solely through means of the money of a wealthy foreigner.⁹⁸

Yeats received support from P.S. O'Hegarty⁹⁹ who wrote to *Sinn Fein* asking for "explanation and proof" for the statements made in the article which he regarded as "an accusation against the greatest living Irish poet of having been insincere in his Nationalism and in his work in the dramatic movement." Arthur Griffith's curt response was: "The facts are as stated by 'S'."

⁹⁶ Evening Mail, 20 March 1908, p.2

⁹⁷ The Freeman's Journal, 5 September 1908, p.9

⁹⁸ Sinn Fein, 19 September 1908, p.3

Patrick Sarsfield O'Hegarty (1879 –1955) was born in Cork where he entered the Post Office service. He worked in London from 1902 to 1913 and was involved in many Irish associations. A writer and reviewer from the nationalist perspective, he frequently reviewed Yeats's work, occasionally using the Irish version of his name P.S. O'hEigeartaig. He was secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs from 1922 to 1944.

¹⁰⁰ Sinn Fein, 26 September 1908, p.1

As 1908 ended Yeats's contemporary reputation in Ireland was now primarily as a playwright of dubious achievement (he was still remembered as the skilled lyricist of his youth). Apart from the attention of <u>United Ireland</u> to <u>Poems 1901</u>, and of *Sinn Fein* to <u>Poems 1899 – 1905</u>, the Irish public had seen no reviews of the poetry he had published since The <u>Wind Among the Reeds</u> in April 1899. It is remarkable that the appearance of his eight volume <u>Collected Works</u>, the final volume of which was published in December 1908, was not noted in any of the Dublin papers or journals. ¹⁰¹ He did however have one great success on the stage in November 1908 when Mrs. Patrick Campbell came to Dublin to play in his <u>Deirdre</u>. The reviews were very positive. On 10 November the <u>Evening Mail</u> gave as its opinion that "the passion and pathos of the play have never previously been realised as they were last evening." ¹⁰² And the same paper's review of the play on the following evening must have been sweet music to Yeats's ears:

From the merely technical point of view this play is a masterpiece of dramatic workmanship. The conflicting characters and their conflicting motives are clearly shown in half-a-dozen lines of expository dialogue, and from that the action moves straightforward, simply and passionately to an extraordinary high-pitched lyric close. . . . In a word Mr. Yeats has at last secured an adequate production for a real dramatic poem and the effect is superb.

Mr. Yeats defies criticism in this piece, which, to be duly appreciated, requires complete submission to the poet's mood. 103

The other Dublin papers were similarly in praise of both of Mrs. Campbell's acting and of the play. Hogan and Kilroy described the production of <u>Deirdre</u> as "the event of the year for the Abbey." ¹⁰⁴

Yeats was continuing to attempt to build bridges with the Irish language movement and was achieving some success, as his attendance at a meeting of the Dublin University Gaelic Society on 17 November demonstrated. Speaking from the same platform as Hyde, Sigerson, Mahaffy and MacNeill, Yeats's contribution was praised in *An Claidheamh Soluis*:

They would, without doubt, not have been sent for review, and being a very expensive set of books, not many would have been sold in Ireland, but the Dublin literary world would certainly been aware of an edition of collected works from so well known a figure as Yeats. Allan Wade in his bibliography quotes P. S. O'Hegarty as estimating that a maximum of 20 sets were issued by Maunsel in Dublin. Wade p.90

¹⁰² Evening Mail, 10 November 1908, p.6

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 11 November 1908, p.2

¹⁰⁴ Hogan and Kilroy, The Abbey Theatre, p. 230

Frenchmen and other foreign critics have accounted him the most consummate of our modern writers in English. We may not all agree with his theories on art and literature, but we cannot forget that he has spent his life in an endeavour to free our ideas from the trammels of foreign thought, or that it was through his writings many of us made our first acquaintance with our early traditions and literature. He has never ceased to work for Ireland, and at Trinity he appealed to the young men to enlist in the intellectual service of their country. "It was the want of intellect in Irish public life," he said, "which was now stirring the minds of the young, and which was bringing Irish thought to be occupied with the Irish language itself." ¹⁰⁵

The death of John M. Synge on 24 March 1909 after a long illness did not mark the end of Yeats's difficulties with those who had criticised Synge's plays. The Leader continued to take every available opportunity to refer to Yeats's defense of The Playboy and attention was also being drawn elsewhere to the dramatic rivalry between the Abbey and those who had seceded. An article written by Susan Mitchell¹⁰⁶ in *Sinn Fein* on 8 May following the success of a production of Seamus O'Kelly's The Shuiler's Child by the Theatre of Ireland with a much praised performance by Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh gave one hurtful opinion, coming as it did from a friend of the Yeats family:

Mr. Yeats you have been a fool. Here is an actress born in Ireland and the Abbey Theatre has no claim on her. I grind my teeth for you, Yeats, with your boneless tragedians. Why did you let Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh go? . . .

Oh Yeats, Yeats! With your broken-kneed heroes and barging heroines, even your drawing-room Deirdre, tender, appealing, complex as she was, did not save you, who, with all your talk of tradition, have only succeeded in producing on Kiltartan French and pidgin English some few passably competent comic actors and actresses. I feel very sad for you and for your loss in the possibilities that your futile dictatorship flung away, certainties now, and you have lost them. . . . Make no mistakes. The Theatre of Ireland can act; they have got the Abbey into a corner. It is for you, Yeats, to make the next move if you can. Let it be a worthy move. 107

It is for you, Teats, to make the next move if you can. Let it be a worthy move

Yeats, however, was not prepared to make any moves to heal the split.

¹⁰⁵ An Claidheamh Soluis, 28 November 1908, p.9

Susan Mitchell (1866 – 1926) was born in Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrum. She was friend of the Yeats family, having stayed with them in London from late 1897 to late 1899. A writer of satiric, religious and patriotic verse, from 1901 she acted as assistant editor to The Irish Homestead and was later sub-editor on The Irish Statesman, then edited by George Russell.

In May 1909 Bernard Shaw's play The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet was refused a licence to open in London. As the English censorship law did not apply in Dublin, Shaw offered the play to the Abbey and his offer was accepted with the play scheduled to open on 25 August. The Dublin newspapers gave extensive coverage to the Abbey's decision, helped considerably by the fact that Yeats and Lady Gregory were releasing statements to the press, including letters being exchanged between them and the Lord Lieutenant's office in Dublin Castle. The fact that the Abbey was in conflict with the Castle appealed to the nationalist community, and to ensure that there was no public disturbance which could give support to the Lord Lieutenant's office, Yeats and Lady Gregory, through the influence of AE, "got at Griffith" to ensure that Sinn Fein did not stir up trouble. The play opened as planned on 25 August preceded by Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan (which seemed always to be presented if any nationalist inspired trouble was anticipated) to a packed house and was extensively reviewed. The outcome was a great success for Yeats as even An Claidheamh Soluis praised him and Lady Gregory for "making a fight for Irish freedom from an English censorship."

During the early months of 1910, Yeats lectured at number of venues in Dublin in preparation for a series of fund raising lectures he was preparing to deliver in London in March. These lectures which were reported widely in the Irish press gave him a forum for promulgating his views on the theatre and the arts in general and were generally well received. However one lecture given under the title of "Ireland and the Arts" at the Gaelic League headquarters in Dublin drew some criticism from *Sinn Fein* on 19 February, particularly as he chose to speak not on the intended subject but on his one-time companions at The Cheshire Cheese in London:

With velvety softness of voice, in tones as of the wonder-world whence he derives the inspiration of his muse, Mr. Yeats unbosomed himself on Sunday night of the burden of mysticism which the fate of his old associates in the Rhymers' Club had engendered in his soul.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Sinn Fein, 8 May 1909, p.1

¹⁰⁸ See Frazier, Adrian, Behind the Scenes, p.229.

¹⁰⁹ See letter from AE. to Lady Gregory quoted in Foster, R.F., W. B. Yeats: A Life, p.605.

¹¹⁰ An Claidheamh Soluis, 28 August 1909, p.9

¹¹¹ Sinn Fein, 19 February 1910, p.1

At the discussion stage we were told that "Mr. Yeats and the general character of his writings came in for a larger share of criticism, curious to say, than the subject of his address." The fact that Yeats had not spoken as promised on "Ireland and the Arts" had annoyed some of his audience at the meeting, particularly an Alaister Maguire, who expressed his annoyance in a letter to *Sinn Fein* some weeks later. This letter showed the depth of antagonism to Yeats in certain sections of the nationalist community; an antagonism based on the old argument that his work was not Irish and not supportive of the nationalist cause:

Mr. Yeats makes no secret of the fact that he is a dreamer of dreams. He tries to excuse it on the grounds that it is done "to sweeten Ireland's wrong." He even tries to give colour to this pretension by a profound respect for Ireland's ancient myths and sagas. He openly uses the Celtic hero tales as a shield to shelter his mysticism and symbolism. But the fact that they are paraded in pseudo-Celtic dress does not make mysticism the less mysticism nor change the character of symbolism. It only makes the necessity of guarding against them the more imperative. It becomes, then, the duty of criticism to remind Mr. Yeats and the public who read him that he is not a national poet, but a national menace. . . . He has failed to strike the pure Celtic note. He is a mystic and a Decadent. Disastrous results can only follow if Ireland admits him as a leader in a literary revival. 112

Yeats had received some support from a correspondent with the initials E.B. in the previous week's edition of *Sinn Fein* who felt that "Ireland can abundantly afford Mr. Yeats and his idiosyncrasies; she can afford to be proud of him without endorsing his every view." This was an opinion not widely shared as a letter from an "Antimystic" on the same page of *Sinn Fein* demonstrated. The letter deprecated Irish poets who

following the example of Mr. Yeats, have abandoned the path trodden by the poets of a former generation, and, instead of the fine rousing poetry which the latter gave us, poetry instinct with the National spirit, which fired the enthusiasm of its readers and left them better patriots than it found them, have substituted a mawkish mysticism and a spurious sentimentality which is rather calculated to depress National patriotism than to raise it.

113 *Ibid.* 26 February 1910, p.4

¹¹² *Ibid.* 5 March 1910, p.1

When Yeats lectured on "Ireland and the Theatre" at the Ard Craobh of the Gaelic League on 3 March both <u>The Irish Times</u> and <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> again reported on the lecture in some detail, and each informed its readers that the vote of thanks was proposed by "Mr. P. H. Pearse". <u>The Irish Times</u> on this occasion devoted an editorial to the lecture in which it stated:

But Mr. Yeats reserves his fiercest attack for politics. The Nationalist movement, he tells us – and we suppose that he would include the Unionist movement – is destroying the national imagination. The process began with the Young Ireland group, and has been going on ever since. . . . Not only our politics, it would seem, are nation-killing. We must not combine for social purposes. We must feed our highly individualised imaginations at the expense of our industries. ¹¹⁴

The editorial disagreed fundamentally with Yeats. His talk was considered as "neither commonsense nor artistic truth. The Ireland which he sees in his visions would never create a theatre or produce a literature."

The renamed nationalist weekly the <u>Irish Nation and Peasant</u>¹¹⁵ also had some difficulty with Yeats's lecture. Describing it as being "emphatic as to the distinction between art and propaganda," the report continued:

But what does Mr. Yeats mean by propaganda? This he did not make clear. His own "Cathleen Ni Houlihan" is propaganda in the wider sense of the word, while it is art in a very real sense. 116

According to the report other questions were raised by Yeats's lecture: "Mr. Yeats spoke of the appeal which works of art make to the unsophisticated peasant. Would all work which Mr. Yeats considers art appeal to the peasant?" And further, what sort of writing would be consider could be described as "mere journalism" on which he was "severe"?

However the harshest criticism of this lecture came again, not surprisingly, from *Sinn Fein*, a criticism which demonstrated the increased strength of contemporary nationalism. Yeats had been for de-Davisation in the 1890s but that was no longer acceptable. *Sinn Fein* pronounced:

¹¹⁴ The Irish Times, 5 March 1910, p.6

Formed by the amalgamation of <u>The Peasant</u> and <u>The Nation</u> it commenced weekly publication in January 1909, but only survived to December 1910

¹¹⁶ Irish Nation and Peasant, 12 March 1910, p.8

Mr. Yeats has now discovered in the Young Irelanders a species of obscurantists. He was, therefore, according to himself, wrong when he wished to be counted one with Davis, the High Priest of Young Ireland. We suggest Mr. Yeats is wrong now; we suggest that instead of finding himself he has lost himself; and we read in his utterances not the illumination of a mind on which a great truth has dawned, but the attempts of a clever man to persuade himself that he has not strayed from the right road. 117

The article then went on to quote with approval from Yeats's early article on Samuel Ferguson, published in the <u>Dublin University Review</u> in 1886, and contrasted it favourably with "the columns of lectures which he has recently poured forth in Dublin and London." Finally, under the heading "The False Yeats," it stated:

There is a bundle of affectations and vanities waiting upon Ireland now pretending to be W. B. Yeats, and much astonished that Ireland will not recognise it. But these vanities and affectations are not the man from whom we have quoted, and when that man waits on Ireland again, as we trust he soon will, Ireland will receive him . . . with a welcome.

Ironically Yeats was one of the speakers, along with Douglas Hyde and Dr. Mahaffy, a few days later at a public meeting held under the auspices of Dublin University Gaelic Society to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Sir Samuel Ferguson. The Irish Times reported Yeats as saying that "he knew Sir Samuel Ferguson when he was a boy, and when Ferguson was a very old man, and he had twice visited him." Yeats also spoke of the influence that Ferguson had on his work and the work of others

when they were laying the foundation of the literary revival in Ireland. He put into the spirit of the nation work thoroughly national, but more literary; work that did not belong to a party, that was not rhetoric, that was in the great path of literature.¹¹⁸

The reports of these lectures, and the controversies engendered, meant the Yeats's name was frequently in the press during these early months of 1910. The response to the views he was now expressing continued to be mixed. It is clear that at this mid point in his career no consistent approach to the man and his work had been arrived at in either the unionist or

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¹¹⁷ Sinn Fein, 12 March 1910, p.1

¹¹⁸ The Irish Times, 16 March 1910, p.5

nationalist press in Ireland. He still was able both to offend and appeal to both traditions as was demonstrated when the Abbey failed to close on the death of King Edward VII in May 1910. Miss Horniman wrote to <u>The Irish Times</u> that she was "both disgusted and angry" that the theatre did not close and threatening "unless proper regard is shown in the press by the directors my subsidy to the National Theatre Society will cease immediately." When the Theatre Manager issued a statement expressing regret that the theatre did not close "due to an accident," The Leader saw another opportunity for attack:

The poet Yeats was getting some praise for having kept the Abbey Theatre open on Saturday, when lo! a protest and a threat came from the English lady who subsidises the Abbey and the author of "Kathleen Ni Houlihan" causes an apology to be sent to the Press! When Irish National opinion objected to the "Playboy" atrocity, Mr. Yeats called in the police. When Miss Horniman objected to the Abbey having been open on Saturday Mr. Yeats apologised. . . . O soulful Mr. Yeats! 121

Notwithstanding this sort of criticism, Yeats was still able to provide the occasional quotation to please the Nationalist community in Ireland as his response to a direct question put to him by Robard Ua Floinn for <u>The Irish Nation and Peasant</u> during a visit in June 1910 by the Abbey players to London demonstrated:

Mr. Yeats, your dislike of political obsessions in the theatre does not mean, I suppose, that you have ceased to be an Irish Nationalist?

"In our theatre", he said, "we have nothing to do with politics. They could only make our art insincere. But, speaking for myself, I cannot see how the Ireland I wish for can come about without a national Government.¹²²

The same paper published a profile of Yeats as one of a series of "Dramatic Impressions" in September. The profile considered that the six poetical dramas produced to date lacked "much dramatic possibility" while the two prose dramas, <u>Cathleen Ni Houlihan</u> and <u>Where There is Nothing</u> were regarded as "good plays, which read well and play well." The

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 13 May 1910, p.7

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ The Leader, 21 May 1910, p.315

¹²² The Irish Nation and Peasant, 11 June 1910, p.5

writer, P.S. O'Hegarty, ¹²³ having remarked that Yeats "had written little great poetry since the 'Wind Among the Reeds'," ¹²⁴ concluded his article:

In his determination to stick to Ireland, to write his poetry for her, his plays for her, to work for her and within her four seas, he gives an example which it is to be hoped other men of genius will follow. And the "Ireland of the Coming Times" and a goodly portion of his contemporary Ireland will always be grateful to him for it.

Even <u>The Leader</u>, at this time, was still prepared to print the occasional positive comment on Yeats with which, as noted previously, its editor would not necessarily agree. For example when Shane Leslie¹²⁵ reviewed <u>A Reader's Guide to Irish Fiction</u> by Father Stephen Brown S.J. he disagreed with some critical views on Yeats expressed by the author, particularly regarding <u>The Secret Rose</u>, as "wild formless tales" and <u>The Celtic Twilight</u> as "the talk of half crazy peasants". In Leslie's view "Yeats' writing in verse and prose has attracted the sympathy of more living men of literature to this country than any writer we can boast of." He continued:

Perhaps it would be easiest to clench (sic) the matter by saying that the Yeats' rejection in his own country is due to the inability of his fellow-countrymen to distinguish between realism in literature and the symbolism of which Mr. Yeats is the most striking exponent (ranking with Maeterlinck in Belgium and Paul Verlaine and Huysmans in France), and there let it rest. 126

In August 1910 Yeats was awarded a Civil List pension by the British Government, something that was guaranteed to create tensions with his nationalist critics. The Leader was particularly vituperative, and over the next few years took great satisfaction in addressing him as "Pensioner Yeats". This was compounded from April 1911 when a controversy developed in Sligo regarding religious bigotry among Protestant businesses in the town. A member of Sligo Corporation, Alderman Collery had written to The Irish Independent regarding a comment in an editorial in the ultra-Protestant local paper The Sligo Independent, which Collery interpreted as meaning that for Catholics "religious hatred in Ireland was by no means a thing of the past." Collery's letter which was reprinted

 ¹²³ Using the Irish version of his name P.S. O'hEigeartaig.
 124 The Irish Nation and Peasant, 24 September 1910, p.1

Sir Shane Leslie (1885 – 1971) was born at Castle Leslie Co. Monaghan, educated at Eton and at Paris and Cambridge universities. He became a Catholic in 1908 and wrote novels, literary studies and an autobiography.

in <u>The Sligo Times</u>, contained one sentence which obviously caught the attention of D. P. Moran:

I should like to know, for instance, how many Catholic young men there are among the clerks, apprentices, and assistants of Messrs. Pollexfen and Jackson, Lyons and Co., Harper, Cambell and Co., and several others.¹²⁷

Moran noted the name Pollexfen, and, compounded with his criticisms of the Abbey touring in England with "The Playboy of the Western World," wrote in the April issue of The Leader:

By the way, the firm of Pollexfen, which figures in Alderman Collery's list of bigot firms, has the distinction of being related to a poet, for Mr. W. B. Yeats is a Sligo Pollexfen on the maternal side. Does that throw any light on the hawking of "The Playboy" for the delectation of the Big Brother?¹²⁸

A few weeks later the attack was extended to incorporate <u>The Playboy</u>, the Pollexfen connection, the Civil List pension, and the reputation of the Persse family for proselytising in Galway:

It was bad enough to have the "Playboy" in Ireland, but hawking it in England seems to us unpardonable. But we are scarcely surprised. The directors of the travelling auxiliary to the carrion crow brigade in England are W. Pollexfen Yeats and Lady Gregory. Lady Gregory is one of the Persses of Galway, one or more of whom, we are informed, made a name for proselytising in bygone days: it is only fair to state that we understand Lady Gregory herself never went in for the soup and salvation business.

. . . Mr. W. Pollexfen Yeats is an ex-extremist, and now, we understand, a pensioner in the pay of the British Government: his kinsfolk in Sligo, the Pollexfens, are traders that recently we had occasion to show up for the exclusion of Papists from their commercial staff. 129

The tone of this criticism continued, growing more and more strident over the next few years. At every opportunity <u>The Leader</u> referred to Yeats as "Pollexfen Yeats" or "Pensioner Yeats".

¹²⁶ The Leader, 29 October 1910, p.253-4

The Sligo Times, 25 March 1911, p.5

¹²⁸ The Leader, 1 April 1911, p.150

When the Abbey toured America in the autumn of 1911 and was subjected to considerable criticism and attack from the Irish American and Catholic communities there, The Leader was happy to relay these attacks to its readers. The views of the Jesuit, Father Kenny, were particularly noted when, after a savage attack on Synge's plays in the weekly magazine America, he expressed the view that "in vileness of caricature and bitterness of anti-Catholic animus, even Synge must yield to Yeats" and continued in reference to Where there is Nothing which was included in the American programme, "Yeats is more dangerous than Synge." When Yeats held a meeting in the Abbey on his return from America, Moran continued in the same vein:

There are a large number of old age pensioners in Ireland, but they must not be confused with able-bodied Pensioner Yeats – Pollexfen Yeats of Sligo. He held a meeting of his sect at the "cosy little house in Abbey Street" on Thursday of last week. He told his sect not to believe "one solitary word" of what they saw in the newspapers about the reception the Abbey players were getting in America. We are being made rather familiar with that sort of thing – don't believe facts; believe me. If you go to Mayo, don't believe your eyes; believe Synge. The Pensioner is, of course, a pure-souled patriot: in payment for his patriotism Emmet got the rope, but Pollexfen Yeats, the author of "Cathleen Ni Houlihan", gets three pounds a week from the British Government.¹³¹

While Moran's <u>The Leader</u> was engaged in this continual sniping at Yeats, the Dublin daily papers were giving considerable coverage to developments in the Abbey Theatre in the early months of 1911. The introduction of a number of screens designed by Gordon Craig for the Abbey was the subject of reports in the <u>Evening Mail</u> and the <u>Evening Telegraph</u> in January. These reports were based on interviews given by Yeats who was enthusiastically promoting this new departure in stage setting. Lady Gregory's <u>Deliverer</u> and a revival of Yeats's <u>The Hour Glass</u> were the productions for which the screens were first used, and both received detailed reviews in <u>The Irish Times</u> and <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>, the new technique being thought particularly apt for Yeats's play. Yeats was also promoting a new method for speaking dramatic verse and at a *causerie* which he held in London he was reported in <u>The Irish Times</u> as saying that "in the West of Ireland there still

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 3 June 1911, p.365

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 18 November 1911, p.326

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 25 November 1911, p.348

survived a remnant of the great popular culture founded on song or spoken traditional literature, once existing all over the world." ¹³³

While Yeats was now primarily active as a playwright, it was the quality of his verse that was continuously emphasised in reviews of his plays. A review published in <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> of <u>The Land of Heart's Desire</u>, which was playing in Dublin for the first time that February, is a good example of the contemporary perception of an Irish audience to his work:

It is given to us in beautiful verse, full of colour and shadow and wonderful images, the magic which Mr. Yeats is so potent a master of. As a poem it is full of loveliness, and its symbolism shadows the longing of all hearts for the beautiful things, and the young and gracious days. But is its dramatic value quite the same if we may venture to criticise at all? Frankly we think it is not.¹³⁴

<u>The Irish Times</u> was also impressed by the play which, it wrote, had previously "never been seen in Ireland" and looked back to the time of its composition:

In the days when he was still a true and natural poet, and a seer without affectation, Mr. W. B. Yeats wrote a little play called "The Land of Heart's Desire". 135

The review recounted the plot of the play in some detail and concluded that it "will need to be seen many times before its full significance is grasped." However the overall sense of the review is one of regret that the man of the theatre had replaced the earlier Yeats, the lyric poet.

It is not surprising that Yeats's poetry, particularly his more recent compositions, were receiving little attention in Ireland. The ban which he had placed on sending his books for review in Ireland meant that the Fisher Unwin <u>Poems</u> which went through five editions between 1899 and 1908, as well as <u>Poems 1899 – 1905</u>, and the <u>Collected Edition</u> of 1908, all of which were being read and reviewed in England, were being published without any recognition in Ireland. The Yeats known to the Irish communities was a poet who had killed his lyric gift. He was now regarded as a man of business, a playwright, a

¹³² Evening Telegraph, 9 January 1911, p.5

The Irish Times, 17 February 1911, p.5

The Freeman's Journal, 17 February 1911, p.9

Chapter 6 1911 - 1917

In March 1911 a new and important literary journal appeared on the Irish scene. The Irish Review was a "monthly magazine of Irish Literature, Art & Science" which had been founded "to give expression to the intellectual movement in Ireland." By contrast with the other Irish journals which had been paying attention to Yeats over the years this new journal was not interpreting him for a community of political nationalists as had United Ireland, The United Irishman, or Sinn Fein, nor was it primarily aimed at the educated, Catholic, University College, Dublin based, readership of the New Ireland Review which had ceased publication with its February 1911 issue. However as Johan Norsted noted of The Irish Review in his biography of Thomas MacDonagh, "though more literary in content, it must have captured much of the New Ireland Review's readership." This was particularly true of its early issues as the New Ireland Review's natural successor Studies did not commence publication until March 1912.

In its first number The Irish Review stated that it "belongs to no party", and that it would "note current affairs in their historical rather than in their political aspect." Its ambitions were literary rather than political but over the period of its existence, from March 1911 to November 1914, it did provide a forum for publication to many writers associated with the nationalist movement. It was edited initially by David Heuston⁵ who was succeeded by Padraic Colum and later by Joseph Plunkett and it published poetry, prose, criticism and drama, some of it of high quality, from George Moore, Padraic Colum, James Stephens, John Eglinton, Thomas MacDonagh, Roger Casement, Forrest Reid, Lord Dunsany and Patrick Pearse. It also published poems by Peter MacBrien, a poet whose work Yeats was to reject for publication by Cuala Press⁶ and who subsequently reviewed Yeats's books frequently from a nationalist and Catholic perspective.

The Irish Review, March 1911, p.1

⁶ Unpublished letter from W.B.Yeats to Peter MacBrien, undated but written from Stone Cottage in the hand

of Ezra Pound, and signed by Yeats. (copy in author's possession)

² Norstedt, Johann, <u>Thomas MacDonagh: A Critical Biography</u>, p.96

³ The Irish Review, March 1911, p.1

⁴ *Ibid.* p.2

⁵ Professor David Heuston of the College of Science was Thomas MacDonagh's landlord at Grange House Lodge in Rathfarnham and acted as first editor as well as guaranteeing the magazine financially until June 1913, when it was purchased by Joseph Plunkett. See Norstedt, op. cit. p. 96 "One evening the sanguine householder announced to the four of us (Colum, Mary Maguire, James Stephens and MacDonagh) that he had the establishment of an Irish monthly in mind." Mary Maguire married Colum in 1912.

In April 1911 The Irish Review printed a review of the Cuala press edition of Yeats's The Green Helmet and Other Poems which had been published in December 1910. The reviewer described Yeats as "the only poet writing in English who can make his poetry effective in the theatre," and then, having recounted what it called "the fable of the play," continued:

as a stage play, it has the defects of its great qualities. It is too full for the one act form. It is doubtful if one could make such crowded experience clear to the mind of an audience seeing the play for the first time and knowing nothing of the fable.

The reviewer then expressed disappointment with the lyrics that make up the rest of the book, comparing them unfavourably with earlier poems such as "The Folly of Being Comforted" or "Never Give All Your Heart" (sic). The reviewer had some perceptive comments to make on the more recent verse, suggesting that Yeats had moved away from the influence of the native Irish tradition in his poetry and was now coming under the influence of an aristocratic European tradition as exemplified by Nietzsche. He was also becoming "more aristocratic in his attitude" a characteristic which was associated "with something that has come into the poet's spirit – the consciousness of haughty isolation."

An article in the same journal in September 1911 gave a contemporary view of Yeats's drama. "Mr. Yeats has yet to convince us that he can create character." In a typical Yeats play the audience was confronted by "one or two related personalities" who "have a deadly mannerism – they make continuous declarations about their lives." This was insincere as "the life within is the last thing that one can speak of with conviction." The article then went on to consider Yeats's essay "Synge and the Ireland of his Time" noting initially that the "hideous phrase that disfigures the essay" in the Cuala Press edition was not allowed in the American magazine The Forum where the essay had been printed in August 1911 and where the reviewer first read it. 10 Having got this criticism out of the way, the essay was commended for "its splendid austerity" and because a number of the statements made in it describing contemporary Ireland "will remain in our minds."

⁷ The Irish Review, April 1911, p. 100

⁹ The Irish Review, September 1911, p.326

⁸ This was in fact true as Yeats had been reading Nietzsche in some detail since 1902 when he received a three volume edition of his works from John Quinn. See Collected Letters, Vol. III, p.313.

When Synge and the Ireland of His Time was published in The Forum in August 1911, the final paragraph in section 1 which describes how Synge had told Yeats of a young doctor who had difficulty in not "jumping on to a seat, and pointing out in that howling mob those whom he is treating for venereal disease," was omitted.

In December 1911 The Irish Review published Yeats's short poem "On Those who Dislike the Playboy" a publication which was surprising in a journal which would undoubtedly be read by many of those who had been opposed to the original production of The Playboy almost five years previously. This was followed in January 1912 by a long critical article entitled "The Early Work of Mr. W.B. Yeats" by Forrest Reid. Reid identified another European, Count Villiers de L'Isle Adam the author of Axel, as an influence on the early Yeats. Yeats's poem "When You are Old" was also compared with Ronsard, but was considered "infinitely finer": "Behind the simple words there is something of the mystery of life itself, a depth and gravity that are characteristic of all Mr. Yeats's best work, whether in verse or prose." The Secret Rose with its "curious personal atmosphere" was judged to be Yeats's greatest prose book. Reid then made a comment on Yeats's work which continues to echo in Yeats criticism to this day, most famously by Hugh Kenner in his essay "The Sacred Book of the Arts" originally published in 1958, 12 but also by John Unterecker and more recently by Hazard Adams: 13

What we mean by style is, I suppose, only the more or less perfect expression of a writer's individuality, and the wonderful uniformity of spirit which reaches from book to book and draws together all Mr. Yeats's work, making of it one great whole, is largely the result of the tremendous strength of his personality. He is always himself. No one has ever worked less blindly, or with a more jealous care for his art; and no one has more often re-written his work with the happy effect of bringing it nearer and nearer to his own innermost vision.¹⁴

Reid quoted the short eight-line poem "The Pity of Love" describing it as "an expression of a moment of pure rapture, too brief and too intense to permit any artificial breaking up into stanzas." He then continued:

There is something extraordinarily right about this poem, so un-Swinburnian, so wholly free from rhetorical ornament, from conventional poetic diction. It is directly expressive. Everything that is not absolutely essential has been removed. What is left is the very soul, the very essence of poetry.

Forrest Reid (1875-1947) was born in Belfast where he lived and published numerous novels as well as critical work. This essay was incorporated into Reid's book, <u>W.B.Yeats: A Critical Study</u>, published in

¹² Unterecker, John, (ed.) Yeats: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 10-22

¹³ See Unterecker, John, <u>A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats</u> and Adams, Hazard, <u>The Book of Yeats's Poems.</u>

Such praise combined with an astute reading of his work must have been sweet to Yeats's ears coming from an Irish publication and can only have encouraged him towards attempting to rebuild his relationships with his Irish nationalist readers from whom he had become somewhat distant in the years after The Playboy difficulties. This effort towards the re-building of bridges became evident when his poem "At the Abbey Theatre" with its opening line "Dear Craoibhin Aoibhin, look into our case", was printed on the front page of The Irish Review in December 1912. Douglas Hyde's response, which was printed in the following month, again on the front page of the journal, demonstrated his wish to treat Yeats's overture positively while not conceding anything in his cultural nationalist beliefs:

Good Friend, and old companion man-at arms,
Who struck shrewd blows beside me long ago,
The Protean crowd perplexing you, I know
Shares common hopes with me, common alarms.
Therefore we fare together, and Circe's charms
On us are plied in vain. "Make friends not foes"
Is still our password, yet we too aim blows
When blows at us are aimed, and quick blood warms.

A narrower cult but broader art is mine,
Your wizard fingers strike a hundred strings
Bewildering with multitudinous things,
Whilst all our offerings are at one shrine.
Therefore we step together. Small the art
To keep one pace where men are one at heart.¹⁵

In the following month's issue an article by Ernest A. Boyd, ¹⁶ on "The Abbey Theatre" projected the, by now common, criticism that Yeats was primarily a lyric poet and not a

¹⁵ *Ibid.* January 1913, p. 561

¹⁴ The Irish Review, January 1912, p.531

Ernest Boyd (1887 – 1946) was born in Dublin and educated in Germany and Switzerland. He worked for The Irish Times from 1910 to 1913 and then entered the British consular service, resigning in 1919. He settled in New York in 1920 where he became friendly with the poet's father John B Yeats. His Ireland's Cultural Renaissance was first published in 1916 and then revised and republished in 1922. He was a constant critic of t he Abbey Theatre.

playwright as "his plays which are always beautiful poems, but too often lose their effect in the theatre." However, he continued:

Kathleen Ni Houlihan, of course, is an exception. The poignant tragedy of this appeal to nationality must always be irresistible. But the influence of Yeats has been indirect rather than direct. He succeeded in inspiring the Irish dramatic movement with something of his lofty idealism, and in keeping alive the desire for art at once simple and sincere. He has not, however, been able to give it the imprint of his mystic symbolism, which has been replaced by the realism, which grows even more pronounced, of another literary generation. 17

Almost coincidental with this article the Weekly Freeman also printed a long article on "The Abbey Theatre: Its History and Mystery" written by W. J. Lawrence 18 who had served as secretary of the Abbey Theatre Company, and had strong, and not particularly favourable, views of Yeats, both as dramatist and theatre manager, which were expressed in such phrases as:

- the possession of unswerving purposefulness, combined with high idealism and a passion for dictatorship, made Mr. Yeats leader of the movement almost by divine right.
- his lack of knowledge of ways and means, his unworldliness and his tendency to flout at public opinion.
- Mr. Yeats's tendency to a masterful wrongheadedness.
- in accordance with a mania for revision which obsesses Mr. Yeats.
- "The Arrow" in which he shot fruitlessly at those who had exercised the function of legitimate criticism.
- Mr. Yeats's defects as a dramatist lie in his lack of interest in normal emotions. He reminds us of that visionary whom he sketched in "The Celtic Twilight" insomuch as he dwells on "thoughts which have evidently a special value to his mind but are to other men the counters of an unknown tongue."
- Mr. Yeats, to his credit be it said, has not taken advantage of his position to give excessive prominence to his own plays. Rather the contrary. But he has permitted

¹⁷ The Irish Review, February 1912, pp. 628-634

¹⁸ W. J. Lawrence (1862 -1940) was born in Belfast. Although he had little formal education he became a well respected drama critic in London and Dublin.

his friendship for Lady Gregory to blind his judgement. . . . [and she] has been given a prominence in the Abbey repertory utterly out of keeping with her merits or her popularity.¹⁹

Another new journal made its appearance in March 1912, and uniquely, this particular journal, <u>Studies</u>, is still being published today. A Jesuit periodical which described itself as "an Irish Quarterly Review of Letters, Philosophy and Science", it emanated from University College, Dublin, and at its foundation was edited by an editorial committee under the chairmanship of Rev. Thomas A. Finlay S.J. who was Professor of Political Economy at the University. In an early number <u>Studies</u> published an article by William Boyle²⁰, who was by then a well-known playwright, on "Some Types of Irish Character" which included some thoughts on Yeats. As Boyle knew Yeats well, his assessment gives an interesting perspective on the poet at this time. The article dealt briefly with some of the younger writers of the day and then continued:

But Mr. Yeats they look up to, and Mr. Yeats said often that "stick to the life that you know" is the right principle. One only regrets that the life Mr. Yeats does *not* know is the life on which he most persistently dogmatises. . . .

True "Kathleen Ni Houlihan" was written before the "Abbey" was born, and nothing so good as "Kathleen" has since appeared there. Mr. Yeats was not made by the "Abbey" – the creator not being the creature – and, at times, I cannot help thinking his directorship has deprived us of work he has not accomplished.

Boyle praised a number of younger poets, particularly Padraic Colum and continued:

But we don't want Yeats imitators. One Yeats is enough for Ireland. Mr. Yeats is himself; great in himself, and as himself, entirely individual. From an Irish point of view – at least, from a modern Irish point of view – he is less national than Moore, less national than Goldsmith, far less national than Mangan. He resents, above all, being copied. Why then copy his ideas? I think I know why some do this. They do it because they're intimidated - they're afraid of being called ignorant.²¹

Sinn Fein continued to pay some attention to Yeats, but was in the main concentrating its attention on the political situation which had been radically changed when the Parliament

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⁹ Weekly Freeman, 7 December 1912, p.11

william Boyle (1853 – 1923) was born in Co. Louth. He worked in the customs service and wrote a number of plays for the Abbey of which the best known is probably "The Mineral Workers" (1906).

Act of 1911 removed the power of veto from the House of Lords and the prospect of Home Rule for Ireland again became a reality. In a review of Lennox Robinson's play <u>Patriots</u>, which had been published by Maunsel in Dublin, it was even prepared to take a more balanced view of The Countess Cathleen than had been the case thirteen years previously:

Mr. Yeats was the first to suffer for the Right to Bully Ireland when years ago he quarreled with the critics of "The Countess Cathleen". In that quarrel no doubt he was right. In the play he had depicted with perhaps the sublimest of his poetry the chafing of the old fiery pagan spirit against the new Christian ideal of duty. The critics did not like the suggestion that there was ever a pagan in Ireland. It did not satisfy them that Mr. Yeats was on the side of the good: they objected to him having villains in the plot at all – unless, of course, they were British.²²

The Irish Times was also demonstrating a favourable disposition towards Yeats. During the early months of 1912 it was prepared to take even his spiritualist interests seriously. When he lectured at the United Arts Club in January on "A New Theory of Apparitions", the paper not alone reported on his lecture in considerable detail but also devoted an editorial to it, writing that "in this matter Mr. Yeats must be treated with respect." The editorial continued:

Mr. Yeats has all the instincts of the true "Spiritist". His poetry and his prose suggest, and sometimes create for us, a world beyond the veil. He lives on the borderland between the unseen and the seen. We are not surprised to learn that he believes in "mediumship" and other psychic phenomena. We should be deeply surprised if he did not.²⁴

The changes, or one could say maturing, of Irish society these years was again evident in an <u>The Irish Times</u> editorial later in January when news came of the arrest of the Abbey players in Philadelphia on a charge of "producing an immoral play":

We prefer, with Mr. W.B. Yeats, to find the explanation in the fact that literary and dramatic opinion in Irish America, or at least in that class of Irish America which the "Playboy's" critics represent, is twenty years behind Ireland. It is still living in

²² Sinn Fein, 10 August 1912, p.2

²⁴ The Irish Times, 13 January 1912, p.6

²¹ Studies, June 1912, p.232.

²³ This is not particularly surprising as Roy Foster notes the great interest that Irish Protestants had in occultism. See "Protestant Magic" in Foster's <u>Paddy and Mr. Punch.</u>

the epoch of Boucicault. It is not capable of reading an inner meaning into a play of this kind.²⁵

The Irish Times had now become Yeats's primary medium for his occasional forays into contemporary issues although he still maintained his ban on having his books sent to it for review. 26 Apart from The Irish Review he was getting very little exposure in the nationalist press. He was no longer contributing to Sinn Fein, as he had been accustomed to do, and was only mentioned in The Leader when some excuse for an attack was identified. The other nationalist daily papers The Freeman's Journal and The Irish <u>Independent</u>, as well as the Unionist <u>Daily Express</u>, were content to report briefly on the occasional lecture or the performances in the Abbey where Yeats's plays were now less frequently being played. In fact political events and industrial unrest dominated press coverage during the years building up to the start of the First World War in 1914.

In April 1912 a third Home Rule Bill was introduced in the House of Commons and was welcomed in Dublin by a national convention at which "the largest Dublin crowd since Parnell's funeral filled O'Connell Street, addressed from five separate platforms."²⁷ However in Ulster the new Bill received a hostile reception and resistance among Unionists intensified. As a result "the vast majority of Ulster Protestant adult males pledged themselves in September 1912 in the Solemn League and Covenant, . . . to repudiate the authority of any parliament forced upon them."²⁸ The situation was further intensified when in January 1913 the Ulster Volunteer Force was established by Edward Carson and James Craig, to be followed in November of that year by the founding of the Irish Volunteers in Dublin. In parallel with this political activity, the Catholic Church was also flexing its muscles. A vigilance campaign against "evil literature" was instituted to actively oppose the importation of newspapers, magazines and books that were regarded as immoral. This campaign proved divisive as the weekly paper The Irish Catholic of 4 January 1913 published its editorial supporting the campaign under the headline "The Evil Press"29 while a letter in the monthly The Irish Protestant argued that the propaganda was

²⁵ *Ibid.* 20 January 1912, p.6

²⁶ The Irish Times had published an extensive literary page on Fridays under the title "Books of the Week" from June 1901. Reviews of Yeats's books were noticeably absent.

²⁷ Maume, Patrick, <u>The Long Gestation</u>, p.122

²⁸ Lee, J.J. <u>Ireland 1912 – 1985</u>, p. 6

²⁹ The Irish Catholic, 4 January 1914, p.5

"solely against the sale of Protestant literature in any shape or form." In January 1913 The Freeman's Journal printed a report of books being publicly burned in Terenure. Further disturbances were created through resistance to the Women's Suffragist movement as concern was expressed that "a Suffrage Bill might delay the Home Rule Bill." 31

These events and the developing industrial unrest which was to come to a head in the Autumn were dominating press coverage in Dublin, but space was still found for the ongoing controversy over the building of a gallery to house the Hugh Lane paintings. It was this controversy which reintroduced Yeats as poet to readers of The Irish Times when, on 11 January 1913, his poem "The Gift" was published and accompanied by an editorial which stated:

It needed courage for an Irishman who is also a Nationalist to write these lines. Nationalist preachers have delivered themselves *ad nauseum* upon the Irish duties of the Unionist upper class. Our landlords and big merchants are ever being told that they might lead the nation if they would but fall in with the political opinions of the majority – a remark which is at the same time both paradox and platitude. But note the craft of Mr. Yeats, which one must admire even more than his courage. He reminds our aristocracies of birth and wealth, not of their duties but of their privileges.³²

A letter that Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory on 14 January shows that the publication of the poem and the accompanying editorial were initiated by Yeats and is a very good example of how Yeats was able to make use of the Dublin press to support his cause: "I gave the poem on condition that they did the article and Hone³³ wrote it. I suggested though on enquiry the lines of it."34

³⁰ The Irish Protestant, May 1913, p.39

Maume, Patrick, The Long Gestation, p.123

The Irish Times, 11 January 1913, p.6. When subsequently published in the Cuala press pamphlet Poems Written in Discouragement, 1912-1913, the poem was given the cumbersome title which it still retains; "To a Wealthy Man, who promised a Second Subscription if it were proved the People wanted Pictures."

³³ Joseph Hone (1882 – 1959) was born in Killiney and educated in Wellington College and Cambridge. He was primarily a literary historian, writing two biographies of Yeats, one published in 1915, and the second in 1942. He was a founder of Maunsel and Co. the Dublin publishing company, and wrote leading articles for The Irish Times.

³⁴ Torchiana, Donald T. and O'Malley, Glenn, (ed.) "Some New Letters from W.B.Yeats to Lady Gregory" from A Review of English Literature, July 1963, p.16.

A responding letter in <u>The Irish Times</u> on 13 January is particularly interesting for the assumption made by the writer that Yeats belongs to the leisured, wealthy class which he was criticising in his poem. It also shows that the writer had read that poem carefully:

Mr. Yeats, in his characteristic and, in its way splendid, poem betrays the inner spirit of the dilettanti who, in the pursuit of personal aims and professional interests, champion the cause of the fine arts in Dublin. To him and to his school the world is still in the making; we are in the Quattrocento still and the ideals of a Florence awakening from the heavy sleep of feudal privilege and popular debasement, must be our only guide in solving the questions of our own fuller day. Mr. Yeats draws all his mental nourishment from the dry breasts of Greece, whose views of men and things please him for the simple reason that they equate with the prejudices of the class to which Mr. Yeats presumably belongs.

. . . Paudeen and Biddy count now as never before, and their "pennies" and "half-pennies" are a better security for any worthy cause than the support of the few superior people whose generosity marks rather their egoistic sense of exclusive gifts than any real sympathy with the beautiful and the true. ³⁵

William Martin Murphy, the proprietor of <u>The Irish Independent</u>, was totally opposed to the building of a new gallery, considering that there was plenty of room in the National Gallery for Lane's paintings, and that the money for a gallery could be better spent alleviating the lot of Dublin's poor. Murphy had been a frequent contributor to the argument against the proposed new gallery both in his own paper and elsewhere. In a response to Yeats's poem he wrote to <u>The Irish Times</u>: "If 'Paudeen's pennies,' so contemptuously poeticised a few days ago in the Press by Mr. W.B. Yeats, are to be abstracted from 'Paudeen's' pocket, at least give him an opportunity of saying whether he approves of the process or not." 36

Yeats's poem received a hostile reception from Arthur Griffith's *Sinn Fein*, which printed it in full in its issue of 18 January and described it as "a pitiful thing" suggesting that Yeats had "outlived his genius". It then continued:

Mr. Yeats' contempt for the coppers of Paudeen and Biddy only applies to the Art Gallery. He is himself a pensioner on Paudeen and Biddy – for every Paudeen and

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³⁵ The Irish Times, 13 January 1913, p.6

³⁶ *Ibid.* 18 January 1913, p.8

Biddy in the country have to pay their coppers yearly to make up the British Government pension of £2 17s 81/4d, a week for which the author of "Kathleen Ni Houlihan" deserted that lady's cause.³⁷

Padraic Colum came to Yeats's defence in the following week's issue of *Sinn Fein* regretting the space the paper gave to "the belittling of an illustrious Irishman" and praising the work that Yeats had done for Irish literature. Griffith would have none of this and responded that by accepting a British government pension, in his view "the Mr. Yeats of Mr. Colum's imagination has set an example of national immorality to the young men of his country which no invocation of the memories of his genius and his patriotism can be permitted to palliate." In Griffith's view the Yeats whom he knew and admired, and "who wrote at our suggestion the ending of "Kathleen ni Houlihan" ³⁹as it is now played to impress further on the young men of Ireland the lesson that if they would see their country crowned again they must be prepared to forfeit everything – is no more" He concluded:

We can assure Mr. Colum that the Mr. Yeats of 1900, the Mr. Yeats who had no mercy for those who made terms with the Strangers in Ireland's House – the Mr Yeats who wrote so fiercely in our columns against those Irish who paid "ignoble loyalty" to Queen Victoria or her government – is as utterly unrelated to the Mr. Yeats who has secured a weekly pension from the Strangers who have "driven Ireland out of her house" as the wild dog is to a Duchess's pug.

Griffith could no longer be described as "the editor of one friendly paper" as he had in Yeats's letter to A. H. Bullen in April 1903. The Yeats who was his friend was no more: "We do not belittle the memory of that true poet and - with all his affectations – good Irishman. Peace to his ashes."

While arguments over the Lane pictures, and particularly over the choice of a site for a gallery to house them, dragged on for many months with letters appearing in the Dublin papers almost daily, it was remarkable how frequently in this and in other contexts, Yeats's name was now appearing in <u>The Irish Times</u> throughout 1913. On 24 January this closer association between Yeats and the predominantly Protestant, Unionist, community which

³⁷ Sinn Fein 18 January 1913, p.1

³⁸ *Ibid.* 25 January 1913, p.1

³⁹ In *Sinn Fein* there was no consistency in the use of "ni Houlihan" or "Ni Houlihan", sometimes one was used, sometimes the other.

represented that paper's dominant readership was underlined at a public meeting of Irish Protestants which was held in Dublin "to protest against the introduction of religious differences into party politics." Yeats was present and proposed the third resolution passed by the meeting. His contribution was reported most fully, not surprisingly, by <u>The Irish Times</u> under the sub-heading "Mr. Yeats and Persecution":

Mr. W.B. Yeats, who was cordially greeted, said that this was the first time he had ever spoken to Irish Protestants. He was a Protestant – of a sort (Laughter). He had done all his work among Irish Catholics. If there was intolerance in Ireland, he knew it; if there was tolerance in Ireland he knew it. . . . He believed on that subject they should speak with entire sincerity, without any thought of political expediency. There was intolerance, and because there was intolerance he had asked to have committed to him the third resolution which stated: -

That this meeting subscribes to the view that the clear verdict of the history of civilised nations in modern times is that the responsibilities of self-government and the growth of political freedom are the most powerful solvents for sectarian animosities.

He was an Irish Nationalist, because he believed since he first gave thought to these things that no country could prosper unless the greater portion of its intellect was occupied with itself. . . . In no country were the best minds intolerant. It was the mediocre minds that were intolerant. (Applause) They were asking nothing but an arena in which the best might come out, and the best might rule. The intolerance which he dreaded was the intolerance that existed among Catholics and Protestants against ideas, against books, against European culture, and he saw nothing that would put down that intolerance, but the obtaining of that arena that would teach them how to sift out the best men. (Applause) In North East Ulster they did not know it, they believed quite honestly that they would be persecuted. There would be no persecution. (Applause) Bring the various elements together in a Legislature, set them to do business, and then the common interest would come. (Applause) Ten years of common business and common interests would destroy what had mostly been sterile party contest. (Hear, hear)⁴⁰

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⁴⁰ The Irish Times, 25 January 1913, p.9

In this speech, to the applause and affirmation of his audience, Yeats had affirmed, in his own way, his membership of the Irish Protestant community, but he had also been careful to emphasise his closeness to the Catholic community and his continuing allegiance to his nationalist politics. It is clear that while he was moving ever closer to the Protestant community, he was still concerned to retain his links with the Catholic nationalist community from which he had received his early support and which he was again reaching occasionally in the pages of <u>The Irish Review</u>, having, in that journal at least, put behind him the controversies over <u>The Playboy</u>.

<u>The Irish Times</u> was not so sanguine as Yeats was about tolerance in a self-governing Ireland. In an editorial on 7 February 1913 it made a judgement which was to ring true of the independent Irish Free State created some nine years later:

There can be no doubt . . . that, if an Irish Parliament sat tomorrow, it would contain a strong party in favour of a censorship, not only of the theatre, but of books, and a censorship of the most drastic kind.⁴¹

That this was not a surprising judgement at the time is evident from the fact that the Irish Catholic papers in particular, as has been noted, carried frequent reports of the activities of anti-immoral literature campaigns which were actively encouraging the introduction of a strict censorship of imported magazines and newspapers which did not conform to the conservative views, expressed in matters of morality, by the Catholic Church. Arthur Griffith had his own particular views on how to deal with the immoral literature threat: "So long as the English language is the language of this country, 'evil literature' will arrive by every boat and find a market."

As the controversy over the site for a new modern art gallery continued, Yeats became personally involved, writing to <u>The Irish Times</u> on 18 March 1913 in support of the bridge site proposed by the architect Edwin Lutyens. This letter drew a colourful response from one correspondent to the paper:

We find it difficult to believe that Sir Hugh Lane, and, still more, Mr W. B. Yeats, are so "dull of soul" that they would deprive themselves and all the Dublin people

⁴¹ Ibid. 7 February 1913, p.6

⁴² Sinn Fein, 8 February 1913, p.5

of the evening western view over the Liffey. Perhaps Mr. Yeats has become so enamoured of "Gordon Craig screens" that he would screen even a sunset!⁴³ This reference to Gordon Craig was no doubt inspired by a lecture which Yeats had given "The Theatre and Beauty" on 18 March in the Central Hall, Westmoreland Street where an exhibition of pictures of scenery and stage design by Gordon Craig had been mounted. In the course of this lecture he had availed of the opportunity of attacking vulgarity in the theatre which he said was due to "the tendency all over the world to educate men whether they liked it or not, and when they had educated a man against his will, he revenged himself by liking all the worst things."44 He also gave his opinion of the Dublin newspaper critics: "Now and again there were intelligent criticisms in the Dublin papers. They showed that the writer had studied the work, but the ordinary critic could not write those articles." Both these comments indicate his growing disillusionment with his Irish public. However, as ever, he tried to counter the negative impact of what he had said as, when interviewed after this lecture for The Freeman's Journal by Francis Cruise O'Brien, he was reported as being much appreciative of that paper's criticism "on the occasion of the first production, a couple of years ago, of Gordon Craig scenery at The Abbey Theatre."45

On 5 April the death of Edward Dowden, Professor of English in Trinity College since 1867, and long time friend of the poet's father, was reported in all the Dublin papers. The Irish Times, true to its new found enthusiasm for Yeats, printed an editorial on 28 April under the title "A Suggestion to T.C.D." in which it recommended Yeats as Dowden's successor under "a readjustment of the terms of the Professorship". The editorial continued:

Mr. Yeats is, beyond dispute, one of the greatest poets of this young country. Probably he has the most authentic inspiration of any living singer in the English tongue. His association with Dublin University would bring *kudos* alike to the man and the institution. ⁴⁶

Having noted that a university chair involved a "good deal of uninspired and hum-drum work" which the editorial writer could not see Yeats doing, the suggestion was made that "the present Chair of English Literature should be resolved into a Chair of Poetry and a

⁴³ The Irish Times, 21 March 1913, p.10

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 19 March1913, p.7

⁴⁵ The Freeman's Journal 19 March 1913, p.8

Lectureship in English Literature, and that the Chair of Poetry should be offered to Mr. Yeats." This suggestion, we are told,

has no authority of any sort behind it, and we cannot even guess at Mr. Yeats's attitude to such a proposal. But it is our personal belief that the linking of the name of the greatest living poet in Ireland with Ireland's greatest University would be good for both, and welcome to the country.

The issue of Yeats's nationalist politics was then dealt with but were not seen as grounds for objection to the proposal:

We hope that no graduate of Trinity would be found to object to such an appointment on the ground that Mr. Yeats is a Nationalist. If Mr. Yeats is a Nationalist, Trinity College is a University; and, as a matter of fact, among its present staff of Fellows and Professors there is already a rich variety of political opinions

This proposal received little support in subsequent issues of <u>The Irish Times</u> and was not promoted further. The Irish Independent noted the suggestion of Yeats being appointed to succeed Dowden by quoting from the English Daily Chronicle without comment and without pointing out that paper's ignorance of Yeats's educational background when it had stated: "Such a choice would do honour to Trinity College as well as to its most eminent living alumnus.",47

The ever-vigilant Sinn Fein, however, had been keeping its eye on these developments and on 3 May had its say in an article titled "Mr. Yeats and the Chair". Its primary objection was to The Irish Times calling Yeats a Nationalist:

Now, we object to Mr. Yeats or Mr. Yeats' coterie suddenly discovering that Mr. Yeats is a Nationalist – long after he has ceased to be one and become a British Government pensioner - when the discovery may be of service in helping him into a well-paid Place. We think, if Trinity College does resolve its chair of English Literature into a chair of Poetry and consigns English Literature to a lectureship, that Mr. W.B. Yeats might well be chosen for such a chair. But to suggest that the author of "The Ode to a Threatened House",48 and the poet who calmly deposed

The Irish Times 28 April 1913, p.4
 The Irish Independent, 5 April 1913, p.6

⁴⁸ Original title "To a Certain Country House in Time of Change" then "Upon a Threatened House" and

before the Dublin Castle Privy Council that he had no political intention in writing "Kathleen ni Houlihan" and that there was no political meaning in it - that, indeed, the whole thing was "a dream" when in fact the playlet was written as Nationalist propaganda and its ending altered before its production to emphasise its propagandism⁴⁹ – is still a Nationalist and that opposition to him would be "intolerance" is a piece of matchless audacity. Let the Press Committees, in future, respect the word "Nationalist." It is not to be associated with place-hunting. ⁵⁰

A few weeks later when the Poet Laureate Alfred Austin died, <u>The Irish Times</u> suggested Kipling to succeed him, remarking with a sense of realism, in another editorial: "Mr. Yeats is a true poet, but we cannot think of him as the official poet of the English people." In fact to the disgust of <u>The Irish Times</u> and of <u>The Church of Ireland Gazette</u> which also supported Kipling, Robert Bridges was chosen to succeed Austin.

In its issues of May and June1913 The Irish Review again featured comment on Yeats. The May edition contained a review of the American poetry magazine Poetry where Yeats had published "The Grey Rock" in April. The reviewer found the poem "somewhat bewildering, because the poet has mixed with his narrative an address to the Rhymers' Club in London."52 In June the latest edition of Yeats's Poems, published by Fisher Unwin was reviewed briefly in the same magazine. The reviewer took issue with changes made to the last act of The Countess Cathleen referring to a comment in the Tauchnitz edition, published in October 1912 where Yeats "tells his Continental readers that the new end to The Countess Cathleen was not made for dramatic or poetic reasons, but to suit an audience that even in Dublin, know little of Irish mythology."53 The reviewer does not agree with Yeats's stated reason for changing the names invoked in the original version of the last act of the play: "We think that Mr. Yeats wrongs his audience. "Fat Asmodel and Giddy Belial" are not more familiar than Orchil or Balor." What is most interesting about this comment is that Yeats's note about the change of names was made only in the Preface to the Tauchnitz edition which carries the notice "The copyright for this collection is purchased for continental circulation only, and the volumes may therefore not be

finally "Upon a House Shaken by Land Agitation".

⁴⁹ We have noted previously Griffith's claim to have suggested an amended ending for the play. See p.195.

⁵⁰ Sinn Fein, 3 May 1913, p.5

⁵¹ The Irish Times, 3 June 1913, p.6 The Irish Review, May 1913, p.168

introduced into Great Britain or her Colonies."⁵⁴ While Yeats's ban on having his publishers send copies of his books for review in Ireland was still in force, it is evident that even those editions most difficult to obtain, such as the Tauchnitz Edition were finding their way to such journals as <u>The Irish Review</u>.

During subsequent months in 1913 the arguments regarding the bridge site for the Lane paintings continued in the Dublin papers and in particular in The Irish Times which published letters from Hugh Lane, as well as from William Martin Murphy, Lennox Robinson, Thomas Lyster, John Lavery, Sir Horace Plunkett and on 7 July from Yeats. At the same time, the beginning of the tramway strike in Dublin during Horse Show week was bringing the long running industrial unrest in the city to a head. Yeats made his final intervention into the gallery dispute on 8 September when his poem originally titled "Romance in Ireland" and later renamed "September 1913" was published again in The Irish Times. The timing of publication was carefully chosen to coincide with a meeting of Dublin Corporation to make a final decision on the gallery site. The Irish Times devoted an editorial to Yeats's poem:

We are glad to publish a new poem by Mr. W B Yeats, and not the less so because it deals with a reality of the time. Mr. Yeats sees behind the opposition to the Art Gallery project a tendency of mind which he fears may grow on us in Ireland. Irish Unionists would hardly vindicate the romantic spirit from the historical events to which Mr. Yeats refers, but he makes his point quite clear. He feels that there is danger of our people becoming hardened to the worship of materialism and commercialism.

We have said much already on the subject of the Art Gallery, and we shall not cover the same ground again. But we feel that today's meeting of the corporation may be the really decisive one, and that, if the day is lost, the city will deserve the reproach which Mr. Yeats makes against those who have grudged the money and

⁵³ *Ibid.* June 1913, p.198. The quotation is from the Preface to the Tauchnitz edition, p.5.

⁵⁴ Cover of <u>Collection of British Authors</u>. <u>Tauchnitz Edition</u>. <u>A Selection from the Poetry of W.B.Yeats</u>, 1913. The preface to the Tauchnitz edition is not included in <u>The Variorum Edition of The Plays of W.B. Yeats</u>.

In "Nation and Class in Yeats's *Responsibilities*", <u>Irish University Review</u>, Autumn/Winter 2000, pp.289-334, Anthony Bradley invokes Benedict Anderson's <u>Imagined Communities</u> by describing the poem as a letter to a newspaper which "imagines a community informed by a certain Pro-Union, pro-British, Protestant variety of Irishness."

the granting of Sir Hugh Lane's conditions. 56

The publication of this poem was again arranged between Yeats and Joseph Hone, as Yeats's letter to Lady Gregory on 26 August makes clear: "I wrote to Hone – I wanted to arrange for publication of my poem in The Irish Times. I shall give Hone an interview but get him to hold it back till I see you." Yeats was again demonstrating his ability to make use of the Irish press to the greatest effect when it suited him. Yug Mohit Chaudhry places considerable emphasis on the fact that this poem was published in The Irish Times, arguing that the generally accepted interpretation of the poem as "a nationalist cry to arms" is flawed and that the poem in its original context was aimed at a Protestant readership and that it

would have validated their sectarian prejudices and flattered their sense of superiority. It denounced the new Catholic middle class that had supplanted them, lamented the lost spirit and authority of Protestant Ascendancy, and contrasted the romance of their heyday with the sordid squalor of the new dispensation."⁵⁸

<u>The Irish Times's</u> editorial does however suggest that its unionist readers would not relate to the romantic spirit of Fitzgerald, Emmet and Tone and that the targets of the poem were the plutocratic and wealthy among its readers.

When the Corporation decided against the bridge site, D.P.Moran's <u>The Leader</u> took the opportunity of attacking Yeats in its accustomed manner:⁵⁹

Notwithstanding that Pensioner Yeats broke into doggerel in the columns of the *Irish Times*, and Lady Gregory wrote a foolish letter, and that the *Irish Times* wrote a silly editorial, the "art" project of the Playboy gang was defeated at the corporation meeting. . . . So far as we can see brass is the chief constituent of some modern poets. With awkward feet the British Pensioner refers to Fitzgerald, Emmet and Wolfe Tone, and with very bad taste the Pensioner of England has a jibe at "a greasy till."

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⁵⁶ <u>The Irish Times</u>, 8 September 1913, p.6. A photocopy of the page of <u>The Irish Times</u> with the poem is included in Appendix 2.

⁵⁷ Torchiana, Donald T. and O'Malley, Glenn, (ed.) "Some New Letters from W.B.Yeats to Lady Gregory", in <u>A Review of English Literature</u> July 1963, p.40

⁵⁸ Chaudhry, op. cit. p.24

⁵⁹ An indication of how Yeats was viewed by <u>The Leader</u> at this time is given by the Cartoon dated 29 March 1913 in Appendix 2.

Yeats continued to work for the proposed new gallery, but as the year progressed new issues arose which had a considerable, if short-term, influence on the perception of Yeats by a Dublin community on which to date he would have had very little impact. On 27 October a "Peace meeting" was held in the Mansion House to try to resolve the strikes which were bringing Dublin life to a standstill. The meeting was attended by the Lord Mayor, The Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, (the Catholic Archbishop sent a letter of apology), a number of M.P.s, and representatives of Trinity College. Yeats spoke at the meeting and his contribution was widely reported. The Evening Herald quoted from what it called the "Characteristic Views of Mr. W.B. Yeats" under the headlines "Poet and the Crisis" and "Fanaticism of Dublin". It also published an editorial on the meeting, focussing on Yeats's proposal that both sides in the labour dispute "should come together without the press being present to inflame passions."61 In The Evening Herald's report on the meeting Yeats was quoted as saying to loud applause that "he had not words sufficient to express his contempt for the Press of Dublin," before being called to order by the Lord Mayor who told him that "he would find an opportunity elsewhere to express contempt for anyone he liked. He should stick to the resolution." Yeats, however, had a final word saying: "someday they would have to reckon with those who had fermented fanaticism in Dublin to break up the organisation of the workers." The Evening Herald's editorial took Yeats to task for these remarks, using against him a comment that he had unwisely made during his speech that he was "one of the directors of a theatre which was suffering every week because of the dispute":

Mr. W.B. Yeats has, apparently, the utmost contempt for the Dublin Press. The Dublin Press will probably survive the contempt of a gentleman who, apparently, considers the present lamentable situation from the point of view of the box-office of the Abbey Theatre. 63

Whether stung by this sort of criticism, or more likely, influenced by Maud Gonne's involvement in the campaign to provide school meals for those children most affected by the strikes and lock-outs, Yeats followed up his comment on fanaticism in the Dublin Press in a most, for him, unlikely publication. On 1 November 1913 The Irish Worker, which described itself as "a live militant organ of working-class opinion" and which had been

62 *Ibid.* p.5

The Leader, 13 September 1913, p.108
 The Evening Herald, 28 October 1913, p.4

founded and edited by Jim Larkin the Irish labour leader, published a piece by Yeats under the heading "Dublin Fanaticism". In this article Yeats excused fanaticism "in priest or layman for you cannot have strong feelings without that capacity" but then continued:

I charge the Dublin Nationalist newspapers with deliberately arousing religious passion to break up the organisation of the working man, with appealing to mob law day after day, with publishing the names of workingmen and their wives for purposes of intimidation. And I charge the Unionist Press of Dublin and those who directed the police with conniving at this conspiracy.

He went on to direct accusations at the <u>Daily Express</u>, <u>The Irish Times</u>, and the police authorities, and demanded that

the coming Police Inquiry shall be so widened that we may get to the bottom of a conspiracy, whose like has not been seen in any English-speaking country during living memory. Intriguers have met together somewhere behind the scenes that they might turn the religion of Him who thought it hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven into an oppression of the poor.⁶⁴

This attack by Yeats drew little public reaction although it did help to heal his rift with George Russell who wrote to him: "I felt all my old friendship and affection surging up as I read what you said." ⁶⁵

Notwithstanding this attack in <u>The Irish Worker</u>, which to <u>The Irish Times</u> must have been seen as an aberration, Yeats's reception by <u>The Irish Times</u> for 1913 ended on as generous a note as it had started. On 1 November the paper published another editorial on a lecture entitled "Ghosts and Dreamers" given by Yeats at the Psychical Research Society which quoted him as saying that he had communicated with ghosts in "no less than five different languages". Yeats responded by letter on 3 November writing, "I have claimed no such accomplishment. I am very ignorant of languages". The Irish Times did not recant but good-naturedly agreed with Yeats, in a footnote to his letter, that "life is too short for explanation of his psychical adventures." <u>The Evening Herald's</u> involvement with Yeats in 1913 also ended on a positive note. In a review of Maurice Bourgeois's book <u>J.M.Synge</u> and the Irish Theatre the reviewer, W.A.Henderson, who had been critical of Yeats's

⁶³ Ibid. p.4

⁶⁴ The Irish Worker, 1 November 1913, p.2

Denson, Alan, (ed.) Letters from AE, p.91

The Irish Times, 1 November 1913, p.6

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 3 November 1913, p.6

contributions to the Abbey Theatre, as we have seen, gave an interesting opinion of Yeats at this time:

If Mr. Yeats never wrote a line he would still remain an outstanding and fascinating figure in the Ireland of his day, Synge had no such personal endowments; his sole claim for fame lies in his work.⁶⁸

In January 1914 Yeats embarked on another lecture tour of the United States, returning to England in early April. During his absence The Evening Herald, which now included Arthur Griffith among its contributors, continued to display an interest in literary matters and in the activities of the Abbey Theatre in particular. In January and March it quoted from articles in the Stage Year Book for 1914 by W. J. Lawrence with the titles "The Abbey Theatre is it Languishing?" and "The Present Position of the Dublin Stage." In the first article Laurence had some praise for Yeats's efforts in founding the theatre but then wrote:

Synge's harsh imagination and grimness of outlook hang like a pall over the whole scheme of Abbey dramaturgy. Misled by his deification, the budding Irish playwright instead of delivering his own message in his own way, has sought to express himself in terms of the Great Acclaimed One.⁶⁹

Sinn Fein called Lawrence's description of the foundation of the Abbey a "fudge." According to Arthur Griffith: "William Rooney projected the National Theatre. Frank Fay built it up. Mr. Yeats ruined it."70

In his March article Lawrence announced:

The Abbey Theatre has not lived up to its promise. . . . But the truth is that the crooked road taken years ago by Mr. W.B. Yeats led the Irish dramatic movement into a bog out of which it has never been able to flounder. From a leader so aloof from the pressing needs of mankind and so contemptuous of public opinion no good can be expected.⁷¹

There was recognition that Yeats and Lady Gregory, unlike the controllers of the other theatres in Dublin, were "not money-changers in the Temple. For them the Theatre is a meeting- place of Art and Life, and not a mere factory for the grinding out of dividends."

⁶⁸ Evening Herald, 1 November 1913, p.7

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 31 January 1914, p.

⁷⁰ Sinn Fein, 14 February 1914, p.1

By the end of March 1914, as Yeats was preparing to return from his American lecture tour, the Dublin strike and lock-out had come to an end with the defeat of the employees, the proposed construction of a Municipal Art Gallery had been abandoned, Hugh Lane had been appointed Director of the National Gallery, and the Home Rule Bill was progressing satisfactorily through the British Parliament. It seemed as if the political issues and controversies in which Yeats had been so heavily involved were coming to resolution. Indeed from these early months of 1914 his name was appearing with decreasing frequency in the Irish press. He was mentioned briefly in reviews of books such as The Wild Harp, a selection of Irish poetry edited by Katherine Tynan, but in the main the attention of the Irish press was focussed on other things; the progress of the Home Rule Bill through the British Parliament and on Edward Carson's resistance to Home Rule for Ulster, the activities of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish Volunteers, the landing of guns in Larne and Donaghadee in the North in April and subsequently in Howth in July with its tragic aftermath. The outbreak of war between England and Germany in August then dominated, particularly The Irish Times which went so far as to bring out a special Sunday edition each week to keep its readers abreast of the news from the front.

One further event did get attention. "On 18 September the Home Rule Bill, accompanied by the Suspensory Bill, suspending its operation for one year or the duration of the war, received the royal assent at a special session of Parliament." John Redmond, the leader if the Irish Party, followed this with a further call for Irishmen to volunteer to join the British army. *Sinn Fein* was totally opposed to any Irish involvement in the war. On 8 August it had responded to Redmond's initial offer of support to the British government:

Ireland is not at war with Germany. She has no quarrel with any Continental Power. England is at war with Germany, and Mr. Redmond has offered England the services of the National Volunteers to "defend Ireland". What has Ireland to defend and whom has she to defend it against?⁷³

Not surprisingly, as the magazine refused to recant its opposition to the war it was suppressed by Dublin Castle within a few months of the commencement of hostilities, its final edition being published on 28 November 1914. Yeats may have lost one opposing

⁷³ Sinn Fein, 8 August 1914, p.3

⁷¹ Evening Herald, 7 March 1914, p.5

⁷² Maume, Patrick, <u>The Long Gestation</u>, p.149

voice but, as will become evident, there were others waiting in the wings and one in particular, <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u>, would take centre stage in the years to come.

In November 1914 the Dublin University Gaelic Society proposed to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Thomas Davis by holding a meeting in Trinity College that would include Yeats and Patrick Pearse among the speakers. J.P. Mahaffy, who was shortly to be appointed Provost of Trinity, refused permission for the meeting to take place in Trinity, as he famously wrote in a letter to the Gaelic Society: "I an informed that a man called Pearse is set down among your speakers." A meeting did eventually take place in the Antient Concert Rooms and both Yeats and Pearse spoke from the same platform. Roy Foster has described the meeting in some detail in his biography of Yeats, quoting from Yeats's letters to Lady Gregory and from comments of Yeats's sister, Lily, and concludes: "This brush with Dublin politics hinted at antipathies and confrontations which were hardening beneath the surface, but WBY was as yet unconscious of them."

There is, however, little doubt that the readers of the Dublin papers as they reported on Yeats's comments and activities, and published his poems and letters, would have been well aware of his growing disillusionment with Dublin, no matter that he was, as always, attempting to maintain a balance between his more extravagant pronouncements and the good will of the different communities in the country. In its report of the Davis centenary meeting, The Irish Times showed how Yeats, on this occasion, was circumspect in his political comments. He seemed pleased to share a platform with Pearse but carefully avoided giving too much offence to the Trinity College authorities or to the Nationalist movement. He expressed little knowledge of "what Mr. Pearse had written about politics" but understood it to be "some sort of anti-Englishism or anti-recruiting." He then continued: "If that was true he was as vehemently opposed to the Unionism of Dr. Mahaffy as he was to the politics of Mr. Pearse but he would like to hear Mr. Pearse on Davis. He could not imagine a safer subject. (Laughter.)" 77

⁷⁵ Yeats's speech was printed in the 17 July 1915 number of the journal <u>New Ireland</u> the contents page of which is included in appendix 2.

⁷⁴ The Irish Times, 14 November 1914, p.8. This paper published the correspondence between Mahaffy and the Correspondence Secretary of Dublin University Gaelic Society regarding the banning of the meeting and the subsequent dissolution of the Society.

⁷⁶ Foster, R.F., <u>W.B.Yeats: A Life Vol. 1</u>, p.525 ⁷⁷ The Irish Times, 21 November 1914, p.9

Yeats then proceeded with his speech, stating that O'Connell's influence had been "almost wholly evil" while the influence of Mitchel had been "almost as evil as the influence of Davis had been good." He continued in praise of Davis of whose virtues, he felt, there was still a great need. In responding to the vote of thanks he quoted from Nietzsche "whom he described as the great German idealist and philosopher." The report then tells us that the the reference to Nietzsche was received with applause and that Yeats remarked that he made the quotation "on purpose, for he would never hear Nietzsche applauded again by a Dublin audience, and he wished to hear him applauded once. (Laughter.)"

Yeats's condemnation of O'Connell drew a predictable riposte from D.P.Moran in <u>The</u> Leader:

O'Connell, as our readers know, was a Papist, so they will readily understand the denunciation of him by the English Pensioner. By the way, why does not this ablebodied Pensioner and bachelor join the army in the hour of need of the country from which he draws his unearned pension?⁷⁸

In May 1915 another nationalist weekly which took an interest in literary and cultural matters appeared in Dublin. New Ireland was founded by Denis Gwynn⁷⁹ to help prepare the country for Home Rule. It survived until September 1919 when, having become more political and supportive of the Sinn Féin party after the Easter 1916 Rising, it was suppressed. An article by Crawford Neil⁸⁰ in the new weekly on 5 June accused Yeats of neglecting "the Irish language as a medium of literature" and of arriving at a compromise between the two languages "which ended in the use of dialect for a dramatic mode" which had "drivelled into nothingness." The reason for the deterioration in Yeats's reception by one representative of the nationalist community was described succinctly: "the poet required language to be an instrument of literature, while the Gaelic dramatists, whose notion of culture was associated with an anti-Irish spirit, were content if their plays revealed, even crudely, the national ideal." In July a further article entitled "The Silence of Mr. Yeats" gave a further reason for this cooling of enthusiasm for Yeats:

⁷⁸ The Leader, 28 November 1914. p.365

Denis Gwynn was a pupil of Patrick Pearse at St. Enda's, joined the British army in 1916, and was subsequently a journalist and academic. He wrote an official biography of John Redmond.

⁸⁰ Neil was among the civilian dead in Easter week in Dublin.

⁸¹ New Ireland, 5 June 1915, p.58

The public is never satisfied with the poet. If he says nothing about their affairs he is accused of cold-hearted egotism; if he intervenes, he will be called an impudent meddler. All through his career Mr. Yeats has been charged with inhuman indifference to the sorrows, hopes and aspirations of social man. Even in the days when he made himself well known as an Irish Nationalist, he would not write a straightforward patriotic poem. "I just haven't the gift," he would say, "and I am not sure that patriotism itself isn't an impure passion for an artist.

The motive of Mr. Yeats has been patriotic, Nationalist if you like, because he has striven to express, not the will of humanity at large, not an universal truth, but the will of the Irish folk. Maybe he failed: to some people Yeats's more recent work is a confession of failure. For there is in this more recent work a 'political' aristocracism which does not harmonise entirely with Mr. Yeats' earlier philosophy or with his old confidence in Irish genius" 82

The journal did, however, balance this growing coolness towards Yeats by printing his speech on Thomas Davis given at the Dublin University Gaelic Society the previous year. 83

A measure of the reputation that Yeats had now achieved in Ireland is indicated by the fact that critical books were now being published in Dublin dealing with his work. The first of these was William Butler Yeats: The Poet in Contemporary Ireland (1915) by Joseph Hone, which was published by Maunsel and Company in Dublin and London. It is a short book that focused attention on what Hone, not surprisingly given his Cambridge education, his status as a director of a leading Irish publishing company and his association with The Irish Times, called Yeats's "endeavour to rid Irish literature of its propagandist tendencies." Hone emphasised Yeats's desire for an Irish audience, a fact that has been noted as early as his letter to Henry Davray in March 1896.

Mr. Yeats may not yet have found an Irish audience; but he is more than ever preoccupied with the thought of one, or he would not be writing those topical poems in which all his personal experience is bound up with Irish events.⁸⁶

Hone expressed a contemporary view of how Yeats was regarded by the ordinary Dublin people:

85 See page 78.

 ⁸² *Ibid.* 31 July 1915, p.187. These comments are of particular interest when associated with the poem "On Being asked for a War Poem" first published with the title "A Reason for Keeping Silent" in March 1916.
 ⁸³ See page 208.

⁸⁴ Hone, Joseph, William Butler Yeats: The Poet in Contemporary Ireland, p. 55

The logical idea of Irish nationality may not have interested him much, though he made open profession of political opinions often enough, being indeed better known to the folk of Dublin as an associate of Miss Maud Gonne, the heroine of the revolutionists, who drew crowds from the slums by her beauty, than as a poet.⁸⁷ He was, however, judged to have been successful in moving away from propaganda:

Nowadays few patriots assert that a poem, or story, or play must have some rhymed lesson in national politics if it is to be Irish. What could not meet with much appreciation in Ireland was a philosophy based on a mystical conception of the primacy of poetry. The nationalist public encountered the aesthetic passion for the first time, and all its hostility was aroused as by something unfamiliar and even depraved.⁸⁸

Forrest Reid's book, <u>W. B. Yeats: A Critical Study</u> (1915), incorporated the essay published in <u>The Irish Review</u> referred to earlier in this chapter. Reid was primarily concerned with explicating Yeats's poetry and drama and in examining his revisions, which even at this stage of his career were substantial. He also looked forward, suggesting that Yeats's future poetry would "not have the beauty of the earlier verse," but would have "a hard intellectual quality in which skill and theory occupy a larger place and inspiration and emotion a smaller."

A review of both Hone's and Reid's books, written by Crawford Neil, was published in New Ireland in December 1915. Neil doubted that Reid could "reveal the poet who deliberately stamps out the ordinary clues and lines of communication by which we arrive at a poem's meaning – the Yeats whose simplicity often masked a very barbed-wire entanglement of subtlety." While Reid was criticised for ignoring "with the exception of one cynical passage, Yeats's relation to his land," Hone was commended for demonstrating "a poet's real desire for Ireland's regeneration." Hone was "clear where Mr. Reid is shadowy." He has "by painstaking work made a piece of contemporary history live again in the critic's art." This was to be Crawford Neil's final review for New Ireland for, as

⁸⁶ Hone, op. cit. p.134

⁸⁷ op. cit. p.41

⁸⁸ Hone, Joseph, William Butler Yeats: The Poet in Contemporary Ireland, p.55

⁸⁹ Reid, Forrest, W.B. Yeats: A Critical Study, p.243

⁹⁰ New Ireland, 18 December 1915, pp. 98 - 100

reported in its 24 June issue, he was shot in the back in Liffey Street during Easter Week and died two weeks later.

While New Ireland was still focussing its attention on literary matters, the readers of the Dublin newspapers were shocked by the news of the sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915 and the death of Hugh Lane. This brought an end to the controversy regarding the building of a new gallery in Dublin but initiated another that was to bring Yeats again into the public arena in a non-literary context. It commenced when Lady Gregory published the unsigned codicil to Lane's will in a letter to The Irish Times on 4 October 1915. The statement in that codicil that "the group of pictures now at the National Gallery (London) which I had bequeathed to that institution, I now bequeath to the City of Dublin, providing that a suitable building is provided for them within five years of my death" was to cause controversy for many years to come.

The fateful year of 1916 began quietly in the public perception of Yeats, as represented in the Irish press. That the Rising and the subsequent executions affected him profoundly is clear from his private letters, but publicly his name was not invoked in the reports or newspaper correspondence that followed the Rising. It was ironic and totally appropriate, however, that on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916 the first day of the Rising, one of the two plays on the re-opening programme of the Abbey Theatre, with a matinee and evening performance scheduled, was <u>Cathleen Ni Houlihan</u>. The performances did not in fact take place. Joseph Holloway tells us that on that Easter Monday, the "Abbey was closed for matinees," and Lennox Robinson, in his book <u>Ireland's Abbey Theatre</u> published in 1951, gave a remarkable example of life copying art, when he wrote of the young actor Arthur Shields: "He should have played in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, on Easter Monday, 1916, but, going to work at the Theatre, found he had to shoulder a rifle and take up his post in the Post Office." This anecdote gives even more point to the well known lines of Yeats's late poem "The Man and the Echo" which was first published in January 1939:

Did that play of mine send out Certain men the English shot?

⁹¹ The Irish Times, 4 October 1915, p.4

⁹² Hogan, Robert, and O'Neill, Michael J., (ed.) Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre, p.179

In the aftermath of the Rising, of which he heard while in England staying with Sir William Rothenstein, Yeats gave serious thought to returning to live more permanently in Ireland. In a letter to John Quinn dated 23 May he wrote: "At the moment I feel as if I shall return to Dublin to live, to begin building again." He also rescinded his long standing ban on having his works sent to the Dublin papers for review as became evident when later in 1916 both Responsibilities and Other Poems and Reveries over Childhood and Youth were published and, for the first time for many years, his work was widely reviewed in Irish newspapers and journals. The rescinding of his ban may also have been influenced by Macmillan and Co. who were now taking over the copyright of his works, but it does indicate a change in his attitude towards Ireland and demonstrates a wish that his work should be reviewed and read there. By 11 May he was already working on his poem "Easter 1916" and its refrain "All changed, changed utterly" could apply quite aptly to Yeats himself as he began to reconsider whether Romantic Ireland was in fact "dead and gone" as he had thought in 1913.

Many of the reasons given for Yeats's delay in publishing "Easter 1916" until 23 October 1920, when it appeared in <u>The New Statesman</u> in London, have been noted by Terence Brown. ⁹⁶ Yeats did, however, allow twenty-five copies of the poem to be printed "for distribution among his friends" and it is remarkable that in March 1919 a short-lived Irish journal <u>The Irish Commonwealth</u> edited by Aodh de Blacam published an article entitled "The Drift of Anglo-Irish literature" by Ernest A Boyd which included in full the first sixteen-line stanza of "Easter1916". Boyd also made a connection between "Easter 1916" and "September1913" as Yeats had done in his note in <u>Responsibilities</u>, remarking of Yeats: "It is not so long ago since he wrote in contempt of those who 'fumble in a greasy till'," and then continuing:

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94 Wade, Allan, (ed.) The Letters of W.B. Yeats, p.614

⁹⁶ Brown, Terence, <u>The Life of W.B.Yeats</u>, p.235

97 Wade, Allan, A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats, p.122

⁹⁹ See footnote on page 187. Where Boyd received a copy of the poem is a matter for speculation.

⁹⁵ See his letter to Lady Gregory tentatively dated 11May 1916 in Wade, Allan, (ed.) The Letters of W.B.Yeats, p.613. "I am trying to write a poem on the men executed – 'terrible beauty has been born Again."

⁹⁸ Aodh de Blacam (1890 – 1951) was born in London where he learned Irish. He moved to Ireland, converted to Catholicism and became a prominent nationalist journalist. He reviewed Yeats's works frequently in numerous journals and newspapers from a nationalist and Catholic perspective.

There already is the beginning of a thought banished for many years from the writings of the poet, who, more than any, strengthened the revolt against the political verse of patriot-poets. Then came "Easter, 1916," in which he confesses

> "I have met them at close of day Coming with vivid faces From counter or desk among grey Eighteenth-century houses.

All changed, changed utterly; A terrible beauty is born."100

While Yeats delayed the publication of his poem, his plan to come to live more permanently in Ireland was taking concrete form without delay. He had found a derelict Norman tower in Co. Galway and envisaged it as a residence. In a letter to Olivia Shakespear, which in Wade's Letters of W.B. Yeats is dated "8 November (probably 1916)", Yeats wrote: "I hear there is quite a sound cottage at the foot of my castle, so I may be there even before the castle is roofed." In the following May he wrote to his father J.B. Yeats from Coole Park: "I came here to take over my Tower, Ballylee Castle." 102 Yeats's decision to purchase the tower was important in that it was the first property that he ever owned, up to now he had always lived in rented accommodation. The expression "my castle" in his letter of 8 November, as quoted, also indicates that his decision to buy Thoor Ballylee was taken before the end of 1916, and as the decision was also made well before his marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees in October 1917, it seems to have been the direct outcome of his wish to return to Ireland "to begin building again" as he had written to John Quinn. 103

The immediate impact of the rescinding of Yeats's ban on sending books to Ireland for review was evident in The Irish Times on 14 October 1916 when his Responsibilities and Other Poems, which had been published on 10 October, was listed among those books received for review. A review duly appeared on the following week in its "Books of the

102 Ibid. p.624

¹⁰⁰ The Irish Commonwealth, March 1919, p.24

Wade, Allan, The Letters of W.B. Yeats, p.615

Week" column. That the other Dublin papers were also receiving his books became evident when both Responsibilities and Other Poems, and Reveries Over Childhood and Youth, which had also been published on 10 October, were reviewed in The Irish Independent, The Freeman's Journal and The Daily Express. It is remarkable to consider that the previous book by Yeats to be reviewed in The Irish Times had been Ideas of Good and Evil in May 1903, and in The Freeman's Journal had been The Shadowy Waters in December 1900. The Daily Express had not reviewed Yeats since The Wind Among the Reeds in April 1899, while The Irish Independent under its current ownership had never reviewed a book by Yeats. Certainly all had "changed utterly" with respect to the exposure of Yeats's writings to the Irish reader.

It is also significant that the reviews of his work were appearing, in some cases, in literary columns that were also featuring the work of writers who had died in the Rising. In the weeks following the reviews of Yeats, The Freeman's Journal published reviews of The Mother and Other Tales by Patrick Pearse, The Poems of Joseph Mary Plunkett, and The Poetical Works of Thomas MacDonagh while The Irish Times also reviewed the MacDonagh and Plunkett books as well as work by Eva Gore-Booth and AE. One or both of the books were also reviewed in the weekly journal New Ireland as well as in the monthly Studies. In placing Yeats's books among those of the "martyrs", as they were now regarded, the Irish newspapers and journals were at least allowing and perhaps inviting the reader to consider Yeats in this new setting. It was, however, to be some years before the poems which demonstrated the impact of the Rising on Yeats's work, and which would allow him to be read in the light of the new circumstances which the Rising had introduced into Irish nationalism, were to be published.

In June 1916 The Talbot Press in Dublin published <u>Literature in Ireland</u>, by Thomas MacDonagh, one of the executed leaders of the Rising whom Yeats celebrated in the as yet unpublished "Easter 1916".

He might have won fame in the end, So sensitive his nature seemed, So daring and sweet his thought.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p.614

The book brought together a collection of lectures and essays with frequent reference to Yeats and coming so soon after MacDonagh's execution his views on Yeats would have carried a lot of weight. To show Yeats's attachment to plain speech he quoted from "a letter to the writer" where Yeats had said: "I remember as an important event getting rid of the word 'rife." However in MacDonagh's opinion the "latest poems of Mr. Yeats show that he has failed to recognise an important fact of English grammar, the function of the conventional word order." MacDonagh also criticised Yeats's very limited knowledge of Irish language pronunciation with the question:

What then of Mr. W. B. Yeats who confesses that when he wrote the greater number of his poems, he had hardly considered seriously the question of the pronunciation of Irish words, who copied at times somebody's perhaps fanciful spelling, and at times the ancient spelling as he found it in some literal translation, pronouncing the words always as they were spelt?¹⁰⁶

MacDonagh acknowledged that Yeats had said: "If ever he learns the old pronunciation of the proper names he has used he will revise the poems." He then gave an example of Yeats's poor Irish by quoting the opening lines of "The Hosting of the Sidhe":

"The host is riding from Knocknarea

And over the grave of Clooth-na-Bare;"

and commenting that

nothing is gained, surely, by that extraordinary perversion of the Irish name of the Old Woman of Beara, *Cailleach na Béara*. The word *clooth* is not Irish; it has no meaning. Even for others than Irish scholars the right word would have served as well. And - if it be not too Philistine a question – would not:

"And over the grave of the Hag of Beare,"

have been better in this poem in English?

This was advice that Yeats ignored as he retained his original spelling throughout the many printings of the poem.

MacDonagh may have had some quibbles as to Yeats's use of Irish but he did accept, unlike others such as D. P. Moran, that there was such a thing as Anglo-Irish literature

¹⁰⁴ MacDonagh, Thomas, <u>Literature in Ireland</u>, p.34 (1916 edition)

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 50

which he defined as "literature produced by the English-speaking Irish, and by these in general only when writing in Ireland and for the Irish people," and in his opinion, the "work of W. B. Yeats may stand with the greatest Anglo-Irish poetry". 108

MacDonagh's positive opinion of Yeats's poetry was not reciprocated by the reactivated views of the Dublin daily papers as they demonstrated that some of the old animosity still remained. In its review of Responsibilities and Other Poems, only The Irish Times was totally positive, describing Yeats as a "sure master of the music and the beauty and the magic of the word," and opined of his book: "Few volumes of its size have borne a richer freight of the pure gold of poetry." Some poems were selected for special mention, among them; "The Grey Rock" which "reveals Mr. Yeats's greater breadth and dignity of diction," "The Two Kings" showing "his strength in narrative," "The Player Queen," ("Song from an Unfinished Play"), being "a lyric that holds something of the hope of immortality" and finally the newer version of "The Hour Glass" from which "prose passages of almost Biblical solemnity and loveliness will be missed."

The Irish Independent described the poems in Responsibilities as "lasting treasures" and praised "The Two Kings" and "The Grey Rock" but, unsurprisingly for a newspaper owned by William Martin Murphy, took objection to the "tediously long and unbecomingly controversial note" which Yeats had written on the poems dealing with the Lane gallery controversy:

Mr. Yeats here rudely spoils the effect of his charming poems by gibes and sneers. It makes one ask for proof of his patriotic politics, and recalls only the Abbey "Playboy" brandishing a bloody loy for the approval of the dilettanti. 110

The Freeman's Journal detected "a good deal of the spirit of something lost or denied pervading this volume, a more than suggestion of a resentfully assertive first person singular." It was particularly unhappy with the poems in which Yeats castigated his critics who wished him to praise "certain bad poems" calling him "a malevolent, hopelessly conceited poet." It then quoted from the new paragraph dated 1916 which Yeats

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 176

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 28

The Irish Times, 21October 1916, p.9

The Irish Independent, 23October 1916, p.5

The Freeman's Journal, 21 October 1916, p.7

had added to the previously written note on the poems dealing with the Lane pictures issue which had been dated 1913:

"Romantic Ireland's dead and gone' sounds old-fashioned now. It seemed true in 1913, but I did not foresee 1916. The late Dublin Rebellion, whatever one can say of its wisdom, will long be remembered for its heroism."

"Perhaps in the years to come," <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> continued, "Mr. Yeats will have reason to revise some of the bitter thoughts he has allowed to run into verse in the light of a better exposition of what now seems dark to him."

The reviewer was primarily concerned here to counter the bitterness of Yeats's "September 1913", but, rather remarkably, did not comment on his attribution of "heroism" to those killed in the Rising, a word which would certainly not have been used by the Unionist community or by The Irish Times or The Daily Express. What is even more surprising is that the review did not print the final sentence in Yeats's July 1916 note, which read: "they weighed so lightly what they gave,' and gave too in some cases without hope of success." In this final sentence Yeats extended the accolade of "heroism" that he had attributed to those who died in the Rising with a very specific association between them and Edward Fitzgerald, Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone from the earlier poem. He also granted them a share in that "delirium of the brave" with which he had garlanded those members of his pantheon of Irish Nationalist heroes.

It seems remiss that this paragraph, so pointedly dated July 1916 and so clearly enunciating the sentiments that would be expressed more forcibly in the poem "Easter 1916" which was under composition at that time, was not alluded to in the Irish nationalist press in their reviews of Responsibilities and Other Poems. It is also surprising that it has been ignored by many of those commentators who have remarked on Yeats's reticence in making any early public comment on the Rising and criticised him for delaying the publication of his poem "Easter 1916" for four years. The paragraph expressed, just as the later poem did, an unforeseen change in the poet's attitude to those who in 1913 could but "fumble in the

printing the poem: "Yeats's indignation [at the executions] was spontaneous: his method of giving expression to that indignation in his published writings seems calculated." See Jeffares, A. Norman, and

Yeats, W.B. Responsibilities and Other Poems, p.187 This note was naturally not in the Cuala Press edition of Responsibilities published in 1914 and was included only in the 1917 British and American editions of Responsibilities and Other Poems and not later. See Variorum Poems p.820. A photocopy of the page from the first edition of Responsibilities and Other Poems including Yeats's note is in appendix 2.
 Conor Cruise O'Brien in his essay "Passion and Cunning: Politics of Yeats" wrote of Yeats's delay in

greasy till," or with whom, in later years, one would exchange "polite meaningless words". These had now been "changed utterly" and may be recognised as "heroes" with Fitzgerald, Emmet and Tone whose names "have gone about the world like wind". The reservation "was it needless death after all?" expressed in "Easter 1916" was also present in the Responsibilities note as Yeats questioned the "wisdom" of the rebels, but most forcefully the note itself, and the poem then under composition, can be read, even if undetected by contemporary readers or since, as a recantation of the opinion that Yeats had expressed in 1913 that "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone." This opinion, as he specifically stated in July 1916, "sounds old-fashioned now," and has to be revised.

The opening sentence of the review of both books in <u>The Daily Express</u> seemed to indicate that the receipt of the books for review was unexpected: "Mr. Yeats' publishers have sent us two of the poet's latest volumes, one in prose, the other a collection of verses." ¹¹⁴ In its review of <u>Responsibilities and Other Poems</u> this paper quoted the note dated 1916 in full, and then deviated from its criticism of the book to give a very characteristic view of how it regarded the "Romantic Ireland" to which Yeats had referred:

Perhaps a truer remark on "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone," could be founded on the reflection that Catholic Ireland

REGARDS HEADLESSLY

the destruction of the great Catholic shrines in Belgium, and stands by with folded arms while the Huns commit all kinds of brutality on the nuns and priests of their Church.

In considering the poems the reviewer, within a short space, mentioned Keats, the civil list pension, the Laureateship, the Trinity College Chair of English Literature (which the reviewer is confident would have been Yeats's had he been a Trinity graduate). The reviewer then took objection to Yeats's inclusion of "a number of wretched epigrams amongst his artistic work" which possess "nothing higher than a schoolboy cleverness" and which, in a time of scarcity of paper, should not be allowed to take up "a whole page" each.

Neither of the two reviews of <u>Responsibilities and Other Poems</u> printed in the literary journals refers to the 1916 note. The review in <u>New Ireland</u>, which was written by Lennox

Cross, K. G. W. (ed.) In Excited Reverie: A Centenary Tribute, p.240.

Robinson¹¹⁵, emphasised the change in form, feeling and style that this volume demonstrated: "There are poems in this new volume when he seems to speak with difficulty, struggling with a new form, a changed mood that he has not yet entirely mastered."¹¹⁶ There will be many readers, Robinson wrote, "to whom the new Yeats with its austere beauty will seem but an ugly changeling." Robinson himself considered that "No Second Troy", which he quoted in full, was "more beautiful than any of those early lyrics" and also commended the poems "written in despondency" in 1913 which he described as "a dark year for all lovers of Ireland." He then quoted "To a Child Dancing in the Wind" which he compared favourably with "The Lake Isle of Inisfree".

Cruise O'Brien, writing in <u>Studies</u>, remarked on Yeats's "pessimism" in the book, particularly when dealing with the troubles of Ireland, "The seeming needs of my fooldriven land." He also argued that Yeats's rhymes were not as carefully chosen as in the past, but admired "his new trick of putting a non-riming (sic) line in the middle of his rimes" which was compared, rather aptly, to the "unresolved discord of the musician brought into poetry." ¹¹⁷

All the reviews quoted noted the change that had come about in Yeats's poetry but the focus of the reviews has also changed. Yeats was no longer being treated as a nationalist icon. Even in the nationalist press his poetry was being read and evaluated as a literary product rather than as a propagandist promotion of the nationalist cause. The Irish Independent was an exception, but its attitude to Yeats's note on the Lane gallery controversy was predictable and consistent with the views previously and consistently expressed by its proprietor, William Martin Murphy. On the unionist side, The Daily Express's remarks on "Romantic Ireland" and the scarcity of paper were coloured by its total support for the war effort and for the introduction of conscription to Ireland.

The Macmillan edition of <u>Reveries over Childhood and Youth</u> was not so widely reviewed as <u>Responsibilities and Other Poems</u>. The justification for publishing it at all is questioned by <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>. In the paper's view Yeats's critics will perhaps

Lennox Robinson (1886 – 1958) was born in Douglas, Co. Cork. He received little formal education but developed a great interest in the theatre and wrote many plays for the Abbey. He was appointed manager and director of the Abbey in 1909 remaining until 1914. He returned as a member of its board of directors in 1923 and remained involved with the theatre after Yeats's death.

¹¹⁶ New Ireland, 16 December 1916, p.90

ask whether Mr. Yeats has really reached that point in the world's regard when the small details of his childhood and youth, his analysis of his own intimate affairs, dreams and fancies have such a compelling interest and importance that he must write them down in a volume of "Reveries" for the benefit of his day.¹¹⁸

The review considered that the book may "provide point for the censorious on which to hang the charge of affectation, and sharpen the dull- witted edge of that hateful word 'poseur'."

The Irish Independent gave Reveries over Childhood and Youth but a brief mention in a combined review with Responsibilities and Other Poems, focussing on the impression given in the book that Yeats's youth "was unhappy and that even yet he is disappointed, unsatisfied, and unsuccessful" but the reviewer felt that this was "a conceit that no lover of real poetry will admit on reading both books, for his prose is the prose of a poet, too."

While The Irish Times listed Reveries over Childhood and Youth among its books received for review, no review appears to have been published. Studies did not review the book either, but New Ireland published a substantial notice written by AE who expressed himself disappointed with the book:

None of the psychologists who have written about imagination ever had any; and here is a poet, the most imaginative of his generation, who has written about his youth, and has told us only about external circumstances and nothing about himself.¹²⁰

AE remarked on "how readily our poet forgets his own songs," and recalled quoting Yeats some verses of his own to find that Yeats did not recognise them as "he had forsaken his past". The knowledge that AE was looking for in this book - the workings of Yeats's imagination, he does not find there:

I wanted to know what all that magic-making meant to the magician, but he has kept his own secret, so we must be content and grateful to one who has revealed more of beauty than any other in his time.

¹¹⁷ Studies, March 1917, p.154-6

The Freeman's Journal, 21October 1916, p.7

The Irish Independent, 23 October 1916, p.5

New Ireland, 16 December 1916, p.88

Reveries Over Childhood and Youth was briefly considered by The Daily Express but was dismissed as "a collection of random jottings regarding the poet's family connections and his early days spent in Sligo, in London and in Dublin."121

Following the extended critical attention that Yeats's writing had received in 1916, it was the issue of the Lane pictures that brought his name before the Irish public again early in 1917. He was reported in The Irish Times in April 1917 as addressing a conference to discuss the Lane picture bequest in the Mansion House and of emphasising the educational benefits to Ireland of having fine pictures in the country. He was also quoted as saying, in an argument that mirrors his previous argument for the funding of a gallery, that he felt that the pictures "would be returned if it were made abundantly evident that the people of Dublin wanted them." 122 This was not to be, and in spite of all of his and of Lady Gregory's efforts, the dispute over the "Lane pictures" was not to be resolved until many years after his death.

In October1917 Yeats's marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees was reported in the Dublin papers and The Freeman's Journal took the opportunity of reviewing the poet's career. He was described as "perhaps the greatest figure in Anglo-Irish literature, and is by general consent of his literary critics first among the poets of his time." He was now a married man with a property in County Galway, (dilapidated though it was), an established poet and playwright with a literary reputation that extended well beyond his native land. His admiration for the leaders of the Rising as expressed in his note in Responsibilities and Other Poems had been glossed over in the press reviews and apart from the idiosyncratic opinions of The Irish Independent regarding the Lane gallery, or of The Daily Express regarding the demise of "Romantic Ireland", his poetry, prose and plays were admired and praised as the end of the Great War approached in the early months of 1918. With the purchase of Thoor Ballylee he was now spending more time in his "troubled land" than he had for years and the close relationship that he was developing with his immediate environment was to have a substantial impact on his work and how it would be interpreted in Ireland as the country became embroiled in the War of Independence and the subsequent Civil War.

The Daily Express, 24 October 1916, p.3

¹²² The Irish Times, 26 April 1917, p.4

The Freeman's Journal, 23 October 1917, p.3

Chapter 7 1918 - 1924

In January 1918 Yeats's philosophical and spiritualist meditation, Per Amica Silentia Lunae was reviewed in The Irish Independent and The Freeman's Journal, but not in The Irish Times. Both reviews thought the book to be difficult. It was "not for the common crowd" according to The Irish Independent, which described the poem with which the book opens "Ego Dominus Tuus" as being "all in keeping with the spirit and visionary speculation of the book," but very different from the lyrics the common reader would associate with "Willie Yeats". The Freeman's Journal also found the book "subtle and difficult," but the reviewer, JMH, (possibly J.M.Hone) was prepared to engage with it in more detail. Focussing also on the poem "Ego Dominus Tuus," the reviewer identified what he considered to be "the one general idea for the 'plain man' to grasp, - and, no doubt, drop hastily," this idea being "that the artist in his art opposes his destiny." In support of this conclusion, the reviewer paraphrased a contention in the book, which has since become well known "We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry." The book, overall, was "a book for the connoisseur of Yeats rather than for the Yeats lover," containing, as it did, "outbursts of feeling" which "will be quoted in the literary salons."

A review written by Katherine Tynan for the Jesuit magazine Studies,⁴ which was edited at this time by Fr. Peter Connolly, was of a completely different nature. The book, in her view, "is but a new stage on the road of mystery and magic which has slowly but surely taken away the poet from his poetry." The lovers of Yeats's poetry will be disappointed by the "strange speculations and experiences" contained in the book, but there was some compensation in the "fascinating confidences" to be found where the poet revealed himself to the reader. Yeats's treatment of his friends, and of Lionel Johnson in particular, whom Yeats had described as a "drunkard," was regretted. Tynan stoutly defended Johnson

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¹ The Irish Independent, 28 January 1918, p.4

² The Freeman's Journal, 4 May 1918, p.3 ³ Yeats, W.B. Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 21

⁴ <u>Studies</u> was the successor of <u>The Lyceum</u> 1887 –1894 and of <u>The New Ireland Review</u> 1894 –1911 both of which were associated with University College, Dublin. The first editor of <u>Studies</u> was Fr. Timothy Corcoran who subsequently subjected Yeats to constant attack in <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u>, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

whom she knew "intimately" against Yeats's depiction of him, describing him as "a saint and a fine gentleman to the end".⁵

Whether Tynan's distaste for Yeats's treatment of his friends was a factor or whether influenced by his unconventional philosophy, it is remarkable that <u>Studies</u> did not review Yeats's books again until it published a review of <u>Last Poems and Plays</u> in December 1940, almost two years after his death.⁶ Brian Kennedy has written: "From the beginning, it was decided that *Studies* should be characterized by reasoned and detached criticism. This led to the deliberate side-stepping of many major issues." Issues identified by Kennedy included the 1916 Rising and World War I. He did go on to say that under the editorship of Fr. Patrick Connolly from 1914 to1950 <u>Studies</u> became "a provocative and important influence on social and cultural issues"; however, it paid little attention to Yeats's work prior to his death in January 1939.⁸

One review of a book of essays by a Jesuit priest James J. Daly⁹ published in America noted that in one of the essays entitled "The Paganism of Mr. Yeats," Fr. Daly had "paid full tribute" to Yeats's "poetical genius" but found "the philosophy of Mr. Yeats less admirable than his poetry." The reviewer considered that Yeats's early advocacy of "pre-Christian paganism" has now been abandoned by the poet whose "later utterances point rather to the pantheism of Spinoza and Hegel" which while "not less erroneous" is at least "intellectually more respectable."

An article on "The Celtic Twilight" by Francis Shaw S.J. in June 1934 argued that the Celtic element in Yeats's poetry was "not representative of the Irish character or traditional Irish literature," as Yeats had accepted the opinions of Renan and Arnold that Celtic and especially Irish literature was predominantly "shadowy and dreamy," whereas in fact, as Shaw wrote: "Irish literature, especially the older literature, is no region of twilight mists

⁵ Studies, March 1918, p.188

⁶ <u>Studies</u> listed such books as <u>The Tower</u> and Yeats's version of <u>Sophocles' King Oedipus</u> as received for review but did not publish the reviews.

⁷ Kennedy, Brian P., "Seventy-five years of Studies" in <u>Studies</u>, Winter 1986, p.362

⁸ A number of articles on Irish literature written by Michael Tierney, Professor of Greek at UCD, were published in which Yeats was implied but not specifically mentioned.

⁹ Daly, James J., <u>A Cheerful Ascetic and other essays</u>. (1932)

¹⁰ Studies, December 1933, p.703

and indolent dreams, but is on the contrary essentially a literature of vigorous action and full blooded life."11

The final months of the war brought more tension in Ireland as with a renewed German offensive on the Western Front the threat of conscription grew. A bill extending conscription to Ireland was passed in Westminster in April and resistance to its enforcement was intense, led by advanced Nationalists and supported by the Catholic hierarchy. Yeats joined in the anti-conscription campaign, signing a letter with Lady Gregory, James Stephens, George Russell and Douglas Hyde to the Dublin Evening Telegraph on 22 May 1918 which was published under the heading "Irish Writers Protest" arguing that the imposition of conscription "will destroy all hope of peace in Ireland and goodwill towards England in our lifetime." In the event conscription was not imposed, but remained on the statute book, and as the war drew to a close, any hope for "peace in Ireland and goodwill towards England" was destroyed by the wide-spread arrests of nationalist leaders on "ill-founded allegations of a 'German plot' among Sinn Féiners," for another rising, and the subsequent withholding of Home Rule by Lloyd George "until the condition of Ireland makes it possible."13

The victory of Sinn Fein in the November 1918 general election, winning "seventy-three seats against the Irish Parliamentary Party's six" set the country on a more extreme path which was to culminate in the War of Independence and the subsequent Civil War. In January 1919 Sinn Fein sent out an invitation to all elected MPs to attend the first session of the first Irish parliament – Dáil Eireann which was held on 21 January 1919. "The Unionist members and the survivors of the old parliamentary party ignored the summons, so in practice the new Dáil consisted only of Sinn Féiners." Only a small number of these were in attendance as most were still in prison but, as F.S. L. Lyons has written, the proceedings were "momentous". A Declaration of Independence was approved and a new and violent chapter in Irish history commenced.

¹¹ Studies, June 1934, p. 267

Evening Telegraph, 22 May 1918, p.1

¹³ Foster, R. F., Modern Ireland 1600 – 1972, p.490

¹⁵ Lyons, F. S. L., <u>Ireland since the Famine</u>, p.400

J.J Lee described the growth in violence throughout the country to which Yeats had planned to return "to begin building again" as follows:

From January 1919 local Volunteer groups began to engage in sporadic assassinations of policemen. . . . The British . . . drove the elected representatives more into the hands of the gunmen by suppressing the Dáil and Sinn Féin in late 1919. The level of Volunteer activity rose steeply. The IRA, as the Volunteers came to be increasingly called, killed 192 policemen and 150 soldiers in 1920 compared with 13 policemen and 1 soldier in 1919. ¹⁶

Yeats and his new wife had moved to the cottage attached to Thoor Ballylee in late September 1918 but shortly returned to Dublin where their daughter Anne was born in February 1919. In the previous month his <u>Two Plays for Dancers</u> consisting of "The Dreaming of the Bones" and "The Only Jealousy of Emer," both written under the influence of the Japanese Noh tradition¹⁷ was published by the Cuala Press and, surprisingly, was reviewed in <u>The Freeman's Journal</u>. As has previously been remarked it was unusual for a Cuala Press book to be reviewed in the Irish press as they were printed in small numbers and mostly sold by subscription. Review copies would not have been sent to the press. ¹⁸ Individuals who had acquired the books personally usually wrote the reviews that appeared.

The Freeman's Journal was the most consistent reviewer of Yeats among the Irish daily press at this time. It had been in financial trouble for some years, and was now in a somewhat similar position to <u>United Ireland</u> after the Parnell split in 1890, in that, with the defeat of the Irish party in the 1918 election, it had lost considerable support and was, to some extent, turning its attention from politics to the arts in an effort to survive. The review of <u>Two Plays for Dancers</u> was published on 5 April 1919 over the initials E.A.B. (most likely Ernest A Boyd, whose book, <u>Ireland's Cultural Renaissance</u>, had been published in 1916, as noted in Chapter 6.) The review argued that the "exotic form" of the Noh theatre was particularly suited to "the suggestive beauty of the poetry" in which

¹⁶ Lee, J. J., <u>Ireland 1912 –1985</u>, p.42

The first "Noh play" written by Yeats was At the Hawk's Well which was written in 1916 and first performed in Lady Cunard's drawing room in London on 2 April 1916. It was published in "The Wild Swans at Coole, other verses and a play in verse", by Cuala Press in November 1917.

¹⁸ Newspapers and Journals generally noted "Books received for review" but books from the Cuala Press did not appear in such listings.

Yeats's "dramatic conceptions develop" ¹⁹. This positive comment on Yeats's use of the Noh technique, coming, as it did from a playwright and critic of Boyd's stature (if indeed Boyd is E.A.B.) indicated that there was, at least, a limited audience in Dublin which could appreciate this new type of theatre.

In March 1919 Yeats's new book of poems, <u>The Wild Swans at Coole</u> was published by Macmillan in London²⁰ and was reviewed in the three main Dublin papers in a manner which again demonstrated the papers' commitment to catering for the preconceptions of their own particular communities of readers. The reviewer in <u>The Irish Times</u> wrote of Yeats having "become conscious of the arrival of middle-age." It detected "a note of bitterness" in the book, directing attention to two poems in particular, "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death," and "On Being Asked for a War Poem". Unsurprisingly, given the unflinching support for the "imperial army" which that paper had maintained throughout the war, these poems came in for some criticism. The former was praised for its "noble thought," but the latter (which had appeared in the earlier Cuala Press volume of the same name, published in 1917) was less favourably looked upon:

In times of war, as in all other times of national anxiety, the people turn to their poets for inspiration and encouragement; they would have turned in vain to Mr. Yeats. . . . The poet may have "no gift to set the statesman right" but he has his gift of song wherewith to hearten and inspire his people. Nevertheless, despite this criticism, we are sincerely grateful to Mr. Yeats for this collection of delicate and brooding verse.

<u>The Irish Times</u> and its community of readers would have expected a more positive response from Yeats to the events of the Great War, but it was the Easter Rising of 1916 which invoked the type of response that they had wished for, and it had been inspired, not by the heroics on the Western Front, but by what they had regarded as a traitorous act of rebellion. Those poems inspired by the Rising were not to be published for another year.

The Irish Independent had no reason to regret the lack of "inspiration and encouragement" in Yeats's war-time poems and was content to note that "the book is singularly free from

²¹ The Irish Times, 29 March 1919, p.9

¹⁹ The Freeman's Journal, 5 April 1919, p.3

The book included twenty-nine poems from the Cuala Press volume The Wild Swans at Coole, other verses and a play in verse, published in November 1917 with seventeen additional poems including "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" and "An Irish Airman foresees his Death".

poems written to stimulate war passion" seeing this as a demonstration of Yeats's "characteristic aloofness and will power," while his "calm dispassionate view of the world conflict is indicated in his analysis of the feelings of an Irish airman."²²

JMH in <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> was of the opinion that Yeats's "pleasure in translating contemporary public events into a very personal kind of verse seems to be passing," but noted the retention of "the magical character" of such earlier books as <u>The Secret Rose</u> or <u>The Wind Among the Reeds.</u> In a phrase that seems to anticipate a later response to <u>A Vision</u>, the poem "The Phases of the Moon" was described as appearing "like the announcement of a recently discovered mathematics of mysticism." The inclusion of such "trifling exercises" as "The Squirrel at Kyle-na-no" was regretted, while the title poem "The Wild Swans at Coole" was admired for its "haunting beauty." Then, having quoted "On Being Asked for a War Poem", the review concluded:

But although a direct and simple effect of diction is now characteristic of Mr. Yeats' style it is seldom that the thought or idea which he wishes to express is the straightforward thing which it is in the poem just quoted. The conception of much of his recent work appears, on a first reading at least, to be a trifle mixed or obscure; and a habit of exploiting events of actual life to the profit of the "phantasmagorical" increases the reader's bewildering difficulty, especially if the reader cannot "place" the events in question. Thus, while the book will be praised, and deservedly, by Mr. Yeats' old friends, it is not one which one would recommend as an introduction to Mr. Yeats' work.

The different approaches to the short lyric "On Being Asked for a War Poem." in these reviews again demonstrates how each newspaper was endeavouring to cater for the aspirations of its own community of readers. The majority of readers of <u>The Irish Times</u>, would have wished that Yeats had given unequivocal support to the British war effort, while the majority of readers of the nationalist papers who had rejected the support for Britain advocated by John Redmond²⁴ and the Irish Parliamentary Party, in favour of the vociferous opposition to conscription of De Valera, Griffith and the other nationalist

The Freeman's Journal, 3 May 1919, p.3

²² The Irish Independent, 7 April 1919, p.4

²⁴ Redmond died in March 1918 at the height of the conscription crisis.

leaders, and which, as has been noted, also included Yeats, would have been more impressed by the less ideological approach of the Irish Airman:

Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,

Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,

A lonely impulse of delight

Drove to this tumult in the clouds;

There was a further Irish review of The Wild Swans at Coole in the May 1919 edition of The Irish Commonwealth²⁵ – that journal in which, as mentioned in the previous chapter, had published Ernest Boyd's article on Anglo-Irish literature which had included the first stanza of "Easter 1916". The review, written by Brinsley MacNamara,²⁶ suggested that the book gave "promise of an even greater Yeats, a poet of more serene repose and the intense rapture of deeper wisdom." Reverting to the type of reception which Yeats's early books had received in Ireland, MacNamara declared Yeats to be a poet "who magnifies our nation in the world's eyes." He continued: "Yeats stands today as the most complete expression and finest product of our Irish *Kultur*, whose roots are very far down in the old Gaelic civilisation." These comments were somewhat against the trend of contemporary Yeats criticism in Ireland which was now evaluating the work more as an important contribution to the field of literature in the English language and, with some reservations, less as an item of propaganda for the nationalist cause or, indeed, as a product of the Celtic revival.

A more broadly based critical approach to Yeats's work continued in the reviews of <u>The Cutting of an Agate</u>, an extended version of an earlier text which reprinted essays dated from 1902 (Edmund Spenser), to 1916 (Certain Noble Plays of Japan). Addh de Blacam veriewed the book in <u>The Irish Independent</u> under the title "Mr. Yeats's Philosophy: A Book of Self-Revelation. Spenser was identified as representing the "Yeatsian ideal" which had been described by Yeats as the love of a "proud, wasteful, aristocratic life," and

²⁵ The Irish Commonwealth, which described itself as "a monthly review of social affairs, politics and literature only survived for three issues from March to May 1919.

²⁷ The Irish Commonwealth, May 1919, p.172

³⁰ The Irish Independent, 21 April 1919, p.4

²⁶ Brinsley MacNamara (1890 – 1963) was born John Weldon in Co. Westmeath. He joined the Abbey as a stagehand and actor, went on tour to America in 1911 and stayed until 1913. He was appointed Registrar of the National Gallery in 1926. He wrote novels and stories as well as plays for the Abbey. His best known book The Valley of the Squinting Windows was published in 1918. See footnote 125 on page 259.

²⁸ It was an enlarged version of an American edition published in November 1912.

²⁹ Aodh de Blacam was, at this time, the editor of <u>The Irish Commonwealth</u>. See footnote on page 212.

a hatred of "officialdom and the sour people who cannot understand the saying that 'all the most valuable things are useless'." The book, overall, according to de Blacam, "teems with rich and noble thought," the essay on Synge containing "much autobiography and a conspectus of the times," and the language in which the book was written will, he wrote, delight "connoisseurs of prose."

The Irish Times also focussed attention on Yeats's "philosophy of dramatic art," quoting liberally from the essay "The Tragic Theatre," and, by contrast with its nationalist rival, making some comment on the current political situation and how it differed from the past:

Of the Ireland of today Mr. Yeats is a caustic critic. For a masterly explanation of the gulf which separates the old Nationalism of John O'Leary's day from that of the present time we must refer the reader to the essay on "Poetry and Tradition".³¹

This comment conveniently forgets that the essay referred to was dated August 1907, just a few months after the Playboy riots, when Yeats was totally disillusioned with the nationalist movement and that Yeats's view of nationalism, as we saw in his note to the volume Responsibilities and Other Poems, had undergone a considerable change since the 1916 Rising. Yeats, however, did chose to reprint the earlier essay, and it was this earlier Yeats that appealed to <u>The Irish Times</u> as it, and its community of readers, were aghast at the ever-increasing violence currently being perpetrated throughout Ireland against the forces of the crown and the Anglo-Irish community in general.

The Freeman's Journal specifically emphasised the dating of the essays included in The Cutting of an Agate by the use of the title "Retrospective Essays" over an extensive review published on 10 May 1919. The review, which was again written by E.A.B., regarded the book as a successor to Ideas of Good and Evil but, demonstrating a change of heart with respect to the Noh plays, accused Yeats of "defiance of cold logic and abstract principles"³² in modifying his theories of drama and transferring his enthusiasm from "the folk-theatre to the drawing room play." Yeats, according to the reviewer, "is nothing if not defiant" as was shown by his reprinting of his essays on Synge

with their unrepentant assertion of the claims of the artist against those of the patriot, masquerading as a critic. Incidentally, this obviously sincere admiration for

³¹ The Irish Times, 3 May 1919, p.9 ³² The Freeman's Journal</sup> 10 May 1919, p.3

the work of Synge is in violent conflict with the not quite so eloquent exposition of the theory of aristocratic drama, as represented by the Noble Plays of Japan.

Yeats was taken to task for not committing himself to "a precise definition of 'aristocracy" which he seemed to confuse with "fashionable society". "The aristocrat", according to the reviewer, "postulated in so many of his arguments is long since extinct." It continued:

It is not surprising that Mr. Yeats's critics are frequently exasperated by his capacity for self-abstraction. In the end one regrets that this superb craftsmanship should be misapplied to subjects which demand precise logic of expression, or wasted on controversial issue, where the nonchalance and cadence of a poet's prose either irritate the seekers after facts, or leave the points under discussion as vague as before."

This review indicated a developing resistance in some quarters to Yeats's growing interest in a more aristocratic theatre. The term "aristocrat" itself was associated, in the minds of the nationalist community in particular, with the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy whose role in Irish society was under severe attack throughout the country.

Yeats was not very satisfied himself with the quality of the reviews his work was receiving in Ireland, or indeed with the overall quality of literary criticism in the country at this time. This was made clear in the opening paragraph of his essay "If I Were Four and Twenty" published in a new Irish literary journal, <u>The Irish Statesman</u>, founded in June 1919 by Sir Horace Plunkett in support of his recently formed Irish Dominion League, an organisation which favoured a self-governing Ireland within the British Empire. Warren B. Wells, an Englishman who had edited the wartime Sunday edition of <u>The Irish Times</u>, was appointed editor³³ and Yeats, surprisingly, was appointed as a director. His essay, which was published over two weeks in August 1919, included the following opening paragraph, which was omitted when the Cuala Press reprinted the essay in 1940:

When I was asked to become a director of The Irish Statesman I agreed, because for many years I have been hoping for some Irish Review, able and willing to submit our life and thought to a constant, precise, unexaggerated, passionate criticism. No organ of the popular party could do that; it would have too many

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³³ West, Trevor, <u>Horace Plunkett: Co-operation and Politics</u>, p.183

people to please; but The Irish Statesman has done it from the first; and now I have begun to examine my own hope, to see if we can construct as well as criticise. I dislike responsibility so much that I shall have little to say to board meetings, and, besides, my thoughts are wild. I shall be content to ask myself what I would do if I were four-and-twenty, and not four-and-fifty, indolent and discouraged, with but one settled habit – that of writing verse.³⁴

Yeats may have thought that <u>The Irish Statesman</u>, and his own writing for it, would not have "too many people to please" but a letter in the 6 September number from Myles Dillon from Ballaghdereen, County Mayo,³⁵ showed that there was one community in Ireland that he still was not totally pleasing:

Ireland should certainly be slow to repudiate so exalted a mind and so privileged a poet as is Mr. Yeats, but men who see almost everything spiritual which they desire for Ireland in the Gaelic movement must seek for something which is not in him. To see this one need only compare what he has written, first with the work of Arthur Symons, with whom he has some link, and then with that of Dr. Hyde, which is Gaelic.³⁶

The old argument was still alive, could Ireland have a national literature that was written in English rather than Irish? Yeats did not respond but The Irish Statesman was clear where it stood on the language question. It recognised and commended the work that had been done by Douglas Hyde and others to revive the Gaelic language, but its objective was to produce fine writing in the English language and it had the support of the premier English language poet in Ireland to achieve this objective. Yeats's influence on the journal was quickly evident as it published an extensive selection of extracts from letters of John Butler Yeats to his son in September and October 1919. The Irish Statesman also published Yeats's poem "A Prayer for my Daughter" on 8 November 1919³⁸, a letter to Lady Gregory entitled "A People's Theatre" on 29 November and 6 December, and on 25 October 1919,

³⁴ The Irish Statesman, 23 August 1919, p.211

Myles Dillon (1900 – 1972) was the son of John Dillon MP, a leading figure in, and briefly leader of, the Irish Parliamentary Party. He was an internationally regarded Celtic scholar, director of the School of Celtic Studies in Dublin. Terence Brown has reported that he briefly tried to teach Irish to Yeats without success.

³⁶ The Irish Statesman, 6 September 1919, p.273

Extracts from 13 letters dated between September 1916 and October 1917 were published in the issues of 20 and 27 September, and 4 and 11 October 1919.

³⁸ Photocopies of the title page of the 8 November number and of the poem itself are included in appendix 2.

a review of <u>The Dreaming of the Bones</u>, one of his <u>Two Plays for Dancers</u>, which had been published by the Cuala Press in January 1919.

This review signed A.C. may have been written by Arthur Clery, who, as has been noted, had frequently reviewed under the pseudonym "Chanel" in <u>The Leader</u>, and subsequently in *Sinn Fein* although <u>The Irish Statesman</u> was a very different publication from either.

A.C.'s review, which was published under the title, "The World Lost for Love," focussed primarily on recounting the plot of the play. It did, however, consider the play one of Yeats's "finest efforts," made an interesting comparison between Dermot and Dervorgilla, and Dante's Paolo and Francesca, having a "crime like to, but a punishment greater than theirs." Yeats had shown the "human pathos" of the story and, according to the reviewer, "may almost be said to have added one more to the great love poems of the world which have for their theme the love that is more lasting than death and almost more powerful than sin."

When <u>The Player Queen</u> was revived at the Abbey in December 1919, <u>The Irish Statesman</u>, remarked: "Most of the audience went to be mystified and they came away disappointed, because they were not quite sure what they ought to be mystified about." It then defended the play: "We prefer to take the play as a simple story, written in beautiful and dignified prose, with a delightfully medieval atmosphere." A later correspondent, however, did not agree, writing of being "tired of the convention in literature of the drunken poet as genius," and then making a more general criticism of the Abbey which echoed the early criticisms of Synge's plays:

The Abbey gives us too much of the worst side of human life. It is well to be shown our faults, but I frankly do not believe there is as much meanness and spite and nastiness in human nature as the majority of Abbey plays would make us believe.

<u>The Irish Statesman</u> ceased publication with its issue of June1920.⁴² Trevor West has suggested that the reason for the journal's demise was that

³⁹ The Irish Statesman, 25 October 1919, p. 438

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 13 December 1919, p.609

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 27 December 1919, p.658

⁴² It was subsequently revived to assume a very important place in Yeats's reception in Ireland as will be discussed in the following chapter.

the *Statesman* had an impact on that sector of British public opinion, instinctively in favour of a liberal settlement [to the Irish problem] which was growing restive at the methods used by the authorities to restore order. The paper exhibited an increasing conviction that nothing less than a radical settlement could be of any use. Plunkett felt that it was flirting with Sinn Féin and turned off the financial tap.⁴³

During 1920 the War of Independence continued to take its toll and dominate the news, and, with no book of Yeats published in that year, his name was to be found only very infrequently in the Irish press. Also with the closure of <u>The Irish Statesman</u> in June 1920 another outlet for his work disappeared. However on 26 November 1920, five days after Bloody Sunday and the killings in Croke Park, <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> published his short lyric "A Meditation in Time of War" which had been published in <u>The Nation</u> in London two weeks previously. It was subsequently included in <u>Michael Robartes and the Dancer</u>, published by Cuala Press in February 1921.

For one throb of the Artery,
While on that old grey stone I sat
Under the old wind-broken tree,
I knew that One is animate,
Mankind inanimate phantasy.⁴⁴

In December 1920 a Government of Ireland Act "proposed to establish parliaments in Dublin and Belfast with powers of local self-government." However these powers "fell far short of Sinn Féin's demands" and the violence continued. J.J. Lee describes the situation as follows:

There were 40000 soldiers in the country in 1921, but much of the fighting was borne by 7000 Black and Tans and 6,000 Auxiliaries, ex-soldiers and ex-officers recruited for a 'police' operation, who began arriving in March and August 1920 respectively. 45

And subsequently:

⁴⁵ Lee, J. J., Ireland 1912 – 1985, p.43

⁴³ West, Trevor, <u>Horace Plunkett: Co-Operation and Politics</u>, p.187

⁴⁴ The Freeman's Journal, 26 November 1920, p.3

In 1920-21 the crown forces suffered 545 dead, and almost 1000 wounded. At least 707 civilians were to die between January and July 1921. 46

One of the actions taken by the new Irish Dáil was to supplant "the British machinery of justice" by "a system or hierarchy of 'Dáil Courts'". ⁴⁷ These were described by Roy Foster as concerning "themselves with controlling cattle-driving and land seizures that would otherwise have turned much respectable opinion against Sinn Féin." ⁴⁸ Yet it was to these Dáil Courts that Yeats referred when, in February 1921, he spoke at the Oxford Union on the motion "English Law has broken down in Ireland". An account of his speech, as reported by the <u>Westminster Gazette</u>, was printed in <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> as follows:

Mr. William Butler Yeats was loudly cheered on rising. He said that not law, only English law, has broken down in Ireland. Sinn Fein brought real justice into his part of Ireland for the first time for centuries. The only complaint was that they protected property perhaps a little too vigorously.

Burke's Words Recalled

He spoke of the murder of a young man and of a girl in his district. Everything done by Germany in Belgium is being done by England in Ireland. Have an independent enquiry (tremendous applause). The Irish farmers are foolishly adopting the world-old policy of guerrilla warfare. Did we call it "murder" in our allies of the Peninsular War? As Burke says, you cannot indict a nation. . . .

Liberty and Law

We still speak of liberty and law, but there is truth in the jibe that the war "made the world safe for hypocrisy." It is untrue that the Black and Tans were hardly-tried men, whose nerves gave way. This might be said of the soldiers, who have for the most part behaved well. Who sent the Black and Tans? If England were the England of Victoria she would find out who sent them and indict them. ⁴⁹

The occasion, which Joseph Hone described as "considered unique in the history of the Union" with Yeats speaking "with extraordinary vehemence" and gathering "impetus from increasing rage" was not reported in any detail in the other Dublin papers. There was no

⁴⁶ Ibid. p.47

⁴⁷ Lyons, F.S.L., <u>Ireland since the Famine</u>, p.408

⁴⁸ Foster, RF., Modern Ireland 1600 – 1972, p.497

⁴⁹ The Freeman's Journal, 19 February 1921, p.5

⁵⁰ Hone, Joseph, W. B. Yeats, p.330

report in The Irish Times and The Irish Independent briefly noted: "Mr. W.B. Yeats defended S.F. Courts and institutions, and cited outrages alleged to have been committed by Crown forces."51 The speech received little attention in Ireland, but it did show the strength of Yeats's feelings at the harsh treatment his country was suffering as his poem "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", published some seven months later powerfully enphasised:

> Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery Can leave the mother, murdered at her door, To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;⁵²

A truce eventually came into effect in July 1921, but the respite was short-lived, as with the negotiation of the Treaty and the subsequent split between pro and anti sides, the country was engulfed in Civil War by mid 1922.

Into this violent world Yeats launched his book of Noh plays when his Four Plays for Dancers was published in October 1921 and a new flurry of interest developed in his literary work. It is remarkable that the publication of Michael Robartes and the Dancer by the Cuala Press in February 1921 went unnoticed by any of the Irish papers or journals. Although reviews of the Cuala Press books were infrequent, as we have noted, the fact that this book included the first volume publication of Yeats's "Easter 1916," "Sixteen Dead Men," and "The Rose Tree," would have led one to expect some reaction in the Irish press.⁵³ But this was not the case, and it was only when these poems were published in Later Poems in November 1922⁵⁴ that there was any reaction to their publication and, as we will see, that reaction was a surprisingly muted one. Possibly the national mood was not right for an appreciation of such poems and the more peaceful and archaic form of the Noh play was more appropriate for such troubled times.

The primary interest in Four Plays for Dancers was Yeats's use of the Japanese Noh drama. The Irish Times declared: "Mr. Yeats seems to have discovered a form which is

⁵¹ The Irish Independent, 19 February 1921, p.6

⁵² Variorum Poems, p.429

^{53 &}quot;Easter 1916" had been published in the New Statesman in London on 23 October 1920 and in The Dial in New York along with "Sixteen Dead Men" and "The Rose Tree", in November 1920.

⁵⁴ As a Macmillan book it would certainly have been sent for review.

especially suited to the dramatic expressions of a more subtle and intimate genius than that of the ordinary dramatist."⁵⁵ By contrast, <u>The Irish Independent</u> considered the plays to be "unconsciously the expression" of Yeats's weariness of the theatre:

They give us the feeling of contact with an exhausted creative faculty artificially stimulated and producing images which have but the pale semblance of things that spring from the fount of pure creative energy.⁵⁶

This review contrasted the language in some lines from <u>The Dreaming of the Bones</u> which it found "bleak" with that from <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> which were considered to be "splendidly full and vivid." The reviewer, who used the witty pseudonym A. P. Hilistine, then argued that Cuchulain was a most unsuitable figure for a drawing-room play as his "Promethean figure needs wide and lofty spaces for its setting," and that to "seek to interpret his spirit through the art form of the Noh play seems as woeful an experiment as that of imprisoning those eagles that look at one so sick-eyed through their cages in the gardens of the zoo."

The Freeman's Journal's review, published some three months after the book's publication and printed above the initial S, welcomed Yeats's search after new forms of drama. The four plays, however, "seem thin – or, better, aerially elusive." ⁵⁷ In a somewhat pretentious manner the review acknowledges that "there are everywhere passages that thrill one with a sense of grandeur: there are moments of awe...there are tendernesses ...there are splendid imaginations." In The Only Jealousy of Emer there was "a warm human love in the very great and very simple scene between Emer and Eithne, some four pages that go to the brain and to the heart like the noblest music." The Dreaming of the Bones was described as "the nearly perfect thing in its kind . . . heartrending and lovely" and Calvary, according to the review, "will puzzle most and perhaps shock some."

With the country in turmoil there were fewer outlets for the printing of reviews of literary works. The Daily Express and Irish Daily Mail, as this paper was now named, had almost entirely given up reviewing books before it finally ceased publication at the end of June 1921. D. P. Moran's The Leader had lost interest in Yeats and focussed whatever literary attention it had on books published by Irish publishers other than the Cuala Press. The Irish

The Irish Independent, 28 November 1921, p.3 The Freeman's Journal, 4 February 1922, p.5

⁵⁵ <u>The Irish Times</u>, 25 November 1921, p.2

Statesman was not published between June 1920 and September 1923 and the evening papers the Evening Mail and the Evening Herald did not publish book reviews. The journal New Ireland which as has been noted became more strongly pro Sinn Fein after Easter 1916 and had been suppressed in September 1919, was reactivated under the title Old Ireland and published in Glasgow and Manchester and for a period in Dublin, but finally ceased publication in October 1921. There were some newcomers to the Irish reviewing scene. In October 1921 The Irish Book Lover, which up to now had been a London publication and so outside the scope of this work, began to be published by Cahill and Company in Dublin, but was not published between May 1922 and June 1924, and The Irish Review, edited by Bulmer Hobson, 8 was briefly resurrected and republished between October 1922 and January 1923. During that period it published a review of Yeats's The Trembling of the Veil which had been privately printed for subscribers only by T. Werner Laurie in October 1922. The review, written by P.S. O'Hegarty, was fulsome in its praise:

A book of beauty. . . . A book also which in its choice of words, its fastidiousness, its preoccupation with the getting of the right word, and the rhythm of its style, is really poetical prose.⁵⁹

O'Hegarty warned the reader against coming to the book "seeking a biography" for in his view "for the life of the poet one must go elsewhere, one must go where it is recorded, to the early poems and to the late poems." He then commented on Yeats's later poetry:

The prose of his middle years is as good as that of his early years, and if it stood alone might well make a man's reputation, but yet, supposing one were asked to weigh the whole of it against two even of the later poems, say against "Easter, 1916" and the very beautiful "A Prayer for My Daughter"? I think the two poems would carry it!

The choice of these two poems was a useful counterview to the majority of contemporary Irish critics for whom Yeats's early verse was still seen as the pinnacle of his poetic achievement. It also identified "Easter 1916" as a key poem in Yeats's *oeuvre*, not really surprising from O'Hegarty's nationalist perspective, but, remarkably not given particular attention, as we will note, when <u>Later Poems</u>, in which it was included, was reviewed elsewhere in the Irish press.

The Irish Review, 6 January 1923, p.70

⁵⁸ Bulmer Hobson (!883 – 1969) was born in Belfast and educated at a Quaker school in Lisburn. He was a member of the Gaelic League, the GAA, and became vice -president of *Sinn Fein* in 1907. He became a supporter of John Redmond and opposed the 1916 Rising. His autobiography <u>Ireland: Yesterday and Tomorrow</u> was published in 1968.

Another action which received scant attention in Ireland had occurred earlier in 1922 when both Yeats and his brother Jack spoke at the Irish Race Congress held in Paris in the last week of January of that year. Yeats spoke on the literary and dramatic revival, while Jack spoke on modern art. 60 Remarkably Eamon de Valera was present at the Congress "chairing sessions and participating in debates" even though the Treaty debate had just been completed in the Dáil with the defeat of de Valera's anti-Treaty position on 7 January by 64 votes to 57 and his subsequent defeat by Arthur Griffith, Yeats's one time supporter and later adversary, in the election for President of the Dáil by 60 votes to 58 on 10 January. 62 The presence of the Yeats brothers at the congress was but briefly mentioned in the Dublin press, but a short report in <u>The Irish Independent</u> has a particular interest:

A truly beautiful address on Irish literature was delivered by Mr. W.B. Yeats, who traced the literary and dramatic revival from its beginning up to the present time, concluding with a moving recitation of Pearse's "Wayfarer" written the night before his execution. 63

It is interesting that Yeats's recitation of Pearse's poem at the end of his lecture was not commented on further in the nationalist press, ⁶⁴ or indeed has not been in Yeatsian literature since, but it seems another example of Yeats adapting to the particular situation given de Valera's presence in Paris. It is not known if de Valera attended Yeats's lecture but if he had it is interesting to speculate on the impact that the recitation by Yeats of a poem by de Valera's colleague in the Easter Rising, written in such circumstances, would have had on the man who was about to lead Ireland into Civil War.

The Civil War which commenced in earnest in April 1922 was to dominate the Irish press during the remainder of the year, with atrocities being committed on both sides. From

⁶² Lee, J.J. Ireland 1912 – 1985, p.54

⁶⁰ Arnold, Bruce, <u>Jack Yeats</u>, p.212 Jack Yeats's lecture was subsequently published under the title <u>Modern</u> Aspects of Irish Art. op. cit. p.211

⁶³ The Irish Independent, 24 January 1922, p.5

⁶⁴ The death of Pope Benedict XV on 22 January was the dominant story of the week.

March to September of that year Yeats with his wife and two children were living at Thoor Ballylee in the confusion of attack and counter-attack:

We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; somewhere
A man is killed, or a house burned,
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

A barricade of stone or of wood;

Some fourteen days of civil war;

Last night they trundled down the road

That dead young soldier in his blood:

Come build in the empty house of the stare.⁶⁵

December 1922 brought Yeats's name before the Irish public in two new, non-literary, contexts. On 7 December 1922 all the Dublin papers announced his appointment to the Irish Senate⁶⁶ set up under the constitution of the new Irish Free State which came into formal existence on 6 December 1922. The Irish Times wrote that Yeats was "Ireland's premier poet. He has a world-wide reputation, and ranks among the finest poets of his time." To The Freeman's Journal he was "the well known Irish litterateur, whose poetry, plays and other writings have attracted universal admiration". When the new Senator took his seat in the following week The Irish Times delighted in describing his appearance under the title "The Poet's Pince-Nez":

The entry of Mr. Yeats caused quite a stir. He has changed greatly since Mr. George Moore saw him coming out of a [wood], and likened him to a folded umbrella. His greying hair enhances his romantic appearance, while the broad black ribbon, which holds his pince-nez, lends just the right touch of swagger to his otherwise bohemian *négligé*. Yesterday he sat alone, away at the very end of the

⁶⁸ The Freeman's Journal, 7 December 1922, p.6

⁶⁵ From "Meditations in Time of Civil War", Variorum Poems, p.425

⁶⁶ There were 60 members of the first Senate, 30 nominated and 30 elected. 15 of the nominated were to sit for 12 years and 15 (including Yeats) to sit for 6 years.

⁶⁷ The Irish Times, 7 December 1922, p.5

backbenches, far from Mr. MacLoughlin and his proletarian colleagues, an Olympian aloof. 69

The Freeman's Journal had a further comment to make on Yeats's presence in the Senate:

It is not to be supposed that Mr. W.B. Yeats, one of President Cosgrave's nominees, will be an active member of the Irish Senate. He was never a strenuous politician.

But as to the sincerity of his national faith since he began to write more than three decades ago, no one who knows him could ever have any doubt⁷⁰.

The article then reminded its readers of the publication of Yeats's poem "Mourn and the Onward" in <u>United Ireland</u> following the death of Parnell and of his friendship with John O'Leary, so leaving the readers in no doubt that this particular paper saw Yeats the Senator, as a true Irish Nationalist, in the mode of Parnell or of O'Leary.

<u>The Irish Times</u> had the opportunity to claim Yeats for a somewhat different Irish tradition on the following week when it reported on the conferring of the honorary degree of D. Litt. on the poet by Dublin University. A translation of the Latin speech by the public orator of Trinity College, Sir Robert Tate, which was printed in full in <u>The Irish Times</u> on 21 December, as indeed it was also in <u>The Irish Independent</u>, commenced:

There stands before you a man renowned in the world of letters, who, while justly placed amongst the foremost poets of our times, is a no less able master of prose, one of the founders of the Irish National Theatre – William Butler Yeats. It is true that he was never one of our students, yet we salute in him a friend well known in these halls; for he belongs to a family closely connected with us for many generations, has more than once charmed our Historical Society by his eloquence, and years ago published his first poem in the "Dublin University Review". 71

With the conferring of this honorary degree, Yeats's rehabilitation by the Trinity College community was now complete.

⁶⁹ The Irish Times, 12 December 1922, p.5. The word in brackets is illegible in microfilm. In Ave (p.242) Yeats was described as "standing at the edge of the lake".

⁷⁰ The Freeman's Journal, 12 December 1922, p.4

The Irish Times,21 December 1921, p.6. The orator had conveniently forgotten how the same <u>Dublin University Review</u> which published Yeats's first poems –the verses from "The Island of Statues" and subsequently "Mosada", had been effectively disowned by Trinity College, being required to remove its coat of arms from the journal's cover and its editorial presence from the college grounds.

In the same month Yeats's <u>Later Poems</u>, which, as noted, contained the poems influenced by the Easter Rising, was published by Macmillan in London. <u>The Irish Times</u> noted the arrival of the book in its "Books Received" column under the heading "New Editions" but possibly because it was a new edition, and all it contained had been previously published, it did not print a review. By not reviewing the book the paper was also relieved of the necessity of commenting on those Easter Rising poems. In its review, <u>The Irish Independent</u> initially welcomed Yeats's decision to return to live in Dublin⁷² and then compared his work to Browning. The review made no mention of the poems dealing with 1916, and read more like a review from a conservative English newspaper than from a popular Irish Nationalist organ. The early poems were praised for their music, the later poems for their thought, and the review throughout was totally uncontroversial.

<u>The Freeman's Journal</u> did introduce an element of controversy into its review published over the initials A.W. It praised the book as Irish: "the most distinctly Irish collection of poems that has been given to the public for many years," and then continued:

In these recent times when Ireland is suffering from the growing pains of her new youth, in the midst of the nerve-wrack of rebellion and civil war, she has remembered him and paid a delicate homage to his genius. When the University of Dublin crowns him with her academic laurel we have an Irish tribute to his power in the realm of letters. And when the Government of the Irish Free State nominates him to the National Senate, he is set apart as one whose genius is a national concern and whose gifts are an asset of the race.

This praise was, however, tempered by some reservations. Yeats was described as being "tone deaf to the thunder of the Christian message" and his representation of the Catholics of Connaught believing in "the efficacy of prayer to a Pagan spirit" was "a travesty of fact and a fiction pardonable only to a lyric poet." The most serious criticism was with respect to the poems on Easter 1916 and on the Art Gallery controversy:

But all his doubt of the capacity of people cannot stay him when he gallops into the splendid melée of 1916. He gives vent to a volcanic sympathy with the famous men of Easter Week. His words are hot as he tells their story. He has thrown aside the slough of his earlier days and now comes into the open wearing the green of the

⁷³ The Freeman's Journal, 20 January 1923, p.7

Yeats's wife Georgie had arranged the purchase of a house in Merrion Square in February 1922 and the family moved to live there in September.

popular faith. Everyone will read with intense interest these glowing verses. Whether critics will find them good art is what concerns us here. In our view their defect is one of form. The verse is metrically weak and bends under the weight of its passion and scorn. The same defect mars the protest against the city authorities on the Art Gallery question. The subject is hardly one for a true poet to touch on. When we read him in the Press at the time we felt sorry that another lyric master should have spoiled the beauty of his odes by the tawdry quality of his epodes. ... We feel so strongly on this point we should almost dare to ask that the pieces be withdrawn from future editions, and that Mr. Yeats should fill their place with another ode in his grand manner.

This is surprising criticism and it is difficult to judge how representative it was, but could be regarded as consistent with the ultra-conservative attitude of The Freeman's Journal, which was attempting to steer a middle path in every issue, and to avoid controversy at all cost. It did at least venture some comment on the Easter 1916 poems by contrast with the other Irish papers or journals, whose silence on these poems is remarkable. However it is possible that as the Civil War was still raging when this book was published there may have been some inhibitions on the part of reviewers in recounting the actions of Easter 1916 when many of the combatants were now engaged in fighting each other.

By the time Yeats's next book was published the Civil War had formally come to an end in a defeat for the Republican side. A cease-fire was agreed in May 1923, although sporadic killings continued throughout the country. Yeats, as a member of the Senate, was now a political public figure — "a smiling public man" as he was to describe himself some years later. In November 1923 the award of the Nobel Prize for literature further added to his high profile in Ireland and internationally. Prior to this award, he had been included in a series of portraits of Irish Artists published in <u>The Irish Times</u>. The portrait demonstrated his contemporary standing with the educated and bourgeois of all communities in Ireland:

It is fairly generally recognised now by those who are lovers of poetry, and, indeed, by nearly all who are able to distinguish good verse from bad, that Mr. W. B. Yeats is the greatest living poet writing in the English language. . . . That his poetry is appreciated by the public is evident from the fact that there is scarcely a bookshelf that does not contain two or three of his volumes, and also by the fact that there is scarcely a drawing room without a framed copy of one or other of his poems. These

latter have been beautifully designed and published at the Cuala Press, which is managed by the Misses Yeats. . . . He is an excellent lecturer, and, possibly, an even better talker. He gives to his subjects the greatest life and interest. He is a man of real vision and fine imagination. . . . On the Senate Mr. Yeats has shown that he can be as practical as any man, and he has made it obvious that he has a sound "political" head. 74

When the award of the Nobel Prize for literature was announced in November 1923 almost all the Irish papers and journals used the occasion to emphasise Yeats's Irishness. It was as if the newly established Free State, which had only been formally in existence for less than a year, had already started to fulfil the ambitions of previous generations who wished to see their country "take her place among the nations of the earth" and to take that place with pride. Each community saw the value of the award in its own way. The Irish Times was in the forefront in proclaiming the award as a national triumph, writing in an editorial under the title "The Poet's Crown":

His success is a national, as well as a personal, triumph, . . . for, although Mr. Yeats writes in the English language, he is purely an Irish poet. The folk-lore of Ireland was his sole inspiration; the spirit of the Gael is the warp and woof of his thought. ... The music of his poetry has carried the folk-genius of Ireland to the ends of the earth. The purity and subtlety of his lyric style have lifted his work far above the welter of vers libre and pretentious rhyming in which the souls of Europe's modern singers have been poured forth to a jaded world.⁷⁵

In the same issue <u>The Irish Times</u> proudly announced that "a telephone message from the Irish Times office was the first indication which Mr. Yeats received of the high tribute which had been paid to his work. He had known nothing whatever about it, and was not even aware of the value of the prize."⁷⁶ It then printed an interview by "its representative" with Yeats in the course of which Yeats generously praised both Lady Gregory and Lennox Robinson saying "he felt that the prize had been awarded rather to the Anglo-Irish literary movement than to himself". The use of the term Anglo-Irish would have pleased a substantial number of the paper's readership, who, before the establishment of the Irish

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The Irish Times, 4 August 1923, p.9
 Ibid. 15 November 1923, p.6
 Ibid. p.7

Free State, would have described themselves as Unionists. But as that term was now redundant, the term Anglo-Irish, with its connotations of Ascendancy, would have been a very acceptable alternative.

In the interview Yeats stated that "everything he had written had had as its inspiration the furtherance of the movement to which he had dedicated his life" and then made some remarks on his work which confirm the views of those critics who, as mentioned previously, have favoured reading the work as a whole:⁷⁷

Whenever he wrote a new poem, he said, he thought of it not only in relation to the literary movement, but also to his work as a whole. Sometimes he feels that his work needs a little more colour here, or a little more there; then he writes a poem to perfect the balance.

For that reason, doubtless, Mr. Yeats never says that one of his lyrics is better than another. He thinks of his work as an artistic entity, which, one suspects is not yet quite complete.

The aim of all his work, he said, had been to perfect what he describes as the syntax of passionate speech. One ought to be able to declaim a lyric, he said, in a market square so that the people who heard it hardly would realise that they were not listening to prose.

This is a useful example of the poet's own words being reported to a contemporary community of readers enabling them to reach a particular understanding and interpretation of the poet's work as it stood at that time.

There was another perspective on the poet in a report in the same edition of <u>The Irish</u> <u>Times</u> of a lecture given to an audience which "consisted for the greater part of ladies," on the previous evening, "under the auspices of the Central Catholic Library," in which he emphasised his Sligo background saying that

when he left Ireland and took up residence in London he spent his holidays generally in Sligo, to which he was intensely attached. He believed that a great deal of that attachment was due to the fascination of the supernatural.

He recounted a vision he had seen near Ballisodare which stayed in his memory and then read some of his poems including 'The Happy Townland,' 'Father Gilligan," and one

⁷⁷ See p. 187.

which the report called "I am Running to Paradise"⁷⁸ which had "been suggested when he was reading the 'Lives of the Saints'." He also read "some of his patriotic poems including 'Red Hanrahan' and 'Kathleen Ni Houlihan' which, he said, "expressed the patriotism of Catholic Nationalist Ireland," and then "as showing the patriotism of the people to whom he belonged, which was somewhat different, he also read a poem which he wrote in England when the Great War broke out."

This report is interesting for a number of reasons; it shows how well Yeats could "play to the audience" in the Central Catholic Library by mentioning his reading of the <u>Lives of the Saints</u>, but also shows his confidence in speaking to such an audience about the supernatural and then in distinguishing his "patriotism" from that of "Catholic Nationalist Ireland". It is also notable that the report was published almost verbatim in <u>The Sligo Champion</u> on 24 November 1923 as the predominant part of its report on Yeats's winning of the Nobel Prize. ⁷⁹

The Connaught Tribune also focussed on the local connection in its brief notice of the Nobel Prize award:

Mr. W.B. Yeats, the recipient of the Nobel Prize, resides in an ancient castle at Ballylee, beside the beautiful residence of another eminent poetess and playwright, Lady Gregory. It is said that Senator Yeats finds much of the inspiration for his beautiful poems in this lonely castle. 80

The Irish Independent's report on the award of the Nobel Prize was somewhat lower key than that of <u>The Irish Times</u>. The paper had put itself into a difficult situation by a comment published just three days earlier when in its "The Library Table" column it criticised Yeats along with George Moore and H. G. Wells, writing that all three of them

have displayed, in one way or another, a very considerable detestation of Ireland, Senator Yeats most of all in his undue emphasis of the worst side of Irish life as presented in certain plays, "The Pot of Broth" for example. 81

The report of the award of the Nobel Prize on 15 November was brief and rather distant but it still saw the award as something of which the country could be proud:

⁷⁸ The poem "Running to Paradise" was published in the volume <u>Responsibilities</u> in 1914.

⁷⁹ The Sligo Champion, 24 November 1923, p.3 The Connaught Tribune, 24 November 1923, p.8

The Nobel Prize for literature has been given this year to Mr. W.B. Yeats. It is a fitting tribute to the greatest living poet writing in the English language, and our country may well rejoice both in the fact that she gave birth to Mr. Yeats and that Europe has done him honour.⁸²

In an editorial under the title "Poet and Patriot", The Freeman's Journal noted that Yeats's winning of the prize "merely confirms in tangible form the verdict of a whole generation."83 Yeats, according to the editorial writer, "brought to literature the spirit of the crusader." The Abbey Theatre "is not merely a famous name in dramatic history, but one of Dublin's institutions, and though it has produced many masterpieces, "Cathleen ni Houlihan" holds its own with the best and is likely to hold it." The editorial then declared that Yeats "remains a perpetual inspiration to his countrymen". In the same edition of the paper Yeats was quoted as telling a Freeman's Journal representative that the award came as "a complete surprise" to him: "I look upon the prize," he said, "as having been given to me rather as a representative of the Irish literary movement than given to me personally."84 Then having praised the work of Synge, Lady Gregory and Lennox Robinson, he concluded: "If Synge were alive, I think it is very probable that the prize would have been given to him." These sentiments which Yeats expressed to the Dublin newspapers immediately after the award of the Nobel Prize were repeated in his official speech to the Swedish Royal Academy in December where he said that when receiving the award from the Swedish King: "I felt that a young man's ghost should have stood upon one side of me [and on the]⁸⁵ other a living woman in her vigorous old age."86

In September 1923 publication of <u>The Irish Statesman</u> recommenced, funded by money raised in America by Sir Horace Plunkett whose house in Foxrock was burned down while he was away for that purpose.⁸⁷ The revived journal was amalgamated with <u>The Irish Homestead</u>, the journal of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (I.A.O.S.), and its editor George Russell (AE) was appointed editor of the new journal assisted by Susan

⁸¹ The Irish Independent, 12 November 1923, p.9

⁸² *Ibid.* 15 November 1923, p.6

⁸³ The Freeman's Journal, 15 November 1923, p.4

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p.5

⁸⁵ These words were omitted in the first edition of <u>The Bounty of Sweden</u>.

⁸⁶ Yeats, W. B. <u>The Bounty of Sweden</u>, p.48. The sentence was slightly different when republished in <u>Autobiographies</u> in 1955 which described Lady Gregory as "a living woman sinking into the infirmity of age."

⁸⁷ Plunkett resigned from the Senate and left Ireland to live in England in October 1923.

Mitchell. This new series of <u>The Irish Statesman</u>, as we will see in the next chapter, was to become very influential in projecting Yeats to its readers in the years to come. Its edition of 24 November was particularly enthusiastic about the award of the Nobel Prize. A column written by AE entitled "Literature and Civilisation," welcomed it in glowing terms:

The rightness of the award of the Nobel Prize to William Butler Yeats will, we think, be questioned by few lovers of what is truly beautiful in literature. No poet of his generation, writing in English, has set before himself higher ideals of perfection in his art, and we cannot remember a single poem where the artist seems to have grown weary in his search for perfection. . . . Senator Yeats has made the name of his country shine in imagination to the rest of the world a hundred times more than any of the political notorieties whose names are on every lip here. ⁸⁸

The column continued by promoting a sense of continuity in Irish literature. Yeats's predecessors are identified as Berkeley, Goldsmith, Swift and Burke, all of whom according to AE, "have always been regarded as important figures in English literature because no Irish tradition found a voice in them." Yeats is described as

the pivot around which Irish literature turned from instinctive to conscious art, and in this last phase our literature began to take on quality, to grow rich and many coloured. Through it, as through a transparency, the world received its first real revelation of what was beautiful in Irish national tradition.

Further praise for Yeats's achievement in winning the Nobel Prize came from The Church of Ireland Gazette which greeted the award with "the greatest pleasure" noting that he was "the first Irishman to receive this world-wide distinction." It continued: "He is considered by many to be the greatest poet living; he is admitted by all to be the greatest lyric poet writing at the present day." ⁸⁹ The journal then looked back over Yeats's literary career and identified his "philosophical essays" and his plays for particular praise. The Countess Cathleen was described as "one of the few 'poetic plays' which act really well" and The Land of Heart's Desire, described as for "pure poetry the most beautiful of all of Mr. Yeats's plays." The Church of Ireland Gazette also noted Yeats's role in the Senate where his speeches "shew (sic) that he is no child in the matter of practical politics."

⁸⁹ The Church of Ireland Gazette, 16 November 1923, p.608

⁸⁸ The Irish Statesman, 24 November 1923, p.325 This report was printed in total in The Sligo Champion on 1 December 1923, p.6. (The Sligo Champion frequently reprinted articles from The Irish Statesman.)

The Irish press's response to the award of the Nobel Prize was, however, not unanimous. Yeats's old enemy D. P. Moran, who had lost interest in Yeats around the middle of 1913 and now no longer even mentioned his name in The Leader, used the occasion in his only comment, to denigrate the award:

British Pensioner Yeats is an English poet, and he has been awarded a Swedish money prize. What has that to do with the Saorstát? Nothing, of course. ... There was a time when Mr. Yeats was quite a champion of the Irish language cause, not that we accuse him of ever having attempted to master even a primer of Irish. But whatever he may be as a poet, he was always a show publicity agent for himself, and certainly made the most, in the material market, of his talent. 90

The satirical magazine <u>Dublin Opinion</u> which had commenced publication in March 1922 was not impressed with the award and demonstrated that there was another view of Yeats and his work prevalent in Dublin:

Senator Yeats has been awarded the Nobel Prize for no very apparent reason, unless perhaps all the other nations have got it once, and now it is our turn. I question whether any writer living or dead has acquired so great a reputation on so little product. I believe I am correct in saying that there is not a line of his poetry known to the average Irishman. Even the critics, such as we have of them, seem to have nothing of his to fall back upon when cornered, except the "Lake Isle of Inisfree," a commonplace subject handled in the manner of the average reputable magazine versifier.

Mr. Yeats has, however, the satisfaction of being the first Irishman whose fairies have led to the crock of gold.⁹¹

Another dissenting voice was heard in The Catholic Bulletin, a monthly journal that had been founded in 1911 and had carried the *nihil obstat* and *imprimi potest* of the Theological Censor and the Archbishop of Dublin up to the end of 1916. 92 As well as reporting on church matters, the journal published an extensive commentary on political and cultural activities in Ireland. Up to the Autumn of 1922 its editor was J. J. O'Kelly

Dublin Opinion, December 1923, p.295

⁹⁰ The Leader, 8 December 1923, p.414

⁹² The Catholic Bulletin has been described as "a family magazine" with a circulation of 10 –15,000 by Brian Murphy. In its January 1930 issue it gave a circulation figure of 25,000.

(1882-1957) who was a close friend of Arthur Griffith and had been both a founder member of the Sinn Fein party in 1905 and of the Keating branch of the Gaelic League in 1901. During O'Kelly's editorship the journal had paid no attention whatsoever to serious literary matters, focussing its attention on frequently denigrating Trinity College and promoting the activities of the Vigilance Association in its campaign against "immoral literature". In the aftermath of Easter 1916 it printed photographs and gave details, over a number of months, of the Irish combatants and civilians who had been killed in the Rising with strong emphasis on their religious convictions. Brian Murphy has described it as "the only Catholic journal to adopt a political position in 1916 – a stance favourable to the Rising."93 It enthusiastically supported de Valera during the Treaty negotiations and the subsequent Dáil debate and continued this support during and after the Civil War. Indeed in December 1924 it listed the names of the seventy-seven Republican prisoners who had been executed by the Irish Free State government between November 1922 and May 1923. When O'Kelly's term as editor ended in 1922 he was succeeded by Patrick Keohane, a director of Gills, the magazine's publisher. While Keohane was nominally editor, Brian Murphy has written: "compelling evidence exists to show that, even after O'Kelly gave up the editorship in 1922, Fr. Corcoran was the main contributor to the Bulletin and that it was his style which set the tone of the magazine."94

Fr. Timothy Corcoran S.J. was born in County Tipperary in 1872, educated in Maynooth and subsequently in Louvain. He taught classics and history at Clongowes from 1894-1901 (James Joyce had left in 1891) and was subsequently appointed Professor of the Theory and Practice of Education at University College Dublin, a position he held from 1909 up to 1942. 95 It was under the editorship of P. J. Keohane and the influence of Fr. Corcoran that The Catholic Bulletin turned its attention to literary matters and commenced its attacks on Yeats and the Anglo-Irish literary movement in general. While the Bulletin's first attack on Yeats came in December 1923, following the award of the Nobel Prize a foretaste of its newly developed attitude to literary matters was evident in March 1923, when in support of its campaign for national censorship, which it saw as being "entirely necessary," the following appeared:

94 Murphy, Brian, <u>J.J.O'Kelly and the Catholic Bulletin</u>, unpublished Ph. D thesis, UCD 1986. ⁹⁵ Information taken from an obituary notice in Analecta Hibernica No.16 1946, p.386.

⁹³ Murphy, Brian, "J. J. O'Kelly, The Catholic Bulletin and contemporary Irish cultural historians", in Archivicum Hibernicum XLIV 1989, p.71.

For instance, in a prominent shop in a prominent Dublin street, the central position in the display window has been occupied for several weeks in the winter now just closing, by a large volume which can only be described as a vast, shapeless, and hideous heap of the most utterly depraved and beastly filth. The writer, who lays his scene in Dublin, and the book itself are not to be named here. Even in Paris it was not found easy to procure for the work a publisher: for Paris and her government are at last waking up to the evils of such publications.

...The publication of this repulsive mass of brutal immorality was somehow achieved, and the book – banned in America and even in London – is displayed for sale in Ireland. ⁹⁶

<u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> then turned its sights from Joyce to Yeats and in December 1923 it published the following diatribe which conjured up memories of D P. Moran at his worst – indeed the style and vocabulary of the piece is almost a replica of that which had been used by Moran in <u>The Leader</u>. The occasion was a lecture given by Yeats at a Catholic convent in Dublin:

Mr. William Butler Yeats, having recently added to his English Civil List pension for poetical writings a much larger annual sum from the pockets of Irish ratepayers, and given no special value in exchange for it, has now joined the new Ascendancy movement, in criticism of a Gaelic Ireland. Hence many people were astonished, and a good deal more than astonished, to find him lecturing, on literature in general and on himself in particular, on behalf of the Central Catholic Library Committee, a couple of weeks ago. . . . The pensioner poet has long made it quite clear that he has no use for Christianity, and that he prefers, both on aesthetic and on ethical grounds, if you please, the pagan past. . . . He turns his back on the Ireland of our Catholic faith, and in what he calls his "pagan speech," yearns for "a Druid land, a Druid tune."

The article continued by comparing Yeats's "Neo-Pagan" writing unfavourably with the writings of Pearse or of Michael Mallin⁹⁸, who, it tells us, wrote encouraging his daughter to become a nun and his son to become a priest shortly before his execution in 1916. It

⁹⁶ The Catholic Bulletin, March 1923, p.132

⁹⁸ Michael Mallin was a member of the Citizen Army, and was the officer in command at St. Stephen's Green

The Catholic Bulletin, December 1923, p.817. The line quoted is from Yeats's poem "To Ireland in the Coming Times" which was first published under its original title "Apologia Addressed to Ireland in the Coming Days" in the volume The Countess Kathleen and various legends and lyrics in 1892.

then apologised to "the high memory of Pearse and of Mallin, for bringing their noble thoughts into comparison with those of the new type of literary lecturer" who has "secured, by the due measure of enlightened paganism in his writings, the Nobel prize, founded by a non-Christian manufacturer of explosives."

The subsequent number of <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> continued the attack in an editorial:

It is common knowledge that the line of recipients of the Nobel prize shows that a reputation for Paganism in thought and word is a very considerable advantage in the sordid annual race for money, engineered, as it always is, by clubs, coteries, salons and cliques. Paganism in prose or in poetry has, it seems, its solid cash value; and if a poet does not write tawdry verse to make his purse heavier, he can be brought by his admirers to where the money is, whether in the form of an English pension, or in extracts from the Irish taxpayer's pocket, or in the Stockholm dole.⁹⁹

These attacks of The Catholic Bulletin, which continued through the following year, were projecting a very different image of Yeats to its own particular community of readers from that projected in the Dublin daily papers or by the Church of Ireland Gazette. It is tempting to contrast the praise of Yeats from the Church of Ireland paper with the attacks from The Catholic Bulletin and draw the conclusion that Yeats was now accepted as a great literary and political figure by the Protestant community in Ireland and was excoriated as anti-Irish and anti-Christian by the Catholic community, but such an analysis would be simplistic. In fact the views of The Catholic Bulletin were extreme and were unrepresentative of the views expressed in other journals or in the daily press. Brian Murphy has raised the question of how seriously the diatribes of Fr. Corcoran against his non-Catholic adversaries should be taken and concludes: "The matter is complex but it seems not unreasonable to suggest that Corcoran's emotive language may not simply be a manifestation of deep rooted malicious intent, but also in part, an exhibition of Rabelaisian ribaldry." 100

Murphy, Brian, J. J. O'Kelly and the Catholic Bulletin, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, UCD 1986, p.434

in the Easter Rising. He was one of the fifteen men executed for their part in the Rising.

The Catholic Bulletin, January 1924, p.5

However Corcoran's language is described there is little doubt but that many educated Catholics, and members of his own Jesuit community, would have thought it vulgar. It is relevant and significant, as also pointed out by Brian Murphy, that in the obituary notices and appreciations published in Studies or in other Catholic journals or papers following Corcoran's death in March 1943, no mention was made of his involvement with The Catholic Bulletin or of his antagonism to the Anglo-Irish literary movement. Indeed the same is true of an obituary notice printed in The Irish Times on 24 March 1943 which stated: "His influence on education in Ireland has been very great, and his publications on the subject were many, and hold a high place in the literature of education." Corcoran's high status within the national community was further emphasised by the presence of de Valera and Sean T. O'Kelly (*Taoiseach* and *Tánaiste*) at his funeral mass on 26 March 1943.

The severity of the attacks by Fr. Corcoran on The Irish Statesman and Yeats would seem strange for a man of his standing but a remark by Joseph O'Neill, Secretary of the Department of Education, in a valedictory on Corcoran, published in Studies after his death gives one possibly relevant insight into his temperament. When considering how to deal with someone with whom he strongly disagreed, O'Neill tells us that Corcoran proposed a meeting to resolve the issue rather than putting anything on paper, saying: There's something in a blank sheet of paper that impels some of us to fill it with furious arguments." There is no doubt that Corcoran filled much paper with "furious arguments" in his attacks on Yeats, Russell and others associated with The Irish Statesman over the years. However these writings cannot, without large reservation, be adjudged representative of the general attitude of the Irish Catholic community towards Yeats at that time.

As the Irish Free State since partition was almost ninety-five percent Catholic, the views of daily papers such as <u>The Freeman's Journal</u> or <u>The Irish Independent</u> which would have a predominantly Catholic readership (<u>The Irish Times</u> would still, at this time, have been the paper of choice for the majority of the Protestant community) must reflect more accurately

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¹⁰¹ The Irish Times, 24 March 1943, p.3

O'Neill, Joseph, "The Educationist" in <u>Studies</u>, June 1943, p.153. In the same issue of <u>Studies</u> an exstudent of Corcoran's at UCD, Maureen Beaumont, rather ironically ended her piece in praise of Corcoran by counting him one of "the indomitable Irishry". *op. cit.* p.160

how the broader Catholic community responded to Yeats's Nobel Prize and to his literary achievements in general. As this response was very positive it is evident that the Catholic community in general, notwithstanding the opinions expressed by <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u>, or by Moran's <u>The Leader</u> was proud of Yeats's award and of the fame he had achieved both for himself and for his country.

The two plays which had been singled out by The Church of Ireland Gazette in its article on Yeats's Nobel Prize award; The Land of Heart's Desire and The Countess Cathleen, were further praised when The Irish Independent published a review of Yeats's next book, Plays and Controversies, which had appeared in November 1923. The review, written by Aodh de Blacam, regretted the need to republish the pieces dealing with the early days of the Irish dramatic movement from Samhain and The Arrow, as in de Blacam's view "Battles with stupid journalists are hardly worth fighting o'er again." Yeats's Four Plays for Dancers had, according to the review, "been sufficiently ridiculed by those who, failing to understand them, have denied them merit, though even the most perplexed of critics ought to recognise a wrought perfection of language." Yeats's comment in his foreword of the likelihood of "the foundation of a State Theatre" was regarded as "special pleading. Powerful pleading it is, at least as bringing vividly before us what the Abbey has done for Irish intellectual progress." De Blacam did take Yeats to task for not getting "some Irish scholar to correct his extraordinary spelling of Gaelic words," but the overall tenor of the review was positive.

The Freeman's Journal, in an unusually brief review for that paper, contented itself with a short celebration of the success of the literary revival and Yeats's place in it. The Irish Times also commented briefly on the difficulties faced by Yeats in the early days of the Irish theatre, but noted that "much that Mr. Yeats had to say twenty years ago has little bearing on the modern problems confronting Irish drama." His theories of simplicity in drama were by now well known but it was his "views on delivery" that were "most likely to be disputed," for, as the review stated: "It requires a poet to intone with effect."

<u>The Church of Ireland Gazette</u> may have been encouraged by the response to its praise for the Nobel Prize award, as it published a review of Yeats's <u>Plays and Controversies</u>, its first

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¹⁰³ The Irish Independent 10 December 1923, p.4 The Irish Times, 21 December 1923, p.6

review of a Yeats book, on 28 December 1923.¹⁰⁵ The review quoted an extract from Yeats's essay "The Reform of the Theatre" which had been published originally in *Samhain* in 1903 and which it described as "a creed which does honour to its creator" as it did to Lennox Robinson who had also followed it. The review continued, stating that:

we must learn that beauty and truth are always justified of themselves, and that their creation is of greater service to our country than writing that compromises either in seeming service of a cause. . . . The Abbey Theatre survived the outcry which tried to silence Synge's "Playboy of the Western World." . . . We cannot forget that Mr. Yeats's own play, "Countess Cathleen," was denounced as unpatriotic, immoral and unchristian. So far as we can judge it, it is not one of these three. In fact, it seems to us to re-echo the Pauline creed of the desire to save others even at the cost of one's own self.

In this short review <u>The Church of Ireland Gazette</u> upset a number of the beliefs so treasured by both the Catholic and Nationalist press; the idea that literature did not have to serve the cause of Irish nationalism, that honour should be done to both Lennox Robinson and Yeats –those two contributors to the much reviled magazine <u>To-morrow</u>, of which we will hear shortly, and finally that <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> could be read as representative of the philosophy of St. Paul.

Another considered, but less controversial, review of <u>Plays and Controversies</u>, written by AE, was published in January 1924 in <u>The Irish Statesman</u>. In reading the book AE looked back, almost regretfully, at the controversies described therein, which had been forgotten in contemporary Ireland. There was, he wrote, "nothing like intellectual controversy for quickening the intellect." In reading through the different controversies "we see the growth of the poet's intellect evolving his philosophy of drama and theatre." But now the theatre Yeats had created "has, perhaps, in getting body, lost something of soul." Plays have had to be put on for commercial reasons, so now the poet was thinking of a new type of drama which didn't need a theatre "but merely a drawing room, an audience of fifty, and a half a dozen young men and women who can dance, speak verse, and play drum or flute." If one of the "Plays for Dancers" was "acted with dignity" it might, according to AE, "lead many to develop a new drama which would go its own way without contamination from commerce." In discussing the plays included in the book AE made a

¹⁰⁵ The Church of Ireland Gazette, 28 December 1923, p.718

distinction between the early plays in which the poetry was "rich and many coloured with an emotional quality which is not so evident in the later plays." In these later plays the "conscious artist has taken over control of the imagination which once seemed more guided by the heart," as "some of the rich flowers have fallen from the poet's tree of life, and we get a new beauty, the beauty of bare words drawn with infinite delicacy". However in both early and later plays there was still "the passion of the artist for perfection, and no line is passed until it is shapely as the artist can make it."

Looking back at Yeats's <u>Plays and Controversies</u> from the end of 1923, as Russell had done in his review, it is notable how much change had occurred in Ireland since the controversies described therein had occurred and the early plays included in the book had been written. Yeats had acknowledged these changes in his "Preface" to the book where he pointed out that the notes, which were mostly taken from *Samhain*, ¹⁰⁷ were "passionately written, and at a moment when Ireland was preparing, in that dark portion of the mind which is like the other side of the moon, for insurrection and anarchic violence." The controversies of the past were mostly concerned with the arts, whether with Irish literature, the theatre, or the provision of an art gallery for Hugh Lane's pictures. Those of the future would be different. Now in the new state and in Yeats's new role of Senator they would focus primarily on those political and moral issues with which the new state was concerned.

In his choice of plays to include in the volume, Yeats was again registering the changes that had taken place over the years since his first plays, The Land of Heart's Desire 109 and The Countess Cathleen, 110 were written and performed. These were his first two plays written at a time when he was interested in developing an Irish literary theatre, which would have popular appeal. But the other plays included in the volume, Four Plays for Dancers, which had been first published in book form in October 1921, were described in his Preface to Plays and Controversies as "written but the other day and intended for performance in drawing-room and studio." In choosing to print the early and late plays

¹⁰⁷ Published between October 1901 and November 1908. Reprinted in one volume in 1970 as Number 14 of the Frank Cass library of English Little Magazines.

¹⁰⁸ Yeats, W. B., <u>Plays and Controversies</u>, p. v-vi

¹⁰⁹ First performed on 29 March 1894 at the Avenue Theatre, London. First published in April 1894.

¹¹⁰ First performed on 8 May 1899 at the Ancient Concert Rooms, Dublin. First published in September 1892.

¹¹¹ Yeats, W. B., Plays and Controversies, p. v

in one volume, 112 Yeats seems to be commenting, as Russell detected, on the new cultural environment created by the foundation of the Irish Free State. It was a state now dominated by a Catholic nationalist majority, one in which the Anglo-Irish community had little influence and one in which there was no intellectual controversy, where "Ireland takes the drama given to it without protest,"113 and where there was little appreciation for art. In such a state a commercial theatre had no attraction for Yeats, it would have to cater for "the mob." The alternative was the exclusive drawing-room theatre represented by Four Plays for Dancers, which could cater for the select few, uncontaminated, as Russell phrased it, "by commerce."

The Catholic Bulletin continued to attack Yeats with monotonous regularity over subsequent years, becoming almost xenophobic in its antagonism towards all those associated with the literary revival. These attacks reached a peak with the publication in August 1924 of the first issue of To-morrow a new and very short-lived literary journal founded and edited by Francis Stuart and Cecil Salkeld, both of whom will feature in a subsequent chapter. In the first of its two issues, To-morrow printed Lennox Robinson's short story "The Madonna of Slieve Dun", concerning the rape of a young girl who then believes she is about to give birth to a new Saviour, and Yeats's poem "Leda and the Swan" to both of which The Catholic Bulletin took grave exception. The attacks on Yeats and also on The Irish Statesman, which had welcomed the publication of To-morrow noting the fact that it had been printed in England "where Irish prejudices are not allowed to interfere with printers' business,"114 are described in considerable detail by Elizabeth Cullingford in the chapter "Swans on the Cesspool: Leda and Rape" of her book Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry and I do not intend repeating what she has done here. It is, however, useful to note, as Cullingford does, that the original first four lines of "Leda and the Swan" as published in To-morrow portray a less seductive violation of the girl than the version subsequently published in A Vision in 1925 and in The Tower in 1928:

¹¹² Yeats had published all his other plays in the volume Plays for an Irish Theatre in November 1922.

¹¹³ The Irish Statesman, 5 January 1924, p.534

The Irish Statesman, August 1924, p.2

A rush, a sudden wheel, and hovering still
The bird descends, and her frail thighs are pressed
By the webbed toes, and that all-powerful bill
Has laid her helpless face upon his breast.¹¹⁵

Cullingford sees the introduction of the "staggering girl" with her thighs "caressed by the dark webs" in the later version of the poem as an "improvement in poetics" which also "intensifies the sexual and kinetic power of the verse." Be that as it may, there was enough sexual power in the original verse to offend Fr. Corcoran and to stay in his mind over subsequent years as he continually referred back to Yeats's "Swan Song" including the term in almost all of his subsequent attacks on Yeats in particular, and to the Anglo-Irish literary movement in general.

Fr. Corcoran managed to draw James Joyce's name into his attack on Yeats with support from an unlikely source. Yeats had praised Joyce's <u>Ulysses</u>¹¹⁷ in a speech on the award for fiction at the presentation of literary awards at the Tailteann Games¹¹⁸, which were held in August 1924. <u>The Irish Independent</u> had reported him as saying:

We feel, however, that it is our duty to say that Mr. James Joyce's book, though as obscene as Rabelais, and therefore forbidden by law in England and the United States, is more indubitably a work of genius than any prose written by an Irishman since the death of Synge. 119

A response to this praise of Joyce's <u>Ulysses</u> was published in <u>The Irish Statesman</u> on 30 August in the form of a letter from Professor Wilbraham Trench of Trinity College. ¹²⁰ Trench wrote:

W.B. Yeats, the poet, has for long years made debtors and thralls of the lovers of beauty, by giving them to see life and the world made doubly beautiful by the light that never was on sea or land. J. Joyce rakes hell, and the sewers, for dirt to throw in the fair face of life, and for poison to make beauty shrivel and die. Now, the Dublin aesthete discovers Joyce, and Dr. Yeats undertakes that no citizen of Dublin shall fail to know his name. In season and out of season he has proclaimed him a

¹¹⁵ To-morrow, August 1924, p.2

¹¹⁶ Cullingford, Elizabeth, Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry, p. 155

¹¹⁷ Ulysses was not eligible for an award as Joyce was living outside Ireland.

See chapter 8 for more on the Tailteann Games.

¹¹⁹ The Irish Independent, 11 August 1924, p.4

Professor Trench (1968- 1941) was Professor of English Literature at Trinity College and as such was, intriguingly, the successor of Edward Dowden.

genius. But be that so, Joyce is a genius. "Tis true, 'tis pity." But there have been geniuses who wallowed in the mire before, though whether any quite equally foul-minded, who shall say?¹²¹

While Professor Trench did not make any comment on Yeats's poem in <u>To-morrow</u>, there were others who did object. Father Finlay, the Jesuit professor from University College, Dublin, who chaired the editorial board of the journal <u>Studies</u> was a member, with Russell, Robinson, Lady Gregory and others, of the Carnegie Library Committee. On reading Robinson's story Fr. Finlay sent a letter of resignation to the Committee because, as Lady Gregory wrote in her journal, he could "not continue association" with Robinson. Lady Gregory also noted that "The Provost" read Fr. Finlay's letter and said that, "having obtained a copy of *Tomorrow*, thought that story very offensive, also Yeats's Leda – 'so unlike his early poems." 123

The objections to <u>To-morrow</u> and to Yeats's poem cannot be easily explained as being the obsession of one particular Catholic priest, Father Timothy Corcoran, although undoubtedly, as we have shown, his antagonism to Yeats and those associated with <u>The Irish Statesman</u> was extreme. As Elizabeth Cullingford had noted, Professor Trench's letter and the disgust of the Provost of Trinity complicated the situation. Cullingford wrote:

The Provost's disgust, like Professor Trench's letter, complicates analysis of the dispute along purely sectarian lines and proves that Yeats and his co-conspirators were capable of promoting an unlikely union of hearts between the Gaelic propagandists and Trinity College. Jesuits and elderly male professors were equally horrified. 124

There was another horrified Catholic magazine, which Cullingford does not discuss (she does mention that Sean O'Casey brought it to Lady Gregory's attention). This was the Dominican publication <u>The Irish Rosary</u> which under the heading "The Squinting

¹²¹ The Irish Statesman, 30 August 1924, p.790

The Provost of Trinity College at that time was Dr. John Henry Bernard who had previously been Dean of St. Patrick's and Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin. As such it is probably not surprising that he would have been unhappy with Robinson's story and Yeats's poem.

¹²³ Murphy, Daniel J., (ed.) <u>Lady Gregory's Journals Vol.1</u>, p.592

¹²⁴ Cullingford, Elizabeth, Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry, p.148

Windows School"¹²⁵ took to task "the Plunkett House clique of pagans, theosophists, and log-rollers, who largely control the *Irish Statesman* and the Abbey Theatre, and whose antics . . . afford food for endless merriment to the initiated."¹²⁶ The magazine <u>Tomorrow</u>, the "latest venture of this pagan group," is described as something that might issue from "the Palmerston Institution for the Feeble-Minded." It concluded:

Its editors, who obviously cannot write English, and seem to have no knowledge of anything worth while, inform the world that they regard Bishops of all denominations as "atheists" - just the sort of opinion we might expect from some imbecile at Palmerston or some madman at Portrane. 127

While the antagonism to Yeats shown by the Provost and Professor from Trinity College was short-lived, The Catholic Bulletin continued to attack him on every possible occasion and frequently in the years to come would revert back for ammunition in its attacks to the dispute over the publication of "Leda and the Swan" in To-morrow. But as these attacks continued, and were supported occasionally by other Catholic publications, such as the Dominican journal, The Irish Rosary or The Catholic Mind, two new journals, The Dublin Magazine, first published in August 1923, and the new series of The Irish Statesman, which recommenced publication in September 1923, were producing a quality of critical analysis which long been absent from the reception which Yeats's writings were receiving in Ireland.

I will look at the output of these two journals in some detail in the next chapter.

The reference is to <u>The Valley of the Squinting Windows</u> by Brinsley MacNamara, a satire on Irish village life published in 1918, which was excoriated throughout Ireland.

¹²⁶ The Irish Rosary, November 1924, p.873

Yeats, in fact, wrote the editorial which included the comment "we count among atheists bad writers and Bishops of all denominations." There is a manuscript draft of the editorial, in an envelope inscribed "Manifesto for Stuart" all in Yeats's hand, in the National Library of Ireland. NLI MS 30,278

Chapter 8 1925 - 1934

The Dublin Magazine was one of the most important of all the Irish literary journals of the first half of the twentieth century. It was founded and edited by Seumas O Sullivan¹ and published initially monthly and then quarterly, its first issue appearing in August 1923. Unusually for a journal published in Dublin, it took no interest in politics, but concentrated its attention on purely literary and artistic matters. The magazine was an elite production with high quality typography and layout. It also carried illustrations and reproductions of paintings by artists such as John Butler Yeats, Augustus John, Harry Kernoff and Nora McGuinness and sold for a subscription of 14s.6d. per year. During Yeats's lifetime (the magazine survived until 1958) it published reviews of nine of his books. It also published his introductions to his plays The Words upon the Window Pane in 1931 and "Fighting the Waves" in 1932, and among the many pieces on the Abbey theatre, it published in full Yeats's speech to the Dublin Literary Society "A Defense of the Abbey Theatre" delivered in February 1923. Reading through The Dublin Magazine over the years in which Yeats was writing it is possible to see him in a particular perspective, surrounded by an impressive coterie of Irish writers. These included his contemporaries or nearcontemporaries such as Douglas Hyde and Lennox Robinson, as well as a host of younger writers such as Padraic Colum, Austin Clarke, Patrick Kavanagh ("Shanco Dubh" was published in the July-September 1937 issue), Liam O'Flaherty, and even the young Samuel Beckett who had a short poem published in the July- September 1934 issue. The regard in which Yeats was held in a magazine which published so many Irish writers of quality is evident in a review of Daniel Corkery's Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature written by P.S. O'Hegarty and published in the January-March 1932 issue of the magazine. O'Hegarty disagreed with Corkery who had rated Synge more highly than Yeats, writing:

The whole of Mr. Yeats's work is Irish literature of the highest order. Not alone is he the greatest living Irish poet, but the greatest poet Ireland has ever produced. Everything he has done has been done with the touch of a master.¹

The second important magazine that commenced publication in 1923, was a revived <u>The Irish Statesman</u>. Sir Horace Plunkett, as noted previously, had revived this magazine in September 1923 with financial support from America, and with George Russell as editor, a

¹ The Dublin Magazine, January- March 1932, p.51

position he retained until the magazine's demise in April 1930.² The Irish Statesman was a weekly magazine selling for 3d. which had a political as well as a literary agenda and by contrast with The Dublin Magazine it had a more commercial, journalistic appearance.³ While it reviewed Yeats's books as they appeared, it did not publish any of his literary work but concentrated instead on such output as his dialogue on "Compulsory Gaelic" in 1924, his "Undelivered Speech on Divorce" and his speech on "The Child and the State" in 1925, and finally his article on "The Censorship and St. Thomas" in 1928. These publications, combined with the political and social writings of Russell and others in The Irish Statesman continued to attract the ire of, and attacks from, some elements of the Catholic press led, in particular, by The Catholic Bulletin and supported on occasions by The Catholic Pictorial as well as from Yeats's old enemy D. P. Moran and his journal The Leader.

It was not only in literary matters that <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> was antagonistic to Yeats and <u>The Irish Statesman</u>. The pro-government stance of <u>The Irish Statesman</u> was also a primary cause for the opprobrium of the <u>Bulletin</u> which ranked its support for Eamon de Valera and its opposition to the Treaty on a par with its opposition to Yeats and his literary colleagues. An editorial comment in March 1925 gives a flavour of its attitude to de Valera:

Eamon de Valera stands today, in nobility of character and purity of life, the same peerless Irish chieftain as he was before and after the scheming and unscrupulous English politicians 'skip-scabbed' the rotten apple of discord, the so-called treaty, amongst our people.⁴

It is not easy to measure the relative influence among the Irish people of <u>The Irish Statesman</u> and <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u>. One commentator, Margaret O'Callaghan, has defined <u>The Irish Statesman's</u> contributors as "intellectually self-confident and clear about the type of Ireland that they wished to create" while <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> "articulated the directionless lashing-out of frustrated inferiority." Another commentator, Brian Murphy, disagrees and has argued that the <u>Bulletin's</u> contributors were of considerable standing in

² For a detailed discussion of Russell's role in and contribution to <u>The Irish Statesman</u> see Allen, Nicholas, <u>Political Visions: George Russell 1913-1930</u>, unpublished Ph.D Thesis, TCD. 2000.

A copy of the cover page of the 14 March 1925 issue announcing the publication of Yeats's "Undelivered Speech" on divorce is included in Appendix 2.

⁴ The Catholic Bulletin, March 1925, p.220

O'Callaghan, Margaret, "Language, Nationality and Cultural Identity in the Irish Free State" in <u>Irish Historical Studies</u>, November 1984, p.236.

their own fields. I would suggest that as far as the readers of The Catholic Bulletin were concerned, the contributions of academics such as Fr. Corcoran, Fr. Paul Walsh, Professor of Church History at Maynooth (1919-1928), W. P. Stockley, Professor of English at UCC, and Monsignor Hagan writing from Rome would have carried considerable weight and influence. Undoubtedly the Bulletin's contributors would not, in retrospect, rank in terms of intellectual or literary ability with those of The Irish Statesman, including as it did Yeats, Russell, O'Faolain, E. R Dodds (subsequently Regius Professor of Greek at the University of Oxford) and many others, but among its own community of readers the Bulletin would have had considerable influence. The attacks on Yeats are so out of character with the other contents of the magazine, and so patently extreme, that in retrospect it is difficult to read them as very representative of the contemporary general Catholic reception of Yeats. However they do represent one particular and unquestionably informed strand of opinion and therefore must be given due weight when assessing how Yeats was regarded by different communities in Ireland in the later stages of his career. Another Catholic journal, The Catholic Pictorial, which commenced publication in February 1925, also displayed a considerable antagonism to Yeats, particularly to his position on divorce, as we will see.

Since his appointment to the Senate, Yeats had now become a well-established public figure in Ireland. His contributions to Senate debates were regularly reported in the press as was his attendance at such festivities as the Tailteann Games which were held in Dublin in August 1924, and for which he was selected as Chairman of the Distinguished Visitors Entertainment Committee. These games were initiated by the Free State government as a celebration of sport and literature. They revived an ancient Celtic festival, (which according to the Four Masters had run from about 630 B.C. to 1169 A.D.), with the primary objective of improving morale and generating a sense of identity in the fledging new state. Yeats's public profile was further enhanced when he took the place of President Cosgrave, who was unable to attend, for the final Banquet to mark the end of the festival, and proposed the toast of welcome to the many visitors who had attended. He was also among the adjudicators, with Lennox Robinson and George Russell for the Tailteann Literary Awards.8

⁶ Murphy, Brian, J.J. O'Kelly and the Catholic Bulletin, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, UCD 1986

⁷ Note in <u>The Irish Monthly</u>, July 1924, p.332.

⁸ The poetry award was shared by Oliver St. John Gogarty for "An Offering of Swans" and Francis Stuart for

Yeats's position as a Senator and public figure did not inhibit The Catholic Bulletin from its attacks and the continuous and outspoken criticism of Yeats by this journal as well as by some other elements of the Catholic press during the nineteen twenties is worth exploring further before returning to the chronological examination of the Irish response to Yeats's literary publications.

The founding of the Irish Free State brought a new role for the Catholic Church in Ireland. With a national government installed in Dublin and a programme of new legislation, appropriate for the new state, being put in place, it saw its opportunity, indeed its responsibility, to influence that legislation to make it reflect Catholic teaching. As J. J. Lee states:

It is true that the 1922 Free State constitution had no sectarian bias. Nevertheless, the Catholic archbishop of Dublin insisted to Cosgrave that the Catholic Church had not merely the right, but the duty, to control Protestant consciences. This attitude of the Catholic Church was demonstrated in a statement made by Cardinal Logue at a reception in the Mansion House in Dublin following a conference of the Catholic Truth Society in October 1923, when he set out what he saw as the primary objective of the Catholic Church in Ireland:

They had now an opportunity of doing a great work for Ireland, which must be placed on a really firm foundation. They must make Ireland what she ought to be, and what Providence destined that she should be – a good, sound, solid Catholic nation. 10

This view was not fully shared by the government of the day who were concerned not to antagonise the Anglo-Irish community which was generally supportive of the Cosgrave administration. Kevin O'Higgins, Minister of Home Affairs, speaking at the same CTS conference, was quoted in The Irish Times as saying:

The word catholic signified, literally, universal purpose and truth, and Catholic and Protestant and Presbyterian were alike catholic in so far as they gave beneficial public service. 11

his poem "We have Kept the Faith".

⁹ Lee, J.J., Ireland <u>1912 – 1985</u>, p.77. ¹⁰ <u>The Irish Times</u>, 12 October 1923, p.8

¹¹ *Ibid.* 13 October 1923, p.7

The efforts of the government to maintain the balance O'Higgins wished for had little success with <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> as its attacks on Yeats, <u>The Irish Statesman</u>, and the Anglo-Irish literary movement continued unabated.

While the role of the Catholic Church had been enhanced in the new state, the status of the Protestant community in the twenty-six counties of which the state was now comprised, was also much changed and diminished since the imposition of partition. ¹² In this new environment, conflict between extremist Catholic journals and the Protestant dominated and outspoken The Irish Statesman over the first decade of the state's existence was inevitable, particularly as the Free State Government began to debate the introduction of new legislation on such sensitive matters as Censorship and Divorce. In his position as Senator and with his close association with The Irish Statesman and what The Catholic Bulletin liked to call "The New Ascendancy," Yeats was to become embroiled over the next decade in controversies well outside the field of literature or the arts and these controversies were to have considerable influence on his reputation and reception particularly by the Catholic and Nationalist communities in Ireland of the time.

The attitude of the different elements of the Catholic Press to Government proposals on Censorship and Divorce, which were opposed by the Catholic hierarchy, was various. Some journals such as the Irish Ecclesiastical Record or Studies stayed clear of controversy and focussed attention either on matters of Theology, Canon Law and Liturgy as in the case of the former, or on educational and general cultural matters in the latter case. D. P. Moran's The Leader, though not strictly an organ of the Catholic press, attacked Yeats and The Irish Statesman from a Catholic as well as from an Irish Irelander perspective. Moran's opinion of Yeats in the new Irish Free State was clearly stated in an editorial in August 1924:

Amongst the variegated humbugs in modern Ireland prominent are men like Mr. Yeats, posing as Irishmen. Mr. Yeats is an Englishman. Whatever number of people bother about what he writes, we are confident that they are mostly English. Moran was also highly critical of Yeats's self-expressed inability to learn Irish which in "addition to being evidence of Mr. Yeats being linguistically a dunce, it corroborates our

¹² Brown, Terence, <u>Ireland: A Social and Cultural History1922- 1985</u>. See particularly the chapter "The Fate of Minorities", pp.102 –137.

view that he must be classed as English." This was quite a remarkable comment from Moran who, as we noted previously, was no great expert in Irish himself.

Two weeks later Moran had more to say on the topic:

Mr. Yeats has no business now for Irish, though no man living worked the Irish Language movement so shrewdly from a shop-keeper's point of view than he did. He used the movement, and now it has no further use for him; the Ireland that is developing, not withstanding all the surface distractions, will have no use for shrewd West Britons like Yeats. 15

There was a distinct similarity between these views of Moran's and the manner in which <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> surveyed the Anglo-Irish literary scene and <u>The Irish Statesman</u> in particular, during the early years of national independence. An editorial published in <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> in February 1925 reads:

The *Irish Statesman* wants us to admit that there is an Anglo-Irish culture, having its own tradition in Ireland. There is no such thing: there is a tawdry and sorry roll of writers who are just third-rate or fourth-rate, if classed against English writers of the time: and all the rest, from Swift downwards, are real English in every sense of the term. It is with English writers that they are really classed by all writers abroad. There is nothing Irish about them, save when, like the Swan Sonneteer Yeats and the ineffable Synge, they pervert good Irish thought to their own base uses. ¹⁶

In his "undelivered speech" on divorce published in <u>The Irish Statesman</u> in March 1925,¹⁷ Yeats had accused President Cosgrave of wishing "to impose his Catholic convictions upon members of the Church of Ireland and upon men of no church"¹⁸- a sentiment that was certain to raise the ire of The Catholic Bulletin, which indeed it did:

Senator W. B. Pollexfen Yeats, author of the unspeakable Swan Song in the foul pages of *To-morrow*, August 1924, vents his views on divorce in the accommodating pages of *The Irish Statesman* for March 14.

¹³ The Leader, 2 August 1924, p.606

Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid. 16 August 1924, p.29

¹⁶ The Catholic Bulletin, February 1925, p.101

¹⁷ A photocopy of the title page of <u>The Irish Statesman</u> announcing Yeats's speech is included in Appendix 2.

¹⁸ The Irish Statesman, 14 March 1925, p.8

It then quoted the opening of Yeats's speech: "I shall vote against the resolution sent up to us by the Dail, (sic) not because I am interested in the subject of divorce, but because I consider the resolution an act of aggression" and commented:

So when Catholics venture to say that they will not vote for Divorce Bills, they are aggressive! Forthwith Pollexfen Yeats strikes the sarcastic note of the New Ascendancy, and with his normal effrontery comments on the benighted mediaevalism, the intolerance, and the purblind views of the mere Irish Catholic. 19 The divorce speech also drew the ire of The Leader. An article under the initials C.W.R. commenced:

Mr. Yeats does not conceal his dislike of the Catholic Church and all that she stands for, and accordingly he takes this opportunity of coming out in his capacity of Senator as an anti-Catholic bigot.²⁰

While, no doubt, the attitude of Fr. Corcoran to Yeats was somewhat eccentric and extreme, there was some support for his views, particularly on the issue of divorce, in other elements of the Catholic press. The Catholic Pictorial, ²¹ which had commenced publication in February 1925 under the editorship of M. J. Murray, also took offence at Yeats's "Undelivered Speech" on divorce as published in The Irish Statesman. In an editorial in its April 1925 issue it set out its objection as follows:

Owing to the position to which Mr. Yeats has elevated himself as representative of modern Irish literature, his words will probably be quoted in other countries as equally representative of modern Irish thought. This alone lends importance to his article, which is not only a travesty of the Irish mind on this subject, but also indicates a studied, or natural, ignorance of the Catholic attitude, which few non-Catholics affect.

. . . It is hardly necessary to answer Mr. Yeats's arguments, which are as old as any arguments ever based in favour of the easy path rather than the right one. His accusation of intolerance on the part of Catholics is answered by his own article, which is almost as intolerant as it could be.

¹⁹ The Catholic Bulletin, April 1925, p.292

The Leader, 28 March 1925, p.181

²¹ The Catholic Pictorial was a monthly journal which described itself as existing "to assist to the best of its ability in the formation of a sound Catholic public opinion in Ireland. It is owned and edited by laymen only". While belonging to no organisation, it was prepared "to submit gladly, indeed with the utmost satisfaction, to ecclesiastical censorship." January 1929, p.8

. . . The majority *and* the minority party in Ireland can learn something from the present issue. The majority can find that a section which wants to maintain a minority State in Ireland is not such an asset as it thought, and the minority must realise that it is not still an oligarchy, and if unable to accept a nation's ruling it had better retire to wherever its views will meet with a wider acceptance.²²

Three months later Yeats delivered his well-known second speech on divorce to the Senate in June 1925; the speech in which he took pride in being one of the "minority" in Ireland, a people who were "one of the great stocks of Europe," the people of Burke, Grattan, Swift, Emmet and Parnell. The Leader was again quick to respond:

We think we sized up Mr. Yeats, and what we may call the Plunkett gang fairly accurately many years ago, though they had a fairly soft time with our green people. In our judgement Mr. Yeats was a Britisher, a bigot, and a bounder, and that is our opinion still.²⁴

As <u>The Leader's</u> article was happy to point out, even <u>The Irish Times</u> had some reservations regarding Yeats's speech, writing in an editorial that

we regret the manner of Senator Yeats's intervention in yesterday's debate. Some of his arguments were perfectly sound, but the whole temper of his speech was hurtful and aggressive. . . . Excursions into the higher criticism are singularly unhelpful in this controversy; and there was neither edification nor good taste in Senator Yeats's rummagings "amid the cold *Hic jacets* of the dead." . . . A poet may sing of broken hearts; but the task of mending the bruised hearts that seek relief from tragic wedlock in the Free State needs qualities of steadiness and compromise that are found more often in plainer men.²⁵

Remarkably, the divorce debate seems to have been one of those rare occasions in which Yeats managed to offend the communities represented by both <u>The Irish Times</u>, and <u>The Irish Independent</u> as well as <u>The Leader</u>, <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> and also a new radical, republican and anti-Government magazine *An Phoblacht* which was edited by Peadar O'Donnell.²⁶ In its first number on 20 June 1925 *An Phoblacht*, under the title "Dr. Yeats'

²⁵ The Irish Times, 12 June 1925, p.6

²² The Catholic Pictorial, April 1925, p.62

²³ Pearce, Donald, R.,(ed.) The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats, p.99

²⁴ The Leader, 20 June 1925, p.464

²⁶Peadar O'Donnell (1893 – 1986) was born in Co. Donegal, educated at St. Patrick's College and became a

Spiritual Ancestry", disputed Yeats's claim to be a member of "the Anglo-Irish minority to which he says he belongs."²⁷ The article then invoked and quoted from Burke, Swift, Grattan, Emmet and finally Parnell and argued that Yeats belonged more correctly to the line of Norbury, Fitzgibbon and Major Sirr.²⁸ The article then clearly defines its intended readership as it concluded:

Dr. Yeats, who owes his senatorial position to one English Minister's threat of war and to another's order to initiate a Civil War, must seek his spiritual ancestry elsewhere. For he does not belong to Irish patriotism.

Attacks on Yeats continued in <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> over the years at every opportunity; whether it was the divorce debate, the education debate, the censorship debate, the row over O'Casey's <u>The Plough and the Stars</u>, or any other issue on which <u>The Irish Statesman</u> or indeed <u>The Irish Times</u> would comment. Consistently whether in editorials or in articles signed "Molua," Yeats's name was highlighted and his association both with his Pollexfen ancestors and with the short-lived journal <u>To-morrow</u> was emphasised.

In September 1926 and in August 1927 Father Corcoran published two articles in <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u>, under his pseudonym "Molua", commenting on an article, "Our Need for Religious Sincerity," which Yeats had published in the English journal, <u>The New Criterion</u>, in April 1926. In "Purging the Pride of Pollexfen" Corcoran reprinted Yeats's footnote: "The Irish Periodical which has hitherto published my occasional comments on Irish events, explained that this essay would endanger its existence. I have therefore sought publication elsewhere," and greets it with mock horror:

Driven from Home! Thrust from the Haughty Portals of Plunkett House, with his Occasional Literary Offspring in his arms!! Why did not a score of sabres leap from their scabbards, to counter this cold-shoulder, cleave it to the chine, and vindicate the vanishing Visionary? Where was the Lennox of old? . . . Was there no puissant herald sent by the House of Persse, to bid defiance to the dour denizen of

teacher. He was a socialist republican, novelist and editor. *An Phoblacht* which he edited from its foundation to its suppression in 1931was described by F. S. L. Lyons as carrying on "a ceaseless campaign of vituperation against the government." Lyons, F. S. L., <u>Ireland since the Famine</u>, p.502. In later years O'Donnell was deputy editor and editor of <u>The Bell</u>.

²⁷ An Phoblacht, 20 June 1925, p.3

²⁸ All of these names, particularly those of Major Sirr who was responsible for the arrest of Robert Emmet, and Lord Norbury who sentenced Emmet to death, would have been anathema to Irish nationalists.
²⁹ Identified as a pseudonym for Fr. Corcoran by Brian Murphy. Unpublished Ph. D thesis, UCD 1986.

the Homestead of the Subsidised Statesman? Where were all the Brethren of the Laurel Crown? 30

In the subsequent article, "Pollexfen Pride and the People," published in August 1927, Fr. Corcoran printed a highly selective number of quotations from Yeats's writings, which, in his view, exhibited "the mind of Pollexfen towards the people of Ireland, and the religion of that people." These included Responsibilities published by Cuala Press in 1914 where "Senator Yeats published his notorious jeer at the people who

'Fumble in a greasy till,

And add the halfpence to the pence,

And prayer to shivering prayer'

and where "among the effusions entitled *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), the Proud Senator to be of 1922 complains in his lordliest style of

'The daily spite of this unmannerly town

Where who has served the most, is most defamed."

and A <u>Vision</u> where "Senator Yeats . . . points out how 'Christianity oppressed the Wise'." 31

These selected quotations, using Yeats's own words, even if out of context, must have had some impact on the readers of The Catholic Bulletin and they underlined, yet again, the influence of a particular editor or reviewer on the public perception of Yeats, whether it be a supportive editor such as George Russell in The Irish Statesman, or an antagonistic one such as D. P. Moran in The Leader, or Patrick Keohane and Father Corcoran in The Catholic Bulletin. The different approaches also emphasises the point often made in previous chapters of this work, that there was no one Irish response to Yeats during his lifetime, and that as new work appeared and as Yeats himself became embroiled in public controversies the Irish response did not remain consistent but varied with time, with political developments, and with the influence of the current cultural, religious and political environment. That this variability in the reception of Yeats and his work by the different interpretive communities in Ireland had continued into the nineteen twenties is evident from the responses which have been noted to his receipt of the Nobel prize and to his appointment to the Irish Senate. It had become increasingly difficult for any

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The Catholic Bulletin, September 1926, p.941
 Ibid. August 1927, p.822

commentator to decry the literary quality of his work, but those magazines with particular political or religious agendas continues to attack the work on the basis of the themes chosen, as in the case of his poem "Leda and the Swan," or on the basis that his writing was no longer prepared to represent, celebrate, and promote the spirit of Ireland as the Irish Irelanders desired. It was mostly, however, Yeats's writing on non-literary matters that drew the ire of his opponents.

The Catholic Bulletin found another cause for attack when, on 30 November 1925, Yeats spoke to the Irish Literary Society on "The Child and the State." His speech was printed in full in The Irish Statesman in December 1925³² and was subjected to a detailed attack in The Catholic Bulletin in January 1926. A paragraph can stand as a penultimate representation of the approach of this particular magazine to Yeats over previous and subsequent years:

He now includes the children of Ireland in his comprehensive calumnies, and prepares to organise religious instruction for them. There will, we presume, be special chapters on the "Marriage Bond" and on Divorce, by the Orator at Large: he will doubtless have special notes on the utilisation of Pagan gods, by his faithful Stephens,³³ and a delicate chapter on the reverence due to the Madonna, indited by the still more reliable Robinson. The aim of all the Associated Aesthetes has, of course, been formulated once for all in an immortal piece of verse by Yeats himself. Paganism is to resume its sway, and the Neo-Pagans are to look complacently on the altered scene, where, as they hope, God Himself will find Himself deserted. We cite this thought in the true Pollexfen phrase: "God stands winding His *lonely* horn."³⁴ This is their cultural climax.³⁵

Fr. Corcoran's knowledge of, and ability to quote from, Yeats's poetry notwithstanding, it is clear that, in these years, it was primarily Yeats's involvement with political and moral issues, outside the literary field, that was causing a rift with the Catholic press. While D. P. Moran ignored Yeats's literary output as he was considered "an English poet," Fr.

³⁵ The Catholic Bulletin, January 1926, p.9

³² It is included, along with his "Undelivered Speech on Divorce," in the appendices to <u>The Senate Speeches of W.B.Yeats</u> edited by Donald R. Pearce.

This was James Stephens (?1880 – 1950) the well known poet, novelist and short-story writer who was also a Protestant.

³⁴ This line is from the poem "Into the Twilight" first published in 1893 in <u>The National Observer</u> and included in The <u>Celtic Twilight</u> published in December 1893.

Corcoran knew the work, and was able to quote selectively from it in his attacks on <u>The Irish Statesman</u> and what it represented in Anglo-Irish Protestant culture. That he was not fully representative of the Catholic attitude towards Yeats can be seen from an article on "Gaelic and Anglo-Irish literature" published by <u>The Irish Statesman</u> in November 1929 and written by another Jesuit, Fr. Stephen J. Brown, who had been instrumental in setting up The Central Catholic Library in 1923. Fr. Brown referred to his book, <u>A Guide to Books in Ireland</u>, which he had published in 1912, and in which he had praised Yeats's work:

I spoke of his *Wanderings of Oisin* as "one of the most splendid pieces of imaginative work in modern poetry," and with almost equal admiration of many of his other poems. I held that he had "a greater mastery over language than perhaps any poet of recent times" (p.102). I have re-read all his poems and plays and I have not altered my judgement. ³⁶

The attitude of <u>The Leader</u> or of <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> and <u>The Catholic Pictorial</u> towards Yeats was in marked contrast to that of the Protestant weekly <u>The Church of Ireland Gazette</u>. This journal favourably reviewed all six volumes of Yeats's collected works published by Macmillan between November 1923 and November 1926 commencing with its review of <u>Plays and Controversies</u> which was noted in the previous chapter. When commenting on "The Celtic Element in Literature" in Yeats's <u>Essays</u>, published in May 1924, it pointed out: "The truth is that all blood in these islands is mixed blood, and the qualities displayed by any race are the results of this mixture." ³⁷ This was a sentiment with which Father Corcoran in <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> or D. P. Moran in <u>The Leader</u> would have violently disagreed.

The Catholic Bulletin did have another opportunity to attack Yeats and the Abbey Theatre in February 1926 with the opening of Sean O'Casey's The Plough and the Stars. The story of the initial reception of the play is familiar, as is Yeats's famous oration from the Abbey stage in which he called the play O'Casey's "apotheosis". At a lecture, two weeks later, on "My Own Poetry", Yeats then "expressed his opinion on the patriotism that resented the faults of a country being exposed," saying that when the country reached "intellectual"

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The Irish Statesman, 30 November 1929, p.253

³⁷The Church of Ireland Gazette, 22 August 1924, p.507

The Irish Times, 12 February 1926, p.7

maturity" it would no longer harbour such a resentment.³⁹ The Catholic Bulletin, true to form, described this comment as "a new specimen of New Ascendancy doctrine, purveyed by the Board provided with a Director in Chief and Orator at Large in the person of W.B. Pollexfen Yeats."

In March 1926 a short-lived new magazine made an appearance in Cork and was soon in conflict with Yeats. The Irish Tribune was, in Nicholas Allen's phrase "set up in Cork by an alliance of Cork Republicans and dissatisfied Free Staters led by Alfred O'Rahilly". ⁴¹ Its first editor L. B. Byrne only survived for three months and from then until its demise in December 1926, O'Rahilly, who was then Professor of Mathematical Physics in UCC, and who, subsequent to his retirement from the chair, joined the Jesuit order, and Daniel Corkery who acted as literary editor, were the primary influences. The first conflict with Yeats arose from an article by Yeats regarding an objection by certain Christian Brothers to the inclusion of the Christmas carol "The Cherry-Tree Carol" in the magazine Our Boys. Yeats had written an article criticising the Christian Brothers' action but George Russell declined to publish it in The Irish Statesman and Yeats had it published in The Dial in London in February 1926 under the title "The Need for Audacity of Thought". ⁴³ A response by Professor O'Rahilly entitled "Mr. Yeats as Theologian," in the 23 April 1926 issue of The Irish Tribune, took Yeats to task, calling his intervention "offensive stupidity," and continuing:

Let Mr. Yeats make no mistake about it. In attacking the Christian Brothers, he is attacking all Irish Catholics. Let me take leave to tell Mr. Yeats that in trying to brand us all as ignorant fools he is merely proving that a poet, like a shoemaker, has a last to which he ought to stick.⁴⁴

³⁹ *Ibid.* 25 February 1926, p.6

⁴¹ Nicholas Allen, Ph.D. Thesis, TCD. 2000, p. 223

⁴⁰ The Catholic Bulletin, March 1926, p.244

⁴² Daniel Corkery (1878 – 1964) was born in Cork and educated at St.Patrick's Training College in Dublin and the Crawford School of Art in Cork. He was Professor of English in UCC from 1930 to 1947. His influential book on traditional Irish poets and poetry, <u>The Hidden Ireland</u> was published in 1924. He was a supporter of the Irish Irelander concept and a trenchant critic of Yeats and the Anglo-Irish literary movement.

⁴³ In a note to the article Yeats stated: "The Irish periodical which has hitherto published my occasional comments on Irish events explained that this essay would endanger its existence. I have therefore sought publication elsewhere." See <u>Unpublished Prose Vol. II</u> p.465.

⁴³ The Irish Tribune, 23 April 1926, p.9

⁴⁴ Ibid.

O'Rahilly, in the manner of Fr. Corcoran in The Catholic Bulletin, then went on to invoke <u>To-morrow</u> and Lennox Robinson's story before expressing agreement with Yeats in his concern that "the present campaign against immoral literature may develop into an undesirable censorship." However, O'Rahilly considered that Yeats's "own outbursts are likely to increase the danger," and suggested that he should "take a further stroll per amica silentia lunae and forget the Cherry Tree and the Christian Brothers."

While Yeats's political or social writings and speeches were being subjected to these attacks in both Dublin and Cork, The Irish Statesman was publishing some of the most comprehensive and thoughtful reviews of his literary work in what was a very busy period of publication for him. The reviews were mostly written by George Russell himself, generally under his spiritual name AE and occasionally under the pseudonym Y.O., and also by Susan Mitchell, F. R. Higgins, and Sean O'Faolain. In all fourteen of Yeats's books were reviewed in The Irish Statesman, from Plays and Controversies in January 1924 to Selected Poems in November 1929.

In his reviews Russell traced the development, as he saw it, of Yeats's art since the early years of their friendship. His review of Plays and Controversies, as discussed in the previous chapter, had noted the changes wrought by Yeats in his drama over the years. When reviewing Essays, Russell considered the book to be

the only contribution of any importance made by an Irish writer to an Irish philosophy of literature and drama. . . . Yet there is no definite philosophy, the unity of the thought arising from the peculiar temperament or imagination of the poet rather than from any logical system he has thought out, and into which all must fit or be outcast.45

Early Poems and Stories appealed greatly to Russell, and while some of the changes made to the early poems were regretted, he was still convinced that "the poetry of Yeats is the greatest spiritual gift any Irishman has made to his tribe."46

Russell had reservations about A Vision which was published in January 1926: "Here I fall away from a mind I have followed, I think with understanding, since I was a boy, and as he

46 Ibid. 17 October 1925, p.176

⁴⁵ The Irish Statesman, 7 June 1924, p.398

becomes remote in his thought I wonder whether he has forgotten his own early wisdom." As a believer in free will, Russell was not content to have his life "drop into inevitable groove after groove." Yeats's system was one of "bewildering complexity," and Russell suspected that in the placing of individuals within the different phases, Yeats was animated "not only by a desire to elucidate the system, but by an impish humour" which invited the question "does it relate so well to life?" Russell welcomed the book accepting that he might comprehend later "much that is now unintelligible" and raised an issue that is still unresolved today:

It is not a book which will affect many in our time. It is possible it may be discussed feverishly by commentators a century hence, as Blake's prophetic books so ignored, so unintelligible a hundred years ago, are discussed by many editors in our time, and he is found to be the profoundest voice of his own age. It is possible *A Vision* may come to be regarded as the greatest of Mr. Yeats' works. It is conceivable also that it may be regarded as his greatest erring from the way of his natural genius, and the lover of his poetry may lament that the most intense concentration of his intellect was given to this book rather than to drama or lyric.

Russell was more comfortable with <u>Estrangement</u>, which was published by Cuala Press in August 1926. The Yeats who wrote this collection of "thoughts from a diary kept in nineteen hundred and nine" was a familiar figure to him. He well understood the causes of Yeats's estrangement:

The national movements were too political and but little cultural, and when there is a divorce between the political and the cultural the political mind tends to become a most arid, poisonous and evil influence in the soul of a country, however successful in its ostensible objects.⁴⁹

Yeats, in Russell's view was "not alone in his estrangement from the popular movements," there were others "not so subtle or self-conscious" who were tired of current politics and "went out to form a movement of their own, the movement which has brought Ireland

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⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 13 February 1926, p.715

The full title of the book was Estrangement: Being Some Fifty Thoughts from a Diary Kept by William Butler Yeats in the Year Nineteen Hundred and Nine.

where it is." Their actions were in contrast with those of the politicians whose objective seemed to be "to create an inferior replica of our neighbour's civilisation over here."

Autobiographies was, in Russell's view, defective as it told but little of the poet's "internal life." While the memories of famous men that Yeats had met would interest the reader most, Russell could not recognise either himself or his friends in the chapter devoted to them, and he asserted that this was "because I see the chasm between our inner life and the outer which he describes." The stories told by Yeats about his friends were praised as "what he says about them is rarely trivial, but the incident or words quoted have some symbolic value, and it is probable that he only remembers what fits into the pattern of his own vision." In Russell's view this book is historically important and must have a place among other historical works currently being published:

Any real history of our time must draw not only upon the records of the fighters and the political chieftains, but upon the thoughts and emotions of those who were working in another sphere, but who were letting loose those imponderable elements which give infinity and profundity to national consciousness.

October Blast, a collection of poems published by Cuala Press in August 1927, was, according to Russell, "full of the anger of the soul discovering that the body does not share its immortality." Yeats's genius was "burnished and bright as ever," and the "old miraculous mastery over words" was still present, but Russell was speaking for many contemporary readers of Yeats when he suggested that the world which Yeats had created in his old age was not as lovable as that created in his youth.

When Yeats's major collection of poems, <u>The Tower</u>, was published by Macmillan in February 1928, it was reviewed in <u>The Irish Statesman</u>, not by Russell himself, who was on a visit to America at the time, but by a writer who was to become a close friend and colleague of Yeats in subsequent years. F. R. Higgins⁵² did not engage in any detail with the book, being content to note that most of the poems contained therein had been included

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 27 August 1927, p.597

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 4 December 1926, p.302

⁵² F. R. Higgins (1896 – 1941) was born in Co. Mayo into a Unionist Protestant family. He developed an early interest in Celtic folklore and wrote poetry influenced by Douglas Hyde's <u>Love Songs of Connacht</u>. He knew Yeats well, having contributed with him to a series of <u>Broadsides</u> consisting of songs, illustrations (by Jack Yeats and others) and music published by the Cuala Press and issued monthly during 1935.He was also a playwright and a director of the Abbey Theatre.

in books previously published and had found "acceptance in The Irish Statesman." He did express admiration for the music of the poetry which, like "a renewal of song springs through Mr. Yeats' recent work with invigorating freshness." ⁵³

Some five months later, in Russell's continued absence, <u>The Death of Synge</u> was reviewed in <u>The Irish Statesman</u> by Sean O'Faolain, who was, at that time, studying for his M.A. at University College, Cork. O'Faolain made some interesting comparisons between Yeats and Synge which carry considerable weight coming, as they did, from a man who was subsequently to develop an international reputation as a writer himself:

Synge was by nature what Yeats has never been, and has always been trying to become by way of romance or mask or discipline. Synge had the monastic eyes of the painter who refuses to take the step from symbol to reality, for whom all life is but so much colour and design and image. Yeats, through the sorrow of his life, has taken that fatal step in his old age, and the resultant identification with human existence has bred in him the passionate urge to rebel that his fantastic youth knew nothing of.⁵⁴

And then referring to the recently published <u>The Tower</u> O'Faolain had this to say:

If we are obliged to consider the later Yeats as an intellectual poet, it is well to remember that his wisdom is really most akin to the wisdom of the mystic. He says in *Tower*, his latest volume of verse:

The half-read wisdom of daemonic images

Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy.

If his own wonder-world is but half understood by him how should it be intelligible wholly to us who but see it in his verse; as in a glass darkly – doubly remote.

Russell returned to this concept of a half understood wonder-world and to his previous remarks on <u>A Vision</u> when he reviewed <u>A Packet for Ezra Pound</u> in September 1929. Both books, he felt, contained "a great deal of confusion" in their thought, but he did not complain as "all journeying into hitherto untravelled forests must be confused, and differ from travel upon beaten high roads." As in his review of the previous book his main objection was to "all that over precise movement of his cycles." Russell quoted Plato "If

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⁵³ *Ibid.* 14 April 1928, p.113

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 29 September 1928, p.71

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 7 September 1929, p.11

there be any gods they certainly do not philosophise," and argued that instead of attempting to "show how God geometrises" we must wait for that "intensity of being which, when we attain it, the sage Patangali⁵⁶ tells us, will enable us to penetrate to the essential essence of anything and comprehend it fully merely by directing our attention to it." While awaiting for that "myriad instant," Russell was content to enjoy the two poems inserted into the book,⁵⁷ and to acknowledge that it might have been necessary for Yeats "to go through all that hard intellectual labour of the *Vision* and his after study of philosophy to write the *Tower*, in which his verse achieved a new power and dignity."

Russell's final review of Yeats's work in <u>The Irish Statesman</u> was of <u>The Winding Stair</u>⁵⁸, which had been published in a limited edition by The Fountain Press in New York in October 1929. The review was full of praise. Russell had by now overcome his earlier reservations about Yeats's later poetry and wrote that "the later poet is not only intellectually the lord of the earlier poet, but that as a stylist there is an amazing advance, yet without any diminution of emotion or imagination." It was a rare thing to find a poet whose later work was his best and Russell considered that it was Yeats's "habit of continual intellectual adventure which has that kept his poetry fresh." He identified the *Dialogue between Self and Soul*, (sic) as the finest poem in the book because it was "the most intimate and self-revealing." Yeats's acceptance in the final lines of that poem was credited to his study of Zen philosophy:

We must laugh and we must sing. (,)

We are blest by everything: $(,)^{59}$

Everything we look upon is blest.

In Russell's opinion the poet would not remain long in that mood, he was "too restless." The review then concluded:

It is that untiring energy of mind which has made his later poetry as we read it seem new and strange and beautiful, and the plain words seem many-coloured, as if they had been dusted over with powdered jewels, not less glowing for all their absence of that vivid colour he used so lavishly in *The Wanderings of Usheen* or *The*

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⁵⁶ An Indian philosopher whom Russell had studied. Denson, Alan, <u>Letters from AE</u>, p.195

⁵⁷ "Meditations upon Death" afterwards called "At Algeciras – A Meditation upon Death" and "Mohini Chatterjee" untitled in the book.

⁵⁸ Must be distinguished from <u>The Winding Stair and other poems</u> published by Macmillan in September 1933.

⁵⁹ The correct punctuation is shown in the brackets.

Shadowy Waters. That was a colour put on more from without. In the new poetry plain things shine as by some inner light, as if they were lustrous by themselves and needed not any external light. Plain things shine when they have been bathed in dream. In dream we create our own light and impart it to the things we dream of.⁶⁰

It is interesting to look at how Russell was wrestling here with his love for Yeats's early poetry while admiring the intellectual hardness of the later verse and coming to appreciate it. In this he was not alone as other Irish reviews of the later work show, but Russell was more prepared than most to admire the development which had taken place in Yeats's thought and to accept that the later poetry justified Yeats's "intellectual adventures into philosophy, mysticism and symbolism, into magic and spiritualism and many ways of thought which most people regard as by-ways which lead no whither."

Other reviewers were also dealing with the books by Yeats published in the 1920s. Aodh de Blacam, writing of Essays in The Irish Independent stated that what was "most striking" in the book was "the persistence of the idea" that Yeats had "served a mystical tradition that is, he believes, more ancient and universal than that of the Catholic Church". He admired the quality of Yeats's prose and chose the essay on Spenser for special mention, not alone for the quality of the writing, but also because all "the historians together tell us less of what Elizabethan Ireland was really like, than his essay."61

The Irish Times, The Irish Book Lover and The Dublin Magazine all commented briefly and positively on Essays, the only somewhat discordant note being struck by "Michael Orkney" in The Dublin Magazine who had re-read the essays "with growing wonder that we are so unappreciative, as a nation, of such a mind amongst us." He continued: "Profundity and subtlety of thought mingle here in a strange, haughty, unembarrassed caress," and then objected strongly to the dedication of the book to Lennox Robinson, who though not mentioned by name in the review was described as having "no shred or whit of inheritance in the Yeats' discipleship."62

⁶⁰ The Irish Statesman, 1 February 1930, p.437 The Irish Independent, 19 May 1924, p.7

The Dublin Magazine, February 1925, p.500

It is notable that when Yeats's <u>The Tower</u>, was published in February 1928 it was not recognised as widely in Ireland, as it was internationally, as the masterwork which it is considered to be today. There were some exceptions as when it won the prize for poetry published in the previous four years in the non-competitive section of the Tailteann Festival in August 1928. In making the award, Dermot O'Brien, Chairman of the RHA, said, as reported in <u>The Irish Independent</u>:

Though much beautiful poetry had been written in these later years by Irish writers, no other book than "The Tower" was thought of when an award had to be made for the finest poetry written since the last Aonach Tailteann. The award had been made for a book which after 40 years of literary creation showed increasing rather than waning powers. ⁶³

Peter MacBrien, writing in <u>The Irish Independent</u>, was the most positive of the Irish reviewers, finding on every page of the book "a personality stronger than, yet singularly consistent with, the one you found in all the other books." He identified "Sailing to Byzantium" as of particular merit, writing: "this greatest of the masters of music has never created harmonies richer than here – it is the ravishment of beauty." <u>The Irish Times</u>, in a brief note in its Quidnunc column, saw the book as "full of sadness" and identified Yeats's verses from "Oedipus at Colonus" as "the finest fruit of his art."

There was a dissenting voice in <u>The Sunday Independent</u> in a review written by M. MacC⁶⁶ which echoed sentiments expressed in <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> some years before. This reviewer identified a "dualism" in Yeats's early genius. <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> was "laden with images and thoughts that might have been taken from Catholic mysticism," while <u>The Land of Heart's Desire</u> was a "heathenish" play. <u>The Tower</u>, "unhappily" according to the reviewer, followed the mood of the latter, being an "undisguised and exultant praise of paganism". The language was "wonderfully delicate" but ruined by "bitter unbelief," and the poet was taken to task for seeing "fit to republish a notorious poem, and another that derides chastity". The lines in which he wrote of his soul as "fastened to a dying animal," and of

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⁶³ The Irish Independent, 13 August 1928, p.8

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 27 February 1928, p.4

⁶⁵ The Irish Times, 21 February 1928, p.4

⁶⁶ Unidentified, but described in <u>The Sunday Independent</u> on 15 February 1925, p.6, as "a lady graduate of the National University whose writings in Irish and in English have been widely enjoyed."

Decrepit age that has been tied to me As to a dog's tail,

were considered "a piteous way in which to face those last days which ought to be full of autumnal fruit and beauty." 67

The opening paragraph of a review of <u>A Packet for Ezra Pound</u>, published in August 1928, which surprisingly appeared in <u>The Catholic Pictorial</u> under the title "A Packet for William Butler Yeats" set the tone for the rest of the piece:

The great man hibernated out of Ireland last year. Quite obviously he is feeling pretty bad, for he has been fighting temptation to go to church and, also, he has been writing poems on death and talking to spooks.⁶⁸

The reviewer then quoted Yeats's description of the early days of his wife's automatic writing and summarised its view of the book as "a packet of blasphemous drivel." These comments were consistent with this journal's reaction to the demise of <u>The Irish Statesman</u> in April 1930. In its May edition (its name had at this stage been changed to <u>The Catholic Mind</u>) it's view of Russell was that

nothing that he has ever done has so discredited him in the eyes of honest men, or has so exposed him as a bigot, as his ignorant criticism of the Columbanians, and his refusal to criticize Freemasonry, whose record of jobbery and intrigue, and anti-Catholic activity, here, as wherever in all the wide world it has reared its hellish standard, is notorious.⁶⁹

The Irish Statesman ceased publication in April 1930, due to the withdrawal of its American funding, influenced no doubt by the Wall Street stock market crash of the previous year, and also to an expensive libel case occasioned by a hostile review published in November 1927. With its departure Yeats lost a very supportive medium of communication with an educated and literate class, even if somewhat remote from the day to day concerns of the common people. However it is appropriate to note that the many positive and complementary reviews and remarks made on Yeats and his work which had been published in that magazine by George Russell and others, did not stand unchallenged within the magazine itself. As early as December 1925 The Irish Statesman's readers were

⁶⁷ The Sunday Independent 15 April 1928, p.6

The Catholic Pictorial, November 1929, p.287

⁶⁹ The Catholic Mind, May 1930, p.116

made aware that there was another and a less enthusiastic view of Yeats being promulgated by some of its contributors when a series of letters were published which took issue with Russell's promotion of Yeats as an Irish poet. Frank O'Connor, in particular, saw Yeats's work at that time as "part of the national irresponsibility." His art, according to O'Connor, did not "at any time or for any occasion whatsoever, . . . come into touch with life, with the world around us." O'Connor was prepared to praise Mangan and Synge because "in them the national memory has survived," but he objected to those who assumed that Yeats's verse "represents Irish literature, that in reading *The Lake Isle of Inisfree* they are doing ample justice to the twelve centuries or so during which the Irish race set down its trouble about the terrible mystery of life." This was a youthful view that O'Connor later rejected, as he became close to Yeats in later years. It did, however, receive some support from Sean O' Faolain in a subsequent issue of The Irish Statesman when he wrote:

I approach the subject from an entirely different viewpoint to Frank O'Connor – for he is a poet and I am not – but our dissatisfaction is apparently due to the same cause, the shallowness and the untruth of a poetry more bothered about how to say things sweetly, than troubled by its own message.⁷²

Yeats published little in the years immediately following the publication of <u>The Winding Stair</u> in a limited edition in New York and <u>Selected Poems</u> in London both in October 1929. The Cuala Press published his <u>Stories of Michael Robartes and his Friends</u> in March 1932 and his <u>Words for Music Perhaps</u> in November of the same year, neither of which was reviewed in Ireland.⁷³ His personal life was stressful in these years, as Terence Brown⁷⁴ tells us, with financial troubles at his sister's press, his own failing health and then the death of Lady Gregory in May 1932.

His period in the Senate had also come to an end in November 1928. Earlier in that year the outcome of his chairmanship of the five-man committee to advise of the design of the first Irish coinage had caused upset in some circles. The proposed new coinage with images of animals and birds was excoriated by a writer in <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> who

⁷⁰ Summerfield, Henry, <u>That Myriad - Minded Man</u>, p.245

⁷¹ The Irish Statesman, 12 December 1925, p.430

⁷² *Ibid.* 9 January 1926, p.558

⁷³ As noted previously, Cuala Press books were not generally reviewed. <u>The Irish Statesman</u>, where Russell would have acquired his own copy being one particular exception.

described the designs as "worse than pagan monstrosities" and the coinage overall as "an insult to the Faith and traditions of this country." However this view did not prevail and the designs were subsequently much admired.

Yeats's final contribution in the Senate was in July 1928 when he spoke briefly on "the process of electing members to the Senate." On 30 July he wrote to Lady Gregory: "Probably I have made my last Senate appearance. A little speech, three sentences, was followed by a minute of great pain . . ." However his absence from the Senate during the debate on the proposed new censorship legislation did not prevent him making his contribution to the issue. On 22 September 1928 his article "The Censorship and Thomas Aquinas" was published in The Irish Statesman. This article, combined with an interview which he had given to the Irish correspondent of The Manchester Guardian and which was reprinted in The Irish Times and The Irish Independent on 23 August again provoked the anger of his perennial critics, represented, as always, most vociferously by The Catholic Bulletin.

An editorial in the October 1928 number of <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> was predictably, and unpleasantly, aggressive:

Mr. Pollexfen Yeats, still a Senator living on the Irish Taxpayers, and a Pensioner of the British Treasury, has found another handy man. . . . He was found, August 22, 1928, in the Irish Correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*. To him the soul of Yeats concerning the Evil Literature Bill was unfolded, or evacuated.⁷⁸

Yeats's comment on the poor quality of Irish education, calling Ireland "the worst-educated country in Northern Europe" was then targetted: "The Senator, it is easily seen, felt himself unappreciated. There was, and is, no demand in Ireland for the 'noble literature' of the Yeats and Russell brand, no wide circulation for the Subsidised *Statesman*."

Yeats was also attacked in a new Catholic weekly paper <u>The Standard</u> which had commenced publication on 19 May 1928 as "An organ of Irish Catholic opinion." In its 25

⁷⁴ Brown, Terence, <u>The Life of W.B. Yeats</u>, p.336

⁷⁵ The Catholic Bulletin, January 1928, p.19

Pearce, Donald, R., (ed.) The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats, p.151

⁷⁷ Wade, Alan, (ed.) The Letters of W.B. Yeats, p.745

⁷⁸ The Catholic Bulletin, October 1928, p.988

August number it noted The Irish Statesman's opposition to the proposed new Censorship Bill which had just received its first reading in the Dáil, and then continued: "Senator W.B. Yeats has also, of course, as might be expected of a contributor to *Tomorrow*, (sic) large views on the licence that the writer might practice." ⁷⁹ The article then quoted a comment from Yeats's interview, which had also been also carried by the two Dublin dailies, when he said that if the Bill became law, it "may inflict a dangerous wound on the Irish intellect." The Standard disagreed, in its view the Bill was not "a measure aimed at general intellectual freedom," its function was "to put down indecency and the corruptions created by a sensational press." An editorial in the same paper on the following week accused Yeats of occasional "recklessness of diatribe" and expressed the opinion that Yeats's reservations on aspects of the Bill seemed "to give a measure of the gap that separates him on questions of moral principle and moral obligation from an almost unanimous Irish opinion." 80 It is interesting to note that the perceived gap between Yeats and the majority Irish community, in this paper's opinion, was now in matters of morals rather than matters of Irishness or nationalism. However it is clear that such a gap had appeared, and that his vehement opposition to the Censorship Bill was further distancing him from the Catholic community in particular.

The increasing antagonism of the Catholic press to Yeats was reinforced in September 1932 when a proposal to found an Irish Academy of Letters was mooted in a letter to prospective members signed by Yeats and George Bernard Shaw. The letter included the following paragraph, which made it clear that the primary objective of the Academy was to provide some organised opposition to the censorship of books in Ireland:

There is in Ireland an official censorship possessing, and actively exercising, powers of suppression which may at any moment confine an Irish author to the British and American market, and thereby make it impossible for him to live by distinctive Irish literature.⁸¹

<u>The Irish Times</u> was fully supportive of the setting up of such a body. In an editorial on 19 September it welcomed the Academy, which had held its inaugural dinner on the previous night: "Since we hate the Free State Government's foolish and futile censorship of books

⁷⁹ The Standard, 25 August 1928, p.12

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 1 September 1928, p.12

⁸¹ Wade, Allan, (ed.) The Letters of W. B. Yeats, p.801

we hope that the new Academy will win its battle – but we cannot be very hopeful." The Irish Times also printed the names of the twenty-five writers who had received the invitation to become members and the ten proposed associate members. (The list included almost all the notable writers of the day; Yeats, Shaw, Joyce who turned down the invitation to join, Colum, Corkery, Hyde, Moore, O'Casey, O'Faolain, O'Connor, Russell, Stephens, etc.) The Irish Independent also noted the setting up of the Academy, printing the letter signed by Yeats and Shaw but did not comment further. 83

Not surprisingly, The Catholic Bulletin was quick to attack the proposed Academy. In an editorial entitled "The Pollexfen Peacock Parade" it identified "some half-a- dozen decent persons" on the list which was in "the main made up of all the Sewage school" and quoting from a speech which Yeats had given at the inaugural dinner as reported in The Irish Times, commented that it "smells somewhat like the sweaty screeching of his two Senatorial diatribes on Divorce." The Irish Rosary, a Dominican publication which had rarely any comment to make on non-religious literary matters, also went on the offensive arguing that "the so-called Irish writers do not represent the real soul of Ireland" as they were "neither Protestants or Catholics" but were "Mystical Moonshine worshippers." It then suggested that Ireland should "awake and establish a Catholic Academy of literature." 85

In September 1933 another major book of Yeats's poetry <u>The Winding Stair and other poems</u> was published by Macmillan and was widely reviewed in Ireland. The most extensive review was written by Padraic Fallon⁸⁶ and published in <u>The Dublin Magazine</u> in April-June 1934. This new book along with the previously published <u>The Tower</u>, represented, in Fallon's view, a period in Yeats's development "more important . . . than any of the earlier periods, drunken though they were with vision of the golden lands, because in it he has come to realise intellectually an attitude that was once romantically sensuous. Himself now, unclothed, is his theme." What the work may have lost in "colour" from the early years it had gained in "intensity." "Unity of Being," achieved

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⁸² The Irish Times, 19 September 1932, p.6

The Irish Independent, 19 September 1932, p.10

⁸⁴ The Catholic Bulletin, October 1932, p.773

The Irish Rosary, December 1932, p.881

⁸⁶ Padraic Fallon (1905 - 1974) was born in Athenry, Co Galway and worked as a customs official for forty years. He wrote plays and poems, which were not collected until after his death.

⁸⁷ The Dublin Magazine, April – June 1934, p.59

through compromise, was at the centre of Yeats's work but had been achieved in different ways, as Fallon pointed out:

The compromise reached in The Tower, that violent, beautiful book, was a bitter and angry thing in comparison with the more harmonious arrangement I find here in The Winding Stair. There, one had the feeling, that the poet, reacting too hastily to the brunt of age, had in a passion, against all his natural inclination, tethered Heart to Soul's chariot and stood back among the crowd to watch the bitter triumph. It was not final of course. . . . So it is no surprise now to find Heart dominant, unrepentant; spinning a darker, more passionate Maya: and the poet again drunkard of its heady juices.

Individual poems were identified for further attention, "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" in particular, where Fallon found the "permanent core" of the poet, "the life-shaper, - almost in spite of the poet himself who has always seemed to trample on his heart at the beginning of a labour only in the end to find it has spun its enchantment about him." Finally Fallon had some regret for the "Gaelic epics" that had now been superseded by the "strange, angry, laughing lyrics in this book," but he suggested: "What the Gaelic tradition loses, the Anglo-Irish tradition gains; for if he is in any line at all, it is that of Swift and Berkeley."

The Irish Book Lover's review was brief but complimentary. In the book there was "Eloquence – sounding and bitter, building up image and allegory out of remote symbol – the embroidery, now as always, rich and brilliant." 88 The reviews in the daily press were, by their nature, less considered and comprehensive than that of The Dublin Magazine. The Irish Times reviewer admired the new book, but there was a sense of regret for the change in style from the early years. The "starry heights" of the earlier verse seemed no longer attainable and if the symbolism of the later work was seen as "a little obscure, it is due to his increasing pre-occupation with the intellectual faculty." The reviewer identified the poem "which is likely to have the widest appeal" (at least to readers of The Irish Times) as "Coole Park 1929" with its memory of Lady Gregory, who had died in April 1932, and its call to the reader to devote

A moment's memory to that laurelled head.

⁸⁹ The Irish Times, 14 October 1933, p.4

⁸⁸ The Irish Book Lover, May – June 1934, p.72

The book was also reviewed in The Irish Press, a new Dublin daily set up by the recently formed Fianna Fáil party under Eamon de Valera, which had commenced publication in September 1933, with Frank Gallagher a staunch supporter of de Valera as editor, and M. J. MacManus⁹⁰ as literary editor. The review was written by Francis Stuart, who was an interesting choice of reviewer, being a poet himself (as noted previously, he had shared the Tailteann prize for his poem "We have Kept the Faith" in August 1924) and the husband of Maud Gonne's daughter Iseult. The fact that he was also a committed Republican would have appealed to readers of The Irish Press. ⁹¹ Stuart's reading of the book had given him a sense of "not only following a changing mood or orientation in the mind of the greatest living poet, but watching a development of universal significance." Yeats was, according to Stuart, becoming "more and more a tragic poet," and his tragic sense was identified with a faith in nobility, a "passionate, intellectual nobility that is bare and stark and a little frightening."

The publication of Yeats's <u>Collected Poems</u> in November 1933, and <u>Collected Plays</u> in November 1934 gave his readers in Ireland an opportunity to look at his work to date as a whole. An unsigned review of <u>Collected Poems</u> in <u>The Dublin Magazine</u> identified the key moment in Yeats's development as his return to Ireland to found a theatre at the beginning of the century. This theatre had "formed" the poet:

It gave him a new approach to poetry, and it gave him a new idiom – the words of ordinary speech, the rhythm of ordinary speech; it gave him new companions, new interests. 93

While the revisions to poems already well known, and in some cases committed to memory, were regretted, the more recent poems were admired particularly "Sailing to Byzantium" which the reviewer judged to be "the greatest short poem of our time."

<u>The Dublin Magazine's</u> review of <u>Collected Plays</u> admired Yeats's effort to combine the arts of music, literature, painting, sculpture and dance in the Noh plays, even though no one was entirely satisfied as each activity was "used only as parts of a whole and then in

The Irish Press quickly achieved a circulation of "almost 100,000', compared with less than 50,000 for *The Irish Times*" Lee, J.J., Ireland 1912 – 1985, p.217

⁹² The Irish Press, 3 October 1933, p.6

⁹⁰ M. J. MacManus (1891 – 1951) was born in Co. Leitrum and educated at London University. He was a freelance journalist in London before returning to Dublin and was literary editor of <u>The Irish Press</u> from 1931 until his death. His Adventures of an Irish Bookman was published in 1952.

too much simplification." In the later plays there was even more simplification with the plays becoming "scarcely more than a bare statement of an idea." These later plays the reviewer stated, did

leave one reader regretful that the definite, rhythmic verse of the "Four plays for dancers"(sic) has been cast aside. It is Mr. Yeats's natural vehicle. His thought does not stand abstraction or simple statement. It is of the sensuous intellect, and finds its natural body only in a complexity of images and musical pattern and in that "intuition by atmosphere" that is the special quality of his best verse. ⁹⁴

The Irish Times, which did not review the Collected Poems, recommended Yeats's Collected Plays for bringing "poetry back to the stage". The reviewer suggested that Yeats's "sense of the theatre has done almost as much for Irish literature as have his lyrics." Through the strictness of the Noh form "the way is cleared for Mr. Yeats' drama, with its lyrics and its dances, and the result has been more perfect than anything he could have achieved with the old freedom." As an overview of Yeats's drama the reviewer suggested:

Mr. Yeats has given us at least one prose play that will live ("Cathleen Ni Houlihan"), and, if he had written no other poetic plays than "The Land of Heart's Desire" and "The Countess Cathleen," he still would be remembered. Perhaps, however, his claim as a poet-dramatist rests even more securely on the small and delicate productions of his later years.

At the end of 1934 following the publication of these two collected editions of his poems and plays Yeats's literary reputation in Ireland was now unassailable. He was, however, still subjected to severe attack, primarily from the Catholic press, due to his opposition to the censorship imposed under the Censorship of Publications act of 1929. In the years following the accession of a Fianna Fáil government under de Valera to power in January 1933 the activities of the Censorship Board became even more vigorous and although Yeats's own work was never banned, he was still seen as a representative figure in the literary community whose work was being subjected to more and more rigorous scrutiny. ⁹⁶ Even the more liberal representatives of the Catholic church supported the imposition of

⁹³ The Dublin Magazine, July-September 1934, p.64

⁹⁴ The Dublin Magazine, January- March 1936, p.71

⁹⁵ The Irish Times, 5 January 1935, p.11

⁹⁶ As evidenced by the banning of books of many of Yeats's contemporaries, such as Frank O'Connor, Francis Hackett, Sean O'Faolain, Austin Clarke and Liam O'Flaherty.

the censorship laws. The Jesuit priest Fr. Stephen Brown, a self-expressed admirer of Yeats's work, as noted previously, wrote in <u>The Irish Monthly</u>: "Some sort of censorship over the printed word, is, therefore, not only the right but the duty of Governments." Another Jesuit priest, Fr. Patrick J. Gannon, wrote of the effect that the Censorship Act was having in the country:

It seems fairly clear that already a chasm, both wide and deep, has been dug between the Church and a section at least of our 'Intelligensia', to use a convenient but somewhat vague term, and the chasm is widening and deepening. ⁹⁸

Yeats's actions in the past were not forgotten as, when the Abbey Theatre produced O'Casey's "The Silver Tassie" in August 1935, a letter from a Dominican priest to <u>The Irish Press</u> made clear. The letter writer described the play as "a vigorous medley of lust and hatred and vulgarity" and complained of its "deliberate indecency and its mean mocking challenge to the Christian Faith" and then suggested that, as distinct from the time of the *Playboy* riots, "the Abbey Theatre is now in tutelage to the Government elected by the Irish Nation" and it had "to reckon with a vigorous intellectual force which is not alien to the authentic spirit of the Irish people." ⁹⁹

It is notable that "the Christian Faith" has now become synonymous with "the authentic spirit of the Irish people." There was, in the eyes of this representative of the Catholic Church, little place in the Ireland of the nineteen thirties for the community which Yeats had famously called "one of the great stocks of Europe."

⁹⁹ The Irish Press, 14 August 1935, p.2

⁹⁷ The Irish Monthly, January 1936, p.27

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* June 1937, p.434

¹⁰⁰ Pearce, Donald R.,(ed.) The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats, p.99

Chapter 9 1935 - 1939

On 13 June 1935 Yeats celebrated his seventieth birthday, an event that was widely celebrated in the Dublin press. The Irish Times published an editorial entitled "Ad Multos Annos" supplemented by a full page of articles, a new photograph of the poet taken at his home in Rathfarnham, and a reproduction of the manuscript of the poem "A Song" from The Player Queen, all under a heading across four columns: "William Butler Yeats: Aetat. 70". The editorial and the articles together give a very good account of the contemporary perception of Yeats across a range of interpreters (the extreme Catholic and Nationalist position is missing with Aodh De Blacam coming closest to representing that particular community) and deserve some detailed attention.²

Francis Hackett who wrote on Yeats's "Place in World Letters" was well qualified to see Yeats in an international context. He had received a Jesuit education at Clongowes Wood College and then emigrated to America where he worked for many years as a literary critic. He then lived for a time in France before returning to Ireland. He wrote biography and novels, with which he ran foul of the censorship law, and left Ireland to live in Denmark when his novel The Green Lion was banned in 1936. In his column Hackett noted that although Yeats was regarded as a great poet in the English language

one must not speak of him as Yeats the English poet. He is Yeats the Irish poet. His place in world literature is inseparable from Ireland by his own choice half a century ago. That choice will be as imperishable as his fame, and his fame will be as imperishable as the English language.

By contrast with Shaw or Wilde, Yeats chose to live in Ireland and, in his early years, to be acknowledged "in the eyes of the world" as "the major, the supreme, poet of the so-called Celtic Renaissance." Latterly his "sensitiveness has become virile and inclusive" and now "the world knows him as our national poet, the one Irishman who has given form to our lyric and lyric to our theatre."

Sean O'Faolain, who wrote on the "Philosophy of Yeats," was also well chosen, being an academic and renowned man of letters. He was from a Catholic background, had been

¹ The Irish Times, 13 June 1935, p.6 A photocopy of this page is included in Appendix 2.

² The articles were subsequently published in a sixteen page pamphlet by <u>The Irish Times</u> and were republished by Haskell House Publisher, New York in 1971

educated at Presentation College in Cork, and at UCC, and had received an MA from Harvard. He was, at this stage, a somewhat disillusioned Republican. As an early member of the Volunteers, and a director of propaganda on the republican side in the Civil War, he was unhappy with the conservatism of contemporary Irish society and with the influence of the Catholic Church and was a strong opponent of censorship. O'Faolain identified a conflict that, in his view, had been in Yeats from the beginning, "between his natural love for a beauty that is dim and occult, . . . and that other side to himself which is alive in the intellect, hard and brilliant like the sun." This conflict "between self and anti-self is the seed of Yeats's philosophy of life." It had been "his task and his torment, to find a philosophy in which man is at once free and creative, absolute possessor of himself in this life, and possessor at the same time of everything that is outside the individual substance of his body and his span." O'Faolain admired enormously the "ambition" and the "courage" of Yeats's later verse which demonstrated an "enrichment far beyond anything he had written up to his fiftieth year," and concluded:

Of such growth, of such persistent development, of such virility, there is possibly no other example in the whole history of lyric verse.⁴

The title of the contribution by F. R. Higgins was "The Poet of a Dream". Higgins was by this time a close friend of Yeats and a director of the Abbey Theatre. His background was Protestant and unionist but he had, from an early age become interested in Irish folklore and traditional literature, an enthusiasm he shared with Austin Clarke. In his article he traced Yeats's impact on Irish poetry, crediting John O'Leary for putting him "into first-hand touch with the muscular song of the Irish balladmen" whose influence was to be found in The Wanderings of Oisin. Yeats then set out on "his most deliberate work; to give this country a consistently artistic conscience through the medium of a poetic hierarchy."

Compare an Irish verse anthology of today with one of 50 years ago, and the distinct achievement of Mr. Yeats's purpose may be seen. That awakened consciousness, political as well as artistic, and the new intimacy with Gaelic literature suddenly quickened Irish imaginations.

Higgins then acknowledges the change that came into Yeats's work "almost thirty years ago" as he "turned in on himself" and left behind the world of the Celtic Renaissance to create what could be described as his own personal "last will and intellectual testament".

³ The Irish Times, 13 June 1935, p.6

⁴ Ibid.

The playwright Denis Johnston who wrote on "Yeats as Dramatist" was from a Protestant, and professional Dublin background. ⁵ He had been educated at Edinburgh, Cambridge and Harvard Law School and had worked as a barrister in Dublin before concentrating on his writing. His best known play "The Old Lady Says 'No'!" was rejected by the Abbey in 1928, (it was produced at the Gate in July 1929) but other plays by Johnston were subsequently produced at the Abbey. "It has become a commonplace nowadays," Johnston wrote, "to attack the Abbey Theatre as gloriously dead, just as it is the practice of sectarian pamphleteers to try to exclude or dismiss Yeats from the annals of Irish literature with the catch-cry of 'West Briton'." Ireland today had forgotten that "it was in the renascent Irish theatre, founded by Mr. Yeats and Lady Gregory, that Irish Ireland discovered its first authentic voice." Johnston acknowledged and admired Yeats's courage in facing the many criticisms to which his theatre had been subjected over the years. Yeats's "dramatic credo" would not have found expression in the commercial theatre, even in his own theatre such a "real work of art" as The King of the Great Clock Tower was, according to Johnston, "endangered by aesthetic considerations that will not recognise the limitations of his medium or even of those of human nature." Johnston concluded:

He has kept a theatre alive by the immense tenacity of his purpose through thirty mad years, and one only has to see him attacked by his literary successors to realise in a flash the gigantic proportions upon which this man is built.⁶

The one dissenting voice in the birthday tributes came from Aodh De Blacam who wrote on "Yeats and the Nation." De Blacam was an unusual choice for that particular newspaper, but as a Catholic convert from Protestantism and a Nationalist and Irish speaker, although born in England, he possibly could be expected to give a more rounded view of Yeats's nationalism than the more typical nationalist commentator. He had been a frequent previous commentator on Yeats in Nationalist and Catholic journals such as *Sinn Fein* and <u>The Irish Monthly</u> and had for a time been editor of the Catholic weekly <u>The Standard</u>.

De Blacam saw Yeats as a successor to a long tradition of Gaelic poets and scribes who wrote of the ancient Celtic heroes and regretted that, through his disagreement with Gavan

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⁵ See the recent biography Adams, Bernard, Denis Johnston: A Life, 2002.

⁶ The Irish Times, 13 June 1935, p.6

Duffy in 1892, the new literary movement of which he was "the greatest master of words" had lost contact with "the past" and above all "with the people." The Abbey Theatre, in de Blacam's opinion, had failed, "it never became the centre of a true national revival in which the *Táin* would return, and all the accumulated riches of our history would be gathered and displayed." The problem was that "there are two strains in 'Anglo-Ireland', one which can be assimilated, the other not." The Abbey school, according to de Blacam, had

turned from objectivity to subjectivity, from that old patriotism which properly is neither exclusively Gaelic nor yet Anglo-Irish, but simply an acceptance of all the Irish heritage, to the doctrine of Swift and Berkeley, the teachers of scepticism.

Yeats's praise of Merriman's "The Midnight Court" which de Blacam described as "a morbid freak, totally untypical of Gaelic letters" was deprecated, but, although he rejected much that Yeats had written, de Blacam could still accept that

he was so clearly part of our own lives that we never can be his judges, and we are left to wonder what posterity will say of him, and whether (as this writer thinks) it will forget our barren quarrels and his late, embittered, esoteric verse to renew delight in the poetry of our youth and his bell-branch days.⁷

Andrew E. Malone, (the pseudonym of L. P. Byrne) wrote the final article on "Yeats and the Abbey". Malone, who was described by <u>The Irish Times</u> as "a dramatic historian and critic", had been a frequent commentator on the Irish theatre over the years. His book <u>The Irish Drama</u> had been published in 1929. His article briefly recounted the history of the theatre in Ireland from the early days of "The Countess Cathleen," and the first performance of "Kathleen Ni Houlihan" in April 1902. The difficulties of the current time and the changes in Irish society since the Abbey's foundation were acknowledged but the article ended on a positive note:

During its thirty-one years the Abbey Theatre has left only for a very little the tradition of the peasant; but during those thirty-one years Ireland itself has been undergoing radical change, and this changing social environment must inevitably change the mood and outlook of the theatre and the drama. So the Irish National Theatre is now at the parting of the ways, and its future road is not yet quite clear. But the poet who inspired it and who guided its course through stormy as well as

⁷ Ibid.

milder seasons is still available to give the benefit of his experienced counsel. Maybe romance will come again, and Mr. Yeats will see inspiration as well as his handiwork live on into a new and vastly different Ireland.⁸

To complement the six articles, <u>The Irish Times</u> also devoted a special editorial to Yeats which presented an authoritative and accepted view of Yeats in the late nineteen thirties by the community represented by <u>The Irish Times</u>. The editorial gave particular praise to Yeats's early poems and stories, which, it suggested, brought back "to the national consciousness of his race a whole fantasia of forgotten pride." His work in the Abbey Theatre "which smashed the tawdry tradition of the stage Irishman" was particularly admired, and in its final paragraph the editorial addressed the issue of Yeats's Irishness in a manner which spoke directly to the majority of <u>The Irish Times's</u> own particular community of readers. Yeats's "almost unique position in Irish life," meant that "he is virtually the first man since Swift who has been able to bring the Anglo-Irish tradition into line with a positive nationalism." Swift, Goldsmith, Berkeley, and Burke were identified as Yeats's predecessors (no room here for Davis, Mangan and Ferguson) but he was also represented as "clinging to his inheritance as a successor of the Irish bards." The editorial then continued:

Thus he has reconciled in his life and in his work a tradition that is purely Gaelic, with the younger, but no less vital tradition of his Anglo-Saxon forebears. In this way W. B. Yeats has set an example to his class, far too many of whom are inclined to accept the taunt of alien aspirations. He also has given the lie direct to those who profess to believe that the heritage of Irish genius is the monopoly of a single type. There never will be any real progress in this country until the people from whom Yeats sprang have taken their rightful place in the national being – and it is not the place of aliens, or even of Irish citizens on sufferance. W. B. Yeats is a member of a so-called minority. He is Anglo-Irish and he is a Protestant. Yet there is no other Irishman of his day and generation who has done one tithe of his work for his native land. His poems have carried the fame of Ireland into the ends of the earth. His dauntless courage bears lasting witness to the falsehood of the charge that Irishmen are moral cowards: and his shining loyalty to his country will be a beacon

⁸ Ibid.

This is underlined by the fact that the paper reprinted it complete and unmodified among the tributes to Yeats on the occasion of the poet's death over three years later.

for future generations of his kind. Irishmen of all classes and of all creeds will salute him today as a moral and intellectual chieftain of their race. In doing honour to him they will do honour to themselves: for William Butler Yeats is the outstanding Irishman of our time.¹⁰

The Irish Press also celebrated the poet's birthday and sent a representative to interview him. Two particular points made by Yeats in this interview, which was printed under the title "W. B. Yeats Looks Back" give an insight into how he remembered the Ireland of his youth and the type of reception his work was receiving there:

Looking back on my 70 years I have done all the things that I wanted to do. All my toiling has been with a purpose and it is for others to pass judgement on it. When the movement I am associated with began, Irish literature was held in contempt. No Irish book was reviewed; not even Standish O'Grady's fine "History of Ireland – Political and Philosophical" received a line in any newspaper. . . . In my young days Dublin was divided into two classes, Unionist and Nationalist. They never met each other; it was that barrier that destroyed social life in Dublin for me. It was all so vicious that Lady Gregory and I made a resolution not to accept invitations of any kind. From our own friends on the Unionist side we could only get some kind of hostility, and from the other side there was too much at issue, because we were producing Synge, who was being objected to. 11

The Irish Independent paid little attention to Yeats's seventieth birthday, apart from a short news item. It did print a brief summary as did The Irish Times (in more detail) and The Irish Press of the laudatory speeches made at a formal dinner, held on 27 June in the Royal Hibernian hotel by the Irish P.E.N. Club to celebrate the birthday. John Masefield, Francis Hackett, and Sean O'Faolain were among the speakers and a presentation was made to Yeats of a drawing by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. 12

While allowing for the fact that these writings and speeches were in the nature of a birthday celebration, it is again remarkable how diversely Yeats could be evaluated by editorial writers and literary figures representing different interpretive communities in his

¹⁰ The Irish Times, 13 June 1935, p.8

The Irish Press, 14 June 1935, p.7

The Irish Times, 28 June 1935, p.7

contemporary Ireland on the basis of a selective reading of his work. Within that work there was material to suit each community so that, with a change of emphasis, Yeats could be read as a Nationalist poet, an Anglo-Irish poet, a European poet, a dreamer, a philosopher, a dramatist, a man of business, and finally as stated in The Irish Press "a shaper of a people's destiny."

The Irish Times continued its emphasis on Yeats's Irishness when responding to A Full Moon in March which was published in November 1935:

It is remarkable that so much of Mr. Yeats's work is of an occasional nature, written for the theatre, or arising, in many cases, directly out of the events and circumstances of his time. This fact emphasises rather than diminishes its greatness. In addition it makes his poetry appeal to every reader capable of appreciating contemporary poetry and particularly to an Irish reader. For despite . . . the loudly voiced opinions of certain Irishmen, it must be obvious that the physical framework, the spiritual approach of Yeats's work is completely Irish. 13

The Church of Ireland Gazette, in one of its occasional reviews of Yeats's work, also noted that "some of these pieces are possibly suggested by public happenings," but in keeping with its role as "a Church paper" stated that "no poet of our generation remains more absorbed in spiritual contemplation, though unlike other mystics who have pursued perilous and intricate ways, he never forgets the poetic illumination of earth or quarrels with mortal existence."14

By contrast The Dublin Magazine saw the book as being "only to some degree" influenced by contemporary life as in the reviewer expressed two particular opinions: "Much of his later work is concerned with his philosophical convictions" and "Philosophy is rarely successful as poetry." The Irish Press, which published an extensive book page every Tuesday, detected a particular emotion in many of the poems in the book; "one emotion is felt strongly in many of them, as in so much of Mr. Yeats's later work – detestation of

¹³ The Irish Times, 14 December 1935, p.7

The Church of Ireland Gazette, 3 January 1936, p. 14 ¹⁵ The Dublin Magazine, January – March 1936, p.75

'fanatics,' contempt for Irish political leaders (except Parnell and O'Higgins), and of 'the mob.'" ¹⁶

In June 1936 a new monthly journal, <u>Ireland To-Day</u>, commenced publication. It included individually edited sections on art, music, and the theatre as well as a book review section edited initially by Sean O'Faolain who set out his approach in the journal's second number: "In this section of Ireland To-Day we hope to disclose the existence of a flexible, informed, individual, and unprejudiced criticism." In the short period of its existence before it ceased publication in March 1938, <u>Ireland To-Day</u> published original work by Frank O'Connor, Patrick Kavanagh, Brian Coffey and Denis Devlin as well as theatre criticism by its theatre critic Sean O'Meardha and articles on music by Aloys Fleishmann, professor of music at UCC. It reviewed just three of Yeats's books, <u>Dramatis Personae</u> in July 1936, the second version of <u>A Vision</u> in November 1937, and <u>The Herne's Egg</u> in February 1938.

Donagh MacDonagh, the son of Thomas MacDonagh, and also a poet and playwright, wrote the review of <u>Dramatis Personae</u> in which he compared the book to George Moore's <u>Hail and Farewell</u> which he described as "the great but cranky sneer of a difficult man" as it covered "practically the same period and scene and is obviously the truth of Yeats rather than the fiction of Moore." Moore "dramatised and exploited not only every incident which occurred or might have occurred, but also his own personal emotions or what he would like them to have been." Yeats, on the other hand, "lets us see just as much of his life as he chooses but we have the feeling, as we have in his poetry, that all we see is valid." However the book was considered useful to lovers of Yeats's poetry as it contained wisdom and thought and in it were "the germs of many of his poems."

The only other Irish review of <u>Dramatis Personae</u> published in <u>The Dublin Magazine</u> was not impressed with the book, seeing it principally as "a lengthy diatribe against George Moore" that was written "for a new overseas public."

¹⁶ The Irish Press, 10 December 1935, p.11

¹⁷ Ireland To-Day, July 1936, p.70

¹⁸ *Ibid.* July 1936, p.75

¹⁹ The Dublin Magazine, April- June 1936, p.67

In February 1937, Yeats made a remarkable, and by this stage of his life, uncharacteristic, incursion into the Dublin daily press when his poem "Roger Casement" was published in <u>The Irish Press</u> under the banner headline "Irish Poet's Striking Challenge". ²⁰ The poem, which was subtitled (after reading "The Forged Casement Diaries" by Dr. Maloney) was flanked by photographs of Yeats and Alfred Noyes, the English poet, whom Yeats had named in the original version of the poem:

Come Alfred Noyes and all the troop
That cried it far and wide,
Come from the forger and his desk,
Desert the perjurer's side;

A quotation from an article Noyes had published in the <u>Philadelphia Public Ledger</u> in August 1916 was printed beneath his photograph describing Casement's diaries as "filthy beyond all description" and touching "the lowest depth of human degradation ever reached."²¹

An editorial in <u>The Irish Press</u> on the following day praised Yeats's poem in no uncertain terms:

It has often been the privilege of poets to anticipate the verdict of history in their interpretation of events. We make bold to say that never was that great gift exercised with greater courage, vision, imaginative insight than in the noble lines on the vile and malignant plot to blacken and defame the memory of Roger Casement which we were able to publish yesterday from the pen of Dr. W. B Yeats.²²

Other messages of praise for Yeats's poem were printed from Sean T O'Kelly, George Noble Plunkett, and Professor Eoin MacNeill, and on 4 February a poem in Irish by Muiris O Cathain was printed which commenced:

A Yeatsaigh

Ár mbuidheachas bith-bhuan leat,

That Yeats was delighted with the publicity he received by the publication of his poem is clear from a letter written to Dorothy Wellesley on 8 February:

²¹ The issue of the authenticity of the Casement diaries has only recently been resolved by means of a forensic examination of the documents. See The Irish Times, 13 March 2002, p.9.

²² The Irish Press, 3 February 1937, p.8

²⁰ <u>The Irish Press</u>, 2 February 1937, p.6. Yeats had originally sent the poem to <u>The Irish Times</u> which, not surprisingly, declined to publish it. A photocopy of the page of <u>The Irish Press</u> is included in Appendix 2.

On Feb.2 my wife went to Dublin shopping & was surprised at the defference everybody showed her in buses & shop. Then she found what it was – the Casement poem was in the morning paper. Next day I was publicly thanked by the vice-president of the Executive Council, by De Valera's political secretary, by our chief antiquarian & an old revolutionist, Count Plunket, who calls my poem 'a ballad the people much needed'. De Valera's newspaper gave me a long leader saying that for generations to come my poem will pour scorn on the forgers & their backers.²³

On 12 February a letter from Alfred Noyes was published again in <u>The Irish Press</u> in which he apologised for the remarks he had made in his published article, stating that he believed that the diaries were genuine when shown them at that time. On the following day Yeats responded by letter to Noyes accepting his explanation and printing a new version of the poem, which removed Noyes's name, replacing the stanza in which it was included with a new verse:²⁴

No matter what the names they wear! A dog must have his day And whether a man be rich or poor He takes the devil's pay.²⁵

The reception accorded to Yeats on the publication of this poem in <u>The Irish Press</u> raises an interesting question in looking at the general issue of contemporary Ireland's response to the poet. What would have been the reception if the poem had, in fact, been printed in <u>The Irish Times</u>? Undoubtedly <u>The Irish Times</u>'s readers would have acted very differently from the people Mrs. Yeats met on the bus. They would have seen the poem from a very different perspective and would have been aghast at Yeats for impugning the English establishment, and at <u>The Irish Times</u> for printing his attack.

In October 1937 Yeats's new and revised version of <u>A Vision</u> was published and received a number of reviews in Ireland, the most comprehensive of which was written by Cecil

²³ Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley, p.138 (1940 edition) The Irish Press, 13 February 1937, p.8

Yeats was obviously not very happy with this hastily revised stanza as when the poem was published in book form in New Poems in April 1938 the original lines two, three and four of the quatrain were restored and line one was now rewritten: "Come Tom and Dick, come all the troop".

Ffrench Salkeld,²⁶ and published in <u>Ireland To-day</u>. Salkeld thought at the book was "beautifully planned and balanced with the "quiet autobiographical note" of the opening section changing "slowly and cunningly into a calm delirium." He had difficulty, however, with the section titled "The Great Wheel" for which no "critical terminology" existed and which he termed "Dogmatic Symbolism." A parallel was drawn with Wittgenstein's doctrine in his <u>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</u> which stated that "a relation between objects can ultimately only be indicated 'not by a symbol, but by a relation between symbols." Meaning could then be expressed by "a kind of 'pictorial' relation." Yeats's "Dogmatic Symbolism" was "a form of spiritual adventure, a mode of thought conveyed in a personal system of symbols, to be experienced rather than understood in the common sense of the word." Salkeld raised the question, "Is Doubt the key to 'A Vision'? He then concluded:

"A Vision" will mean many things to many men; if it does not show us the bright craters of Truth, it will suggest the penumbral aspect of the moon, revealing to the listening mind the tortured stirrings of the imagination, the heavy sweep and beating of its wings through the dark night of the soul.²⁷

The Irish Independent, in a review by R.O'F, made a brave effort to describe the book within the limitations of a "newspaper review." The subheadings to the review give a flavour to its contents: "Invisible Beings, Communicated with Mr. Yeats, He Says" "The Invisibles Speak," Leaving the Reader Mystified," and "The Author's Philosophers." The reviewer had one major, and probably not unexpected, concern about Yeats's approach:

He mentions that he has read a great deal of medieval mysticism, but he has apparently, made no use of the systematic directions for the discernment of spirits which mystical theology has drawn from the experiences and the writings of the Christian mystical saints. His part in the strange colloquies has been, it seems, purely receptive; the Church regards this passivity as extremely perilous.²⁸

The chief problem with the book was identified as the "almost unintelligible terminology" and "the indefensible eclecticism," which gave "the thought the general appearance of being trivial and unprofitable."

Cecil Salkeld (1904 -1969) was born in India where his father was in the Indian Civil Service. He returned to Ireland on his father's death in 1910. He studied painting in Ireland and Germany and wrote poetry and plays. He edited, with Francis Stuart, the short-lived and infamous in certain eyes, journal, <u>To-morrow</u>.
 Ireland Today, November 1937, p.77

The Irish Independent, 2 November 1937, p.4

The only other Irish review of <u>A Vision</u>, which appeared in <u>The Church of Ireland Gazette</u>, had no concerns about the book's complexity and welcomed it "with no common delight." The enthusiasm of the review is attributed by Roy Foster to the fact that Yeats's interest in occultism "enabled him to make common cause with the Protestant Freemason tradition," and that for "an Irish Protestant, of course, the Masonic order continued to offer one of the few convenient avenues to the irrational, the arbitrary and the sense of a secret society." ²⁹ The reviewer is particularly proud of the fact that when Yeats told of "the genesis of his great work" he had stated: "Part of it was thought out in All-Souls' Chapel, Oxford, and part in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin." The remainder of the review is primarily concerned in extolling the benefits of solitude in the production of works by Goethe, Dante, St. Paul, Chaucer, Mohammed, Cervantes and others. Impressive company for Yeats!

The final book by Yeats to be reviewed during his lifetime in Ireland was The Herne's Egg, which was published in January 1938 and reviewed in The Irish Times, The Irish Press, and in Ireland Today and was also commented on by The Catholic Bulletin. The Irish Times's reviewer considered that the play would "probably empty a London theatre within an hour." Its symbolism was considered to be "clear enough to offend the reverent and to delight the irreverent, but there are obvious signs of waning power in the poet."

The Irish Press's review was written by the playwright T. C. Murray to whom the play seemed "to symbolise some message of which the poet holds the key."

Murray, as a playwright himself, noted of the play that in "the mind's eye it shapes itself as the projection of a fantastic dream and should, therefore, present an interesting problem to a producer." Sean O'Meadhra writing in Ireland To-day considered the play but "a rather bawdy satire on militarism obscured by some futile mysticism." Yeats did retain his "old skill in verse" and his "old flair for experiment" but the play could be summed up in its final lines:

"All that trouble and nothing to show for it,

²⁹ Foster R. F. <u>Paddy and Mr. Punch</u>, p.230. Terence Brown has established that Yeats was not a Mason, but there were many among his friends and associates. The comment made by <u>The Irish Playgoer</u> in November 1899, as noted in Chapter 3 is relevant.

The Irish Times, 26 February 1938, p.7
 The Irish Press, 8 February 1938, p.6

Nothing but just another donkey."³²

The Catholic Bulletin demonstrated that its animosity towards Yeats had not lessened over the years as it noted the book's publication with a typical editorial piece under the title "The Latest Egg of the Academy Auk." The editorial announced that "the crude and coarse mess that he has styled *The Herne's Egg*" produced by the "sole and solitary extant specimen of the Mahatma school of versification, the great Auk of the London - Dublin Academy of Letters"33 had "arrived on the literary stage," and then, as it had done so often in the past, it invoked for comparison "the notorious 'Swan-Sonnet'" of 1924.

In August 1938 a theatre festival at the Abbey Theatre was to be the occasion of Yeats's last public appearance in Ireland. Ironically, his new play Purgatory, which was first performed at the festival, generated a mild controversy which bore some resemblance to the controversy surrounding The Countess Cathleen, his first play staged in Dublin some thirty five years previously. Following the first production of <u>Purgatory</u> on 10 August, Yeats made a short speech from the Abbey stage in which he was reported in The Irish Independent as saying: "I wish to say that I have put into this play not many thoughts that are picturesque, but my own beliefs about this world and the next."³⁴ Such an explanation did not meet the approval of Fr. Terence Connolly, Head of the English Department of Boston College Graduate School, who queried the meaning of the play at a lecture on Yeats given by F.R. Higgins as part of the Festival on the following day. Fr. Connolly said he had read the script of the play, but could not understand its meaning and then asked what were Yeats's beliefs? On 13 August Yeats's response was quoted in the three Dublin dailies. In a written reply Yeats pointed out: "My plot is my meaning. I think the dead suffer remorse and re-create their old lives just as I have described."³⁵ He then continued:

In my play, a spirit suffers because of its share, when alive, in the destruction of an honoured house; that destruction is taking place all over Ireland to-day. Sometimes it is the result of poverty, but more often because a new individualistic generation has lost interest in the ancient sanctities.

³² <u>Ireland Today</u> February 1938, p.183

The Catholic Bulletin, March 1938, p.185

The Irish Independent, 11 August 1938, p.10. The Irish Independent gave its average daily net paid sales at this time as 145,000.

³⁵ Ibid. 13 August 1938, p.9

The theatre critics of the three Dublin dailies had their own views on the play. The Irish Press thought it demonstrated Yeats's "preoccupation with the ever recurring cycles of things" and identified a relationship with Dostoievsky's belief "that a murder's conscience is his greatest punishment." The Irish Independent thought it "a grim austere play, haunted by an overpowering sense of the oneness of this life and the next." The Irish Times took a particularly pessimistic view:

In his maturity Mr. Yeats has no hope to offer to adventuring mankind: apparently the only consolation he has to offer is that the world must continue to suffer purgatorial pains for the sins of its earlier inhabitants. That is a philosophy of despair; but it may be that what Mr. Yeats intends to offer is a statement that purgatory is really the present life.³⁸

The reception accorded to <u>Purgatory</u> is in marked contrast to that accorded to <u>The Countess Cathleen</u> in 1899 or <u>The Playboy of the Western World</u> in 1907. The Irish Free State of 1938, now a predominantly Catholic country, with a Censorship of Publications Act in force, and under the strong influence of the Catholic hierarchy, was now, in its national press, able to discuss the play without the introduction of the sort of nationalistic or religious arguments which had been in vogue at the times of the earlier controversies. In fact a letter to <u>The Irish Times</u> on 15 August from John Lucy of Glenageary, Dublin, was the first evidence that some of the original thinking remained. Lucy thought the play "smacks of perversion,"³⁹ and then continued:

The scene of the presentation of this play is a predominately Catholic country, from which the play has received some Catholic aspect, and this is the perversion, because it seems dangerous to Catholic philosophers and teachers to connect purgatory with negation, no matter how serene or wise, rather than with the vision of eternal happiness in God.

A response from Frank O'Connor⁴⁰ was printed the following day: "When will Irish people learn that the impassioned airing of sectarian prejudice is the worst form of vulgarity?", Further letters followed, but the controversy did not have the venom of previous years and the comment of Fr. Connolly when shown Yeats's written response to his query summed

³⁶ The Irish Press, 11 August 1938, p.7

The Irish Independent, 11 August 1938, p.10

The Irish Times, 11 August 1938, p.6

The Irish Times, 15 August 1938, p.5

⁴⁰ After early disagreements Frank O'Connor was, at this stage, quite friendly with, and supportive of Yeats.

up the general attitude, "he smiled slowly, shrugged his shoulders and said 'Let it die'." ⁴² And so it did - the final controversy in a life which seemed full of them came to a quiet end and shortly afterwards Yeats left Ireland for the last time. His name was to appear again in the Irish daily press only when the announcement of his death in Mentone in the south of France was announced in all the papers in January 1939.

On Monday 30 January 1939, two days after Yeats's death, editorials and obituary notices were printed in the Dublin daily and evening papers as well as in The Cork Examiner. Notices in the provincial press followed. Further notices were printed in those magazines which had been following and commenting on his career over the years; The Dublin Magazine, Studies, The Church of Ireland Gazette, The Irish Rosary. The notices, which were not all inhibited by the convention of nii nisi bonum, followed a, by now familiar, pattern.

For <u>The Irish Times</u> Yeats was included as one of the "great company of poets who died in exile – Shelley and Keats and Rupert Brooke." Swift was introduced, with whom Yeats was said to share "a burning patriotism which aroused a people to higher dignity, which spurred a community to action, and which left to his country the abiding inspiration of his poetry." Yeats's drama was praised as "he brought verse back to the stage, and it gave to Ireland the beginnings of that body of drama for which the country has come to be revered in all parts of the world, and the Abbey Theatre is his splendid monument." On another page <u>The Irish Times</u> reprinted its editorial from its edition of 13 June 1935 ⁴⁴ and a short appreciation of Yeats written by Lennox Robinson:

W. B. Yeats was the finest poet writing in English for over the last 100 years, and was certainly among Irish poets the equal of Moore and Mangan and Tennyson. He lived to a ripe age, but never echoed himself, as did Tennyson or Burns. He was one of the most modern of the moderns and every young poet looked to him as his model. He made Ireland's national theatre – the Abbey Theatre – and wrote the best

The Irish Press, 13 August 1938, p.8

44 See page 289.

⁴¹ The Irish Times, 16 August 1938, p.8

⁴³ The Irish Times, 30 January 1939, p.6. The last named would not have pleased Yeats given his minimal representation of Brooke in his edition of The Oxford book of English Verse which had been published in November 1936.

poetic drama for it. Ireland has lost one of her greatest sons and the world has lost one of her greatest poets. He was my dearest friend for twenty and more years. 45

<u>The Irish Times</u> had expressed the wish that Yeats's body should be buried in St. Patrick's Cathedral, but some days later, noting the family's decision that Drumcliff should be his final resting place, it printed the poem "Under Ben Bulben" with the proud statement that these were "verses, which have not hitherto been published."

The Irish Times's community of readers were no doubt pleased to be reminded, in the final lines of the poem, of Yeats's ancestral relationship with the Church of Ireland rector of Drumcliff.

The Sligo Independent demonstrated its own particular "cultural code" in regretting Yeats's death because of his connection with "a highly esteemed local family," and then, copied The Irish Times in referring in its notice to Yeats's honorary degree from Trinity College and his receipt of the Nobel Prize. Both papers made the same rather remarkable statement:

But when, in 1930, the English Poet Laureateship became vacant, and he was made a candidate by leading authorities in England, it became apparent that his place in the literary life of his time was much more exalted than he was prepared to rate it a year earlier.⁴⁷

It is difficult to imagine how both of these newspapers could rate being a candidate for the English Poet Laureateship higher than the Nobel Prize.

On 1 February, <u>The Irish Times</u> published a further appreciation of Yeats by Desmond Fitzgerald, ⁴⁸ who represented a new community of educated Catholic nationalists (his wife was a Northern Presbyterian Nationalist) which strikes a chord with the main thrust of this thesis. Fitzgerald wrote of the impact of discovering Yeats's work for the first time as it appeared and concluded:

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 3 February 1939, p.7 A photocopy of the page from <u>The Irish Times</u> is included in Appendix 2.

⁴⁷ The Sligo Independent, 4 February 1939, p.2

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 30 January 1939, p.8

Desmond Fitzgerald (1888 – 1947) was born in England but learned Irish there. He moved to County Kerry in 1913, was involved in the Rising of 1916, and imprisoned. He was later elected to the Dail and served the Cosgrave Government as Minister for External Affairs from 1922 – 1927. He was friendly with Yeats and a co-founder of the Irish Academy of Letters in 1932. He was the father of Garrett Fitzgerald.

For us, however, the feeling remains that it was reserved as a privilege for our generation to know in the instancy of the moment the complete and dazzling revelation that he brought.⁴⁹

The Irish Press celebrated a different Yeats, announcing his death on its front page with an article that focussed on his early career and his association with John O'Leary. The article stated that Yeats had become a member of the I.R.B. but left it "with many of the younger members, who became dissatisfied with the leadership of the organisation following the Boer war." Yeats's play Cathleen Ni Houlihan was remembered with the comment that it may have inspired the leaders of the 1916 Rising. Finally a verse from the poem "Sixteen Dead Men" was quoted – an interesting contrast to "Under Ben Bulben" as printed in The Irish Times:

O but we talked at large before
The sixteen men were shot,
But who can talk of give and take,
What should be and what not
While those dead men are loitering there
To stir the boiling pot?

Yeats's nationalism was emphasised in <u>The Irish Press's</u> editorial in the same edition of the paper:

Yeats began that great cultural revival which was to produce not only the Abbey Theatre and all it stands for, but which was to inspire and stimulate the great national resurgence of which Easter Week was the final expression.⁵¹

His work with Douglas Hyde was remembered which "turned the thoughts of the nation back to its great cultural heritage, to its traditional songs and its folklore, to the many half-forgotten treasures buried in the literature of the Gael." Yeats's poetry "though fashioned in the tongue of the foreigner" is acknowledged as among the finest ever written and is "essentially and unmistakably Irish." The editorial then concluded:

Whilst the world of letters pays tribute to the life-work of a great poet, Ireland mourns the passing of a man who has helped to mould her destiny and who must be accounted one of the greatest of her sons.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.8

⁴⁹ The Irish Times, 1 February 1939, p.5

The Irish Press, 30 January 1939, p.1

<u>The Irish Independent</u>, which in the same edition announced its average net daily sales for 1938 at 140,374,⁵² did not indulge in the nationalistic praise of <u>The Irish Press</u> but printed an appreciation of Yeats written by Dr. Walter Starkie⁵³ as well as a more conventional obituary summarising the poet's life and achievements. Starkie focussed his attention on Yeats's theatre and his "struggle" against realism, quoting the poet as saying on one occasion:

Realism is the delight today of all those whose minds, educated alone by schoolmasters and newspapers, are without the memory of beauty and emotional subtlety.⁵⁴

In Starkie's opinion Yeats would be diminished if seen only as the "creator of a dream world," because, in his view: "No one among our Irish writers had a clearer and more unhampered vision of the world today." The Irish Independent's sister paper The Evening Herald, alone among the Dublin papers, did not mark the poet's death apart from a short news item regarding "an effort to have his remains brought home."

An editorial in <u>The Evening Mail</u> was generous in its praise for the dead poet. He had "shed lustre on this country by the greatness of his genius and the brilliance of his talents." He showed the Irish people "a vision of spiritual greatness transcending the lure of material prosperity." And then the paper showed its own particular "cultural code" by echoing Rupert Brooke's well known poem "The Soldier" in declaring that Yeats was to be buried in "a foreign country; but not only to this but to all future generations of his countrymen that grave will be forever Ireland." ⁵⁵

The Cork Examiner also paid its tribute to Yeats, rather strangely crediting Oscar Wilde with encouraging him "to try his fortune in London," and then suggesting that he would "probably be best remembered for those critical essays which for subtlety of thought and beauty of style are unrivalled in Anglo-Irish letters." It then reprinted Lennox Robinson's

⁵² By comparison J. J. Lee gives a circulation figure for <u>The Irish Times</u> of "less than 50,000 " and for <u>The Irish Press</u> of 115,000 in 1933. Lee J. J., <u>Ireland 1912 –1985</u>, p.217 and p.177.

Walter Starkie (1894 - 1976) was born in Dublin and educated at TCD where he became Professor of Spanish and Lecturer in Italian Literature from 1926 to 1947. He traveled widely in Europe and published books on his travels and on Romany gypsies. He was a director of the Abbey Theatre from 1927 to 1942.

⁵⁴ The Irish Independent, 30 January 1939, p.9

The Evening Mail, 30 January 1939, p.4 The Cork Examiner, 30 January 1939, p.6

tribute that had been issued on the evening of Yeats's death, and was printed in <u>The Irish</u> Times as has been noted.

The literary and other journals had, naturally, the opportunity of preparing more considered articles on the occasion of Yeats's death. The Dublin Magazine published an appreciation by Austin Clarke in its April-June 1939 number. Clarke did not have the friendliest of relationships with Yeats exacerbated by Yeats's exclusion of his work from The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, which Yeats had edited in 1936. Maurice Harmon has described Clarke 's poetic stance as "deliberately anti-Yeatsian" in that he incorporated a direct Catholic experience, and the "forms and prosody of native Irish poetry" into his work. However, notwithstanding their differences, Clarke's notice on Yeats was generous. He wrote: "It is difficult as yet to see either his extraordinary career or his poetry in real perspective. He is among those rare men of genius who have in their own lifetime outlived one reputation and gained another."58 It is this lack of "real perspective," the immediacy of interpretation which has been the concern of this thesis, that gives a particular interest to Clarke's comments and what is particularly notable, but not surprising considering Clarke's views on Irish poetry, was that Clarke's reading of Yeats, particularly his later poetry, placed him within "the major currents of English poetry" and made little of his Irishness. To Clarke "Yeats's attitude to home rule in Irish letters in his later years is somewhat of a mystery." ⁵⁹ He did consider that in the penultimate verse of "Under Ben Bulben" Yeats had "abjured the modern English school," but showing some of his own current disillusionment with the Irish scene, to which he had just returned after almost fifteen years absence, 60 Clarke finally considered that in "these days of our new materialistic Irish state, poetry will have a harder, less picturesque task."

The Irish Monthly published a nine page article on Yeats entitled "Yeats as I Knew Him" written by Aodh de Blacam who, as has been noted, had been a frequent reviewer of Yeats's books from the nationalist and Catholic perspective in both newspapers and journals over the years. The article commenced with the stanza from "To Ireland in the Coming Times" in which Yeats invoked "Davis, Mangan Ferguson" immediately

⁵⁷ Harmon, Maurice, "Yeats, Austin Clarke and Sean O'Faolain" in Allison, Jonathan, (ed.) <u>Yeats's Political Identities</u>, pp.224-5.

The Dublin Magazine, April – June 1939, p.6

³⁹ Ibid. p.10

⁶⁰ Clarke had moved to live in London in 1922 and had arrived back to Dublin in 1937.

identifying the community that de Blacam represented. How representative his opinion was within that community is difficult to judge. Today his opinion would appear eccentric:

A few exquisite lyrics, a handful of very fine poetic plays, a few delicately lovely essays, the whole making a volume of, perhaps, 400 pages – this is the sum total of the work of Yeats that will live: hardly more than a minor poet's permanent achievement. It is surprising, when one goes through the shelf of books from his pen, to find what a large mass of work of no value a man of such distinction could produce.61

Yeats's "mystical essays and books" were dismissed as "worthless" as were his autobiographical writings, being "crammed with drunken degenerates, mad seers, squalid folk, dreams that have no more relation to reality than a vision under opium." De Blacam disapproved of the later Yeats, the man who wrote "The Second Coming" describing "Bethlehem as the birthplace of a monster" and was horrified at the late plays Calvary and particularly Purgatory. (Here we must take cognisance of the fact that the article was published in a Catholic magazine.) Finally he regretted that the poet had not been "constant to the dream of his youth" but found encouragement in a verse from the posthumously published "Under Ben Bulben" which "showed him turning to his homeland at the last; and claiming the Irish name with his expiring breath":

> Cast your mind on other days That we in coming days may be Still the indomitable Irishry.

The Jesuit magazine Studies published a long and strikingly balanced assessment, of Yeats written by Professor J.J. Hogan⁶² of UCD. Yeats was described as "the first great poet of modern Ireland, the poet who will command our literature so long as we use the English tongue."63 Hogan acknowledged Yeats's achievements in other fields; as a "fine prosewriter and critic", as "dramatist and the chief creator of our theatre" and, with less certainty, as "a great public man and a principal shaper of our recent history," but then focussed his attention on the poetry. Its development over the years was described; from the first period which was mostly "remote from real life", to the second period beginning "about 1910" when real life was represented, and then, as he grew older, when he "was

⁶¹ The Irish Monthly, March 1939, p. 207

⁶² Jeremiah J Hogan was professor of English at UCD. His book <u>The English Language in Ireland</u> had been published in 1927.

brought to question and doubt his simple reading of life; to face the problems of Good and Evil, of heaven and hell." The difficulty of identifying any consistent political stance in Yeats's life was acknowledged; at one moment he "thinks that everything of value in Ireland is Anglo-Irish" and then he would "fling himself into the extremest mystical nationalism." Hogan identified the poems in which the poet "labours for a solution" to the world's "perplexities" as among "the greatest metaphysical poetry of the present age," selecting and quoted in particular from "Meditations in Time of Civil War" and "Sailing to Byzantium". In his final poems, Hogan considered that "the poet has been developing the self or nature concept into a lively, Rabelais –like naturalism, employing the humour and coarseness of popular speech and folksong rhythm." This balanced and positive criticism was in marked contrast to that of The Irish Monthly or even more so of the other Catholic magazines, The Catholic Bulletin and The Irish Rosary in which objectivity suffered at the altar of their own particular political and religious agenda.

The Church of Ireland Gazette had no doubts about Yeats's greatness as a poet, but while celebrating his nationality, set out very clearly its own particular brand of Irishness.

Yeats came of the stock which, while it will defend and indeed proclaim in every breath its claim to belong to Ireland, yet has never considered foreign to it the great and historic culture which, because English is the language in which it is immortalised, we must call English. . . . Nothing could be more absurd than to think of the Anglo-Irish poets as in some way contributing to an outside culture because they wrote in English. It is rather that in their work English poetry becomes Irish poetry.64

As an example of how differently Yeats's writings could be interpreted by Ireland's different communities, "Landor and Donne" whom Yeats had also identified as precursors, as well as Blake were invoked, rather than "Mangan, Davis, Ferguson" as with The Irish Monthly. In further contrast it was Yeats's later poetry that was here most admired; poetry that could "convey thought daring, direct, and strong." The poet was seen as "outspoken and even violent" in vehemently "denouncing those reactionary measures which a people now freed has imposed upon itself," but he was conscious, as the article tells us,

that the fulfilment of political and national ambitions will not bring about a rebirth of the spirit in themselves. When we found a new country for our people we are not

63 Studies, March 1939, pp. 35 - 48
 64 The Church of Ireland Gazette, 3 February 1939, p.72

to found it on the popular, the spectacular triumph. We are to build it on no vulgar foundation, but to give them

Not what they wanted most
But the right twigs for an eagle's nest. (sic)

D. P. Moran's <u>The Leader</u>, 65 which in the past had been less than positive, to put it mildly, towards Yeats published an article by Seamus O'Neill 66, which in its context was quite surprising. The average reader could "pass by the most obscure of his poetry" but Yeats "did give us beautiful things; plays, lyrics, ballads." Yeats was admired for not deserting Ireland as other writers had done, he "betrayed her not, and for one who was not of the ancient faith of Ireland, he came at times very near the vision, and his heart beat with the people and with understanding of them." O'Neill continued:

In Ireland we like our poets to be patriotic; indeed, some of us are inclined to belittle the work of a man unless he employs his talents in the cause. Yeats may not have taken a direct part in the political movement of recent times, but lovers of poetry will be glad of that, for he might have squandered his gifts and genius on the petty and sordid. Yet he loved Ireland so well that from his heart's core he cried out:

"Know that I would accounted be
True brother of that company,
Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song;" 67

The article ended on a further positive note:

Not unjustly did he introduce some of his poems with the quotation from St. Augustine: "Sero te amavi, Pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova! Sero te amavi." For he left behind him in the world more beauty than he found, and surely that were pleasing to the recording angel. 69

⁶⁵ It should be noted that D. P. Moran had died in February 1936 and editorial duties for <u>The Leader</u> had been taken over by his daughter.

⁶⁶ Seamus O'Neill (1910 – 1981) was born in Co. Down and educated at Queen's University, Belfast. He was Professor of History at Carysfort College of Education for many years and also wrote novels, poetry and plays.

⁶⁷ This is an early, but not entirely accurate, version of the poem.

⁶⁸ Epigraph to "The Rose" first published in <u>Poems</u> of 1895 ⁶⁹ The Leader, 25 February 1939, p.639

While The Leader was, to some extent, prepared to forget its previous prejudice against Yeats, that other journal which had consistently attacked him for almost twenty years, The Catholic Bulletin was not prepared to be so charitable. In its March 1939 issue it published an article by a Jesuit priest, Fr. Stephen Quinn, which quoted extracts from the notices on Yeats's death printed in two English newspapers The Times and The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post. Quinn insisted that the "plain import of such passages cannot fail to make itself felt by such students of literature as may still be inclined to believe that the late Mr. Yeats was in any vital way entitled to be designated as an Irish writer."⁷⁰ The argument was extended in an editorial in the subsequent issue to include "the alleged and entirely spurious thing called 'Anglo-Irish Literature'." This literature, the editorial concluded, "has nothing to do with the one Gaelic literature which . . . has always been its own very self at all times, a plain Gaelic Literature of our Gaelic race, never a hybrid with any modern, upstart, hyphenated thing." The editorial then turned its attention to a report of an address given to the U.C.D. Literature Society by the Jesuit priest Fr. Stephen Browne which, it said, was "an excellent summary of an enemy position." Fr. Browne had made a case for acceptance of Irish literature in English, arguing that "it had a claim upon them because it was their own." Fr. Browne had also said that they "might dislike and even repudiate certain features of it. But they could no more disown it than the French could disown Voltaire, or Anatole France." The Catholic Bulletin's editorial writer would not accept this, and pointed to the views of Professor Tierney⁷², as expressed in <u>The Leader</u> on 11 March as a vindication of his position. Tierney had described the "native Irish sentiment" as "the product of a very ancient and unique aristocratic culture" while the nation of "the Protestant minority" was "a modern upstart".

Fr. Stephen Quinn had the final word in another article in the same April issue of <u>The Catholic Bulletin</u> in which he quoted selectively from Aodh de Blacam's obituary notice in <u>The Irish Monthly</u>. Ignoring the final positive note which has been identified here in de Blacam's article it concentrated attention on his mockery of Yeats's theosophy quoting him as follows:

It is humiliating to read of a man of Yeats's gifts being led, in his best years, by a

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⁷⁰ The Catholic Bulletin, March 1939, p.184

⁷¹ *Ibid.* April 1939, p.213

Michael Tierney (1894 – 1975) was born in Co. Galway, educated in Ballinasloe and at UCD where he took a degree in classics. After postgraduate work in Paris, Athens and Berlin he was appointed Professor of Greek at UCD in 1922. He was president of UCD from 1947 to 1964.

vulgar charlatan like Madame Blavatsky, and piteous to find him devoting years, even in old age, to the writing of mock-mystical rubbish.⁷³

The Irish Rosary, the Dominican magazine that had been critical of the journal <u>To-morrow</u> some fifteen years previously, had not overcome its antagonism to the literary movement led by Yeats. In an editorial on Yeats under the title "De Mortuis . . .", it felt constrained to admit "it is impossible for us to treat his influence with boundless admiration, after the manner of many appreciations in the press." That Yeats was "a great literary genius" was accepted, but his poetic gift had "serious limitations and grave defects" due primarily to his lack of what <u>The Irish Rosary</u> called "a philosophy of religious truth." The editorial continued:

His glitter of words portrayed merely ephemeral scenes and a fantastic philosophy that are at best but make-believes of the Splendour of the True. His philosophy, as philosophy, was extremely poor and his thinking – in *Purgatory* for instance – strangely thin and shallow.

It finally drew attention to "the empty philosophy" of Yeats's epitaph, and, in a reference to a proposal that Yeats should be buried in St. Patrick's Cathedral, noted "the impropriety of the boom (sic) of his burial in a temple once a Catholic Cathedral." In 1939 Ireland was a long way from the spirit of ecumenism!

⁷³ The Irish Monthly, April 1939, p.242

⁷⁴ The Irish Rosary, March 1939, pp. 161-164

Conclusion

The obituary notices and notices of appreciation that followed Yeats's death were the first attempts to see the poet whole. They have been followed by a great multitude of critical analyses and biographical studies of Yeats over more than fifty years. Much has been learned in these works, and more will be learned in the future as newly developed critical techniques are applied and new information uncovered, in particular as his Collected <u>Letters</u> continue to be published and studies continue on <u>Yeats's Vision Papers</u>. However, I maintain that the work undertaken in this thesis will have continuing validity, no matter what the future holds in Yeats studies. In assessing his literary output from "The Island of Statues" to "Under Ben Bulben" and from Mosada to Purgatory, the perspective in this thesis has, in all cases, been Irish and it has been contemporary with the work's publication. The work has been attended to or ignored, admired or deprecated, as the reviewers and critics of the day in Ireland saw fit. Similarly with Yeats's public life; his involvement with the 1798 centenary celebrations, his attacks on William Martin Murphy and others in his fight for a gallery for Hugh Lane's pictures, his response to World War I and the Easter Rising, or later as a Senator, his conflict with the Catholic Church in its support for censorship and its opposition to divorce, have all been discussed and assessed in accordance with the cultural and political environment of the time as expressed in the words of contemporary newspapers and journals.

In applying a retrospective view to what has been written here, we can see that the reception that Yeats received in Ireland in his lifetime, as represented by contemporary journals and newspapers, was many-faceted. It emerges that there was no one identifiable audience in Ireland for his work – there was no single community that his "Fisherman" could represent. The Ireland which he was addressing was in a state of political and cultural flux throughout his working life. Out of this flux had come, not only a new state, but a body of well respected and admired writing through which Ireland's literary reputation had "gone about the world like wind." As well as being at the forefront of this creative endeavour, Yeats had also set down and developed the criteria by which the newly emerging work should be evaluated. He created not only a literature, but also a standard by which the Irish interpretive communities would be able to assess his own work and that of his contemporaries. This standard had evolved over his lifetime from the politically motivated desire that literature should further or hinder nationalist objectives for Home

Rule and National Independence, to dealing with literature as an art, as represented by the later criticism from The Irish Statesman, The Dublin Magazine and Ireland Today.

Yeats had become bitter in his middle years when his work was attacked to such an extent that he imposed his ban on having his work sent to the Irish press for review but, as has been noted, the year 1916 changed a lot in his relationship with the Irish public. From that year on his commitment to "sweeten Ireland's wrong" was revived. The open and bitter criticisms of "September 1913" had evolved into the "terrible beauty" of "Easter 1916". The distinction grew between Yeats the poet and Yeats the public man, and as in his poetry he "turned in on himself" as F.R. Higgins wrote in 1935, it was the public man that became the focus of attention in Ireland. His publications in The Irish Statesman, his speeches in the Senate and the attacks to which he was subjected in The Catholic Bulletin and The Catholic Mind all diverted attention from his poetry. He emphasised his public persona deliberately by publicly associating himself with Swift, Burke and Grattan in place of the earlier triumvirate of Davis, Mangan and Ferguson.

The quality and scale of the literary work was such that by the end all communities, whether Protestant or Catholic, Nationalist or Unionist, Gaelic-Irish or Anglo-Irish had to recognise his greatness as a literary figure while deprecating, or in some cases just ignoring, his political pronouncements. It was necessary, as he wrote, to "take our greatness with our bitterness." His later readers could avail of a choice; the Nationalist and mostly Catholic community, as represented by critics such as Aodh de Blacam, could look back to the early Celtic poetry and see therein a true successor to Davis, Mangan, Ferguson whose work was an inspiration to the founders of the new Irish state at the beginning of the century, the Anglo-Irish and mostly Protestant community could look to the powerful middle and late poems and see there the successor of Swift, the Protestant Irishman, but could also incorporate the tradition of Blake and Shelley but give to it a particular Irish air. Those readers with loyalty to neither of these communities could engage directly with the poet whether he was wearing "a coat covered with embroideries" or "walking naked".² Similarly Cathleen Ni Houlihan continued to invoke an Ireland beloved but still lacking the "fourth green field" by one community, and Purgatory could invoke an Ireland lost and

The Irish Times, 13 June 1935, p.7

² From "A Coat" Variorum Poems, p.320

regretted by another, while the Noh plays could appeal to a community unencumbered by a commitment to contemporary politics.

This thesis has demonstrated that there was no single interpretive community in Ireland just as there was no single Yeats to be interpreted. The communities responding to Yeats had, from the beginning, been divided – initially in a fairly clear-cut manner between Nationalist and Unionist - those who read and then rejected the <u>Dublin University Review</u> and remained to read <u>United Ireland</u>, <u>The Irish Fireside</u> or <u>The Irish Monthly</u> and those who read <u>The Irish Times</u> and the English literary magazines such as <u>The Nineteenth</u> <u>Century</u> and <u>Macmillan's Magazine</u>. In later years the divisions were not so clear as the new educated Irish middle class began to make its voice heard and a new Irish Irelander, Gaelic nationalism arose which adopted the early poetry and particularly "Cathleen Ni Houlihan", as its representative Irish literature, albeit in the English language.

After a period of disillusionment and rejection, 1916 brought Yeats back to Ireland "to begin building again," to eventually take his place among the country's legislators and through his speeches in the Senate and his articles in The Irish Statesman to project his image of an ideal Ireland. His conflict was now primarily with the Catholic church which by attempting, with some success, to impose its own standards of morals and behaviour on all communities in Ireland, drove a wedge between Yeats and a large proportion of the Irish people which had not healed at his death in January 1939. At the same time a new intellectual community had grown up, writers such as O'Connor, O' Faolain and Francis Stuart, poets like Colum, and Clarke now recognised Yeats as a writer of world renown and importance, indeed one under whose shadow they were in danger of being suffocated. They represented a very different Ireland from that in which Yeats had started to write and publish.

As the quotation from T.S. Eliot in the introduction that the history of Yeats's time could not be understood without him suggested, so it has been necessary throughout this thesis to trace the momentous changes which had brought the country from the days of Parnell to the days of de Valera, from the ever elusive prospect of achieving Home Rule and breaking the historic connection with Great Britain, to a position of isolation and enmity as the United Kingdom which now included the six northern counties – the fourth green field – entered into a dark night of conflict with Hitler's Germany and Ireland stayed isolated and

resented, encumbered by a draconian censorship which, while designed originally to stem the flow of "immoral literature" coming in from Great Britain, was now having the effect of preventing its people from reading a substantial proportion of the work of the young writers who had taken over Yeats's mantle.

The changes in the political and social landscape of Ireland mirrored to a large extent the reception accorded to Yeats and his work. While the poetry mostly escaped opprobrium, with the notable exception of "Leda and the Swan" which continued to raise the ire of the Catholic journals, it was the plays and particularly the occasional speeches and writings which caused the greatest rift with the Catholic community. It is notable that much of these political writings have now faded from public view and, while some of the plays are occasionally performed, it is Yeats the poet who is remembered when his name is mentioned in the Ireland of the twenty-first century.

To the Ireland of his contemporaries, as we have seen, Yeats had been many things. To them he seemed to fulfil the prayer which Mohini Chatterjee had advised him to repeat:

Say
Every night in bed,
"I have been a king,
I have been a slave,
Nor is there anything,
Fool, rascal, knave,
That I have not been."

Yeats did not need eternal recurrence to have been many things. In his own lifetime, as seen through the eyes of his Irish commentators, he had been an advanced nationalist and a supporter of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, in his own words "a Protestant of sorts" and a Theosophist, a supporter of civil liberty and an admirer of fascism, an enthusiast for the Irish language and a threat to the survival of that language. He had been subject to attack from the nationalist community and from the unionist community, from Irish Irelanders and from the Anglo-Irish, from Trinity College and from University College Dublin, from

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³ Variorum Poems, pp.495-6

the Gaelic League, from members of the Catholic Church, and the same bodies, communities, and churches had also, on other occasions, praised him.

If there is one overarching conclusion that can be drawn from this study, it is that one must be circumspect in attaching labels to Yeats. Each effort to define the poet in terms of the religious, or political or cultural movements of his time seems to meet with a counter-truth, but in one aspect he can be clearly labelled without any fear of contradiction, he was an Irishman who wished to write primarily for an Irish audience and, as such, this effort to see him through the eyes of his contemporaries in Ireland has a validity that cannot be gainsaid.

Appendix 1

Irish Reviews of Published Books by W.B.Yeats

(1) Mosada. (Dublin: Sealy, Bryers, and Walker, October. 1886)

The Irish Monthly March 1887

(2) Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry. (ed.) (London: Walter Scott, September 1888)

The Nation 27 Oct. 1888

Irish Monthly November 1888

(3) The Wandering of Oisin and other Poems. (London: Kegan Paul, January 1889)

Irish Monthly Feb 1889

The Freeman's Journal 1 Feb 1889

Dublin Evening Telegraph 6 Feb 1889

Dublin Evening Mail 13 Feb 1889

The Sligo Independent 16 Feb 1889

The Clonmel Chronicle 23 Feb 1889

The Irish Times 4 March 1889

The Weekly Freeman's Journal 9 March 1889

United Ireland 23 March 1889

The Nation 25 May 1889

The Lyceum June 1889

(4) Stories from Carleton. (ed.) (London: Walter Scott, August 1889)

The Nation 28 Dec. 1889

(5) Representative Irish tales. (ed.) (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, March 1891)

Irish Monthly July 1891 The Nation 2 May 1891 United Ireland 16 May 1891

(6) John Sherman and Dhoya. (London: T.Fisher Unwin, November 1891)

United Ireland 28 Nov 1891
Irish Monthly Nov 1891
Dublin Evening Telegraph 29 Dec 1891
Irish Daily Independent 4 Jan. 1892

(7) The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, September 1892)

Irish Daily Independent 2 Sept. 1892 United Ireland 3 Sept. 1892 The Irish Catholic 3 Sept. 1892 The Daily Express 5 Sept. 1892 Irish Monthly October 1892 Irish Society 22 October 1892

(8) The Works of William Blake.(ed.) London: Bernard Quaritch, February 1893)

Irish Weekly Independent 22 March 1893 United Ireland 22 April 1893

(9) The Celtic Twilight. (London: Lawrence and Bullen, December 1893)

United Ireland 23 Dec. 1893 Irish Daily Independent 17 Jan 1894

(10) A Book of Irish Verse.(ed.) (London: Methuen and Co., March 1895)

Irish Weekly Independent 23 March 1895 United Ireland 23 March 1895 The Daily Express 21 March 1895 New Ireland Review May 1895

(11) Poems. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, October 1895)

Irish Weekly Independent 26 October 1895 United Ireland 14 December 1895 New Ireland Review December 1895

(12) The Secret Rose. (London: Laurence & Bullen, April 1897)

The Freeman's Journal 10April 1897 United Ireland 1 May 1897 New Ireland Review May 1897

(13) The Wind among the Reeds. (London: Elkin Mathews, April 1899)

The Daily Express 22 April 1899
The Freeman's Journal 28 April 1899
Irish Weekly Independent 6 May 1899

(14) A Book of Irish Verse (Revised Edition). (ed.) (London: Methuen and Co., January 1900)

The United Irishman 10 March 1900

(15) The Shadowy Waters. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, December 1900)

The Freeman's Journal 1 January 1901 The Irish Figaro 27 April 1901

(16) Poems. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, April 1901)

The United Irishman 27 April 1901

(17) Ideas of Good and Evil. (London: A. H. Bullen, May 1903)

The Irish Times 22 May 1903
The United Irishman 27 June 1903

(18) Plays for an Irish Theatre Vol. 1 and 11. (London: A. H. Bullen, March 1904)

The United Irishman 21 May 1904

(19) Poems 1899-1905. (London: A. H. Bullen, October 1906) Sinn Fein 24 November 1906

(20) Deirdre. (London: A. H. Bullen, August 1907)

The Northern Whig 7 September 1907

(21) Discoveries. (Dublin: Dun Emer Press, December 1907)

Sinn Fein 22 February 1908

(22) The Green Helmet and Other Poems. (Dublin: The Cuala Press, December 1910)

The Irish Review April 1912

(23) Plays for an Irish Theatre. (London: A. H. Bullen, December 1911)

Sinn Fein 6 July 1912

(24) Reveries over Childhood and Youth. (London: Macmillan, October 1916)

The Freeman's Journal 21 October 1916

The Irish Independent 23 October 1916

The Daily Express 24 October 1916

The Cork Constitution 31 October 1916

New Ireland 16 December 1916

(25) Responsibilities and Other Poems. (London: Macmillan, October 1916)

The Irish Times 21 October 1916

The Freeman's Journal 21 October 1916

The Irish Independent 23 October 1916

The Daily Express 24 October 1916

The Cork Constitution 31 October 1916

New Ireland 16 December 1916

Studies March 1917

(26) Per Amica Silentia Lunae. (London: Macmillan, January 1918)

The Irish Independent 28 January 1918

The Freeman's Journal 4 May 1918

Studies March 1918

(27) Two Plays for Dancers. (Dublin: The Cuala Press, January 1919)

The Freeman's Journal 5 April 1919

The Irish Statesman 25 October 1919

(28) The Wild Swans at Coole. (London: Macmillan, March 1919)

The Irish Times 29 March 1919

The Irish Independent 7 April 1919

The Cork Constitution 11 April 1919

The Freeman's Journal 3 May 1919

(29) The Cutting of an Agate. (London: Macmillan, April 1919)

The Irish Independent 21 April 1919

The Cork Constitution 28 April 1919

The Irish Times 3 May 1919

The Freeman's Journal 10 May 1919

(30) Four Plays for Dancers. (London: Macmillan, October 1921)

The Irish Times 25 November 1921

The Irish Independent 28 November 1921

The Freeman's Journal 4 February 1922

(31) The Trembling of the Veil. (London: T. Werner Laurie, October 1922)

The Irish Independent 13 November 1922

The Irish Review 6 January 1923

(32) Later Poems. (London: Macmillan, November 1922)

The Sunday Independent 24 December 1922

The Irish Independent 26 December 1922

The Freeman's Journal 20 January 1923

(33) Plays and Controversies. (London: Macmillan, November 1923)

The Irish Independent 10 December 1923

The Freeman's Journal 15 December 1923

The Irish Times 21 December 1923

The Church of Ireland Gazette 28 December 1923

The Irish Statesman 5 January 1924

(34) Essays. (London: Macmillan, May 1924)

The Irish Independent 19 May 1924

The Irish Statesman 7 June 1924

The Irish Times 13 June 1924

The Irish Book Lover June 1924

The Church of Ireland Gazette 22 August 1924

The Dublin Magazine February 1925

(35) The Bounty of Sweden. (Dublin: The Cuala Press, July 1925)

The Irish Statesman 1 August 1925

The Irish Times 7 August 1925

(36) Early Poems and Stories. (London: Macmillan, September 1925)

The Church of Ireland Gazette 16 October 1925

The Irish Statesman 17 October 1925

The Irish Independent 19 October 1925

The Irish Times 6 November 1925

The Sunday Independent 7 March 1926

(37) A Vision. (London: T. Werner Laurie, January 1926)

The Irish Statesman 13 February 1926

(38) Estrangement. (Dublin: The Cuala Press, August 1926)

The Irish Statesman 4 September 1926

The Dublin Magazine April- June 1927

(39) Autobiographies. (London: Macmillan, November 1926)

The Sunday Independent 14 November 1926

The Irish Independent 29 November 1926

The Irish Statesman 4 December 1926

The Irish Times 21 January 1927

The Dublin Magazine April- June 1927

(40) Poems. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, February 1927)

The Irish Times 25 February 1927

(41) October Blast. (Dublin: The Cuala Press, August 1927)

The Irish Statesman 27 August 1927

(42) Stories of Red Hanrahan and The Secret Rose. (London:

Macmillan, November 1927)

The Irish Times 25 November 1927

The Irish Statesman 17 December 1927

(43) The Tower. (London: Macmillan, February 1928)

The Irish Times 21 February 1928

The Cork Examiner 22 February 1928

The Irish Independent 27 February 1928

The Irish Statesman 14 April 1928

The Sunday Independent 15 April 1928

(44) Sophocles' King Oedipus. (London: Macmillan, March 1928)

The Cork Examiner 4 April 1928

The Sunday Independent 15 April 1928

The Irish Independent 30 April 1928

(45) The Death of Synge. (Dublin: The Cuala Press, June 1928)

The Irish Statesman 29 September 1928

(46) A Packet for Ezra Pound. (Dublin: The Cuala Press, August 1929)

The Irish Statesman 7 September 1929

The Catholic Pictorial November 1929

(47) The Winding Stair. (New York: The Fountain Press, October 1929)

The Irish Statesman 1 February 1930

(48) Selected Poems. (London: Macmillan, October 1929)

The Church of Ireland Gazette 25 October 1929

The Irish Statesman 9 November 1929

(49) The Winding Stair and Other Poems. (London: Macmillan, September 1933)

The Irish Press 3 October 1933

The Irish Times 14 October 1933

The Church of Ireland Gazette 10 November 1933

The Dublin Magazine April – June 1934

The Irish Book Lover May – June 1934

(50) The Collected Poems. (London: Macmillan, November 1933)

The Irish Press 1 January 1934

The Irish Independent 10 April 1934

The Dublin Magazine July – September 1934

(51) Letters to the New Island. (Cambridge, Massachusetts:

Harvard University Press, January 1934)

The Dublin Magazine July - September 1934

(52) Wheels and Butterflies. (London: Macmillan, November 1934)

The Irish Independent 4 December 1934

(53) The Collected Plays. (London: Macmillan, November 1934)

The Irish Times 5 January 1935

The Irish Book Lover March – April 1935

The Dublin Magazine January – March 1936

(54) A Full Moon in March. (London: Macmillan, November 1935)

The Irish Press 10 December 1935

The Irish Times 14 December 1935

The Church of Ireland Gazette 3 January 1936

The Irish Independent 28 January 1936

The Dublin Magazine January - March 1936

(55) Dramatis Personae. (Dublin: The Cuala Press, December 1935)

The Dublin Magazine April – June 1936

Ireland Today July 1936

(56) A Vision. (London: Macmillan, October 1937)

Ireland Today October 1937

The Irish Independent 2 November 1937

The Church of Ireland Gazette 4 February 1938

(57) The Herne's Egg. (London: Macmillan, January 1938)

The Irish Press 8 February 1938
The Irish Times 26 February 1938
Ireland Today February 1938

(58) Last Poems and Plays. (London: Macmillan, January 1940)

The Irish Press 5 March 1940
The Irish Times 9 March 1940
The Irish Book Lover July 1940
Studies December 1940

Appendix 2

This Appendix contains illustrations from Irish newspapers and journals creating a series of visual images of how Yeats was presented to readers in Ireland from his first publication in the <u>Dublin University Review</u> in March 1885 to the publication of his poem "Under Ben Bulben" in <u>The Irish Times</u> on 3 February 1939, four days after his death.

- No.1. The title page of the <u>Dublin University Review</u> of March 1885 which lists Yeats's first poems published; "Song of the Faeries" and "Voices", in the Kottabistic section of the journal.
- No. 1a. Page 35 of the March 1885 edition of the <u>Dublin University Review</u> showing the two poems appearing for the first time under the name W. B. Yeats.
- No.2. Yeats's poem "Remembrance" published by Fr. Matthew Russell in the July 1886 edition of <u>The Irish Monthly</u> at the request of Katherine Tynan.
- No. 3. The hastily prepared page of <u>United Ireland</u> of 10 October 1891 containing Yeats's poem "Mourn and the Onward" written to mourn the death of Parnell and placed above the paper's editorial titled "Done to the Death".
- No. 4. A copy of a portrait of Yeats by AE published in <u>The Irish Homestead</u> on 13 November 1897 which was some eight years before AE took over the editorship of that journal. The portrait is described as "reduced from a beautiful crayon drawing by Mr. G Russell, better known as "AE" a young Irishman".
- No. 5. A cartoon in <u>The Leader</u> on 29 March 1913 showing Yeats addressing a crowded theatre followed by ten quatrains of doggerel. The scene is described as follows:

A hall filled with long-haired bards, bounders and other intensely cultured persons. Pensioner Yeats comes forward to chant, and is received with a tremendous outburst of rhythmical cheering, followed by an opal hush.

- No. 6. Yeats's poem "Romance in Ireland" later renamed "September 1913" as published in <u>The Irish Times</u> on 8 September 1913.
- No. 7. A copy of the contents page of the 17 July 1915 edition of the journal New Ireland announcing the publication of the speech on Thomas Davis given by Yeats at a meeting of the Dublin University Gaelic Society in the previous November. The meeting had been banned from Trinity College due to the proposed presence of "a man called Pearse".
- No.8. A copy of a page of notes from the first edition of <u>Responsibilities</u> with the new note, dated July 1916, added by Yeats to those previously published, dealing with the proposed gallery for Hugh Lane's pictures.
- No. 9. A copy of the title page of the November 1919 edition of <u>The Irish Statesman</u>, of which Yeats was then a director, announcing the publication of a "New Poem by W. B. Yeats".
- No. 10. The poem "A Prayer for my Daughter" as published in <u>The Irish Statesman</u> of November 1919.
- No. 11. A copy of the title page from the second series of <u>The Irish Statesman</u> dated 14 March 1925 announcing the publication of Senator Yeats's "Undelivered Speech on Divorce".
- No. 12. A copy of the page from <u>The Irish Times</u> of 13 June 1935 celebrating Yeats's seventieth birthday under the title "William Butler Yeats: Aetat. 70".

No. 13. A copy of the page from <u>The Irish Press</u> of February 1937 with Yeats's poem "Roger Casement".

No.14. A copy of the page from <u>The Irish Times</u> of 3 February 1939 following Yeats's death and publishing his poem "Under Ben Bulben".

THE

BLIN UNIVERSITY REVIEW:

A Monthly Magazine of Citerature, Art, and Anibersity Intelligence.

No. 2.]

DUBLIN, MARCH, 1885.

Price Sixpence.

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Editorial Notes.

Supplement of The Dublin University Il appear early this month, giving a critical he Exhibition of the Royal Hibernian Acah opens on March 2nd. It will contain many of the leading pictures of this year's Exhibipromises to be fully up to, if not above, the previous years.

ent number of THE REVIEW celebrates some s, all of world-wide interest; one coming closely to ourselves. A biographical sketch is in our columns, as well as a note on his phic conception. Among the mighty masters ach and Handel stand prominently forward. sity Choral Society has just occupied itself of illustrating their achievements in art; and ent something of the story of their lives.

d edition of Prof. Tyrrell' vol. I., has at length app a serious effort was not time for the Hilary Class nior Freshmen were reduc

No.1

Dublin University Review March 1885

of borrowing, as the first edition had been for some time out of print. Mr. Tyrrell has largely improved his book, having availed himself of the indefatigable industry and zeal of that devoted classical scholar, Mr. L. C. Purser. Mr. Purser has collated the Harleian codices in the British Museum, now used for the first time in the criticism of Cicero; and the results, so far as they affect the present volume, are given. The second volume is promised; and we hope that Mr. Tyrrell may be able to bring his important task to completion.

We are informed on very good authority that in the several Moderatorship Courses in Trinity College there are more than twenty books set down which are out of print, and which are consequently inaccessible to many Students. The fact that a book is fit to be continued in the Moderatorship course is surely evidence that it is worth republication; and if this would not prove a financial success, we think the Board should see their way to subsidizing such a venture, as they often have done for works of lose prosumable importance. These volumes can, of

ne Library; but to candidates who din this is the reverse of an advanalso is closed for three weeks at rear when it would be most values. The difficulties in the way of

Title Page

Rottabistic.

Song of the Facries.

A MAN has a hope for heaven, But soulless a faery dies, As a leaf that is old, and withered and cold When the wint'ry vapours rise.

Soon shall our wings be stilled, And our laughter over and done, So let us dance, where the yellow lance Of the barley shoots in the sun.

So let us dance on the fringed waves, And shout at the wisest owls In their downy caps, and startle the naps Of the dreaming water-fowls.

And fight for the black sloe-berries, For soulless a faery dies, As a leaf that is old, and withered and cold When the wintry vapours rise.

W. B. YEATS.

Faices.

WHAT do you weave so soft and bright? The cloak I weave of sorrow; O lovely to see in all men's sight Shall be the cloak of sorrow-In all men's sight.

What do you build with sails for flight? A boat I build for sorrow; O swift on the seas all day and night Saileth the rover sorrow-All day and night.

What do you weave with wool so white? The sandals these of sorrow; Soundless shall be the footfall light In each man's ears of sorrow-Sudden and light. W. B. YEATS.

Ambition.

In man ambition is the commonest thing; Each one by nature loves to be a king.

HERRICK.

Ambitio.

Ambitio nimis est volgatum ; No.1a Quisque sibi partes sumere

Chorus from Sophokles.

Εὐίππου, ξένε, τᾶσδε χώρας. Oed. Col. 668-680, First Strophe.

O STRANGER, thou hast reach'd a rest, A land whose steeds win wide renown, Where white Kolonos' dwellings crown The chalky steep; of lands most blest. There nightingales' clear notes upswell

More than in all the world beside, Through shady-verdured glens which hide The dark-tress'd ivy where they dwell.

They love to haunt the sacred glade Where branching trees so thick outspread Their vaulted leafage overhead; No sunbeam e'er can pierce the shade, Nor enter blasts of any storm.

The mirthful god there roameth aye, Bakchos, attending day by day The nymphs that nursed his infant form.

M. R.

Cato.

Cato. Let not a torrent of impetuous zeal Transport thee thus beyond the bounds of reason; True fortitude is seen in great exploits, That justice warrants, and that wisdom guides; All else is tow'ring frenzy and distraction. Lucius, we next would know what's your opinion.

Luc. My thoughts, I must confess, are turn'd on peace. Already have we shown our love to Rome, Now let us show submission to the gods. We took up arms, not to revenge ourselves, But free the commonwealth; when this end fails, Arms have no further use. Our country's cause, That drew our swords, now wrests them from our hands, And bids us not delight in Roman blood Unprofitably shed. What men could do Is done already: heav'n and earth will witness, If Rome must fall, that we are innocent.

ADDISON.

KATON.

Κ. οὐκ ὥφελ', ὡς πλημμυρὶς, ἡ προθυμία βία φέρειν σε τερμόνων γνώμης πέρα. εὐανδρίας γὰρ ὅστις ἐκτελῶν καλὰ δίκην τε βάσανον νουν θ' υφηγητηρ' έχει. παντ' ἄλλ' έλαφρὰ λύσσα καὶ φρενών ἄλη. Λούκιε, σὺ δ' έξης ἀν λέγοις ἃ σοὶ δοκεῖ.

Λ. ήμη, φράσω γάρ, φρήν προς είρηνην ρέπει. αλις προτού φανέντες οι δύστοι πόλει μη νων φρονουντες μείζον ή θεητούς χρεών ύφθωμεν ήμων έγχος ήρ' οιδείς θέλων δίκην μετελθείν άλλ' ελευθερούν χθώνα. τησδ' έλπίδος στερείσε τίς χρεία 'σθ' δπλων; πόλις χερών τον τωιδ' άφορπάζει ξύρη η πρίν σπάσασα κούκ έξ χαίρειν φώνω

Perte Eryyerer bedjakujer ipier, ei mirret Popy, Veni και βρυτοί ξυνίστορες.

T.

Dublin University Review March 1885

serve one's country," his truth, and honesty, and public virtue were of inestimable value.

May the story of his life, as told in his brother's most interesting volumes, produce the result which he himself would have most earnestly desired—a zealous love of religion and of Christ's poor, and a conviction that there can be no nobler cause in which a man may toil and suffer.

REMEMBRANCE.

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

Of ceaseless loneliness and high regret
Sings the young wistful spirit of a star
Enfolden in the shadows of the East,
And silence holding revelry and feast;
Just now my soul rose up and touched it, far
In space, made equal with a sigh, we met.

W. B. YEATS.

No.2

The Irish Monthly
July 1886

"Remembrance"

for the volume front o thankf sown g velvet : the gar and th tracing as they unimag lovelies spent t down 8 Austral acquair. the Me now, ar seen ei! the hor change early s another a wing of wave ledge, c

the air touch of that so furthes

bester would as that would as that that would as that that would as that that the mode of the form of

onee Mr. GRAY complains sadly of the attempt and grande by the National Press to "bind him with and Canado by the National Press to "bind aim or gray last, Father Kenny is reported to have said the this own speeches." Why, he pathetically excitage outsits at the desire of their encinies to drive uchirof the speeches of the Leinster Hall?

That actute statesman and most reliable ponman on an Irian platform ever made a fluor speech than that delivered by Mr. Geadstonest Father O'REILLY, of Mullingar, is nothing if On this Thursday morning as we go to at Newcaetle-on-Type on Friday last. Modest include sanguine. "The moment," said the rev. press a human body lies stiff and cold in speech than that delivered by Mr. GLADSTONE ati-ijof Dan, ien't it?

last complained that the language used by him regainst Mr. GLADSTONE ten years ago, when alik England was against Parriell, has been quoted to the Leadership of the House of Commons has what this means? Does Ireland know that against him (Mr. Dillon). Why should not it to become vacant by the death of Mr. W. H. the mightiest intellect which has given Mr. Dillon then declared that Gladstone in Smith on Tucaday last. The right itself to her cause for two hundred years his treatment of the Boers was guilty of the house of the control of the Boers was guilty of the house of the control of the Boers was guilty of the house of the control of the Boers was guilty of the house of the cause for two hundred years blackest act of treathery ever committed by an desiderable time previous to his death in bad last ceased to think and plan for her? Ab, English Minister. Now he calls on the Irish thealth, and on Friday last a serious change for fellow-countrymen, you turned upon him is

ld Glast:

politics centaland in the annual report of gration, and admit all the force employed! makes in a political and personal sense. w. of the consideration that an ourly and offi-Mr. Gladetone blinself as to the new H Ireland would be most deirable-Indeed existing circumstances. Whether as the Government or as the leader of the Oppost In related argently demand some definition to the state of the state o Is in office to the proper period for such lowed by the draft of a Home Kale Bill. V dig There are obvious reasons aby Italand Me

Mr. Joint Reamon, M.P., visited Mayers, it to the off-repeated entreaties of the Fishery and East in Portland on Friday last, and Commissioners, and have obtained a curse from a Recommendation of the Fishery from the princers in fairly good health. They increased their gratitude to their friends who people how to cure markerel for the American characteristic for the American for the American form of the A jths subject in the principal cities of Great Britaln. Awas intended to provide against has occurred. Ye on the bread high mountains will brit.

Mr. Rudmonn, having gone through all the evi-Again and again the Fishery Inspectors urged and the first decidence in Mr. Foan's care, is satisfied that he was that the mackerel trade in the south was doomed found guilty on the most trivial evidence. Be to absolute rain unless an instructor were obtained found guilty on the most trivial evidence. Be to absolute rain unless an instructor were obtained found guilty on the most trivial evidence. Be to absolute rain unless an instructor were obtained found from Norway, or someone sent to Norway to be the case, and believes that it will result in aspectly its learn there, who would teach the Irish fishers the twenty pears' sentence inflicted upon him influence. This was a small and simple steps the twenty pears' sentence inflicted upon him influence. This was a small and simple steps the twenty pears' sentence inflicted upon him in manner. This was a small and simple steps the twenty pears' sentence inflicted upon him in manner. This was a small and simple steps the twenty pears' sentence inflicted upon him in the would have cost very little, but it would the manner posed to every consideration of justice.

The man is gone who guided ye, navery. The man is gone who guided ye

Especiacio. But the Featherationists generally the proposition of a technical instructor, india Technical (astronomy form) appear to be unforgiving. They won't have the liever this appointment of a technical instructor, india Technical (astronomy form) and if it is the state of the unit of the unit table of table of the unit table of the unit table of table of

At a Federation meeting at Athlone on Sonhis own speeches." Why, no patients out that it was the desire of their encines to drive claims, shouldn't he be allowed to wriggled out the Irish priests from their duties. No, but it is to these speeches as others have wriggled out their determination to make the Irish priests their determination to make the Irish priests. anderstand that in politics the layman is as much, That actute statesman and most reliable poll-the priests. That's all, Father Kelly.

gentleman, at a meeting last Sunday, "the moment the death-knell was sounded in Great | Brighton. It is the body of Charles Mr. Dillon in his speech in Carrick on Sanday Britain of the Tory Party, that moment they PARNELL It lies there to day, soulless: would gain National Independence."

English Minister. Now no cause ou the state the little and on Friday last a serious change to filenow-countrymen, journal in the people to place the utmost confidence in the worse took place in his condition, which his hour of trial. Do you feel happy this caused the greatest fears in the minds of his hour of trial. Do you feel happy this caused the greatest fears in the minds of his hour of trial.

in view

No.3

United Ireland 10 October 1891

Moure-and then of ward, there is no rettoing

W. B. YEAR.

UNITED IRELAND.

DUBLIN: SATURDAY, OCT. 19, 1971.

CHAPTER CONTROL TO THE CONTROL OF TH "DONE TO DEATH."

stark and soulless. Does Ireland know Physicianz. The announcement of his death was morning as the news flashes over the hills.

Here's what the Derry Journal, which has heard with seelings of regret in English political of Ireland that he is dead? DRAD? Grox. lately 'verted to the Seceders, said on Friday scircles, regardless of party.

[ast: I bo Mr. that CHARLES PARNELL'S mind has ceased to the Com think for as ? Can it be true that revalent his heart has ceased to beat for us (Govern- Ab, brothers, brothers, what have you unwise done; A year would have taught ye ce do to the short year, had the kind Providence who yahip, has watched over the old country for thirty generations but spared our down Chief.



Mr. W. B. YEATS,
thor of The Winderings of Ois'n, and other Poems, "The Celtic Twilight," "The Counters Kathleen," "The Heart of the Rose," etc.

No.4

The Irish Homestead
13 November 1897

Sketch of W.B. Yeats by AE



DAY.

RANGEMENT WITH OF THE TIMES

AND THE TUTION

strongly appear Mr. rs prove obdurate" th ciso his undoubted right ment. This poposal, saye not bear analysis: le ponsible quarters, and it origin iu a compicte ig al and constitutional usage twis to show the unwisdom ir remaining ident in fact attitude of Utder. Plaine totllem would not have protingles of depair. The legistion admix that he constitutional, but he falls doubted right of the Soverally there is no question nestitution there are certain the Crown, but they are disuse. In spite of this that the policy of the Grand the Crown, but they are disuse. In spite of this that the policy of the Grand the Crown, but they are disuse. In spite of this that the policy of the Grand the crown, but they are disuse. In spite of this that the policy of the Grand the majority of this must face the possibility in the the control of a second the control of the cont

mbt dissolve Parliand Ministers.

SIBILITIES OF FERENCE.

touches on the possibilities Conference. Until it says, and the unhappy memoris revived by the Irish policy in the slow terival of programmer and all parties were preparing misemorial feids. The programmer and the slow terival of programmer and the summon and tered Conference, Unionists, refuse to assist. At present in see no sign of any such Government appears to be consequences of its policy if parried out to its logical postpone a settlement for in, for no permanent solution, for no permanent solution allem is possible except by

OF THE CROWY.

he Times to day, dated fren the I mee to hay dated from the MacNeill, N. P., point onto the question whether the trierra shall be heard in 1924, the Royal Velo has not been 107, the circurastances on that reality such as to make the ce with the desire of Parlayrom over-ridit; the wish of the Legislature. If I am not Mr MacNeill adds, the best contained in stores of the veco xertised in clear antagonizm to both Houses of Parliament ill, was the teto of William ge of a bill for the limiting of a Parliament to three year, year after—1624, if I remembered in the properties of the Septemial Act. MacNeill, M.P., points o

TIMES" OF TERRIBLE EXPLOSION.

FIVE PERSONS KILLED.

(EFFER'S TSLEGRAM)

PAR'S SATURDAY.

A violent explosion occurred this afternoon at a fireworks actory at Aubervilliers, causing the death of his persons and injuring ten.

The explosion occurred where a foreman and four workmen were pouring water on some chemicals in a hole in the grand, near one of the powder magazines. The bodies of the five victims were them, but no pieces, to a distance of a hundred varia. A man, working on the railway, near by; is a injured by a stope hurled through the aif by the force of the explosion.

ROMANCE IN IRELAND.

(On reading bruch of the correspondence against the Art Gallery.)
What need you being come to sense, But fumble on a greasy till.
And and the la pence to the bence, And prayer to shivering prayer, entil You have dried the marrow from the bone, For men welf born to pray and save?
Romantic Irelaids dead and cone—
It's with O'l pary in the grave.

It's with O'l pary in the grave.
Yet they were of a different kind.
The names that stilled your childish play;
They have gond about the world like wind.
But little tirde had they to pray
For whom the bangman's rope was spun;
And what, God help us, could they save?
Romantic Irelayd's dead and gone—
It's with O'l cary in the grave.
Was it for this the wild geese in read.
The grey wing upon every tide?
For this that fit that blood was shed?
For this that fit that blood was ahed?
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Fohe,
All that deli Fum of the brave
Romantic Ireland's dead and, gone—
It's with O'l cary in the grave.

AMERICANS AND THE ART GALLERY.

Letter From Lady Greeny.

Letter From Lady Greeny.

TO. THE EDITION OF THE HUST TIMES.
Sin,—I have that liked to wited anything in the controversy as to the site for the Art Callery, for I thought that was a question for Dublin itself to nettle; and, although my husband once represented Dublin it Parliament and I was matried in a church in Dublin, where so much of my later work has been and I sometimen this I should like a grave in Glasavin—yet belong to Connacht.

I must howker, with now about the American moned which was promised through me. This more wished was definitely offered the save that special collection of pictures which was promised through me. This more was definitely offered the save that special collection of pictures which we seem likely to lose. If those pictures are withdrawn, it bust go back. I have, therefore, been reading very closely the correspondence in the papers, for if I have to write and tell American friends that during hose have failed I want to have a definite peason to give for that failure. I cannot say that the pictures are refused because of the Bridge site not having been approved of, because It was just while I was colbecting that money in America that I received a cable saying that the Corporation had altopted it. My frikinds there were pleased this what they thought, the spirited idea this—earth being acred uswet took water and hir for our site gand the only reward I defered for all they were giving was the inscribing of the nationality of the schicect. The money subscribed in American was by no meaning all frish. I mail rention Mr. I do not like to say that the pictures are refused because of the nationality of the schicect. The money subscribed in American was by no meaning all rish. I mail mention Mr. I man herchitect it the Parmell statue.

St. Gladens, who, it half pictures are grown and the only of the pictures are refused in an architect of the pictures are refused because of the pictures are refused because of the nationality of the scholar pictures are refused by

DUBLIN LABOUR

SACKVILLE STREET MEETING.

SPEECHES OF TRADES CONGRESS DELEGATES.

TO DAY'S CONFERENCE OF MASTERS AND MEN

TERMS OF SETTLEMENT DISCUSSED.

MR. BARNES, M.P., AND LARKINISM.

ON THE MIDLAND RAILWAY. STRIKE

MEETING PROTEST

LONDON.

TROUBLES

Saturday passed over quietly in Dublin. There were no disturbances at any time, and at right there were fewer policemen on daty than on that night week.

Yesterday the funeral took place to Glanevin Cemotery of John Byrne, who died as the result of injuries that he received

as the result of injuries that he received on Saturday night, 30th August. He had been a member of the Transport Workers' Union, and his funeral, like that of Nolan. t nion, aid his funeral, like that of Nolan, who was buried earlier in the week, was attended by large numbers of workmen, accompanied by bands. 'The Coroner's Jury on Sturday found that he died from fracture of the skull, but that there was no evidence to show how the injury had been inflirted.

At loclock reserraly a big meeting was held in Sackvile street "to assert the right of tree speech." The space between the Selson of unn and the Parnell status was biled with people, who were addressed from three brakes. A resolution was adopted asserting the right of free speech and trade union combination, and demanding an independent inquiry it to the conduct of the police. Speeches were defivered by several of the English deletates, and it was announced that a joint

THE TRAMWAY SERVICES:

We are saked to state that the Rathfarnham and Delphinis Barn cars, which were for some days divorted to other routes, will be run as usual though Aungier street and Camden street to lay:

WINDOW OF TRAMCAR BROKEN.
One of the windows in a Clontarf tramcar was broken last evening on the North Strand road with a kone, thrown by some person who could not be identified at the time as the street was rather crowded,

IRIBH AND CORNISH LABOUR TROUBLES.

LABOUR TROUBLES.

The following resolution has been passed by the London District Council of the Nationa Union of Clerks:

That this september meetine of the above Council of the National Union of Clerks twees with horse and disgues the relief by the National Council of the National Council of the National Opinion of Clerks twees with horse and disgues the relief to the National Opinion of Clerks twees with horse and disgues the relief to the National Opinion of Clerks twees with horse and public precing. All the languisment of Sir I barron's continuous and open incitement to jectiful Stein of the National Opinion of Clerks the National Council of the National Opinion o

Evered by several of the English delegates, and it was announced that a joint conference, including representatives from all the trades union organisations in Dublin would be held-to-day with the employer.

A meeting, which was attended by three thousand representatives of trade unions and social organisations in London, was held in Trafalgar square vesterialy to protest against "the murderous outrages by police in Dublin." Speeches were delivered by Mr. Bon Tille: and others, and a resolution was passed protesting against the police methods, asking for an inquiry into the whole matter, and for Lord Aberdeen's dismissal.

The Tramwar Company annotance to-day that the service of cars via. Aungier street, will the service of cars via. Aungier street, and the service of cars via. Aungier street, will the service of the English transport of the service of the English transport of the English transpo

The Irish Times 8 September 1913

"Romance in Ireland"

By W. B. Yeats HOMAS DAVIS See Page 147. .

AN IRISH WEEKLY REVIEW.

No. 10.

[Registered as] a Newspaper.]

JULY 17, 1915. SATURDAY,

ONE PENNY.

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ler to prevent misunderstandings, the Editor wishes to at he accepts no responsibility for any views expressed aper other than those contained in the unsigned Editorial He is desirous that New IRELAND should as broad a platform as possible for the expression of opinions.

NOTES OF THE

Corporation will have met to form a deci-CIVES sion which-whether it accepts or rejects LEAD. our policy-must become a landmark in Irish history. It is to meet on Wednesday -whether or not it will give the lead to the country upon the best-and in our opinion, probably the ince of securing at least the full provisions of the Home Rule Act. The Suspensory Act, as we have out week after week, is so worded that unless its is expressly prolonged beyond September 17 of nt year, it terminates on that date, and the Home must thereupon be brought into force.

this issue of NEW IRELAND is published, the Dublin

ay be pardoned for claiming that we have been mainly ital in bringing prominently before the public the y of securing Home Rule in the autumn. Since the -Government- was formed we have insisted withssible emphasis in each number of New IRELAND ne Rule in September affords the one solution of Ilties of the new situation. We have devoted our columns almost exclusively to the question. The preparation is very short; and no opportunity can concentrating public opinion on the issue.

untry has only a bare to No. 7 ND THE settlement Ever RY. must show solid p the Municipal Co ead. We trust that the notion before it by an ove

New Ireland 17 July 1915

Yeats on Thomas Davis

it does so, we may depend on the whole country-following without hesitation or delay. But whether Dublin leads or not, the question will have been raised and cannot rest. The political wire-pullers in Dublin may, if they believe it suits their purposes, succeed in preventing the resolution from-being carried. It is to the country we look for the sound, virile national instinct which can act without being paralysed by too fine a calculation of the chances of the political game. If the country will organise itself spontaneously and enthusiastically, as it did in the Volunteer movement of a year ago, it will create in itself a force that will override the intrigues of politicians. Dublin gave the lead to the Volunteers. Once again Dublin has its golden chance. If it fails now, it will stand discredited in the history of the Irish national movement.

The time for preparation is so brief that every moment must count. It will be said that within two months the question cannot possibly be brought again into the sphere of practical politics. It took the Imperial Government-far-less time to destroy its constitution and bring-about the Coalition. The transformation was so sudden that to this day no onecan say what causes, if any, made it a necessity. The reasons for bringing Home Rule into force now are, on the other hand,-many-and obvious.-In-any-case-the-preliminary-preparations must be long. If the Act is put in force in September, the Irish Parliament can hardly meet till the war is ended.

We have urged since the Coalition was first formed that the Home Rule Act must be brought into THE COVERNMENT'S operation at once as the only way out of the uncertainty of the new situation. The events of the last week have made appal-

the instability of the present Government. he smallest knowledge of the inside working ical developments is aware that the most es may be made at any time in the personnel All the Press in England that is not immed in playing some particular political game, sgust and alarm at the organised attacks on

187

Note referring to the Easter

Rising

but a few lines, not so many certainly as the objection of various persons to supply Sir Hugh Lane with 'a monument at the city's expense,' and as the gallery was supported by Mr. James Larkin, the chief Labour leader, and important slum workers, I assume that the purpose of the opposition was not exclusively charitable.

NOTES

These controversies, political, literary, and artistic, have showed that neither religion nor politics can of itself create minds with enough receptivity to become wise, or just and generous enough to make a nation. Other cities have been as stupid-Samuel Butler laughs at shocked Montreal for hiding the Discobolus in a cellar-but Dublin is the capital of a nation, and an ancient race has nowhere else to look for an education. Goethe in Wilhelm Meister describes a saintly and naturally gracious woman, who getting into a quarrel over some trumpery detail of religious observance, grows-she and all her little religious community—angry and vindictive. In Ireland I am constantly reminded of that fable of the futility of all discipline that is not of the whole being. Religious Ireland—and the pious Protestants of my childhood were signal examples—thinks of divine things as a round of duties separated from life and not as an element that may be discovered in all circum-

stance and emotion, while political Ireland sees the good citizen but as a man who holds to certain opinions and not as a man of good will. Against all this we have but a few educated men and the remnants of an old traditional culture among the poor. Both were stronger forty years ago, before the rise of our new middle class which showed as its first public event, during the nine years of the Parnellite split, how base at moments of excitement are minds without culture. 1914.

'Romantic Ireland's dead and gone' sounds old-fashioned now. It seemed true in 1913, but I did not foresee 1916. The late Dublin Rebellion, whatever one can say of its wisdom. will long be remembered for its heroism. 'They weighed so lightly what they gave,' and gave too in some cases without hope of success. July 1916.

THE DOLLS

The fable for this poem came into my head while I was giving some lectures in Dublin. I had noticed once again how all thought among us is frozen into 'something other than human life.' After I had made the poem, I looked up one day into the blue of the sky, and suddenly imagined, as if lost in the blue of the sky, stiff figures in procession. I remembered that they were the habitual image suggested by blue

THE IRISH STAILESIAN

Registered at the G.P.O. SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 1919 Vol. I. No. 20] SIXPENCE CONTENTS EVENTS AND COMMENTS IRISHMEN OF TO-DAY. VII—THE VERY 469 Young Men. By Brinsley McNamara LORD SOUTHBOROUGH'S PROPOSAL 472 LIFE AND LETTERS. By John Eglinton ·LABOUR AND THE LEAGUE 472 REVIEWS: AN IRISHMAN'S DIARY. By Sigma 473 482 SANE CONSERVATISM A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER. By W. B. THE TWILIGHT OF MR. BIRMINGHAM 483 Yeats 475 WILLIAM DE MORGAN'S LAST NOVEL 485 FEDERAL FINANCE. By Lord Monteagle K.P. 475 CORRESPONDENCE: IRISH POWER RESOURCES. I-THE NATURAL 486 From Southorn and Others Sources of Energy. By Robert R. Hoare 477 By A. D. ANDROCLES" AT THE ABBEY. 490 THE BLIND ALLEY. By Guillaume FINANCIAL NOTES, 490

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E publish this week, as a supplement, the full text of the speech which Sir Horace Plunkett delivered last week at the National Liberal Club. We publish it because the versions which appeared in the daily Press were necessarily incomplete, and because the argument, to be followed, must be read in its fullness. It is well that this speech, a weighed and considered statement and no mere rhetorical outburst, should be studied both here and in England. Its reception by the Press has been remarkable. The Irish provincial Press, which speaks for moderate Sinn Fein, gave it a hearty welcome, and it is evident that its effect in England was to bring many people to look at the Irish question with a new vision. We hope that when English people are judging the rival merits of the various schemes which Mr. Long's Committee may put before them, they will judge in the light of the principles which the speech enunciates. They will judge well if they do so. We do not know, so conflicting are the rumours, whether the scheme of two Governments and a co-ordinating nominated authority, which was stated to be the fruit of the Cabinet Committee's labours, is a ballon d'essai, or the product of a playful imagination. If it is a ballon d'essai it is already deflated. No Irishman, whatever school he may belong to, would tolerate so fantastic a plan. If this is not the scheme then whatever scheme they have is almost certain to be unworkable and unacceptable. If they are sincerely anxious for a plan that will work, they will find it ready dr

Horace Plunkett's speech. It is that what we want, not what the is the only remedy for our ills.

We are glad to note that in.
Monday to The Times, Lord! I
his considered judgment that the

by an Irish Parliament is now an essential condition of a settlement. Lord MacDonnell has not reached this conclusion hastily. His own preference during the Convention was in favour of fiscal control, but rather than prejudice the possibility of agreement he, with many others, agreed at an early stage to the expedient of postponing a decision without prejudice until after the war, when machinery was to be set going to decide the matter. Even after the Convention, when the facts of Irish political life forced many who had voted for the Majority Report to the view that without Customs control there would be no settlement, Lord MacDonnell was cautious and wary. He feared to alter the fabric which had been so laboriously built in the Convention. His new pronouncement therefore is a weighty one. It ought to receive the serious consideration of the English people, who should see in it the final warning. The opinion of responsible and moderate men, men who, loving their country, yet are proud of the British Commonwealth, is being slowly exasperated by the perfidy of the Government. These men can be betrayed too

Lord Robert Cecil, in one of a series of articles which he is contributing to the Globe examines, with that searching conscientiousness which marks him out from the politicians of our time, the question of Ireland. He sets down, on the one hand, his own belief that the Union is the most beneficial form of government, and that Ireland suffers no material mismale. On the other he recognizes that

ard British rule as evil and has the courage, in the light which the war was fought, mself believes to put aside his d to accept the judgment of Ie, therefore pleads for the of the status of a Dominion,

No. 9

The Irish Statesman 8 November 1919

Title Page

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A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER

I

Once more the storm is howling and half hid Under this cradle-hood and coverlid My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle But Gregory's Woods and one bare hill Whereby the haystack and roof-levelling wind, Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed; And for an hour I have walked and prayed Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

TI

I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower, And under the arches of the bridge, and scream In the elms above the flooded stream; Imagining in excited reverie
That the future years had come, Dancing to a frenzied drum,
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.

III

May she be granted beauty and yet not Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught, Or hers before a looking-glass, for such Being made beautiful overmuch, Consider beauty a sufficient end, Lose natural kindness and maybe The heart-revealing intimacy
That chooses right, and never find a friend.

IV

Helen being chosen found life flat and dull And later had much trouble from a fool, While that great Queen, that rose out of the Being fatherless, could have her way, Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man. It's certain that fine women eat A crazy salad with their meat Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are carned
By those that are not entirely beautiful;
Yet many, that has played the fool
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,
And many a poor man that has roved,
Loved and thought himself beloved,
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.

VI

May she become a flourishing hidden tree
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be
And have no business but dispensing round
Their magnanimities of sound,
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
Nor but in merriment a quarrel
Oh, may she live like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.

VII

My mind because the minds that I have loved, The sort of beauty that I have approved, Prosper but little, has dried up of late, Yet knows that to be choked with hate May well be of all evil chances chief. If there's no hatred in a mind Assault and battery of the wind Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

VIII

An intellectual hatred is the worst,
So let her think opinions are accursed.
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood
For an old bellows full of angry wind?

IX

Considering that, all hatred driven hence, The soul recovers radical innocence And learns at last that it is self-delighting, Self-appeasing, self-affrighting, And that its own sweet will is heaven's will, She can, though every face should scowl And every windy quarter howl.

Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

X

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

June 1919.

W. B. YEATS.

FEDERAL FINANCE

"Do not make an Union with us, Sir, we should unite with you only to rob you. We should have robbed the Scotch, if they had anything of which we could have robbed them." So said Doctor, Johnson to an Irish gentleman in 1779, putting his finger on the financial spot; and finance has remained the crux ever since.

The finance of the 1914 Act was its most vulnerable point. On finance the Irish Convention broke down. "Finance presents us with the only real difficulty in the way of the scheme" (of Federal Devolution), said Mr. Murray MacDonald, the leading Federalist, in the House of Commons on June 3, and we Dominionists admit it to be the chief one. Of late the threat of Partition has overshadowed it but the omens still shew danger of the crippling of finance as well as the mutilation of area—in Sir Horace Plunkett's phrase, "half a Parliament for three-quarters of Ireland."

Whether Mr. Walter Long's Cabinet Committee and the Speaker's Devolution Commission are twins or rivals we can only guess, but Federalism is strongly represented on the former as on the latter, for its

Carson in the Devointemplated "more ountry," thus outh protested against

No. 10

The Irish Statesman
8 November 1919

"A Prayer for my Daughter"

The

G.W. RUSSELL (Æ).

3d.

ENSINSILES INCIDENT

with-which-is-incorporated

THE IRISH HOMESTEAD

Vol. IV. No. 1.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14th, 1925.

PRICE THREEPENCE.

SPECIAL ARTICLES

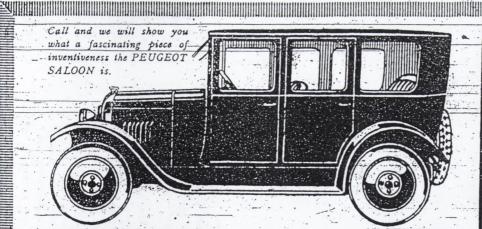
Reservoirs of National Life.

An Undelivered Speech.

By W. B. Yeats.

Keats and His Circle.

By A. E.



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No.11

The Irish Statesman
14 March 1925

Title Page

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sustained his literacy career long enough to have worked his vein to its far deptilu, and by a cunning and desciplined hand. The actievement soars He himself has spoken of Ponne and Lunder, but in the MARTA English a higher light must full ou it is the jura lox of his fame.

it is the juralox of his tame, in state of time as Yeats the lie is Yeats the Irish poet, wered literature in inseparable by his own diodee half a central that choice will be as imperiaband choice will be as imperish fame, and his fame will be as as the English language. It is minute than a hill above Florione of St. Paul's.

Irish

sies the English language it is like Walt Whitman or Emer r Allen Pde, gives himself into adition of English poetry. Bu ail, has the English tradition liman? The words are English, ion the spiral is rastly removed. is English but is American. So ish. As a young man be could, like Shaw or Oscar Wilde, to and and write out of it. He did and and write out of it. He die Still planting, he returned to a had no high living tradition of had no great public and no-ile differs in English. It is distinction, in the eyes of the he latina the major, the note of the so-called Celtic

ort of the shoreafted Celtic

1 Tim word was grandouse for a
shiltening activity which took
rings. Stephena, Colum, Boyle,
rings, Stephena, Colum, Boyle,
rings, with a Geelic annex—which
engld ant span O'Casey, which rolled lagainst
and excluded James Joyre, Liem O'Haherty,
and excluded James Joyre, Liem O'Haherty,

into explored names softe, how or merry, into the later, president, and even frence there. But there was a defined period of implication, framatic and pretic. It produced for a rate critica, John Eplinton. The creat of the incovaneut was Youth.

The Voice of Connacht

In the exercise it was a romantic movement. was a touch of comody, which means outset, but the young Yeals was far in the His world was out of joint manufactor starved in the modern city. acceptant stated in the modern (applied lack to Infland by ple voice of the following place of the following place of the following place of the season soul and its reason of the thome that were for the by modificative scholars. In this borney is pre-histories who have been season to be a season of the following place of the pla Term was a glarentess past, laden by the first was a glarentess past, laden by the first in defeat, with gleams, leaves It was not Ressettis Sambattes, or even William for a palet, drawner vision, lady leave, in which a lovelers

body teets, in which a borders of the first for country people; it does not consider people; it does not consider that was a consequently record. The terms of choosing values in an over every considerable and tolgarity, Led a nervenantic Has many tyrus, limply, tolate with the people of the peop

I world the I was an very began Rolling a viewed pearl eye.
For he carrier sie my lady go getverter, by;

A dienz, Dreepy beggn had spied on the cuts But a thicking narally can-o a beggn blued from his buts;

Or any kin, els his a orlyour hours: they have how kend but orly meo for a beautiful lady to rymen, alone a Ver bed

"A Song," from W. B. Yesis's "The Plater Queen," which he has Revised for Production in London degling the Autous.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE POET OF A W. B. YEATS DREAM

By SEAN O FAOLAIN

TITEEN years ago nobede would have about it seriously of speaking of Yeats as a philosopher. To everybody he was the lyric poet of light touch for whom the



Two Elements at War | Where "Beauty is Taut, Passion Precise"

By F. R. HIGGINS

BEFURE meeting John Uleary, during whiriwind advant the leighties, the young poet, W. B. Sometimes experie Yeals, had already opened his eyes in of Frankenstein.

defining the Conflict

Conflict

But there is more to it than this. Not present the present and the hard hard in a arise could depend on the conflict of the present and the present and experience life. Yests out of his meaning the present and the present

TENACITY OF PURPOSE THROUGH THIRTY YEARS

BY DENIS JOHNSTON

OT so very long ago Mr. Teats was



tered sound thirty five years ago is a distifict portle of Horrible,

since has been reloring inwittingly of Mr. Yeats is only talking to

First Authentie Voice

actick the Abbey Beatre as glorously dead, not as it is the practice of sectarina poliphiblecers to try to exclude or dimins yells from the annals of Irish Buyature with West Briton. 'Pioneers, of course, are the fresh to be forgotten, particularly if the weapons that they have bytell, are as successful in the hands of 66. They were written in the Antient incret Rooms as long ago as 1899, where he Ireland of that day heated us for iferously is lever it did in Easter Week, and it is now Laby Gregory, that feels Ireland discovered the liret turbunstic soles. It was here that Ioland's problems and Ireland's morehund lettage were given a iteratury, and the subbid agaratian activation that passed for tradpolitics. Juring the misrestant entery was taked to the dignity of a mitigal struggle though the results of the dignity of a mitigal struggle though the results of the dignity of a mitigal struggle though the results of the dignity of a mitigal struggle though the results of the dignity of a mitigal struggle though the struggle through the results of the dignity of the d

neat" (to quote Mr. O'Casey), alle can thank although Mr. Yeats, in contemplating the

By F. R. MIGGINS

By F. R. MIG

It is, incleed, fortunate for the libestre that he has had a playhouse of his ewn; for his dramatic cyrds could not otherwise have found expression. It is theoretically shauswrable, in a realm where theories po for nothiny. Thus, his canon of criticism



YEATS AND THE NATION

A Surrender to Subjectivity: Why the learning beautiful of the land of lives and the new statement of the land of lives and the new statement of the land of lives and liv

BY AODH DE BLACAM

EATS is regarded abroad as the discovering the control of the transfer of the

Only at this pation dired could the frish epic terrains in aid age to review the Nonin and the targets be forgetter. In the Cash the relial memory lives on whorsher times, pooring the part, but the Christian could be the Cash the Penal and the part, but the Christian could be the Cash the Penal and the part, but the Christian cover "green" things when side side with the Penal and the summer of the part of the p

YEATS AND THE ABBEY

School of Dramatists and School of Acting

BY ANDREW E. MALONE

Greens recorded in her London botte in 1898. Frances the theatre had attached be had experimented in the and he had experimented in it form. But the Loudon theatwood last century was unpropitions the poet. The Indias-trial Revolution had been to effective that it seemed to have housed the well of

the people no less than the mechanism ti lurian emponica had taken the place of pactic arrivation. The making of money had taken the place of worship of leauty. and the " wile" anh. to the counting

houm. of that time an organisation day to stage "plays with more than appeal," and it was that Indepen which staged the first play by M 1894. It was in 1891 that J. lowed the lead reviously given Berlin by founding the Independent

As early as 1886 he mail "Mosaila," a "dramatic particular later, in 1892. "The Commerleen" appeared in look form. In the theatre werns to have was blank in the bibliographics don the whole treth is known from conversation with Lady Gregory in !-

' Somewhere in the Suburbs

The English theatre had no pie Doet, but Mr. Yeats had discovered brastifully and who was at the beautifully and who was at the sinterested in the presentation of Jama. The notion of a "little treat where in the suburbe to produce drams" in Sollaboration with Moncarred quite naturally to the product of the produce of the produ desired to have his plays produced stare. Lady Gregory records the mil "it was a puty we had no high be has wrong, for very quickly lasty effected the meessary gurantee mobey, and the Insh Literary Thetire into lesing within a year after that the cellular in Lordon.

The title of the enterprise was cur-

Edward Maitte, who later paul ail is hadward Martyn, who take paid all the princes from his private purse; but the was undoubtedly that of Mr. Your influence and energy of Lady the hypeight the idea into actual bene. opening Moore assembled the company of conducted the robestsale in London. A first performance given by the brish Life. Theatre was in the Antient Convert Kann by Dublin with a cost recruited in Fig. and the programme consisted of Countries Cathleen," by W. H. Von "The Heather Field," by Kilward ! City on other play with the name of W. Yesta attached was presented by the Lawrere Theatre, and that was "Part and Comment of the Williams," is which M: and Heave, in which M: Vi-epillalwarded with theorge Mone, and wi-was staged by Sir Frank Benson's com-traction of the Called Theory of the children of the Called Theory of the Beeloe en a .a.r are common ... Our National This enter

the most look thinh think than the Ed French, but bearts nor 1: Yeats int. abetraction 1 - 4 Iremulaus M that must read a Had Year tion. had . o knowe him.

topics.

Poets

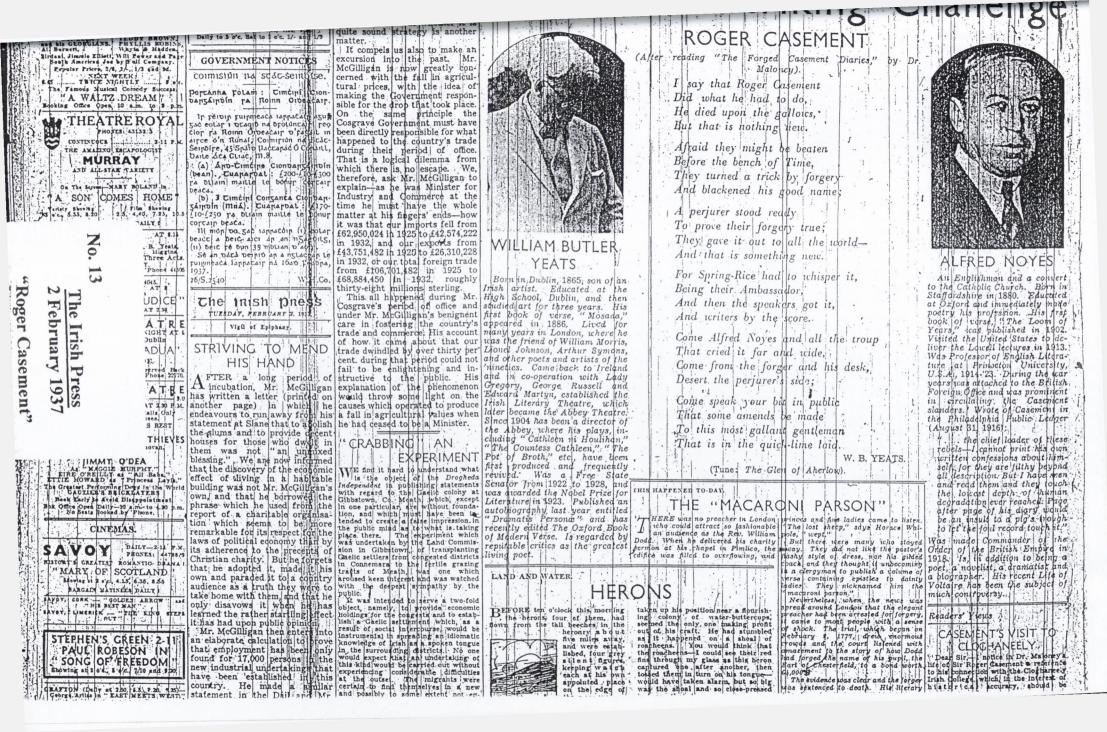
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19. 10. 10.







Last Wish of W. B. Yeats

To Lie in France For a Year, Then to Drumcliffe

THE members of the Yeats family have decided, in accordance with the explicit wish of the dead poet, that he should be buried in the graveyard of Drumelitie, Co. Sligo, in the parish of which his great; grandfather was rector, and in the county which has many associations with the Yeats family and the poet's youth.

with the Yeats family and the poet's youth.

Mr. Yeats repeated this wish to members of his family on myst than one occasion, and had already expressed it in rernes written last summer. A week or two before he died in France he said to his wife:

"If I die hers bury me up there on the mountain (the mountain clie mountain cemetery, Rocquebrune), and then, after a year or so, dig me up and bring me privately to Sligo."

The verses, which have not hitherto been published, are as follows:—

UNDER BEN BULBEN.

I. Swear by what the sages spoke Round the Mariotic Lake That the Witch of Atlas knew, Spoke and set the cocks s-crow.

Sweer by those horsemen, by those women, Complession and form prove superhuman, That pale, long viaged company That airs in immortality Completances of their passions won; Now they tide the wintry dawn Where Ben Bulben sets the scene.

Here's the gist of what they mean.

Many times man lives and dies Between his two eternities That of race and that of soul And ancient Ireland knew it all. Whether man die in his bed. Or the rife knocks him drad, A brief parting from those dear Is the worst man has to feer.

Though grave-diggers' toil is long. Sharp their spades, their muscle strong, They but thrust their buried mea. Back in the human mind again.

Dack in the human mind again.

III.

You that Mitchel's prayer have heard "Sand war in our time, O Lord!"

Know that when all words are said.
And a man is fighting mad.

Something drops from eyes long blind. He completes his partial mind.

For an instant stands at sase,
Levan the wisset man grown time.

Even the wisset man grown time.

Defors he can accomplish fate,

Know his work or choose his mate.

Poet and sculptor do the work
Nor let the modish painter shirk
What his great forefathers did,
Bring the soul of man fo God,
Make him fill the cradles right.

Measurement began our might: Forms a stark Egyptian thought, Forms that gentler Phidias wrought.

Michaelangelo left a proof
On the Sistine Chapel roof,
Again Can disturb proof,
Again Can disturb globe-trotting Madam
Till her bowels are in heat,
Proof that there's a purpose set
Before the secret working mind:
Profane perfection of mankind.

Profase perfection of mankind.

Quattro-Cento put in paint,
On backgrounds for a God or Saint,
Gardran where a sool's at ease;
Where werefuling that meets the series of t

DR. RYAN, Minister for Agriculture, told the members of the Agricultural Commission, which held its first sitting at Government Bulldings yeslerday, that in inquiraling into the position of the agricultural industry there would not be a great deal to be gained by postmortems.

great deal to be gained by postmortems. It was the future that really
counted, and what mattered now
were the additional measures which
might be taken in the immediate
future for the improvement of the
industry.

Emphasising the importance of
maintaining high standards of
quality, he said that what might be
termed the international markets for
agricultural commodities were
limited ones.

It was essential, he said, that this
country's produce should achieve a
reputation of the highest possible
quality. In a country like this, where
agriculture was the main industry,
they must be careful to avoid a policy,
which might be akin to placing agriculture permanently on the doler

HINTS TO NEW COMMISSION

The Commission was set up last month by the Government to inquire into the position of agriculture and to recommend schemes for its improvement and to recommend schemes for its improvement and to recommend and the control of the consideration of the consideration of the measures which it might be practicable and in the national interest to take for the national interest of the national interest of the national interest of the national interest of promoting and maintaining in the national interest and the the surface of promoting and maintaining increased agricultural productions might be protracted; but it had to be borne in mind that the carlier therefore was received it would be possible to take action towards achieving the end in view—increased agricultural production. The trapped has a continuous to the continuous to the continuous to the continuous to the continuous the continuous to the continuous the

NO POST-MORTEMS

There was not a great deal to be gained by post-morfems of either the sevent of the distant past, he said. It was the future that really, counted, and what mattered now were the additional measure which might in the immediate laters which might be additionally in this country. Agriculture way be said to be the very life-bleed of the nation. It is the basis on which our whole conomic structure is built up, and anything that affects the prosperity of farming is reflected in the condition of livelihood of the whole community.

"It will, I think, be generally agreed that increased production is one of the roman of charming industry, because it would not only raise the general level of the grows the overhead costs on each unit of produce marketed. In the main it is to increased propuction or send unit of produce marketed. In the main it is in increased propuction we must look for increased propuction we must look for increased propuction. He was a considered an agricultural commodities and the influence which external markets, therefore, have on our price levels, it will be realised that production must be carried out in the most efficient manner possible if the farmer is to have a reasonable mitgrin of profit."

HIGH STANDARD

In that connection proceeded Dr. Reanthe importance of maintaining high the importance of the importance of

TO-DAY'S WEATHER

Strong winds. Rain later.

No. 14

The Irish Times 3 February 1939

"Under Ben Bulben"

Sir Francis Fremantle (Conservative), seconding the motion, said it would be ungenerous not to support the proposall that members who had served their country well in the flouse should be secured from absolute powerty.

that members who had served their country well in the House should be secured from absolate poverty.

PREMITER'S APPROVAL

The Prime Minister said that, as he had remarked on a former occasion, it was not possible to set up a scheme of pensions of the produced of the secure of the

MR. WEDGWOOD ON "IRISH ENEMIES"

SUGGESTION THAT THEY SHOULD BE DEPORTED

SHOULD BE DEPORTED

Mr. J. C. Wedgwood (Labouy), in the House of Commons yesterday, asked the House of Commons yesterday, asked the Secretary of State for the Home Departing British according British property, and in particular, would be take steps to acquire process for deport those Irish who did damage bers or became a charge on public funds in this country.

Mr. J. C. Wedgwood (Labouy), in the Secretary of State for the Home Departing British property, and in particular, would be take steps to acquire process for deport those Irish who did damage bers or became a charge on public funds in this country.

Mr. J. C. Wedgwood (Labouy), in the Confusion fell upon our trade, Eight what we will be the state of the Home Departing British and the take steps to acquire profession. The holines of monits and then Italian proper and the state for the Home Department whether he could make a trade of the property of the special importance of main training hower supply to factories at the present time.

Mr. W. Gauche of Commons of Main and the state of the special training how the state of the Home Department of the process of the special training how the state of the special from the United Kingdom raines general lesses of far-reaching insportance which cannot properly be special training the state of the state of

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Freyne, John, P.,(ed.) <u>Uncollected Prose by W.B.Yeats Volume One</u>, (London: Macmillan, 1970)

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The Dublin Evening Mail	Feb. 1823 – Feb.1928
The Northern Whig	Jan. 1824 – Sept. 1963
The Cork Examiner	Aug. 1841 - March 1996
The Dublin Daily Express	Feb.1851 – Feb. 1917
The Irish Times	March 1859 - in progress
The Cork Constitution	Oct. 1873 - Dec. 1924
The Dublin Evening Telegraph	Oct. 1884 – Dec. 1924
The Evening Herald	Dec. 1891 - in progress
Irish Daily Independent	Dec.1891 - Dec.1904
The Evening Irish Times	April 1896 – June 1915
The Daily Nation	June 1897 - Aug. 1900
The Irish Independent	Jan 1905 - in progress
Daily Express and Irish Daily Mail	Feb.1917 - Dec.1924
Evening Mail	Feb. 1928 - July 1962
The Irish Press	Sept. 1931 - May 1995

Weekly Newspapers

The Weekly Freeman	Jan. 1818 – Dec. 1924
	(not published 1840 – 1860)
The Sunday Freeman	June 1913 – Dec. 1915
The Nation	Oct. 1842 – June 1891
The Weekly Irish Times	July1875 - Nov.1941
United Ireland	Aug.1881 - Sept.1898
Irish Catholic and Nation	July 1891 – June 1896
The Irish Weekly Independent	April 1893 – Aug. 1960
Irish Catholic	June 1896 – in progress

Weekly Nation	June 1897 - Sept. 1900
The United Irishman	March 1899 - April 1906
An Claidheamh Soluis	March 1899 - Jan. 1918
The Irish People	Sept. 1899 - Dec. 1900
The Irish Peasant	Feb.1903 – Dec.1906
The Sunday Independent	Jan. 1906 – in progress
Sinn Fein	May 1906 - Nov. 1914
The Peasant	Feb.1907 - Dec.1908
The Irish Nation and Peasant	Jan.1909 - Dec. 1910
The Irish Worker	May 1911 - Dec. 1914
The Irish Tribune	March 1926 - Dec. 1926
Standard	May 1928 – June 1963
The Clonmel Chronicle	July 1848 – March 1935
The Sligo Times	Feb. 1909 - Jan. 1914
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Journals/ Reviews/Magazines

The Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette	Jan. 1859 – Dec. 1900 continued as
The Church of Ireland Gazette	Jan. 1901 – in progress
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Young Ireland	Jan. 1882 - Dec. 1885
Hibernia	Jan.1882 – July 1883
Hibernia revived	Jan. 1937 – Oct. 1980
The Irish Fireside	July1883 - Oct. 1887

Dublin University Review	V	Feb.1885 - Dec.1886
The Lyceum		Sept. 1887 - Feb. 1894
Irish Society		Jan. 1888 – June 1924
The Dublin Figaro		Feb. 1892 – Dec. 1893
The Irish Figaro		June 1895 – Dec. 1904
New Ireland Review		March 1894 - Feb. 1911
The Irish Homestead		March 1895 - Sept.1923
An Shan Van Vocht		Jan. 1896 - March 1899
The Irish Rosary		April 1897 – Dec. 1962
Beltaine		May 1899 - April 1900
The Irish Playgoer		Nov.1899 - May 1900
All Ireland Review		Jan. 1900 - April 1906
The Leader		Sept.1900 – Dec. 1927
St. Stephens		June 1901 - March 1906
The Irish Protestant		Aug. 1901 - Jan. 1915
Samhain		Oct. 1901 - Nov. 1908
Dana		May 1904 - April 1905
The Nationist		Sept. 1905 - March 1906
The Shanachie		Spring 1906 – Winter 1907
The Arrow		Oct. 1906 - Aug. 1909
Hermes		Feb. 1907 - Feb. 1908
The National Democrat		Feb. 1907 - Aug. 1907
Irish Freedom		Nov. 1910 – Dec. 1914
		Nov. 1926 – Dec. 1937
The Catholic Bulletin		Jan. 1911 - Dec.1939
The Irish Review		March 1911 – Nov. 1914
	Revived	Oct. 1922 - Jan. 1923
Studies		March 1912 – in progress
New Ireland		May 1915 - Sept. 1919 continued as
Old Ireland		Oct. 1919 - Oct. 1921
The Republic		June 1919 - Sept. 1919
The Irish Statesman		June 1919 – June 1920
	Revived	Sept. 1923 - April 1930
The Irish Book Lover		Oct.1921 - Sept. 1957 (Published in Dublin)

Dublin Opinion	March 1922 - Dec.1970
The Dublin Magazine	Aug. 1923 – Aug. 1925
	Revived Jan. 1926 – April 1958
To-morrow	Aug. 1924 – Sept. 1924
The Catholic Pictorial	Feb.1925 - Dec.1929 incorporated into
The Catholic Mind	Jan. 1930 – Dec. 1935
An Phoblact	June 1925 - July 1936
Outlook	Jan. 1932 – April 1932
Ireland Today	June 1936 - March 1938