

## The Celtic Awakening

*The pathos of distance ; a book of a thousand and one moments*

James Huneker

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### IRELAND

“ Ireland, oh Ireland ! Centre of my longings.  
Country of my fathers, home of my heart !  
Over seas you call me : *Why an exile from me ?*  
*Wherefore sea-severed, long leagues apart ?*

“ As the shining salmon, homeless in the sea depths.  
Hears the river call him, scents out the land.  
Leaps and rejoices in the meeting of the waters,  
Breasts weir and torrent, nests him in the sand ;

“ Lives there and loves, yet, with the year's returning.  
Rusting in the river, pines for the sea,  
Sweeps back again to the ripple of the tideway,  
Roamer of the waters, vagabond and free.

“ Wanderer am I like the salmon of the rivers ;  
London is my ocean, murmurous and deep.  
Tossing and vast ; yet through the roar of London  
Comes to me thy summons, calls me in sleep.

“ Pearly are the skies in the country of my fathers.  
Purple are thy mountains, home of my heart.  
Mother of my yearning, love of all my longings,  
Keep me in remembrance, long leagues apart.”

— Stephen Gwynn.

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How dewy is the freshness and exquisite flavour of the newer Celtic poetry, from the more ambitious thunders of its epics to its tenderest lyric leafage ! It has been a veritable renaissance. Simultaneously, there burst forth throughout Ireland a trilling of birdlike notes never before heard, and the choir has become more compact and augmented. Fiona Macleod told in luscious, melting prose her haunting tales ; beautiful Dora Sigerson sang of the roses that fade ; Katharine Tynan-Hinkson achieved at a bound the spun sweetness of music in her Larks.

“ I saw no staircase winding, winding,  
Up in the dazzle, sapphire and binding,

Yet round by round, in exquisite air,  
The song went up the stair."

A pure ravishment of the ear this lyric. Lionel Johnson, an Irish Wordsworth, intoned graver harmonies ; Nora Hopper caught the lilt of the folk on the hillside with her Fairy Fiddler ; Douglas Hyde, a giant in learning, fearlessly wrote his poems in Erse, challenging with their sturdy splendour the ancient sagas ; George Moore made plays with W. B. Yeats ; Edward Martyn his Maieive, Heather Field ; Mr. Yeats his Countess Cathleen ; Fiona Macleod The Hour of Beauty, and Alice Milligan a piece founded on the stirring adventures of Diarmuid and Grania.

Some English critics who went over to Dublin were amazed at the many beauties of this new literature, a literature rooted in the vast, immemorial *Volsk lied* of Erin. Then Lady Gregory published her translation of Cuchullain of Muirthemne, and we saw that as Wagner sought for rejuvenation of the music-drama in the Icelandic sagas, so these young Irishmen, enthusiastically bent upon recreating a national literature, went to the very living sources, the poetic "meeting of the waters," for their inspiration. Dr. Douglas Hyde was, and is, the very protagonist of the movement, though its beginnings may be detected in the dark, moody lyrics of James Clarence Mangan, in the classic lines of William Allingham.

Matthew Arnold spoke of the "Celtic natural magic" inherent in the great poetry of England. Here we get it in all its sad and sunny perfections from the woodnote wild of Moira O'Neill to the beautiful phrases of Yeats. The Celt and the Sarmatian are alike in their despairing patriotism, their preference for the melancholy minor scale of emotion, their sudden alternations of sorrow and gayety, defiance and despair. And the Irishman, like the Polishman, is often merry at heart even when his song has cadences dripping with mournfulness. We hear it in the Chopin mazurkas, the really representative music of Chopin, and we hear it in those doleful tunes sung by the Irish peasantry. Even their expressive "keening," touching, as it does, the rock-bed of earthly calamity, can be turned to a rollicking lay with a mere inflection. The Slav and Celt are alike—they fall from heaven to hell in a moment, though they always live to tell the tale.

What Celt whose feet are set in alien streets can hear unmoved the plaintive Conymeela of Moira O'Neill ?

"Over here in England, I'm helpin' wi' the hay  
An' I wisht I was in Ireland the livelong day ;  
Weary on the English hay, an' sorra take the wheat !  
*Och ! Conymeela an' the blue sky over it'*"

And the singer varies the refrain with "Conymeela an' the low south wind," "Sweet Conymeela an' the same soft rain," until you feel the heart-throb of the lonely exile, and Conymeela with its patch of blue sky, out of which the Irish rain pours—for even the rain is witty in Ireland — becomes the one desirable spot on the globe. Here is a veritable poetic counterblast to Robert Browning's "Oh, to be in England, now that April's there."

And "A. E.," who is George W. Russell in the flesh — what a flame-like spirit, a pantheist who adores Dana the mother of the gods with the consuming ardour of a Roman Catholic before the image of Our Lady. He can sing :

“ In the dusk silver sweet,  
Down the violet-scented ways  
As I moved with quiet feet  
I was met by mighty days.”

And you hear as in a murmuring shell the music of Keats, Verlaine, and — Ireland. Russell is a true poet.

This same Celtic melancholy, with an heroic quality rare since the legendary days and all welded into music, lyric, symphonic, and dramatic, is to be found in the work of William Butler Yeats. From the *Wind Among the Reeds* to *The Seven Woods*, from the *Wanderings of Oisín* — incomparable in its lulling music, truly music that like Oisín’s eyes is “dull with the smoke of their dreams” — to that touching *Morality*, *The Hour Glass* — all of Mr. Yeats’s poems and plays create the feeling that we are in the presence of a singer whose voice and vision are new, whose voice and vision are commensurate with the themes he chants. Above all he arouses the image in us of a window, like Keats’s magic casement opening upon perilous seas and strange vistas wherein may be discovered the cloudy figures of Deirdre, Dana, Cuchullain, Diarmuid, and Grania ; Bran moves lazily in the mist, and in the threatening storm-clouds we see the dim shape of Aoife, the best beloved woman of that mighty chieftain Cuchullain, who slew the son of her body and his own loins. This window is the poet’s own ; it commands his particular domain in the land of dreams ; and what more dare we ask of a poet than the sharing of his vision, the sound of his voice ?

The esoteric quality of Yeats comes out more strongly in the prose stories. A mystic, with all a mystic’s sense of reality — Huysmans declares that the mystic is the most practical person alive — Yeats has dived deeply into the writings of the exalted, from Joachim of Flora to Jacob Boehme, from St. Teresa to William Blake.

We recall several of his tales, particularly *The Tables of the Law*, *Rosa Alchemica*, *The Binding of the Hair*. Especially notable are his contributions to Blake criticism, so rare that Charles Algernon Swinburne alone preceded him in the field.

Nor shall we soon forget the two poems in *Windle Straws*, or the rhythmic magnificence of *The Shadowy Horses* : “ I hear the shadowy horses, their long manes a-shake, their hoofs heavy with tumults, their eyes glimmering white” ; or the half-hidden charm of *O’Sullivan Rua to the Secret Rose*. Pagan ? Yes, pagan all of them in their keen devotion to sky and water, grass and brown Mother Earth. Yeats seems to be uttering one long chant of regret for the vanished gods, though like Heinrich Heine, his gods are but “ in exile.” They peep from behind the bulrush and timorously hide in the calyx of the flower ; they are everywhere, in the folds of the garrulous old woman, in the love-light of the girl’s black eyes. Ireland is fairly paved with fairies, and Yeats tells us of them in his sweet, languorous poetic speech.

One is struck not so much with the breadth of his work as with its depth and intensity. The Celt is narrow at times — but he touches the far stars, though his feet are plunged in the black waters of the bogs. The vision of Yeats approaches more nearly that of a seer. He sees visions. He is exalted by the sight of the fringe on some wandering god’s garment And he relates to us in naive accents his fear and his joy at the privilege. After a carnival of Realism, when the master-materialists were defining the limits of space, when Matter and Force were crowned on the throne of reason, suddenly comes this awakening of the spiritual, comes first to Belgium, spreads to France, then to Ireland. After solid brick and mortar — to quote Arthur Symons — the dreams multi-coloured and tragic of poets ! It has been called pre-Raphaelism,

symbolism, neo-Catholicism, and what not — it is but the human heart crying for other and more spiritual fare than the hard bread of reality.

The Irish Independent Theatre has its literary organs in *Beltaine*, in *Samhain*, and other publications edited by Mr. Yeats. Therein one learns of its ideals, of its accomplished work. The Countess Cathleen was first acted in 1899 at the Antient Concert Rooms in Dublin. Mr. Martyn's *The Heather Field* and Mr. Moore's admirable play *The Bending of the Bough*, and Mr. Yeats's *Diarmuid and Grania*, were, with plays by Dr. Hyde and several others, successfully produced.

Yeats says : " Our daily life has fallen among prosaic things and ignoble things, but our dreams remember the enchanted valleys." He remembers his dreams, tenuous as they sometimes are, and many of them troubled. As he has grown, the contours of his work are firmer, the content weightier. A comparison of *The Land of Heart's Desire* and *On Baile's Strand* will prove this. One is the stuff out of which visions are woven ; the other, despite its slight resemblances to Maeterlinck — notably at the close, when the fool tells the blind man of the drama — is of heroic mould. The mad king thrusting and slashing at the tumbling breakers, after he has discovered that he has slain his own son, is a figure of antique and tragic stature. We hear more of the musician, the folk-lorist, the brooding Rosicrucian — is Yeats not his own Michael Robartes ? — in the earlier verse ; but in this image of hero and king quite as insane as Xerxes and Canute, we begin to feel the dramatic potentiality of the young Irish poet. In *The Hour Glass* there is a note of faith hitherto absent.

The artistic creeds of Mr. Yeats are clearly formulated in his collection of prose essays. *Ideas of Good and Evil* — a very Nietzsche-like title. In this book Blake and Nietzsche are happily compared. We learn what he thinks of the theatre, of the Celtic elements in literature, of " the emotion of multitude," and there is a record of the good work of Mr. Benson and his company at Stratford-on-Avon. One idea, among a thousand others, is worthy of quotation. In speaking of Matthew Arnold and his phrase, " the natural magic of the Celt," Mr. Yeats writes : " I do not think he understood that our ' natural magic ' is but the ancient worship of nature and that troubled ecstasy before her, that certainty of all beautiful places being haunted, which is brought into men's minds." The thirst for the unfounded emotion and a wild melancholy are troublesome things in this world, sighs the poet.

He believes that France has everything of high literature except the emotion of multitude, the quality we find in the Greek plays with their chorus. The Shakespearian drama gets the emotion of multitude out of the sub-plot, which copies the main plot. Ibsen and Maeterlinck get it by creating a new form, " for they get multitude from the Wild Duck in the attic, or from the Crown at the bottom of the Fountain, vague symbols that set the mind wandering from idea to emotion, emotion to emotion." Mr. Yeats finds French dramatic poetry too rhetorical — " rhetoric is the will trying to do the work of the imagination" — and the French play too logical, too well ordered.

It is dramatic technique, however, that counts in the construction of a play. All the imagination in the world, all the poetic dreams, are naught if the architectural quantity be left out. I find Mr. Yeats's plays full of the impalpable charm — he almost makes the invisible visible I — we catch in Chopin, Chopin in one of his evanescent secret moods. But place these shapes of beauty out from the dusk of dreams, place them before " the fire of the footlights," and they waver and evaporate. Mr. Yeats and his associates must carve their creations from harder material than lovely words, lovely dreams. To be beautiful upon the stage, with a spiritual beauty, is a terrible, a brave undertaking. Maeterlinck dared to be so ; so did Ibsen — though

his is the beauty of characterisation. Mr. Yeats would mould from the mist his humans. In the acted drama this is impossible. Shakespeare himself did not accomplish the feat, because, being in all matters a realist, a practical man of the theatre, he did not attempt it. His dreams are always realised.

Mr. William Archer has written of the movement : “ The Irish drama possesses a true and — why should we shrink the word — a great poet in Mr. Yeats ; but as yet it has given us only dramatic sketches—no thought-out picture with composition and depth in it. . . . The characters stand on one plane, as it were on the shallow stage, always in a more or less irregular row, never in an elaborate group. The incidents succeed one another in careful and logical gradation, but have no complexity of interrelation. They form a series, not a system.”

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John M. Synge

The early death of a lyric poet is not a loss without compensation, for birds sing sweetest when young ; but with a dramatic poet the case is altered. Perhaps Keats and Shelley would have given the world profounder music, music with fundamental harmonies ; we are rich with the legacies they left. The deaths of Schubert and Chopin may not have been, for the same reason, such irreparable misfortunes. The disappearance of John M. Synge from the map of life ten years earlier would have spelled nothing to the world, his death ten years hence might have found us in possession of half a dozen greater plays than the slim sheaf of six he left us when he passed away a few weeks ago at Dublin. A dramatist must know life as well as art : those “ little mirrors of sincerity” which are the heart of the lyricist must in a play mirror the life exterior before they can stir us to the core. Life, life felt and seen and sung, these are the true architectonics of great drama ; all the rest is stagecraft. Now John Synge was a poet who spoke in dear, rich-fibred prose. The eternal *wanderlust* that was in men like Bamfylde-Moore Carew and George Borrow also stung the blood of Synge. He had the gipsy scholar temperament. He went about France and Germany, and in his beloved Aran Islands his fiddle was the friend of the half-wild peasantry. He was not thirty-eight when he died, yet he left behind him the sound of his voice, the voice of a large, sane soul — both the soul of a dreamer and the man of action who is the dramatist. His taking off before his prime means much to Irish literature, though happily his few days suffice for the consecration of his genius.

The chemistry which transmuted experience into art will doubtless be analysed by his future biographers. His life was simple — simplicity was the key-note of the man. He loved literature, but he loved life better. He was not of the decadent temperament ; he was too robust of body and spirit to be melancholy, nor did he ever, on the absinthe slopes of Montmartre, grasp for the laurels of the “ moderns.” His friend Yeats has written : “ Synge was essentially an orderly man with unlimited indulgence for the disorderly.” He did contemplate a career devoted to criticism. His favourite French writer was *Racine* — we are far removed here from the decadence — but luckily Yeats persuaded his young countrsmann to return to Ireland, there to write of the people and the land from which he sprang. Seldom has advice borne better results. Synge went to the Aran Islands, off the coast of Galway, and in a book of rare interest and vast naïveté gave us a series of pictures that may be considered the primal sketches for his plays. Though *The Aran Islands* was published in 1907 it is a record dating back several years. Over the Western country he went afoot, living in the cabins, talking by the wayside with the old men and the girls, and drawing his bow for the couples

dancing. He loved the people, and his eye was not the measuring eye of the surgeons we expect from novelists and dramatists.

Synge was neither a symbolist nor a man with a message. His symbols are the sea, the sky, and the humans who lead the hard, bitter lives of a half-ruined land, bankrupt of nearly all else except its dreams. Your reformer who puts plays on the stage to prove something is only half an artist, no matter what his wit or the justice of his cause.

But in the Synge plays “sweet Corrymeela an’ the same soft rain” does not interest him as do the words of the headstrong girl by the hedge who wants to marry the tinker ; or the blind pair of tramps whose vision returns and with their sight a hell of disappointment ; or the passionate woman of the glen, whistling for her lover, or the riders to the sea, scooper of graves. Human emotions, the more elemental the better, are for Synge the subject-matter of his cameo carved work. He is mindful of technique ; he learned the art in France ; he can fashion a climax with the best of them. There are no loose ends. His story moves from the first to the last speech. Eminently for the footlights, these tiny dramas may be read without losing their essential thrill. Beauty and terror within the frame of homely speech and homely actions are never lost sight of ; and what different men and women are Synge’s when compared to the traditional stage Irishmen of Carleton, Lover, Lever, Boucicault, and a hundred others. Yet the roaring, drinking, love-making broth of a boy hasn’t changed. He may be found in Synge, but he is presented without the romantic sentimental twist.

Perhaps the picture may be unflattering, but it is a truer picture than the older. The Play-boy of the Western World was hissed at Dublin, and New York, and harshly arraigned by press and public. The Irish never could stand criticism. The very same element here which protests against the caricatured Celt in comedy and vaudeville, and with just cause, would probably attack Synge’s plays as unpatriotically slanderous. Certainly, this dramatist does not attenuate the superstition, savagery, ignorance, drunkenness, and debasement of the peasantry in certain sections of Ireland. His colours, however, are not laid on coarsely, as if with a Zola brush. There is an eternal something in the Celt that keeps him from reaching the brute. Possibly the New Irishman does not differ at base from his forebears, but he is a shade sadder ; he is not as rollicking as the gossoons of Carleton. His virtues are celebrated by Synge ; his pessimism, which is ever tipped on its edges by an ineluctable hope for better times ; his confirmed belief in the marvellous, his idolatry of personal prowess, his bravery, generosity, hot heart, and witty speech — all these qualities are not by any means missing in the plays. Indeed, they loom large. All Ireland is not the province of Synge. He has only fenced off certain tracts of the western coast — the east as well in *The Well of the Saints* — the coast of Mayo and a glen in County Wicklow. If he had lived he might have described with the same vitality and vivacity the man who walks in Phoenix Park, or the people of Donegal, “the far down.” Judging from his own unpleasant experiences in Dublin he could have echoed Charles Lever, who once sang of his country folk as :

“ Fightin’ like divils for conciliation,  
An’ hatin’ each other for the love of God.”

“ These people make no distinction between the natural and the supernatural,” wrote Synge in his *Aran Islands*. Nor do the characters of his plays. Technically buttressed as they are at every point, the skeleton cleanly articulated, nevertheless the major impression they convey is atmospheric. Real people pass before your eyes ; there is not the remote and slowly moving antique tapestry, as in the Maeterlinck or Yeats fantasies. Stout-built lads whack their father, or the tinker and his trull knock over the priest : there is loud talk and drink and bold actions ; but the magic of the Celt envelops all. This is more notable in *Riders to the Sea*,

which has a Maeterlinckian touch — the modulation of the suspicion of death into its culminating terrors ; but it is Irish. It is Synge. What could be more Irish than the last speech of *Maurya*, the mother bereaved by the greedy sea of her husband and sons : “ No man at all can be living forever ; and we must be satisfied.” The very pith of Celtic fatalism ! The grim humour of the supposed dead man in *The Shadow of the Glen* is Irish too ; and also the tramp who fills the ears of the banished wife with his weaving eloquence. She goes with him into the wet and wind of the night, knowing that a “ grand morning” will surely follow. This humour is pervasive and does not reveal itself in the lightning flash of epigram. It is the same with the tender poetry that informs Synge’s rhythmic prose. His dialogue goes to a time of its own, a tune in the web of which music and meaning are closely spun in the same skein, while beneath hums the sad diapason of humanity.

Consider the speeches in *The Playboy of the Western World*, the most important of the dramas. Each line is illuminating. Such concision is refreshing. Character emerges from both phrase and situation. This play, while it is not so shudder-breeding as *Riders to the Sea*, is more universal in interest. *Christy Mahon*, the young hero who is not heroic, is an Irish *Peer Gynt*. He lies that he may create the illusion of heroism ; a liar of the breed artistic. He boasts of murdering his father (didn’t the cultivated Charles Baudelaire actually boast the same noble deed ?) for he knows the simple folk will regard him with mingled horror and admiration. The two rivals for his love, *Pegeen Mike* and the *Widow Quin* are etched by the needle of a master ; the fierce, passionate girl is real, but the cunning widow is delightful comedy. She crosses the page or the footlights and you touch her flattering hand, hear her blarneying voice. The minor characters are excellent, and they are subtly disposed on the various planes of interest and action. The piece moves briskly or languidly, the varying lines fit each human with consummate appropriateness. The story itself is as old as Troy, as is also the theme of *The Well of the Saints*. Synge is never esoteric. His argument never leaves the earth, yet few dramatists evoke such a sense of the Beyond. He is a seer as well as a manipulator of comedy. The vigorous sketch of his head by John B. Yeats (prefacing *The Playboy of the Western World*) shows us a fine strong profile, a big brow, and the gaze of the dreamer, but a dreamer for whom the visible world existed. “ The Synoges are strong,” answered a relative to the inquiry : “ Was J. M. Synge’s death hastened by the hostile reception accorded his play in Dublin ?” It was not. His view of life was too philosophical for criticism to hurt ; he had the objective temperament of the dramatist, the painter of manners, the psychologist. Nearing the maturity of his splendid powers, on the threshold of a love marriage, he disappeared like the mist on one of his fairy-haunted hills. But the real John Synge will endure in his plays.

#### A Poet of Visions

William Butler Yeats is a young man — he was born at Dublin, June, 1865 — but he is already famous, and for those who only know of his name through Dame Rumour’s trumpet his fame will be further assured by the sight of his collected works in prose and verse, eight volumes long, published at the Shakespeare Head Press, Stratford-on-Avon. Mr. Bullin has spared no pains to make these substantial volumes agreeable to eye and touch ; quarter vellum backs and gray linen sides, bold, dear type, and paper light in weight. The price, too, is not prohibitive for the collector. A bibliography of the various editions, English, American — Mr. John Quinn has privately printed many plays of Yeats in New York — is all that could be desired. The poet is pictured in frontispiece by such artists as John S. Sargent, Mancini, Charles Shannon, and by his father, John Butler Yeats ; the reproductions are excellent.

Volume I contains the Sargent head, from a charcoal drawing, the original in the possession of Mr. Quinn. It is Yeats seen by Sargent and definitely set forth in the terms of the Sargent daylight prose — a young man wearing a Byronic collar, the silhouette as firm as iron, the eyes in the shadow of the heavy overhanging hair. A splendid bit of modelling, yet not the essential Yeats, who is nocturnal, or trembling on the edges of the twilight or dawn. Volume III shows us Charles Shannon's conception: a three-quarter view, the cerebral region markedly accentuated, the expression contemplative. A vital rendering. The Mancini drawing in volume V looks like an improvisation by the brilliant Italian colourist on themes from Yeatsian moods. The poet faces you, he wears glasses, his eyes are almost effaced, his mouth is quizzical ; he is perhaps looking at Celtic hats conversing with the dhoul of midnight on some cosmical back-fence. We like the drawing of the elder Yeats prefacing volume VII ; it is the poet Yeats of *Rosa Alchemica*, and the *Tables of the Law* ; Yeats the student of the *Rosy Cross*, the mystic Yeats of 1896, who, immersed in the occultism of the Orient, was peering through the mists of Erin in search of a symbol to fully express his love for her. He is a trifle uncanny, a dweller on the threshold, and for us nearer the real Yeats than the other presentations. In this instance blood tells the tale, notwithstanding the glory that is Sargent's, that is Shannon's, that is Mancini's. One fact, however, stares you in the face : all four artists have seen their subject as he is, an authentic poet. His gamut is one of fantasy ; he is less at ease among the sonorous sagas than amid the fantasy of misty mountains, bracken lights and the sound of falling waters.

The bibliography tells us that *Mosada*, a dramatic poem, was the first published work. It was reprinted in 1886 from the *Dublin University Review*, and in company with other poems, plays, and prose does not appear in the definitive edition ; among other omissions we note *The Pot of Broth*. Yeats has the courage of a surgeon. Does he sing at the beginning of the bibliography :

“ Accursed who brings to light of day  
The writings I have cast away !  
But blessed he that stirs them not  
And lets the kind worms take the lot.”

What a motto for all writers ! The various volumes are about equally divided between verse and prose, and we do not pretend to assert that the interest is unflinchingly maintained. For the last ten years the poet has been doubled by a propagandist, and in the too few intervals left the latter the dramatist began to bud. The neo-Irish literary movement, literally a cry of back to the people, back to the soil, back to the Gaelic myths, is now history. Suddenly the sleepy old city on the River Liffey became the centre of a poetic renaissance, a renaissance of wonder, as Theodore Watts-Dunton would say. Further, the spirit of Paris, of the romanticism of 1830, invaded Dublin. Several Yeats plays were placed under the ban of public displeasure. *Countess Cathleen* for one ; as for J. M. Synge, it was a case for the police when his *Playboy of the Western World* was produced. (Mr. Yeats assures us that there were 500 at the second performance.) Evidently Dublin awoke to the knowledge that a new art was being born and that the travail was not without its pangs.

Yeats has been at both the centre and circumference of this artistic wheel, the hub of which is unquestionably Dr. Douglas Hyde. With such colleagues as Lady Gregory, the late Synge, Russell (“Æ”) Martyn, George Moore, Father Peter O’Leary, and a host of other writers, playwrights, poets, critics, the experiments in the smaller auditoriums and at the Abbey Theatre attracted the attention of not only England but of the world. How much the lyric poet who is William Butler Yeats has lost or gained by his devotion to what seemed a hopeless

dream we dare not say, but after rereading his collected works one may not doubt as to their contemporary importance and future permanency. The rich undertones of *The Wind Among the Reeds*, full at moments as are those songs of the echoes of the dead poets, are the key-notes after all of the later Yeats. He is always following a vision or hearing a voice, a "sweet everlasting voice," hearing "the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake." These songs he perhaps thinks slight and dim to-day, but they are not. They are redolent of wind and sky and the souls of the forgotten things far away and the desire for the dead women with locks of gold and the terrible war that is to be waged in the valley of the Black Pig, where all will bow down to the "Master of the still stars and the flaming door." There is less metaphysics, too, in the early verse. Often we feel the weight of the cerebral whiplash in his later verse ; also the tones of sophistication. In the *Seven Woods* holds such jewels as *The Folly of Being Comforted*, *Never Give All the Heart*, and that lovely *The Hollow Wood*, with its Elizabethan lilt, "O hurry to the water amid the trees, for there the tall tree and his Leman sigh." And "O do not love too long" — has the poet ever since recaptured such tender, plaintive notes ? Youth is a time for living and singing and loving, and a poet is not young forever. The pipe of Yeats may not compass the octave ; but his pipe is pure, its veiled tones hide the magic of the Celt.

We need not dwell now on *The Wanderings of Qisin*, with the stem responses of *St. Patric* ; or on the *Fenians*, or those whose eyes were "dull with the smoke of their dreams," a little epic of disenchantment of the vanished pagan gods. In volume II will be found the four favourite plays : *The King's Threshold*, *On Baile's Strand*, *Deirdre*, and *The Shadowy Waters*. They are known to American readers. While they do not always prove that the poet has the fire of the footlights in his veins, they are nevertheless of great imaginative beauty and of a finely woven poetic texture, and the dramatisation not alone of a moving tale but of moods that seem just beyond the rim of the soul. We can imagine Claude Debussy or Loeffler suffusing these plays with mysterious music. On *Baile's Strand*, and its mad father duelling with the waters, evokes an elemental thrill ; the dire reality when the Blind Man cries to the Fool : "Somebody is trembling, Fool! The bench is shaking" ; but it is Cuchulain shivering as he learns that he has slain his son. Such touches as these convince you that Yeats has a dramatic pulse. It is *Deirdre* that drives home this contention. To us it seems the best grounded, best realised of his work for the theatre. It has the element of awe and the elements of surprise, fear, great passion, and noble humanity. And after *Tristan and Isolde*, that perfect dramatic poem, is not the tale of *Deirdre* the most sweet and pitiful ? *Conchubar* is a sinister King Mark, *Naisi* a second *Tristan*, and *Deirdre* an undaunted *Isolde*. What if Wagner had known this touching legend ! There is emotional stuff in it for a music drama. Yeats has handled his material simply and directly — the tale goes on swift, relentless feet to its sorrowful end. There is enough poetry in it to furnish forth the reputation of a dozen minor poets. *The Shadowy Waters* is a theme for the Irishman ; he swims in an atmosphere where others would hardly respire. He himself is *Forgael*, with the luminous and magical harp. He has tasted that crust of bread of which *Paracelsus* spoke, and therefore has tasted all the stars and all the heavens.

*The Land of the Heart's Desire*, with its supernatural overtones, *The Hour Glass*, *The Countess Cathleen*, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, and *The Unicorn from the Stars* — "where there is nothing there is God" — are familiar. Whether Yeats is as near the soil as *Synge* or as happy in catching the gestures and accents of the peasant we are free to doubt. Yet in *The Unicorn* there is realism enough to satisfy those who long merely for veracious surfaces. This poet knows the "boreens," the bogs and the "caubeens," the "gloom" and the "doom" of his native land.

He is compact with sympathy. If he is a symbolist in *The Golden Helmet* he can reproduce with fidelity the voice of Teig the fool in *The Hour Glass* ; or he is both poet and painter in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and its finely wrought climax. He has not, let us add, attempted to domesticate the banshee in the back yard of Irish poetry. Through his “ magic casement” we may always see the haze of illusion.

Yeats reminds us a little of that old Irishwoman he quotes in one of the western villages who believed hell an invention of the priests to keep people good, and that ghosts would not be permitted to go “ traipsin’ about the earth” ; but she believed that “ there are faeries and little leprechauns and water horses and fallen angels.” He has so saturated himself with the folklore of Ireland, with the gossip of its gods and fighting men and its pagan mythology, that we are caught within the loop of his sorceries in a dream as he conjures up the mighty deeds and ancient superstitions in *The Celtic Twilight* and the stories of Red Hanrahan. This is an attractive volume (V) and should be first read by those readers to whom all this wealth of legend may prove new. The plays will then be better understood.

Ideas of Good and Evil (volume VI), essays on sundry subjects, like volume VIII, *Discoveries*, reveal the poet as a prose writer of assured ease and a master of modern ideas. He knows Nietzsche, Flaubert, Ibsen, and he knows William Blake. We need not agree with his various dicta on dramatic art, on the technique of verse, or on that chimera the speaking of verse to the accompaniment of monotone music ; nor need we countenance his statement that music is the most impersonal of the arts ; the reverse is the truth. Mr. Yeats, like so many poets, seems to be tone-deaf . Music tells him no secrets ; words are his music ; at the best, music and words combined is an unholy marriage. But why should he envy the musician ? His own verse goes to a tune of its own, a loosely built, melancholy, delicious tune, as Celtic as is the evanescent music of Chopin Polish. We do not hear the swish of the battle-axe in his verse ; the heroic is seen as in a bewitched mirror, the cries of the dying are muffled by the harmonies of a soul that sits and wonders and faces the past, never the present.

In Volume VII are those two prose masterpieces — for such they are — of the esoteric : *Rosa Alchemica* and *The Tables of the Law*. For the mystically inclined, Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne will be very real ; the atmospheric quality betrays the artist. As for the various essays in propaganda, which appeared in *Beltaine*, *Samhain*, the *Arrow*, and elsewhere, they arouse the impression of an alert, sensitive, critical mind, fighting for the acceptance of ideas of national importance. Mr. Yeats the critic is different from Yeats the poet. He is a virile opponent, and as sincere as he is versatile in argument. He must have been a prime figure in the general war waged on the indifference and animosity of his countrymen. Will the new Irish theatre endure ? Any thing may be successful in Ireland ; success is a shy bird that rarely perches on her worn and tear-stained standards, but in the conflict William Butler Yeats found his soul, and that is the main business of a man’s life, and all the life of a poet.

The pathos of distance ; a book of a thousand and one moments (1913)

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