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William Butler Yeats
as
An Interpreter of Modern Life

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WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS
AS
AN INTERPRETER OF MODERN LIFE

BY

CARL CLINTON VAN DOREN

THESIS

FOR THE

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Carl Clinton Van Doren

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IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF Bachelor of Arts, Special Honors

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Bibliography

In the main body of the thesis the works of Mr. Yeats have served as the basis for this study. For the biographical sketch the following books and periodical contributions have been used:

Who's Who 1907
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  Stephen Gwynn

    (a) "The Irish Literary Theatre and its Affinities,"
      Volume 76, page 1050-1062
    (b) "An Uncommercial Theatre," Volume 78
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The Literary Digest 1903

  "The 'Standard-Bearer' of the Celtic Revival,"
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    (This is a digest of an article by Prof. Katherine
    Lee Bates on the life and works of Mr. Yeats in the
    Boston "Transcript" for November 11, 1903.)

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WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS AS AN INTERPRETER OF MODERN LIFE

Biographical Sketch.

Mr. William Butler Yeats was born at Dublin in 1865. He is the son of John B. Yeats, the artist, a man of considerable poetic feeling, who began his artistic work late in life, but has achieved some little distinction as a painter. His portrait of his son, used as a frontispiece to "The Celtic Twilight," is characteristic, and helps us to understand both men. The poet was educated at Godolphin School, Hammersmith, and at the Dublin High School. At the latter school (according to Mr. Charles Johnston) (1) the future poet was exceedingly talkative, and had a passion for experimental science. He was strong in mathematics and chemistry, but did little with languages either ancient or modern. He early made his mark as a heretic by an essay on Evolutionary Botany, written while he was very much under the influence of "The Descent of Man." A dogmatic master and one of Yeats' schoolmates seem to have been greatly perturbed by his freedom of thought, and considerable friction was the result. During this period he used to take long walks with his friend Johnston out into the country about Dublin, and came first to sharpen his observation of nature, although he generally regarded it from a scientific point of view.

Later his science was more and more humanized by his father, at whose studio many discussions were held on art, literature and philosophy. For a time he thought of following in his father's foot-

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1. "Yeats in the Making," Poet Lore, Summer 1906.

steps, and studied hard at the Art Schools in Merrion Square. The experience of this period is shown in his discussions in the introduction to "The Poems of William Blake" and in his essays onthat artist in "Ideas of Good and Evil." He had left school when he was about eighteen, and was somewhat undecided as to his career until he was twenty-one, when he turned definitely to literature.

Already he had begun to feel a passion for poetry, especially for that of Swinburne and the melodists, and he himself had written considerable verse which was never published. This early work was highly romantic, but he did not yet feel the impulse which has since made him the poet of mystical Ireland; he had not even begun to draw his material particularly from Celtic legend. To do this he was influenced largely by his friendship with John O'Leary, who introduced him to the poems of Sir Samuel Fergusson. Henceforth Yeats was given up to a desire to be the singer of Gaelic tradition. "Then with a deliberateness that still surprises me, for in my heart of hearts I have never been quite certain that one should be more than an artist, that even patriotism is more than an impure desire in an artist, I set to work to find a style and things to write about that the ballad writers might be better."[1] The first fruit of this decision was "The Wanderings of Oisin," published originally in the Dublin University Review, and later used to give the title to his first book of verse (1889).

During 1885 he became attracted by the wisdom of India, reflected in some of his early poems, especially "An Indian Upon God." Later he began the study of Blake's Prophetic Books, and in 1893 edited (with Mr. E. J. Ellis) "The Works of William Blake." The

[1] "What is Popular Poetry," in "Ideas of Good and Evil, "page 2-3

same year he edited "The Poems of William Blake" for the Muses' Library. Afterward he became interested in modern Cabalism, and in the French Decadents. These last have exerted a great influence upon all his succeeding work.

Mystic as he is, however, Mr. Yeats is also a man of action, and knows to a nicety the art of the propagandist. He is acknowledged not only to be the great Irish poet of the generation, but also as the leader in the Irish revival which is so notable at present. He was one of the chief organizers and the head of the Irish Literary Theatre, begun at Dublin in 1899, which tried to do for Irish drama what Antoine with the Théâtre Libre did for the French. The first performance in May of that year included Mr. Yeats' "The Countess Cathleen" which was badly received because, as it was claimed, the Irish peasantry was traduced in it. When (in February, 1900) "The Land of Heart's Desire," written in Gaelic by Dr. Douglas Hyde, was produced, it pleased much better than the piece of the previous year. During 1900, however, Mr. Yeats, with others, saw fit to print views concerning the coming of Queen Victoria to Ireland that cost him the support of the Unionists for the theatrical season of 1901. At this time was given a play in which Mr. Yeats and Mr. George Moore collaborated, called "Diarmuid and Grania." The criticism offered for this play—it was a failure—was that the authors "had gone to Irish legend to find in epic tradition the plot of an average French novel."[1] The same year a little one act piece called "The Twisting of the Rope" by Dr. Hyde was played in Irish, and moved the audience a great deal. The incident had been borrowed from a

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[1] "The Irish Literary Theatre and its Affinities," by Stephen Gwynn. Fortnightly Review, Volume 76, page 1055.

story by Mr. Yeats in "The Secret Rose."

The Irish Literary Theatre died after the season of 1901, but its promoters did not give up hope. The next year the Irish National Dramatic Society was organized with Mr. Yeats as President. Since then a good many of his little plays have been presented before Irish audiences with gratifying success. He says of his work in this connection, "I am no longer writing for a few friends here and there, but I am asking my own people to listen, as many as can find their way into the Abbey Theatre in Dublin or some provincial one when our company is on tour. Perhaps one can explain in plays, where one has more room than in songs and ballads, even those intricate thoughts, those elaborate emotions, that are one's self."[1]

During the week of Samhain (October 26 to November 2), 1902, the Irish National Dramatic Company produced in the theater of Mr. F. J. Fay at Dublin Mr. Yeats' "Cathleen ni Houlihan," which had already been played by a company of Irish actors the preceding Easter, and "A Pot of Broth." Since then his writing has been confined almost wholly to plays for the theatre in which he is so much interested. In 1903 he came to America under the auspices of the Irish Literary Society of New York and went across the entire continent giving lectures and readings from his works. His present address (as given in Who's Who for 1907) is 18 Woburn Buildings, Euston Road, London.

A list of his published works (exclusive of contributions to periodicals)

[1] Preface to Volume One of "The Poetical Works of William B. Yeats," Page VII-VIII.

1889 The Wanderings of Oisin
1890 Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry (Edited with Introduction)
1891 John Sherman; Dhoya;
Stories from Carleton (Edited with Introduction)
1892 The Countess Kathleen: an Irish drama; and various legends and lyrics
1893 The Celtic Twilight
The Poems of William Blake (Edited with Introduction)
The Works of William Blake (Edited with E. J. Ellis)
1894 The Land of Heart's Desire
Irish Fairy Tales (Edited)
1895 Poems, Selected
A Book of Irish Verse (Edited with Introduction)
A Book of Images (Drawings by W. F. Horton with Introduction)
1897 The Secret Rose
The Tables of the Law: The Adoration of the Magi (Privately printed)
1899 The Wind Among the Reeds
Poems
Beltaine, the Organ of the Irish Literary Theatre (1899-1900)
1900 The Shadowy Waters
A Book of Irish Verse (Revised)
1901 Poems
Samhain, the Organ of the Irish National Theatre Society (1901-1902)
1902 Cathleen ni-Houlihan
The Celtic Twilight (Revised Edition)
Introduction to Lady Gregory's "Cuchulain of Muirthemne"
1903 Where there is Nothing Volume One of Plays for an Irish Theatre
Ideas of Good and Evil
In the Seven Woods
1904 Introduction to Lady Gregory's "Gods and Fighting Men"
Volumes Two and Three of Plays for an Irish Theatre

Plays for an Irish Theatre
Volume I Where There is Nothing
Volume II The Hour-Glass: A Morality
Cathleen ni Houlihan
The Pot of Broth
Volume III
The King's Threshold
On Baile's Strand

1906 The Poetical Works of William B. Yeats
Volume I Lyrical Poems
Volume II Still in press

I have given what may seem an undue amount of space to biographical details of Mr. Yeats in order to emphasize a characteristic which must attract the attention of any careful reader. He who in his life seems capable of a career of action, shows in his poetry a continuous desire to get away from present realities that he may lose himself in the drowsy glamor of mysticism and brood over the twilight of the legendary past. His readers are never allowed to forget that he considers that he has little business here, and would gladly be elsewhere if he were not held by circumstances which lie beyond his own power to change. His desire for shelter from the world has its characteristic expression in one of his early poems, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree."

"I will arise and go now and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loudglade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sound by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core" (1)

Beyond all others of his works, however, his play "The Land of Heart's Desire" contains his desire to escape from the dreary "round of mechanic business," and go to visit the people of Faery. The characters are Maurteen and Bridget Bruin, their son Shawn, his young wife Maire, Father Hart, a priest, and a faery child. Maire has been reading a book, and Bridget objects to it, because she thinks the girl idle and heedless. The book is an old one

1. The Poetical works of William B. Yeats. Volume I, page 179-180.

which Maurteen's grandfather had written, and not at all to his credit, his grandson thinks, because it filled his house with bards and ballad makers who wasted all his substance. Father Hart asks Maire what is in the wonderful book, and she tells him that it is the story of Princess Adene, who heard a voice"singing on a May eve like this," and followed it to the land of faery,

"Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue."

Maurteen says his grandfather was forever muttering just such things, and was no judge at all of a dog or a horse.

Father Hart, urged to it by Maurteen, bids the girl refrain from reading the book because,he says, it tells of the "wrecked angels" that set snares on the paths of men and women, "And bait them with light hopes and heavy dreams." He tells her out of the wisdom of his experience:

"My colleen, I have seen some other girls
Restless and ill at ease, but years went by
And they grew like their neighbors and were glad
In minding children, working at the churn,
And gossiping of weddings and of wakes,
For life moves out of a red flare of dreams
Into a common light of common hours,
Until old age brings the red flare again."

The young Shawn is not too old and wise to sympathize with his bride, and he reminds them that the girl's fancies make her lot much better than it might be. She goes to the door and strews flowers outside. She says dreamily that she saw a strange little child there. Father Hart warns her against such children of the fiend as fairies are, but she says she believes God loves them. She goes to the door again, to give a porringer of milk to a queer little old woman. Bridget says evil will be brought upon the house

for a year by Maire's lack of judgment in giving to the "good people," that is, the fairies. Maurteen, however, tells his wife not to be cross and calls the girl to his side, for he says he wants her as a light to his age.

"To sit beside the board and drink good wine
And watch the turf smoke coiling from the fire
And feel content and wisdom in your heart,
This is the best of life; when we are young
We long to tread a way none trod before,
But find the excellent old way through love
And through the care of children to the hour
For bidding Fate and Time and Change goodbye."

Maire goes once more to the door, this time with a burning sod to give to a little old man who, she tells them, wanted to light his pipe. Again Bridget becomes angry and Maire calls to the fairies to take her "out of this dull house,"

"For I would ride with you upon the wind,
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame!"

Shawn leads her to the settle where he quiets her with words of love and sympathy until they hear a voice singing in the distance, then nearer:

"The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart
And the lonely of heart is withered away,
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;
For they hear the wind laugh, and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,
'When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung,
The lonely of heart is withered away.'"

Maurteen opens the door and a child "dressed in pale green and with red-gold hair" enters. The old people are much pleased with her, and warm her and give her food. She is a high-born child; she can not endure sour wine and she says to Bridget:

"The young may lie in bed and dream and hope,
But you work on because your heart is old."

She tells Maurteen that he is wise, but wise because his heart is old. She starts to begin dancing, but suddenly cries out on beholding the crucifix, and will not desist till Father Hart has taken it into the next room. Then she begins to dance, and Maire thinks she hears other steps on the floor and faint music in the wind. The fairy asks them if they love her, and when Maurteen and the priest assent, she tells the one that he loves the fireside, and the other that he loves "Him above." Maire when asked the same question, says she does not know. The child answers:

"You love that great tall fellow over there:
Yet I could make you ride upon the winds,
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame."

Maire cries out for protection, and Father Hart declares that the little visitor is of the faery people. All but the bride gather about him for protection. The child strews primroses about Maire in a circle which Shawn can not enter. Then the two powers, the fairy and the priest, each begin trying to win Maire away from the other. Father Hart calls her in the name of Heaven and of Christ to return to home and love. The child calls her "in the name of your own heart" to come

"Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue."

Maire says she will go. The child replies,

"But clinging mortal hope must fall from you."

Shawn then succeeds in reaching his wife, and when he calls their

early love to her mind, she sinks into his arms. The child speaks again and again, and Maire dies.

Father Hart

"Thus do the spirits of evil snatch their prey
Almost out of the very hand of God;
And day by day their power is more and more,
And men and women leave old paths, for pride
Comes knocking with thin knuckles on the heart."

Throughout the piece the author's sympathy is wholly with the "lonely of heart." Although he makes Maurteen and Father Hart the mouth pieces of a good deal of worldly wisdom, he plainly despises them for having it, Father Hart more than the old peasant. Shawn is made by his youth and love to sympathize with his wife's nameless yearning, but he cannot feel it himself. He is a young man with spiritual faculties only a little developed, while the others have none at all. Father Hart is a self-satisfied dogmatist, Bridget is an old woman who has forgotten her youth and does not wish to remember it, while Maurteen still remembers his, but looks upon it as a mere foible which he once had in common with all mankind. Only Maire is able to reach the deep wells of spiritual truth and feeling, and the conflict in her heart between her immortal visions and her "clinging mortal love" is more than she can outlive. That is the way with all the worthiest dwellers in this world, Mr. Yeats thinks. If they could go stolidly on, stupidly leading a stupid life, they would not know of anything of more importance than mouth hunger and bodily cold; but that they cannot do. They are so born that their ears are attuned to a higher harmony than the tiresome hum of daily duties. Like the little one in his poem "The Stolen Child" they hear the faeries calling,

"Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping
Than you can understand."(1)

If they are held to the earth, they are either actually killed like Maire of the play, or, what is perhaps worse, they grow finally to lose their vision, and become like all the rest of the dull world. The tragedy of many a soul is that it must be surrounded by a horde of stolid folk, who can not understand it, because they are deaf to all the calls from fairyland, or who will not understand it, because they will not heed what they might hear, if they would not close their ears against the sounds that come to them. They raise up the unreverberating barrier of will against the gentle vibrations of the world of spirits.

Such people as these have changed the world from what it was to its present marred condition. "In the beginning the earth was perhaps made to fulfil the desire of man, but now it has got old and fallen into decay."(2)It seems to Mr. Yeats that the present, as it now is, has no hope in it for anyone. It is transient,

"From our birthday until we die
Is but the winking of an eye,"(3)

and it can not satisfy the heart of a single one of the souls who yearn for the Incorruptible Rose of perfection, because in our day " we cannot have any unmixed emotions. There is always something in our enemy that we like, and something in our sweetheart that we dislike. It is this entanglement of moods which makes us old, and puckers our brows and deepens the furrows about our eyes." (a)

(a) "The Celtic Twilight," page 130
(1) Poetical Works, Volume I, page 39
(2) "The Celtic Twilight," page 145
(3) Poetical Works, Volume I, page 208

What makes the world still more gloomy for us is our inability to hope for better things in the future. The history of the past few centuries shows us that the world has not advanced, but has rather gone backwards. There is no just reason for believing that things will change their course. "It is one of our illusions, as I think, that education, the softening of manners, the perfecting of law--countless images of a fading light--can create nobleness and beauty and that life moves slowly and evenly towards some perfection. Progress is miracle, and it is sudden, because miracles are the work of an all-powerful energy, and nature has no power except to die and to forget." (1) What we have called the progress of the world is but "the slow dying of men's hearts." (2)

Paul Ruttledge in the play "Where there is Nothing," speaks many of Mr. Yeats' beliefs about the world and its value as a place to live in. He has come to care nothing for his friends and acquaintances and for even his brother Thomas, who, with his wife and children, makes his home at Paul's house to keep it. Paul is bored by all the people he knows, and associates with no one but Father Jerome, a priest from a neighboring monastery. Even with Jerome he is not in perfect accord, because the monk thinks the gentleman more restless than he need be. He tells him he ought to see more of his neighbors.

> "Paul Ruttledge. There's nothing interesting but human nature, and that's in the single soul, but these neighbors of mine they think in flocks and roosts.
>
> Jerome. You are too hard on them. They are busy men, they hav'n't much time for thought, I daresay.
>
> Paul Ruttledge. That's what I complain of.

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1. "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 268.
2. "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 253.

Paul Ruttledge. Do you remember those strange ones (dreams) I had at college?

Jerome. Those visions of pulling something down?

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, they have come back to me lately. Sometimes I dream I am pulling down my own house, and sometimes it is the whole world that I am pulling down. (Standing up.) I would like to have great iron claws, and to put them about the pillars, and to pull and pull till everything fell into pieces.

Jerome. I don't see what good that would do you.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, yes it would. When everything was pulled down we would have more room to get drunk in, to drink contentedly out of the cup of life, out of the drunken cup of life."

This thorough-going iconoclast comes to the conclusion that the best thing for him to do is to join a company of tinkers who come by, so that he may escape from the life he finds so distasteful. His friends try very hard to dissuade him, and declare that the tinkers are a bad class, but he replies:

"Oh, I know that; they are are quite lawless. That is what attracts me to them—I am going to be irresponsible."

Then he goes away leaving his advisers horrified.

In the second act when he is talking with Charlie Ward, the chief of the tinkers, he tells that he has felt the "wandering in the heart." He does not like the brightly lighted houses that respectable people live in. "The dark. Yes, I think that is what I want. The dark, where there is nothing that is anything, and nobody that is anybody; one can be free there, where there is nothing." He says he is desirous of becoming a tinker in all respects, and engages himself to a girl of the clan, Sabina Silver, to whom he is going to be married tinker fashion by lepping over the budget. At this point Father Jerome, who has not heard of Paul's desertion

of his estate, puts in his appearance, and tries to persuade the man to go back to the world, but his efforts are unavailing. Paul declares that he has as much right to leave his property as the saints, for he too has heard beautiful music, and he is called away to a life of battle and swords. He says that he has taken to the road to overtake a wild beast that the tinkers are expert in snaring. It is a wild beast "with iron teeth and brazen claws that can root up spires and towers." It is called "Laughter, the mightiest of the enemies of God." "When I have tamed the beast, perhaps I will bring him to your religious house to be baptized." Father Jerome is scandalized, but the tinkers drive him away, and Paul Ruttledge, to celebrate his approaching nuptials with Sabina, decides that he will throw all the public houses in the neighborhood wide open for a week so that everyone may drink to the bride and groom.

At the beginning of the third act the tinkers are all jubilant with drink, and from beyond the scenes come the cries of the village folk who have become very drunk. Five local magistrates get into the shed where Paul Ruttledge and his followers are stopping, and reproach with great severity the cause of the uproar that is going on about them. They abuse him for putting an end to all work in the place, and he tells them that work is only a little thing compared to experience.

"Mr. Dowler. Everyone knows there is no more valuable blessing than work.

Mr. Algie. Idleness is the curse of this country.

Paul Ruttledge. I am prejudiced, for I have always been an idler. Doubtless, the poor must work.It was no doubt, of them you were speaking. Yet, doesn't the Church say, doesn't it describe heaven as a place where saints and angels only sing and hold branches and wander about hand in hand? That must be changed.

> We must teach the poor to think work a thing fit for heaven, a blessed thing."

The magistrates rebuke him for meddling with religious matters, and are promptly bound by the tinkers, at Paul's command, and set upon the empty barrels that stand about. The vagabonds then try them for being unchristian in their lives. They declare that the soldier is not a Christian, nor the rich man, nor the judge, because they constantly break Christian injunctions in the very carrying out of the duties of their professions. Paul then sends them away, after giving an invitation to join the wanderers.

In the first scene of the fourth act, Paul, who has become too ill to keep up with the tinkers' march, is carried to the door of the monastery and left there, although Sabina, his wife, whom he had treated most kindly, opposes the measure with vigor. Later he is seen lying in a trance on the altar steps while several friars are dancing slowly about him in the dim light. It develops that he has been in the convent five years, and during that time has moved the monks very much by his preaching. They are dancing now because he has told them to do it whenever they find him in a trance, because it would "bring joy down out of heaven, and make it easier for him to preach." By and by he wakes and tells that in his dream he was bidden to bear a message to all men. Father Jerome reminds him that the Superior has said he must not do so, because he is leading the monks astray.

> "Paul Ruttledge. If I have been given certain truths to tell, I must tell them at once before they slip away from me.
>
> Jerome. I cannot understand your ideas; you tell them impossible things. Things that are against the order of nature.
>
> Paul Ruttledge. I have learned that one needs a religion so wholly supernatural, that is so opposed to the order

of nature that the world can never capture it."

Several friars now enter and Paul Ruttledge begins to preach.. ----------"For a long time after their making men and women wandered here and there, half blind from the drunkenness of eternity; they had not yet forgotten that the green Earth was the Love of God and that all Life was the will of God, and so they wept and laughed and hated according to the impulse of their hearts. (He takes up the green boughs and presses them to his breast.) They gathered the green Earth to their breasts and their lips, as I gather these boughs to mine, in what they believed would be an eternal kiss.--

It was then that the temptation began. Not only the Serpent who goes upon his belly, but all the animal spirits that have loved things better than life, came out of their holes and began to whisper. The men and women listened to them, and because when they had lived according to the joyful Will of God in mother wit and natural kindness, they sometimes did one another an injury, they thought that it would be better to be safe than to be blessed, they made the Laws. The Laws were the first sin. They were the first mouthful of the apple, the moment man had made them he began to die; we must put out the Laws as I put out this candle. (He puts out a candle.) --

And when they had lived amidst the green Earth, that is the Love of God, they were sometimes wetted by the rain, and sometimes cold and hungry, and sometimes alone from one another; they thought it would be better to be comfortable than to be blessed. They began to build big houses and big towns. They grew wealthy and they

sat chattering at their doors; and the embrace that was to have been eternal ended, lips and hands were parted. (He lets the boughs slip out of his arms.) We must put out the towns as I put out this candle. (Puts out another candle.)

But that is not all, for man created a worse thing, yes, a worse defiance against God. (The Friars groan.) God put holiness into everthing that lives, for everything that desires is full of His Will, and everything that is beautiful is full of His Love; but man grew timid because it had been hard to find his way amongst so much holiness, and though God had made all time holy, man said that only the day on which God rested from life was holy, and though God had made all places holy, man said 'no place but this place that I put pillars and walls about is holy, this place where I rest from life,' and in this and like ways he built up the Church. We must destroy the Church, we must put it out as I put out this candle. (Puts out another candle.)

That is not all. These things may be accomplished and yet nothing be accomplished. The Christian's business is not reformation but revelation, and the only labours he can put his hand to can never be accomplished in time. (He stands silent for a moment and then cries, lifting his hand above his head.) Give me wine out of thy pitchers; oh, God, how splendid is my cup of drunkenness. We must become blind, and deaf, and dizzy. We must get rid of everything that is not measureless eternal life. We must put out hope as I put out this candle (Puts out a candle) and memory as

I put out this candle.(As before) And thought, the waster of Life, as I put out this candle. (As before) And at last we must put out the light of the Sun and of the Moon, and all the light of the World and the World itself. (He now puts out the last candle, the chapel is very dark. The only light is the faint light of morning coming through the window.) We must destroy the World; we must destroy everything that has Law and Number, for where there is nothing, there is God."

The Superior who has entered silently comes forward and bids the "blasphemous rebel" begone.

"Paul Ruttledge. Do as you like to me,but you cannot silence my thoughts. I learned them from Jesus Christ, who made a terrible joy, and sent it to overturn governments, and all settled order."

Several monks declare they will leave the convent and go with this marvelous preacher. Some of them, however, are overcome by fear of the Superior and turn back.

> "Paul Ruttledge. Many will forsake the truth before the world is pulled down. (Stretching out his arms over his head.) I pulled down my own house, now I go out to pull down the world.
>
> Superior. Strip off those holy habits.
>
> Paul Ruttledge. (Taking off his habit) One by one I am plucking off the rags and tatters of the world."

The final act shows the heretic living with his followers in the ruins of some building once intended for ecclesiastical purposes. Material obstacles are beginning to arise. There is not enough food to go around, and the people have come to believe that Paul has bewitched the village. His fellow priests suggest that they start a school and teach poor children, then they could

found a community of converts to their beliefs, and finally—and finally, interrupts the leader, get back everything they had escaped from. Then the villagers rush in and beat Paul to death with sticks and stones. His last words are "remember always where there is nothing there is God." Sabina Silver, his former wife, weeps over his body, for he had been very kind to her, but no one understands why he had been what he was.

Destructive as he seems in "The Land of Heart's Desire," and in "Where There is Nothing," Mr. Yeats has not torn from modern life all our faith in its value, without pointing us a way by which we can escape from its imperfection and inability to satisfy our highest needs. We still have recourse to beauty."If Beauty is not a gateway out of the net we were taken in at our birth, it will not long be beauty, and we will find it better to sit at home by the fire and fatten a lazy body or to run hither and thither in some foolish sport than to look at the finest show that light and shadow ever made among green leaves." (1) It is art then that must be our guide away from the poor "marred world" we have been snared in. The preface to "The Celtic Twilight" is testimony that Mr. Yeats is trying to carry out his belief. "I have desired, like every artist, to create a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant, and significant things of this marred and clumsy world, and to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland to any of my own people who would look where I bid them." "Hope and Memory have one daughter, and her name is Art, and she has built her dwelling far from the desperate field where men hang out their garments upon forked boughs to be banners of battle."

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1 "The Celtic Twilight," page 107

As to the nature of this art which is to furnish the salvation of modern life, Mr. Yeats has given his views with definiteness. He says that "literature dwindles to a mere chronicle of circumstances, or passionless phantasies, and passionless meditation, unless it is constantly flooded with the passions and beliefs of ancient times."(1)What he says here is the result of his belief in a former golden age of the world, from which men's hearts have decayed. He goes on, moreover, to give two other dicta which require further explanation. "It (Art) brings us near to the archetypal ideas themselves, and away from nature which is but their looking glass," (2) and "All Art which is not mere story-telling, or mere portraiture, is symbolic-----for it entangles, in complex colours and forms, a part of the divine essence."(3)To account for these one must work out a phase of Mr. Yeats' nature which is, after all, the most notable thing about him, viewed from the present standpoint—his mysticism. There is need to exercise care in choosing any thing from "The Celtic Twilight," for his stories of the visions that he has seen, and that peasants have told him they have seen are mingled so artfully that one can not know what Mr. Yeats believes and what he is merely reporting. He does go to some lengths, however, in "Ideas of Good and Evil" to furnish a philosophical basis for his mystical beliefs. He lays down these three doctrines for the believer in magic.

"(1) That the borders of our minds are ever shifting, and that

1 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 290
2 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 152.
3 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 230

many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols." (1)

The first of these shows very much the influence of the Oriental studies of his youth. With him emphasis is placed not upon the individuality of each human mind, but upon the unity of all human minds, which, though each in a way is distinct, yet taken together form one great mind for Nature, of which every single mind can be more or less cognizant if it will let down the bars of a hindering will and allow the flood of the universal mind to sweep over it. The possibility of oneness with the mind of Nature will cause questions to arise as to what after all is real, those objects which one sees every day by virtue of the single mind, or the visions which come to him when he has put himself in tune with the Great Mind. Are the visions "'the Eternal realities' of which we are the reflection in the vegetable glass of nature, or a momentary dream." To answer is to take sides in the only controversy in which it is greatly worth taking sides, and in the only controversy which may never be decided." (2) "And surely, at whatever risk, we (poets) must cry out that imagination is always seeking to remake the world according to the impulses and the patterns in that great Mind, and that great memory! Can there be anything so important as to cry out that what

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1 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 29
2 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 236

we call romance, poetry, intellectual beauty, is the only signal that the supreme Enchanter, or some one in his Councils, is speaking of what has been, and shall be again, in the consummation of time?" (1)

It is the fault of modern life that we cannot easily commune with the great Mind, but there is a way to get around the obstacles. Our barbaric ancestors, who had not had their sensibilities deadened by living in cities, or their separate minds over-enlarged by education, were more open than we to spiritual impressions, and carried on a more intimate communion with the general mind of Nature. If we are to feel the revelations that come to them, since we cannot become primitive ourselves, we must do it in a way to be explained by the second of Mr. Yeats' magical doctrines. Our memories must be put in accord with the great memory so that we can draw from the feelings of past mankind the knowledge and emotions that can make us wise and happy in the present. "I doubt indeed if the crude circumstances of the world, which seems to create all our emotions, does more than reflect, as in multiplying mirrors, the emotions that have come to solitary men in moments of poetical contemplation." (2) It is the duty of the poet now-a-days to "seek alone to hear the strange things said

By God to the bright hearts of those long dead." (3)

Our gathering of ancient jewels of wisdom and emotion from the memory of Nature is to be helped by the fact which serves for the basis of the third magical doctrine, that this great mind and this

1 "Ideas of Good and Evil, page 68
2 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 246
3 "Poetical Works," Volume I page 156

great memory can be evoked by symbols. " I cannot now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used unconsciously by the masters of magic, or half unconsciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist. At first I tried to distinguish between symbols and symbols, between what I called inherent symbols and arbitrary symbols, but the distinction has come to mean little or nothing. Whether their power has arisen out of themselves, or whether it has an arbitrary origin, matters little, for they act, as I believe, because the great memory associates them with certain events and moods and persons. Whatever the passions of men have gathered about, becomes a symbol in the great memory, and in the hands of him who has the secret, it is a worker of wonders, a caller-up of angels or devils. The symbols are of all kinds, for everything in heaven or earth has its association, momentous or trivial, in the great memory, and one never knows what forgotten events may have plunged it, like the toadstool and the ragweed, into the great passions." (1) "All sounds, all colors, all forms, either because of their pre-ordained energies, or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions." (2)

These beliefs of his furnish a logical explanation of the fact that Mr. Yeats is most closely allied with the school of symbolists in literature. They also explain his equal devotion to the cause of native art. He believes that the literature which has developed in any nation must have come from the folk if it is to be

1 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 64-65
2 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 243

able to call up by symbols the emotions and half-conscious memories which a work of literary art must call up if it be great. The work of the coteries will be founded upon an arbitrary or local tradition and will make too limited an appeal to be of the highest effectiveness.

The complexity and haste of our modern life have no place in the pages of Mr. Yeats' books except to be censured in such phrases as "the fool heart of the counting-house." (1) The unbounded strength of our great engines and the marvelous delicacy of our finer mechanical appliances seem never to make his heart leap with wonder. He sees nothing epic or heroic in the titanic strifes and successes of a captain of industry. He is not fired to exultation by the great deeds of Napoleon or Lincoln or Darwin. Without taking into account the heroism and splendor of modern life, he sees nothing but the heroism and splendor of the past, and when he compares what he sees in one with what he sees in the other he finds his own generation repellent to his senses. So he avoids the men and women of to-day that he may grow better acquainted with Cuchulain and Queen Maeve. If it were possible for all the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to be lost except a copy of Mr. Yeats' collected works, and some one of two thousand years hence should find it and be able to read it, he would be likely to think that the age of Yeats was an age of romance and idyllic sentiment, where enchanting songs were forever sung by passionate lovers under the branches of the Green Tree. It would be only the man of keen critical insight who would realize that all this luscious beauty could not reflect an actual

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1 "Poetical Works," Volume I, page 310

condition of life, but rather the moods and dreams of beings who were out of harmony with their environment and had sought solace and delight in the ancient woods and pleasant fields of fancy.

What Mr. Yeats sees in the world he interprets in the light of his philosophy of life. Birth is our fall into a snare of tangled circumstance. The credulous superstition of children and illiterate people and savages is not the foolish nonsense we often make ourselves think it, for it comes from the imagination, and "the imagination has some way of lighting on the truth that the reason has not, and its commandments delivered when the body is still and the reason silent, are the most binding we can ever know." (1) Impulse is a surer guide than reason, because impulses come from the Great Mind, while the will is man-made and artificial and bars one from the world of spirit. Love would perhaps be nothing but mere animal hunger were it not for the poet "and his shadow the priest," (2) who have looked upon the physical manifestation as a symbol and have seen underneath it the great spiritual attraction of soul for soul. Patriotism owes its present existence almost wholly to the singer who has made a sentiment of it. Religion is a survival of an ancient worship of beauty in nature, and now that dogmas and abstractions have hid the old meaning the burden of the priest has fallen upon the shoulders of the artist who must lead the world back upon its journey by filling human minds "with the essences of things and not with things." (3) "In our time we are agreed that we make our souls out of some one

1 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 91
2 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 246
3 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 303

of the great poets of ancient times or out of Shelley or Wordsworth, or Goethe or Balzac, or Flaubert, or Count Tolstoy, in the books he wrote before he became a prophet and fell into a lesser order, or out of Mr. Whistler's pictures, while we amuse ourselves, or, at best, make a poorer sort of soul, by listening to sermons or by doing or by not doing certain things." (1) The end of the cares of life is death. "What else can death be but the beginning of wisdom and power and beauty." (2) What the future life will be like Mr. Yeats does not venture to say, but the last quotation gives an idea as to what he thinks of it.

Briefly, then, Mr. Yeats' interpretation of modern life is the interpretation of a man who finds the time out of joint, and tries rather to live in a better world created by the fancy, than to set the old one right.

1 "Ideas of Good and Evil," page 169
2 "The Celtic Twilight," page 192