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YEATS: A LYRIC POET.

by

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CHAPTER I.

B I O G R A P H Y

William Butler Yeats was born in Dublin in 1865. His grandfather was a clergyman of a small parish in County Down. His father had been carefully educated, first in English schools and later in Trinity College, Dublin. After graduating with honor from Trinity he studied art at the Dublin Royal Society and became the leading portrait painter of his day. He was a poet as well as a painter, and left to his son the heritage of delicacy and refinement that permeates his work. He belonged to the Pre-Raphaelite school of painters as his son belongs to the Pre-Raphaelite school of poets. The last twelve years of his life he spent in America. Here he did little painting but lectured and wrote extensively. His "Essays Irish and American" are of literary value, marked by a wide tolerance and show a happily blended personality.

The poet's mother was descended from seafaring folk of the Cornish coast. "So with a Pre-Raphaelite painter for a father, and seafaring folk on his mother's side, he can trace the influence of the studio and the sea on his development." (1)

(1) ~~Forrest Reid~~ - The Celtic Dawn.

Lloyd Morris

When Yeats was nine years old his parents moved to London and here he entered the Godolphin school. When he was nineteen the family returned to Ireland and Yeats entered the Dublin Royal Society where for three years he studied art.

But the chief formative influence of these years was neither the English school nor the Dublin college. It was that of the long vacations spent in the west of Ireland. In a letter to Lady Gregory quoted by Weygandt in "Irish Plays and Playwrights" he says, - "When I was a boy I used to wander about at Rossis Point and Ballesidare listening to old songs and stories. I wrote down what I heard and made poems out of the stories or put them into little chapters of the first edition of "The Celtic Twilight"; and that is how I began to write in the Irish way.

Then I went to London to make my living, and though I spent a part of every year in Ireland, and tried to keep the old life in my memory by reading every country tale I could find in books or old newspapers, I began to forget the true countenance of country life.....A wise woman told me that my work was getting too full of those little jewelled thoughts that come from the sun and have no nation.....Then you brought me with you to see your friends in the cottages

and to talk to old wise men on Slien Echtge, and we gathered together, or you gathered for me a great number of stories and traditional beliefs. You taught me to understand again and much more perfectly than before the true content of country life."

Thus it is that Mr. Yeats himself describes his training for his art.

Katherine Tyman who knew Yeats personally says,-
"Willie Yeats was at the time of our first meeting, tall and lanky, beautiful to look at with his dark face, its touch of vivid coloring, the night-black hair, the eager dark eyes. At that time he was all dreams, all gentleness."

And St. John Ervine, Irish playwright and novelist, gives us in "The North American Review" a picture of recent date,-

"He lives in Woburn Buildings behind Euston Road, London, over a cobbler's shop. A middle aged woman cooks his meals and keeps his house clean, and the cobbler will tell you if he is in, or when he is expected. He is now a tall man with dark hanging hair turning gray and has a queer way of focusing when he looks at you. His poetic appearance is entirely physical owing nothing to any eccentricity of dress."

Ervine tells us further,- "Yeats is not easy to talk to in a familiar fashion. I imagine he has difficulty in talking on common subjects and is not comfortable with individuals. He needs an audience. He is elaborately courteous to a stranger, but has forgotten or never known how to greet a friend. His sight is poor and failing, his voice tired and plaintive. All inertia, negation, and inactive desire are sounded in Yeats's voice," Like the music of Innisfree in which we feel he will not arise and go to Innisfree. The vision of the nine bean rows and the hive for the honey bees will remain a vision, he will never make it an active reality. Yeats is called by those who know him personally a recluse. He is a lonely soul living where dreams are more real than reality.

Yeats first planned to follow in the footsteps of his father and become a painter. For three years he remained at the Dublin art school, but finally he gave his time entirely to literature. Since his first publication in 1889 many honors have been his. He was made Senator of the Irish Free State, and Minister of Fine Arts in Dublin University. Trinity College, Dublin, made him a Doctor of Literature, and England wanted to knight him but he begged to be excused. In 1923 the Nobel prize for literature was

conferred upon him. "It was due to his enthusiasm that the Celtic movement crystallized into a fact. It was his confidence and his courage that found fruit in Synge and Stephens; Ervine is influenced by him. But Yeats, as an individual, towers above his contemporaries and in his fifty-eighth year has achieved the nation's substance of immortality." (1)

(1) Providence Journal, Jan. 3, 1924.

CHAPTER II.

A I M S .

1. Literature in Ireland prior to 1889.

To understand the genius of Yeats we must give some time to the sources of his inspiration, that is to ancient Irish literature and folk-lore. The Celtic movement of which Yeats is the soul, consisted as he himself said in opening up the fountains of these legends and so "opening a new intoxication for the imagination of the world." (1)

These legends form an extensive literature. Jubainville estimates that the literature produced by the Irish before the 17th century and still existing would fill a thousand octave volumes. Dr. Hyde claims that the oldest of these books of saga poetry and annals are vastly more ancient than the literature of the rest of Europe, some dating from the 7th century and much that authoritatively belongs prior to 1100. The themes are the themes of modern romantic poetry, nature and humanity. They consist of eulogies and elegies as well as historical pieces, "the attraction of which lies in the elegance of form which is lost in translation." (2)

To the 12th century belong the early saga and romance in their written forms. Among these three cycles

- (1) Yeats: Ideals of Good and Evil.
- (2) Dr. Hyde: Literature in Ireland.

stand out prominently.

- (1) The Mythological cycle.
- (2) The Heroic cycle in which Cuchulain is the dominating figure.
- (3) The Finnian and Ossianic cycle.

I. The myths group themselves about the early invasions of Ireland. They throw some light on the early religious ideas of the race. They treat of the folk who are fabled as having colonized Ireland, of people races, dynasties, of the struggle between good and evil. They are as legendary^a as the tales of Remus and Romulus, or Helen^r or of King Arthur.

II. The Heroic cycle deals with the history of the present Irish race, or at least with apparent history. The characters are not long prior to, or are contemporaneous with Christ. To this cycle belongs the tale of Deirdre.

III. The Finnian cycle belongs two hundred years later. Their theme is the wars of King Finn and his son Ossian (Oisen, Unsheen).

In 1169 occurred the first Norman invasion of Ireland which resulted in the arrest of Irish development, and the disintegration of Irish life. For three hundred years after the Norman Conquest Ireland produced nothing in art, literature or scholarship, even faintly comparable with

what they had achieved before. With the Normans came collapse, "Red ruin and the breaking up of laws", but the Irish bards persisted. Spenser says of them: "There are amongst the Irish a certain kind of people called bards, which are to them instead of poets, and which are had in so high regard and estimation among them, that none dare displeas^s them."

The end of the 17th century witnessed the final and complete disintegration of the bardic order, and the making of verse in the Gaelic tongue was relegated to a few scattered individuals mostly peasants. Hence arose a body of folk poetry which in recent years has been collected and studied.

Dr. Hyde says,- "So the Gaelic renaissance goes back to a literature of a different kind from the Greek and Latin, a literature entirely anonymous, without epic or dramatic verse, a literature of fragments, little personal poems, short dramatic monologues and dramatic lyrics interspersed in prose tales." Yet it is claimed that this remnant of literature is the earliest voice from the dawn of West Europe civilization, and the most primitive and original of the literatures of West Europe.

It was not until the beginning of the 19th century that English speaking Ireland had a distinctly

national literature, a literature which Dr. Hyde calls the Anglo-Irish. To this group belong the lyrics of Thomas Moore, the novels of Maria Edgeworth and translations by the group of young intellectuals who called themselves young Ireland. This group founded two papers, "The Nation" by Thomas Davis was used to promote a moral and intellectual reform in Ireland and in it he expressed his political philosophy in both prose and verse. The other, "United Irishmen" was founded by John Mitchell. In it Mitchell preached the doctrine of blood and iron. This branch of the movement was instrumental in bringing about the revolt which preceded the famine of 1849. The Fⁱⁿian movement took up the doctrine of Mitchell. Other writers of this period were Ellen O'Leary, Sir Samuel Ferguson, De Vere and Allingham.

In 1889, the year in which both Ellen O'Leary and Allingham died, W.B. Yeats published "The Wanderings of Ossian" and Douglas Hyde "A Book of Gaelic Stories." From the publication of these two books the revival of Irish literature written in English dates.

The movement thus launched by Yeats and Hyde shows itself in five fields of major influence.

(1) Literature (2) Drama (3) Revival of Gaelic for daily use (4) Economic and Social Reform (5) Political Thought.

While apparently a movement born of the early enthusiasms of W.B. Yeats, it is in reality the expression of several synthesis^e. Its foundation is deeply imbedded in political and social history and the movement is as much concerned with intellectual emancipation and economic progress, as it is with the literary art. It has for its aim the reconstruction of Irish life.

On the side of politics the ideals of John Mitchell and the Young Irish party, have been of wide reaching influence and have found fruition in the Sinn Finn party "Ourselves for Ourselves." This party demanded a complete severance from England believing that Ireland must achieve constitutional independence by a renunciation of all dependence, economic, administrative and intellectual upon England. This movement reached its climax in the rebellion of 1919 which resulted in the formation of The Irish Free State.

The economic and social reform is more easily understood by the Anglo-Saxon. This branch followed the teachings of Thomas Davis. Its aim was to ameliorate living conditions among the peasantry by:

- (a) The re-establishment of cottage crafts and other arts formerly cultivated by the peasantry.
- (b) A synthesis of economic and agrarian reforms.

By:

- (1) The Land Purchase Act.
- (2) Relief of conditions in congested districts.
- (3) Creation of a Department of Agriculture and of technical institutions.

Yeats because of his early association with the Young Ireland group followed the theories of Davis and planned to create a literature in England^{ish} which would express the national consciousness of Ireland. Many Irish writers, among them Hyde and O'Donohue, compare the literary activity which ensued with that of the Elizabethan period. ^{Lloyd Morris} Ferrest Reid in "The Celtic Dawn" draws the analogy thus,-

(1) Both were the fulfillment of a desire for a purely national art.

(2) In both instances the creative activity was prefaced and accompanied by critical discussion, dealing with the general theory of poetry and with the medium of expression to be employed.

(3) The creative intelligence of both periods were directed towards, (1) poetry (2) drama (3) its latest development, the novel.

The Irish writers had a choice of three vehicles of expression, the Gaelic, the Anglo Irish and the modern

English. Dr. Hyde has bent "the splendid energy of his splendid mind" to reviving a dead language, and his propaganda has been so far successful that at present all children attending public school in The Irish Free State must learn to read Gaelic.

Eglinton argues for modern English. He claims that the spirit of nationality proclaims itself by a thought movement rather than by a language movement, and in the revival of a dead language he finds a schism in what appears to be a first dawn of a truly national consciousness in Ireland. He points out the futility of attempting to dispense with the accumulated culture of English intellectual development.

Yeats, George Stephens and others of the Anglo Irish group advocate the use of "Anglo Irish" because it is a colloquial language and not a literary, and as such is the direct expression of experience and has never been standardized in its suggestiveness, "nor vitiated in the power to adequately reflect the concreteness of life and the abstraction of thought." (1) Anglo Irish, Yeats claims, is the fusion of Elizabethan English and the rough old world of the Gaelic tongue, and as such is most purely adapted to the interpretation of the Celtic mind and Celtic life.

(1) Yeats: Ideas of Good and Evil.

Thus Hyde and Yeats stood for nationalism in art, as opposed to Eglinton and the modern idea of "Freedom as an essential of modern Progress."

Yeats nationalism was directed rather towards a moral and intellectual revolution, than towards one purely political in its nature. He desired a spiritual renaissance and he believed it could be achieved by employing art as its medium and his aim was to create an art having its foundation in the soul of the race. So he set himself to create a literature that would adequately express the Celtic consciousness in the English language. The art that he desired to create was to come out of life expressing those emotions that evoke images of beauty and are in themselves beautiful.

In "Ideas of Good and Evil", Yeats says: "The Celtic movement as I see it is principally the opening of the foundation of fairy lore of the ancient Irish." (1) and, -"I thought one day if somebody could make a style which would not be an English style and yet would be musical and full of color, many others would take fire from him, and we would have a really good school of ballad poetry in Ireland." (2)

And again he says, - "She (Nature) wanted a few verses from me, so she filled my head with thoughts

(1) & (2) Yeats: Ideas of Good and Evil.

of making a whole literature and plucked me from the Dublin Art School and sent me into a library to read bad translations from the Irish, and at last down into Connought to sit by turf fires." (1)

Thus Yeats tells of his literary aims. To open up the storehouse of old legends, and to make them a vehicle ^{for} of the expression of the Celtic mind. The results may be summarized as follows:

(1) The creation of a national culture through literature embodying the ideals and the spirit of the race. This literature is essentially democratic in its aim, and is characterized by a desire to approach life in its simplest and most truthful terms, and to deal with its essence rather than its external manifestations.

(2) In the matter of expression there have been three divergent veins, i.e., Hyde, Yeats, and Eglinton as to the language in which the Celtic soul achieves its fullest expression.

(3) Interest in language for its own beauty; in the renewal of Celtic tradition, folklore and legend.

(4) The vein of life which dismisses what we ordinarily call reality as "externality", and loses itself in the spirit, finding its expression in symbol.

(1) Yeats: Ideas of Good and Evil.

CHAPTER III.

YEATS'S CONTRIBUTION AS A LYRIST.

The intellect of Ireland is romantic and spiritual rather than scientific and analytical. To Yeats it seemed that this soul of Ireland was to be found in its traditions, in its history, and in its legends, the consciousness of which has had its psychological influence in two qualities that he seems peculiar to the Irish peoples.

(1) The tense ardor of patriotism.

(2) The half-pagan, half-christian belief in the reality of an unseen world "which has made possible the co-existence of the fairy world and catholic theology." (1)

So into this fund of fairy lore Yeats delved. He absorbed its spirit and practised with forms of expression. In 1889 he published "The Wanderings of Usheen" (Ossian) in which he retells the colloquy between Ossian the last of the Fianna, and St. Patrick.

Ossian or Usheen, the son of Finn, was sought by Neave, a beautiful maiden from the land of the ever young. He rode with her over the sea until he came to her home in fairy land. Then beguiled by her beauty he lived there for three hundred years, which to him seemed as three. He often longed for the companionship of his

(1) ~~Forrest Reid,~~ The Celtic Dawn.

Lloyd Morris

fellow heroes. In order to appease him Neave distracted him with many adventures, but these did not seem to satisfy. Finally she set him upon a magic horse and sent him over the sea to Ireland, warning him that if he dismounted he would never be able to return to her.

Arriving in Ireland he found all changed. The men were miserable and weak, and sang no longer the joyous songs of old, and in place of the raths of the king were the churches of a new and dismal religion. He learned that Fianna had become merely a name, that all had been dead for two centuries and more, and filled with sadness he planned to return to Neave. On the shore some men trying to move a sack of sand fell crushed by its weight and Ossian, stooping from his horse pitched the sack five yards with his hand. But the effort broke his saddle girth and he fell in the roadway. His horse disappeared, and the weight of three centuries fell upon him. To him comes St. Patrick who has heard of his former prowess, and wishes to know of his three centuries of "dalliance with a demon thing." Ossian tells his story and then inquires what has become of the Fianna.

He learns that they have been doomed to eternal damnation. Thereupon he recants his profession of Christianity, preferring to be with his companions even in hell, to being in heaven among the weak who take no joy in life.

"It were sad to gaze on the blessed and no man
I loved of old there.
I throw down the chain of small stones!
When life in my body has ceased
I will go to Caolte and Conan and Bran,
Sgeolan, Lomair,
And dwell in the house of the Fenians,
Be they in flames or at feast."

The legend, as Yeats tells it, has a certain honesty of thought and a certain psychological value in the vigor with which it portrays the clash between the new ideals and the old. But the distinctive beauty is lyrical. Patrick and Ossian represent less two opposing schools of thought, than two different kinds of feelings about life, and hence two different values set upon it. The paganism of Ossian can scarcely be said to be less spiritual than the christianity of St. Patrick ; but in each the spirituality is that of emotion. Neither reacts to life in terms of thought, but in those of feeling. Ossian is in love with the visible beauty of life, with action, with the external, with the familiar spirits that inhabit nature.

Thus he makes Ossian describe the meeting with Neave,-

"A pearl-pale high born lady who rode
On a horse with a bridle of findrinny;
And like a sunset were her lips
A stormy sunset on doomed ships;
A citron color gloomed in her hair
And down to her feet white vesture flowed,
And with the glimmering crimson glowed
On many a figured embroidery;
And it was bound with a pearl pale shell
That wavered like the summer streams
As her soft bosom rose and fell."

And St. Patrick answers,-

"You are still wrecked among heathen dreams."

To him the soul is of supreme importance and his emotion finds its expression as naturally in ascetism as that of Ossian in exuberance. Unrelenting are his last words to Usheen:

"On the flaming stones without refuge,
the limbs of the Fenians are tost;
None war on the masters of Hell, who
could break up the world in their rage;
But kneel and wear out the flags and pray
for your soul that is lost
Through the demon love of its youth
and its godless and passionate age."

It is not however in the depiction of spiritual types, but in the suggestion of emotion through pictures of beauty in nature, and of imaginative beauty, which he places in the land of the fairy, that Yeats excels in this his earliest volume. The lines in which Neave pictures to Ossian, the luxury and glory of her home in fairy-land

have that sensuousness that belongs particularly to Yeats.

" O Usheen, mount by me and ride
To shores by the wash of the tremulous tide,
Where men have heaped no burial mounds,
And the days pass by like a wayward tune,
Where broken faith has never been known
And the blushes of first love never have flown;
There will I give you a hundred hounds
No mightier creatures bay at the moon;
And a hundred robes of murmuring silk,
And a hundred calves, and a hundred sheep
Whose long wool whiter than sea froth flows;
And a hundred spears and a hundred bows,
And oil and wine and honey and milk,
And always never anxious sleep;
While a hundred youths mighty of limb
But knowing nor tumult nor hate nor strife,
And a hundred maidens merry as birds
Who when they dance to a fitful measure
Have a speed like the speed of the salmon herds;
Shall follow your horn and obey your whim,
And you shall know the Danaan leisure,
And Niam be with you for a wife. '
Then she sighed gently, 'It grows late
Music and love and sleep await
Where I would be when the white moon climbs;
The red sun falls, and the world grows dim,'
.....
And we rode out from the human lands."

But throughout the poem lines of sensuous,
lyric beauty, lines that sing the joy of life, abound.

"That sloping green De Danaan sod
Sing God is joy, and joy is God:
And things that have grown sad are wicked,
And things that fear the dawn of morrow
Or that grey wandering osprey, sorrow."

Such as these are the "little jewelled thoughts"
of which Yeats later tries to strip his verse.

But from 1889 to 1899 Yeats continued to produce lyric poems of great beauty. "The haunting beauty of a twilight wood" is his chief contribution during this period. Professor Phelps calls them "iridescent dreams."

In the collection of "Early Poems", published in 1925, his dedication to Ashe King contains the following: "I tried after the publication of "The Wanderings of Ossian" to write of nothing but emotion" and further, - "These poems written before my ~~sevenths~~ and twentieth year cannot have altogether failed in simplicity, for they are still the most popular I have written." (1)

"The Crossways" was published in 1889 and contains the ever popular lyrics, "Down by the Salley Gardens," "The Ballad of Moll Magee" and "The Ballad of Father O'Hart". The opening poem of this volume in almost the first lines voices the author's faith in words as "a projectile of thought."

"But O sick children of the world,
Of all the many changing things
In dreary dancing past us whirled
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings
Words alone are certain good."

The low dreamy melancholy music of this earlier poetry is characteristic of the volumes that follow.

(1) Yeats : Early Poems.

"The Rose" was published in 1893. In a note to the first poem in this volume, "The Rose upon the Road of Time", Yeats says, - "The quality symbolized as "The Rose" differs from the intellectual beauty of Shelley and of Spenser in that I have imagined it suffering with man, and not as something pursued and seen from afar off." He apostrophizes the rose thus, -

"Come near that no more blinded by man's fate,
I find under the boughs of love and hate
In all poor foolish things that live a day
Eternal Beauty wandering on her way."

Yeats's ideal of Eternal Beauty is further developed in "The Rose of Peace", "The Rose of Battle" and "The Rose of the World" and in the same volume we have those poems of absolute beauty, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" and "The Ballad of Father Gilligan."

But Yeats even in 1893 or perhaps more particularly in 1893, was a patriot as well as the lover of beauty. This volume ends with "To Ireland in the Coming Time." His love of Ireland stood first, and he was a poet because he felt that he could serve Ireland through his art better than he could serve her as statesman or as soldier.

"Know that I would accounted be
True brother of that company
Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong
Ballad and story, rann and song.
.....
I cast my heart into my rhymes
That you in the dim coming times
May know how my heart went with them
After the red rose-bordered hem."

From 1893 to 1895 he published mostly prose legends written in the Anglo-Gaelic. "The Celtic Twilight" legends were written while Yeats was developing the National Literary Society ; the other legends of this volume "when I had left Dublin in despondency."

About 1895 Yeats developed a new phase. This new phase is marked by a change from the explicit and melodious lyric, to one of subtle intention, clothed in obscure symbols, reverting only occasionally to the simplicity of his earlier verse. But beauty still abounds. Even the titles are sweet symphonies, poems in themselves. Professor Phelps says,—"Perhaps it is not fanciful to observe that "The Wind among the Reeds" suggests better than any other arrangement of words the lovely minor melodies of our poet, while "The Shadowy Waters" gives exactly the picture that comes into one's mind in thinking of his poems. There is an extraordinary fluidity in his verse, like running water under the shade of overhanging branches."

"The Wind among the Reeds" was published in 1899. Various influences had come into his life since he left Dublin in 1897. "The literary atmosphere of London and Paris, the theosophy of Blavatsky, the elaborate English cultivated by the followers of Walter Pater." (1)

(1) Time's Literary Supplement, Oct./25.

In reading these poems one feels at once that the appeal now is not to the emotions primarily, but to the intellect. The compliment that he pays to the readers' understanding in Browningsque in the matter that he leaves to the imagination. Contrast "The Secret Rose" of this volume with The Rose of 1893.

"Far off most secret and inviolate Rose
Enfold me in my hours of ease,
.....

Surely thine hour has come, the great wind blows
Far off, most secret and inviolate rose."

The thought is the same, but the form, the phraseology, the plane as it were, have been altered by the influences of the years.

"Had I the heaven's embroidered cloths
Enwrought with gold and silver light
The blue and the divine and the dark cloths
Of night, and light, and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet,
But I, being poor, have only my dreams.
I have spread my dreams under your feet,
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams."

He has advanced from the simplicity of instinct, to which his early writing owes its popularity, to the plane of refined sophistication which marks its maturity. "The Fiddler of Dooney" at the end of this volume shows that Yeats has not lost the ability to write in simple and melodious ballad style.

In "The Seven Woods" of 1904, "The Shadowy Waters" of 1906, "The Green Helmet and Other Poems" of 1912 and "Responsibilities" of 1914, the development continues. Critics differ as to the value of the change. Some would prefer that Yeats should remain forever the poet of the emotions, and write forever simple poems of the "Innisfree" type. This would mean that Mr. Yeats would remain forever in the ranks of the second rate poets. Is there anything in his work up to 1916 to indicate that he should be placed in the higher class?

Many critics agree that Yeats stands today in the front rank of living poets, because,-

1. Yeats has a purpose in writing. This purpose is to create beauty, that this 'Beauty' may come down to walk with common men, to uplift them, to inspire them. It is for Ireland and Irishmen that he writes, but his appeal is universal. "He has schooled himself to live down desires and impatience and to shut himself away from the discords and irrelevances of life in a cloister of reverie." (1) In so doing he has favored the saint within himself. The aesthetic quality predominates both his life and his poetry.

2. With the requisite greatness of the purpose of poetry Yeats links up a further requisite. He chooses

(1) Times Literary Supplement.

the great subjects of poetry, religion, nature and humanity. He wrote for humanity, to uplift Ireland. His religion is mysticism and the love of nature manifests itself everywhere.

Since the publication of "Responsibilities" in 1916, Yeats has lived through the period of The Great War, and the period of reconstruction. What has the war done for Yeats? A volume still in the hands of the publishers we await with interest; but "Wild Swans at Coole" published in 1919 shows the trend.

"I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat.
But the fools caught it;
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked."

And again, in 1921 he writes of "The Rose....."

"Maybe a breath of politic words
Has withered our Rose Tree,
Or maybe but a wind that blows
Across the bitter sea.
.....

"But where can we draw water",
Said Pearse to Connolly,
"When all the wells are parched away?"
O plain as plain can be
There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree.

By a careful revision of his work, a merciless elimination of unessentials, a finer crystallization of emotions, he has achieved a greater sympathy. He has sojourned in the tents of science, he has studied art and become a painter, studied spiritualism, is a mystic, and has been in the storm centre of political turmoil. All these experiences, objective as well as subjective, tend to the development of a rare mind under unusual circumstances. Lewis J. McQuilland, in Booknotes Sept. 1925 says: "Of all poets of our day none is more entirely an artist in speech, in manner, in habit. There is now about him in middle age much of the wistfulness of his youth, of its haunting charm, its grave reveries, its grave-eyed wonder breaking into little smiles." (1)

Looking back on his own youth he says, - "I could find nothing to make a song but kings, helmets and swords, and half-forgotten things."

"His earlier music as compared with his later was more elaborate. The later has a deeper though perhaps less enchanting music. The starkness of language has a charm of its own, the thought is bolder, more clear cut, the pictures more definite, only requiring attention to become invested with a glamor not ready made. The effort

(1) Lewis J. McQuilland, in Booknotes Sept. 1925.

after concreteness, condensation, and a natural prose order, a dominating desire to tell the truth about aspects of nature, common experiences, and intellectual problems mark a deepening in the best sense. He is sometimes obscure because he compresses too much and we fail to find the key because of lack of intellectual effort on our part." (1)

So we find in Mr. Yeats's lyric poetry a steady growth, the earlier work endeared by familiarity, the later, sometimes strange and difficult, but the two forming a harmonious whole.

(1) Review of Later Plays & Poems, World Wide 1922.

CHAPTER IV.

M Y S T I C I S M A N D S Y M B O L I S M
I N Y E A T S ' S P O E T R Y .

Yeats is a follower of the Pre-Raphaelite school but with a difference. When Swinburne "With empty music floods the air" and where Rosset^{ti} clothes imaginative and visionary subjects in everyday sensuous language, Yeats lives in vision and imagination, in word as in thought. He is a visionary, a mystic. To him the unseen is more real than the seen. In the introduction to "Wild Swans at Coole" he tells us that he can only express his convictions about the world through "phantasmagoria." But there must be no doubt as to Yeats's message, no fear of not understanding what he is attempting. He ever and always explains himself, and almost convinces us. In "Ideas of Good and Evil" he says,-

"I have observed dreams and visions very carefully, and am now certain that the imagination has some way of lighting on the truth, that the reason has not, and that its commandments delivered when the body is still and the reason silent are the most binding we can ever know." (1)

(1) Yeats: Ideas of Good and Evil.

And again,- "The vision of truth in the depth of the mind when the eyes are closed." (1)

His scientific explanation of what he so strongly feels to be a truth may be summarized thus,-

1. The borders of our minds are ever shifting, and many minds can flow into one another, and can create a single mind, a single energy.

2. The borders of our memories too are shifting, and our memories are a path of one great memory, the memory of nature herself.

3. The Great Mind and the Great Memory can be evoked by symbolism.

This explanation differs from the explanation of psychologists more in phraseology than in content. The Great Mind and the Great Memory or, as he sometimes calls it, the Race Memory, are linked to the sub-conscious; and the symbols that evoke them to the self-hypnotism and state of trance. This is suggested too in his introduction to "The Trembling of the Veil". "Have we but seen in the memory of the race something believed thousands of years ago, or has somebody, I myself perhaps, but dreamed a fantastic dream, which had come to those others by transference of thought? I came to no conclusion, but

(1) Ideas of Good and Evil.

I was sure there was some symbolic meaning could I but find it." (1)

In order to come into the closest harmony with this Great Mind, Yeats tries to purge his later work of descriptions of nature, of all anecdotes, of scientific opinion, of "that vehemence which would make us do or not do certain things", (2) and he seeks those wavering, meditative, organic rhythms which are the embodiment of the imagination. To do this it is necessary that "words be as subtle and complex as the body of a flower. It must have the perfection that escapes analysis, the subtleties that have an new meaning every day." (3)

But words are to Yeats never simply words; they are always symbols in the sense that they suggest what they can never mean. They act thus because the 'Great Memory' associates them with certain events and words and passions. "Whatever the passions of man have gathered about becomes a symbol in this Great Memory, and in the hands of him who has the secret is a worker of wonders." (4)

(1) The Trembling of the Veil.

(2) Ideas of Good and Evil.

(3) Lloyd Moiris : The Celtic Dawn.

(4) Ideas of Good and Evil.

Yeats lives the life of a recluse today and is a mystic. He sees visions and dreams dreams. He tells us that he "cast a glamour" over a servant making her see him with his arm in a sling. His reasoning follows: "If I can unintentionally cast a glamour over persons of our own time there is no reason to doubt that men could cast intentionally a far stronger glamour over the more sensitive peoples of ancient times. Why should not St. Patrick and all his clerics pass their enemies as a herd of deer, or the enchanters of Morte de Arthur make troops of horses seem gray stones?"(1) And from this he goes on to explain how the staff of Moses appeared as a serpent.

For an example of his symbolic poetry Yeats himself points to "The Cap and the Bells" from the volume "The Wind Among the Reeds." Because of his own comment on it, I have chosen it to illustrate this phase of his work.

(1) Ideas of Good and Evil.

THE CAP AND BELLS.

The jester walked in the garden:
The garden had fallen still;
He bade his soul rise upward
And stand on her window-sill.

It rose in a straight blue garment,
When owls begin to call:
It had grown wise-tongued by thinking
Of a quiet and light footfall;

But the young queen would not listen;
She rose in her pale night gown;
She drew in the heavy casement
And pushed the latches down.

He bade his heart go to her,
When the owls called out no more;
In a red and quivering garment
It sang to her through the door.

It had grown sweet-tongued by dreaming,
Of a flutter of flower-like hair;
But she took up her fan from the table
And waved it off on the air.

"I have cap and bells," he pondered,
"I will send them to her and die";
And when the morning whitened
He left them where she went by.

She laid them upon her bosom,
Under a cloud of her hair,
And her red lips sang them a love-song:
Till stars grew out of the air.

She opened her door and her window,
And the heart and the soul came through,
To her right hand came the red one,
To her left hand came the blue.

They set up a noise like crickets,
A chattering wise and sweet,
And her hair was a folded flower
And the quiet of love in her feet.

Of this poem Yeats says,- "I dreamed this story. The dream gave me the sense of illumination and exhilaration that one gets from visions. This power has always meant a great deal to me, though as is the way with symbols, it has not always meant the same thing. I am quite sure the authors are in Eternity, and can only be questioned by dreams."

So we see that his theory is an explicit denial of Arnold's theory that poetry is a criticism of life. To him the function of poetry is to produce in the hearers, through the rhythm of the verse, a psychological condition bordering on trance and then evoke the Great Mind and the Great Memory through symbols, to play upon those moods that have no place in the waking life of energy and activity.

"All would be well
Could we but give us wholly to our dreams
And get into their world that to the sense is shadowy.
And not linger wretchedly among substantial things;
For it is dreams that lift us to the flowing, changing
world
That the heart longs for.
What is love itself, even if it be the lightest of light
love,
But dreams that hurry from beyond the world,
To make low laughter more than meat and drink,
Though it but set us sighing. Fellow wanderer
Could we but mix ourselves into a dream
Not in its image in a mirror." (1)

To this plea of Forgael, Aibric answers as so often do we,-
"While we're in the body that's impossible."

(1) The Shadowy Waters.

CHAPTER V.

A C H I E V E M E N T .

Mr. Yeats is one of the few living poets who has given his life to the production of poetry. The dignity of the poet falls naturally upon him. Though a mystic, he is yet fundamentally incredulous and dissatisfied, perpetually engaged in probing and refining his impressions, and searching for ever deeper and deeper significance of things. In this quality as well as in the form of much of his later poetry we are reminded of Browning. There is the same lack of ornament, bareness of diction, the crystallization of expression verging upon obscurity which, while it "refresh the heart will tire the brain." But in Yeats it is the imagination that will tire in its attempt to follow the poet's flight. Theodore Maynard in the "Poetic Review" compares Browning to the beef-steak and onions of our literary life and Yeats to its strawberries and cream.

In thought Yeats is closer to Shelley than to any other poet. Like Shelley he feels keenly the social evils of his country. Like him too, his plans for reform are founded upon an emotional philosophy, upon feeling

deeply about life rather than thinking deeply about it.
He too, was ^{disillusioned} and voices the pathos of disillusionment in
prose and verse.

"Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide;
For this that all the blood was shed
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave;
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet could we turn the years again
And call those exiles as they were,
In all their loneliness and pain
You'd cry 'Some woman's yellow hair
Has maddened every mother's son:'
They weighed so lightly what they gave,
But let them be, they're dead and gone,
They're with O'Leary in the grave." (1)

And in 1914 he appended this note,-

"Religious Ireland thinks of divine things as a round
of duties separated from life, and not as an element
that may be discovered in all circumstance 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 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."

(1) September 1913, in The Green Helmet and other Poems.

Disillusionment, an early enthusiasm lost, Yeats, like Shelley, sees in familiar things the shadows of the infinite and perfect ideas which their restless spirits are always probing. Like Shelley too, Yeats has a pagan delight in beauty. The Rose symbolizes absolute beauty, and differs from the beauty of Shelley in only one detail, that it is with man and suffers with him, not a far off thing to be pursued.

His love poetry differs from that of Keats and Shelley in one important detail. He is the first English poet who has treated of earthly love as a thing wholly of the spirit, existing only in a dream of mystic ecstasy, in which physical beauty is totally immaterial, except as the visible clothing of the soul itself. He has the conception of the ideal beauty of Keats but it is of the soul, not of the sense.

In lightness of touch, in variety of metre, in beauty of sound, his early poems remind us constantly of Shelley.

Like the Pre-Raphaelites, he was a student and admirer of Blake. But the mysticism of Yeats differs from the mysticism of Blake in its "fundamental searching for the wells of truth." Edward Wilson writing in the

"New Republic" April 1925, says,-

"It is significant that Mr. Yeats whose sense of reality is not inferior to that of any scientist or realist living, should seem to feel a belief in the supernatural to be somehow bound up with faith in the poet's vision." (1) His great imaginative insight and his theories are impressive despite the fact that they had been arrived at mystically, instead of through the medium of modern psychology.

The blending of the occult and the real, the entering into the hearts of the imaginative and emotionally sensitive Irish peasants, the expression of the natural beauty of West Ireland and the vision of beauty in his own soul,- to express these in metre haunting and harmonious is the achievement of William Butler Yeats.

(1) Edward Wilson in the New Republic, Apr. 1925.

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