CHAPTER IV

IRISH DRAMA
The ideas on drama and the theatre which Yeats tried to popularize show his antagonism to the commercial theatre. According to him they gave nothing more than what Rossetti called "the soulless self-reflections of man's skill." His own attitude is well expressed in "Pages from a Diary in 1930" where he writes, "I wished through the drama, through a commingling of verse and dance, through singing that was also speech, through what I called the applied arts of literature, to plunge it back into social life." He laid down three rules for the plays which he desired to produce in the theatre he himself built up:

"First. Our plays must be literature or written in the spirit of literature. The modern theatre has died away to what it is because the writers have thought of their audiences instead of their subject."

"Second. If we are to make a drama of energy, of extravagance, of fantasy, of musical and noble speech, we shall need an appropriate stage-management. Up to a generation or two ago, and to our own generation, here and there, lingered a method of acting and of stage-management,

2. Ibid., p.300.
3. Ibid., p.164.
which had come down, losing much of its beauty and meaning on the way, from the days of Shakespeare."\(^4\)

"Third. We must have a new kind of scenic art....The background should be of as little importance as the background of a portrait - group, and it should, when possible, be of one colour or of one tint, that the persons on the stage, wherever they stand, may harmonise with it or contrast with it and preoccupy our attention."\(^5\)

As regards his own choice of Irish material he wrote

"Ireland in our day has rediscovered the old heroic literature of Ireland, and she has rediscovered the imagination of the folk. My own preoccupation is more with the heroic legend than with the folk,"\(^6\) etc. His ideal of the drama relates to what he calls the theatre of art and is very different from the prevalent fashion of the day, "our plays will be for the most part remote, spiritual, and ideal."\(^7\) In his essay "Certain Noble Plays of Japan" Yeats has stated his own principal source of inspiration in writing for the stage: "In fact, with the help of Japanese plays 'translated by Ernest Fenollosa and finished by Ezra Pound,' I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect, and symbolic, and having no need of mob or Press to pay its way - an aristocratic form."\(^8\)

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4. Ibid., p.170
5. Ibid., p.177
6. Ibid., p.183
8. Ibid., p.221
"An art is always at its greatest when it is most human. Greek acting was great because it did all but everything with the voice, and modern acting may be great when it does everything with voice and movement. But an art which smothers these things with bad painting, with innumerable garish colours, with continual restless mimicries of the surface of life, is an art of fading humanity, a decaying art."

Yeats is author of twenty-six plays according to the Collected Edition published by Macmillan in 1953. Of these with the exception of "The King of the Great Clock Tower" (1935) all are one-act plays and the medium in the majority of them is verse, prose being used in only about half a dozen of these. As regards the prose plays Yeats states: "I am writing these prose plays knowing well that they are rather a departure from my own proper work, which is plays in verse. I am doing them because prose plays are necessary to our little theatre, and also because one likes to try experiments."  

Yeats has been the creator of the Irish Theatre with the collaboration of Lady Gregory. The present century has witnessed several plays at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, of outstanding value.

The first of the plays in the Collected edition is "The Countess Cathleen" written in 1892. The period lies outside of our time limit. For in the present work we are concerned with plays written in the 20th century. We shall briefly analyse this early play, mainly because of the interest in an eschatological doctrine, apparently in conflict with the Christian view. The plot describes how the humane Countess is prepared to sell all her vast property so as to offer relief to a famine-stricken population, selling their souls to the agents of the Devil to make provision for the body. The agents of the dark power steal her money and make off with it secretly. The Countess sells her soul for a huge sum of money which is distributed to the poor. This was for her an unendurable strain. Her heart broke with misery. But she was not in the power of Satan in spite of this bargain. Her charity redeemed her in the eyes of God and the following unconventional statement comes from an angel who escorts her soul to heaven: "The Light of Lights/ Looks always on the motive, not the deed,/The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone." What led to much criticism was the view that the Countess's soul fetched higher price than that of a poor workman. Are souls graded according to birth and position?


12. Ibid., p.50.
Other characters, able to meet Satan's challenge include Aleel, the poet who loves the Countess, conquering evil by love, Oona her foster-mother by her unflinching loyalty, Mary, a peasant's wife, by her readiness to suffer and endure rather than submit to its power.

The fable is partly mythological, the scene is laid in the Ireland of old times. Stage directions head each scene. Although the play contains an idea which is remarkable for unorthodoxy, technically it does not suggest any special feature which we can note. The two agents of the Devil are dressed as Eastern merchants carrying small carpets. In this account Yeats is, apparently, giving evidence of an interest in the picturesque, developed, one would imagine, by his training as an artist.

2. "The Land of Heart's Desire" (1894) is an account of a young wife being led away to Utopia,

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;

This journey to the Land of Heart's Desire is made by a Faery Child; she dies without any sign of ailment because

earthly life is incompatible with existence in such a Utopia. The account belongs to some remote time and the scene is laid in county Sligo. The time of composition belongs to "the Celtic Twilight" period of the poet's life which is generally thought to extend to 1904. It is interspersed with songs and dance and may, therefore, be described as a dance drama or opera. Its characteristic is a yearning for the impossible, associated with the romantic temper. The grip on everyday reality is lax and the poet is apparently indifferent to this, his preoccupation being with dream and vision.

3. With "Cathleen Ni Houlihan" (1902) Yeats seems to become a contemporary in his design although avoiding realism in his treatment of the plot. For the incident described is supposed to take place in 1798 and Cathleen is Ireland under the domination of the British. Of this she speaks indirectly as: "Too many strangers in the house."

They have taken: "My four beautiful green fields." About herself she says: "Some call me the Poor Old Woman, and there are some that call me Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan." She is getting ready for a conflict with the Imperial Power and her hope is that of "putting the strangers out of my house." Michael of the play was about to wed

15. Ibid., p.81.  
16. Ibid., p.85.  
17. Ibid., p.84.
a beautiful girl who was to bring in a large dowry but he followed her without caring for personal happiness. A little lad Patrick was asked if he saw the old woman going down the road but he said, "I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen." An impersonation of resurgent Ireland would always seem young and beautiful to patriots aspiring to freedom. The play is in prose but it contains songs. The language is poetical, well expressing the temper of a people remarkable for a youthful attitude and capacity for feeling, to which more sophisticated communities do not often provide a parallel.

4. "Deirdre" (1907) is a verse play. The plot concerns King Conchubar who in his old age was infatuated by the child Deirdre and decided to marry her after she had grown up. But he was frustrated. For "Naoise, the son of Usna, climbed up there,/ And having wooed, or, as some say, been wooed,/ Carried her off." The king was angry, and seven years later he invited the couple to his palace where he had Naoise killed, expecting thereby to be able to marry Deirdre. But the bereaved woman did not outlive her husband. The play includes many songs and the characters are mainly mythological. Blank

18. Ibid., p. 88
19. Ibid., p. 172.
verse more or less of the Shakespearian type is used. The best lines in the play are spoken by Fergus:

I have believed the best of every man,
And find that to believe it is enough
To make a bad man show him at his best,
Or even a good man swing his lantern higher.  

One would naturally compare this play with Synge's on the same subject. The latter seems to emphasize the horror of the betrayal and the doubts that invade the minds of the couple when the invitation is made. In Yeats' play music and the quality of the verse-dialogue combine to build up a poetic atmosphere where the horror seems less significant than the passion. Yeats has presented a number of passionate characters who argue and yet rely upon their passion rather than reason to express their point of view. Deirdre's death is a sacrifice to love yet Conchubar did not think that he was in the wrong:

I, being King, did right
In choosing her most fitting to be Queen,
And letting no boy lover take the sway.  

20. Ibid., p.181
21. Ibid., p.203
"At the Hawk's Well" (1917), also written in blank verse, introduces what may be called the Cuchulain Series of Plays. The period is described as the Irish Heroic age. Cuchulain comes to the Hawk's well. It is protected by a guardian and has the power to confer immortality upon whoever is able to taste its water which appears at long intervals and lasts for a few moments only. An old man has waited already for fifty years in expectation of the miraculous flood, but has always missed it. He tried to persuade Cuchulain to give the first chance to taste, should this water appear in the well. The play ends with songs by Musicians, of which the following forms a part:

'The man that I praise',
Cries out the empty well,
'Lives all his days
Where a hand on the bell
Can call the milch cows
To the comfortable door of his house.
Who but an idiot would praise
Dry stones in a well?"22

One technique used in this play and elsewhere is that of unfolding and folding of the cloth by the actors. This is probably intended as a sign that the scene is being changed.

22. Ibid., p.219.
This idea seems to be confirmed by this stage direction in "Calvary." "At the beginning of the play the First Musician comes to the front of the bare place, round three sides of which the audience are seated, with a folded cloth hanging from his joined hands. Two other Musicians come, as in the preceding play, ("The Dreaming of the Bones"), one from either side, and unfold the cloth so that it shuts out the stage, and then fold it again, singing and moving rhythmically. They do the same at the end of the play, which enables the players to leave the stage unseen."^23 The idea in unfolding the cloth may be one of the following:

1. to keep the actors' hand engaged;
2. to indicate a change of scene;
3. as a symbol to show that man learns the great mysteries and forgets them;
4. the process of intuition as a fleeting experience.

The passage quoted above as song of the empty well seems to reject the idea of immortality, - ever enduring and sapless, as unattractive if not positively unacceptable. The singer declares that to exist is no comfort, to live should be the aim.

6. "The Green Helmet" (1910) is described by the author as "An Heroic Farce". The plot is fantastic and seem to recall

23. Ibid., p.449
the story of "Gawain and the Green Knight." The knight allows his head to be cut off and demands that somebody should also offer his head as a return of courtesy. Cuchulain agrees to do this although his wife Emer wails bitterly at the prospect. There is, however, no tragic end. The denouement is happy. The Red Man who makes the challenge describes himself as "the Rector of this land" and places a helmet on Cuchulain's head. The following concluding verses reveal the business to which the Red Man is vowed:

And I choose the laughing lip
That shall not turn from laughing, whatever rise or fall;
The heart that grows no bitterer although betrayed by all;
The hand that loves to scatter; the life like a gambler's throw;
And these things I make prosper, till a day come that I know,
When heart and mind shall darken that the weak may end the strong,
And the long-remembering harpers have matter for their song.24

We learn that Cuchulain is chosen as the champion of his country because he has hit the fancy of the Rector, — the Red Man, and we can now look forward to the various feats of Cuchulain, set forth in the plays that follow. "The Green Helmet" has a legendary subject, its purpose evidently is to recall the Irish heroic age. Yeats is remote from contemporary

24. Ibid., p. 243
theme and treatment which we, however, find in full measure in his "Purgatory" published in the year of his death.

7. "The Pot of Broth" by W.B. Yeats belongs to the year 1904. The work was produced with some assistance from Lady Gregory. She wrote: "For The Pot of Broth I wrote dialogue and I worked as well at the plot and construction of some of the poetic plays, especially The King's Threshold and Beirdre; for I have learned by this time a good deal about playwriting to which I had never given a thought before." 25

There are three characters in the play, John Coneely his wife Sibby Coneely and a tramp. Yeats avoided the middle-class world. It seemed to him to be devoid of an imaginative quality, found in the upper and the lowest strata of society. These live uninhibited lives, free from fear. "There are only three classes I respect", he exclaimed, "the aristocracy who are above fear; the poor who are beneath it, and the artists whom God has made reckless!" 26 These three classes of men are usually painted by him with understanding.

The actual plot recalls Ben Jonson's "The Alchemist". The Tudor dramatist ruthlessly exposes and laughs at human gullibility. Ben Jonson wrote with an eye to correction and

25. Peter Ure's Yeats the Playwright (Routledge, 1963), p.35n.
stressed the element of folly. Yeats, however, writes about a similar weakness but his design does not seem to be correction. For certain follies reflect the national character. To lose them, therefore, is to lose an interesting trait. Hence the play cannot be regarded as a critical comedy, its purpose being pure entertainment.

A tramp enters the kitchen of the Goneelys and looks for something to eat. The kitchen is bare except for some milk and smell of spirits. His search is interrupted by a crackling noise outside, followed by directions given in a feminine voice. The orders were to stop the schemer of a hen flying upon the thatch like an eagle. The masculine voice replied, saying that he had been baffled by the hen's quick movements. The tramp identified the husband and the wife. He had nothing on his person except the stone he had picked up to throw at a yelping dog but he remembered that when he was younger he had no trouble in getting a dinner. For he well knew the art of getting round people even when they were not initially well disposed to him.

Preparations for entertaining "his Reverence" were being made at the cottage. The hen was soon dressed for the dinner. The husband and wife express obvious dissatisfaction that
their neighbours had found an excuse to put the expense of
the dinner on them. At the point the wife notices the
tramp, and asks him to go away. She said, she was expecting
company and had no extra food to give him. The tramp,
however, was too clever for these simple-minded people.
He says, he is in the habit of bestowing favour and is
everywhere asked to pay a second visit after he had made
the first. He holds up the stone as evidence of a miraculous
power he possessed. Sibby, credulous by nature, wondered if
he had been among the Sidhe. For where else could he obtain
such power? The tramp explaining the virtue of the stone,
said that it was enchanted and could make a broth for dinner.
He takes a pot, puts it on the oven with the stone inside,
filling it with water and promising that, before long there
will be a grand pot of broth for him. As he says this he
puts one after another a series of ingredients into the pot
which the couple hardly notice. As regards how he came by
the stone he said that he had obtained it from a man who,
he thought, was one minute as small as a nut, and the next
minute his head was in the stars. Sibby and her husband
believed all the yarns the tramp could improvise. He put
the chicken into the pot and wanted time so that it might
properly boil and give the required flavour to the broth.
Resorting to a more complex strategy he sang songs describing how people expressed sorrow and loss when Sibby was married and taken away by her husband. Apparently, the whole village adored her beauty. Upon this Sibby told her husband that he was not good enough for her. The woman was completely in the tramp's power and she tasted some spoonfuls of the broth greatly liking the flavour while the tramp drank it all up quickly. He said that the stone was something a lord might envy, but it was a great bother to carry a pot about and so he would part with it if the couple gave him some food to eat on the way to the next village. He picked up the chicken and a bottle of whiskey as a part of his bargain with the husband's consent and they regarded him as "a very gifted man".

The play is based upon Irish life and its superstitious beliefs. The behaviour of the tramp is unusual. Outside Ireland he could scarcely get an opportunity to enter a household, far less to tell the kind of story he did. The play contains references to the Sidhe, the Fiannta-h-Eireann and to certain Roman Catholic beliefs and practices. The tramp, however, uses a highly poetical language: "I'll show it to you in a minute as white as your own skin, where the lily and the rose are fighting for mastery. Did you ever hear what the boys in your own parish were singing after
you being married from them - such of them that had any
voice at all and not choked with crying, or senseless with
the drop of drink they took to comfort them and to keep
their wits from going, with the loss of you?"27

As regards belief in the Sidhe Yeats writes in
"The Celtie Twilight" : "No matter what one doubts one
never doubts the faeries,..."28 If this is the Irish belief
it explains the attitude of the couple. Sibby is, however,
moved by the tribute to her beauty rather than by the
accounts of the Sidhe. At the time of writing the play
(1904) Yeats also wrote "In the Seven Woods" which includes
the poem "Adam's Curse" the lines :

...'To be born woman is to know -
Although they do not talk of it at school—
That we must labour to be beautiful'.29

The tramp obviously, cheated the couple. But he cheated them
only of a dinner. It is something about which a moral tone
seems uncalled for. His crime boils down to using his wit
to wangle a dinner. There is another interpretation which
may also apply to the case. Yeats himself suggests it in
"Samhain : 1903" where he regards the love of mischief as
lying very near "the core of Irish intellect."30 The

27. One-Act Plays of To-day, Third Series, p.230.
30. Explorations, p.103.
tramp might have been led by hunger to the practice of the little fraud but there is also something to be said about the love of mischief which is so near the core of Irish intellect.

8. "On Baile's Strand" (1904) is written in a mixture of prose and verse and contains some songs. It is a continuation of the Cuchulain theme and we learn from it the mysterious ancestry of the great hero:

As I have that clean hawk out of the air
That, as men say, begot this body of mine
Upon a mortal woman.  

Cuchulain takes oath of obedience to Conchubar;

I swear to be obedient in all things
To Conchubar, and to uphold his children.

This is done after some preliminary opposition, for the proud hero though much younger, resented subordination to Conchubar. The central theme is, however, tragic. A young man comes from a neighbouring country and challenges Cuchulain to battle. Without giving any details about his ancestry to establish a noble lineage so as to make the challenge acceptable, he merely observed:

I will give no other proof than the hawk gives
That it's no sparrow! 

32. Ibid., p. 263
33. Ibid., p. 265
Cuchulain kills him and then comes to know that he is his son by Aoife; the description of Aoife is remarkable, containing as it does a homage to Maud Gonne's beauty.

Ah! Conchubhar, had you seen her
With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers
Thrown backward, and the bowstring at her ear
Or sitting at the fire with those grave eyes
Full of good counsel as it were with wine,
Or when love ran through all the lineaments
Of her wild body — although she had no child,
None other had all beauty, queen or lover,
Or was so fitted to give birth to kings.\(^{34}\)

Cuchulain driven to madness by his anguish fights under a Druid Spell with the waves. The Fool's comment on this comes near the play's end: "The waves have mastered him!" The concluding sentence, however, is put into the mouth of his companion, the Blind Man, reporting the progress of the cooking: "Come this way; come quickly! The ovens will be full. We will put our hands into the ovens."\(^ {35}\) This anti-climax is designed to indicate that whatever heroism may be displayed, the commonplace world will assert its power and demand attention to itself.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., p.265. \(^{34}\) Ibid., pp. 258-259

\(^{35}\) Ibid., p.278.
"The Only Jealousy of Emer" (1919). One of the most notable things in this play is a song about beauty and the centuries required for arriving at its perfection:

A woman's beauty is like a white
Frail bird, like a white sea-bird
alone
At daybreak after stormy night
Between two furrows upon the ploughed
land.

Emer, the wife of Cuchulain, sends for his mistress Eithne Inguba and reports how her husband after killing his son fought with the waves, his senseless body being afterwards washed up by the sea and laid at her door, Eithne Inguba knows that she is better loved than anyone as his newest love. At the same time she is aware that Cuchulain will turn to his wife rather than his mistress: "but in the end/ Will love the woman best who loved him first/ And loved him through the years when love seemed lost!"

The ghost of Cuchulain is one of the characters, another is a woman of the Sidhe (wearing mask). Eithne Inguba declares that she brought the hero back to life after Emer had renounced her claims on him. The hero returns to the arms of his mistress. This he could do because his devoted queen

had given up her rights as wife for the sake of his life and happiness. Some verses describing the uncertainty of Inguba's reception at the palace of the Queen Emer achieve a symbolic effect.

But now one comes on hesitating feet,
Young Eithne Inguba, Cuchulain's mistress.
She stands a moment in the open door.
Beyond the open door the bitter sea,
The shining, bitter sea, is crying out,
(singing) White shell, white wing!
I will not choose for my friend
A frail, unserviceable thing
That drifts and dreams, and but knows.
That waters are without end
And that wind blows. 38

After Cuchulain is restored the Musicians sing. The unfolding and folding of the cloth indicate a change, more significant than a change of scene on the stage. The death of Cuchulain at the hands of a Blind Man is described in a verse play written on the subject in 1939. The great hero, who is turned grey, offers himself to the Blind Man to be slain by him. His last act is not heroic; it has, however, another quality ranking even higher. By his death he seeks to benefit a poor man as he had always benefited both the rich and the poor as long as he had lived.

38. Ibid., p.283
"The Hour-Glass" (1914) is written in a combination of verse and prose. The play is markedly strong in its intellectual element, which perhaps accounts for the denial of God and Eternity by a teacher, introduced as a "Wise Man". There are some pupils among the characters and a Fool possessing the only kind of knowledge whose worth is admitted through an angel's intervention at the end. The angel tells the Wise Man that he will die "when the last grain of sand has fallen through this glass."  

His teaching has been so wicked that for a long time no one has been able to enter heaven. He has denied purgatory but not hell. The angel explained what hell means. The view seems to be consistent with a sense of ultimate values:

"Hell is the place of those who have denied;"  

The Angel tells him that before his hour runs out, he must find some one who still believes. All his pupils give learned answers but not one of them tells him that he believes. The Fool who had said earlier, "When one is so quiet that there is not a thought in one's head maybe, there is something that wakes up inside one, something happy and

39. Ibid., p.308
40. Ibid., p.309
quiet, and then all in a minute one can smell summer flowers, and tall people go by, happy and laughing, but they will not let us look at their faces." 41

The Wise Man dies but he had a moment of illumination in which he seems to realize the truth of Dante's famous words: 'la sua volontade e nostra pace', rendering it in the following language:

May God's will prevail on the instant,
Although His will be my eternal pain.
I have no question:
It is enough, I know what fixed the station
Of star and cloud.
And knowing all, I cry
That whatso God has willed
On the instant be fulfilled,
Though that be my damnation. 42

The Angel enters holding a casket and the Fool notices a white butterfly escaping from the dead man's mouth. It is his soul and is put in the casket the lid of which will be opened in the Garden of Paradise. The Fool goes on speaking and refers to the winds still blowing and the grass still growing evidently as indication of God's everlasting mercy. If God had judged man's sinfulness with the severity it deserved, could these blessings still continue?

41. Ibid., p.306
42. Ibid., p.323
"The Dreaming of the Bones" (1919) is in verse. The subject-matter is the legend of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla who were responsible for bringing the Normans to Ireland with great loss to the country. For seven hundred years they have roamed about as spectres seeking forgiveness for the betrayal of their country. In this play they appeal for the purpose of a young man who was connected with a political outrage and was trying to conceal himself from the agents of law and order, hot on his trail. The young man refuses to forgive:

\[
0, \text{ never, never}
\]

\[
\text{Shall Diarmuid and Dervorgilla be forgiven.}\]^{43}

There are certain questions which occur to the young man and he asks them freely. We have in these questions and in the answers they evoke a sense of the terrible pain and frustration of the ghostly existence, which long survives flesh and blood:

**Young Man** ... Why do you dance?

Why do you gaze, and with so passionate eyes,
One on the other; and then turn away,
Covering your eyes, and weave it in a dance?
Who are you? what are you? you are not natural.

**Young Girl.** Seven hundred years our lips have never met.

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43. Ibid., p.442
Young Man. Why do you look so strangely at one another, so strangely and so sweetly?

Young Girl. Seven hundred years.

Young Man. So strangely and so sweetly. 44

A ghostly existence stretching far beyond this life as a form of penance seems to be acknowledged as real by the poet and he has several times stated this belief. The tragic story is dramatized with a rich poetical flavour and certain technical methods are applied, which are apparently new on the English stage. The actors are advised to fold and unfold a piece of cloth to the accompaniment of song, implying thereby a change of scene. It may be that this is the poet's idea of offering comment upon the changes which keep on coming with an effect of alternation so that nothing seems to be lost or gained on a long view.

12. In "The Words upon the Window-Pane" (1934-) one of the characters Dr. Trench apparently holds identical views on the subject of a ghostly existence beyond life. Dr Trench says: "Sometimes a spirit relives not the pain of death but some passionate or tragic moment of life." 45 "The Dreaming of the Bones" concludes with a song sung by Musicians. Masks are

44. Ibid., p.443
45. Ibid., p.604
also used and the folding and unfolding of the cloth, a technical device with many implications, is accompanied by singing of songs. The play seems to be a contrast between an act of betrayal and an act of service to one's country. When the two types meet there can be no real exchange between them and yet some human pathos is engendered by the contact in which general participation is possible. "The Words upon the Window-Pane" describes a seance in which the spirit of Jonathan Swift is evoked. He answers question regarding his relation with Vanessa. The reason Swift gives for not marrying anyone seems to be correct in the opinion of John Corbet who attended the seance and was engaged in writing a doctoral dissertation on Swift at Cambridge. Swift's voice, reflected in that of the medium, said, "I have something in my blood that no child must inherit. I have constant attacks of dizziness; I pretend they come from a surfeit of fruit when I was a child." In this respect we notice a similarity of attitude between the father who kills his son in "Purgatory" and Swift who refuses to have a family for fear of perpetuating undesirable traits of character.

46. Ibid., p.609
Corbet is ready to believe Swift's explanation as true and has no doubt about the identity of the ghost speaking through the medium. In a three act play - "The World of Light" 47 by Aldous Huxley there is an attempt to satirize all forms of spiritualism through the characters of Wenham, Hugo, and Mr. Gray. We find from the account that Mr. Wenham was a victim of an imposture in the name of spiritualism. But the fraud, however, was not exposed. An interested person stops Mr. Wenham's mouth with gold. Yeats evidently believed in communications from the world of the dead. His "A Vision" 48 gives an exposition of such a faith.

13. "Purgatory" (1939) is a verse drama with only two characters, a boy and an old man. We see them in front of a ruined house with a bare tree in the background. The old man speaks to the boy in words which introduce the theme, developed in less than an hour's time with the prospect unchanged. "The moonlight falls upon the path, / The shadow of a cloud upon the house, / And that's symbolical; study that tree, / What is it like?" 49

Immediately after this the old man in a reminiscent

mood goes on to say that he saw the tree fifty years ago:
"Before the thunderbolt had riven it,..." 50

Then follows the supernatural element so necessary for the progress of the plot. The old man sees human forms in that broken-down house without stairs and floors. There, in fact, his parents are reliving their transgressions: the poet held firmly the idea that the dead had to undergo such a purgatory. The mother was well-to-do and a member of a distinguished family and the father was groom but the social difference did not prevent them from marrying. After marriage he had squandered on wine, women and cards all the wealth which his wife had brought. His extravagant habit ruined the family property. He cut down the trees and destroyed the security which the family's wealth, had assured: "to kill a house/Where great men grew up, married, died,/I here declare a capital offence." 51 When he was sixteen his father set fire to the house in a drunken fit. He struck his father with a knife, killed him and escaped. As he had no education and no home to shelter him, he became a pedlar, a profession which he thought good enough for him being no more than his father's son. In that ruined house the lighted window becomes visible with a young girl standing beside it. "This night is the anniversary/Of my mother's wedding night,/Or of the night wherein I was begotten." 52

50. Ibid., p.682
51. Ibid., p.683
52. Ibid., p.685
All the experiences are repeated night after night in this purgatorial form. But the boy complains that he does not hear the noise of the hoof-beat or see the light both which his father does. Yet the stage direction shows that the young girl actually appears at the ruined window and a light is also seen there. The objective view cannot be dismissed as a piece of hallucination. After the recital of the past the old man stabs his son. He is likely to be an image of his grand father and will re-enact his wickedness if permitted to live. When the old man killed him he brought to an end the possibilities he had dreaded.

I finished all that consequence.
I killed that lad because had he grown up
He would have struck a woman's fancy,
Begot, and passed pollution on.
I am a wretched foul old man
And therefore harmless. 53

The killing of the boy is followed by a reference to the tree, stated in the stage direction as bare and now treated as a symbol for a purified soul. Does the old man believe that he has attained to purity by the act, that his purgatorial experience is now at an end? This does not seem to be his view. For he would not have then described himself as "a wretched foul old man." The old man's reason for acting

53. Ibid., p.688
as he did is quite clear. The play is a very complex enquiry into our moral concern with self and society. The murder was a sacrifice to preserve something more valuable than life; it was to preserve the great social values from those who are likely to destroy them. The last words he spoke were a prayer for his mother:

    O God,
    Release my mother's soul from its dream!
    Mankind can do no more. Appease
    The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.54

This play fills only eight and a half pages of *Collected Plays* and its actual duration might not be more than half an hour. Yet a tragic effect is produced, the warring feeling well brought out and the climax of horror achieved without resort to melodrama. The elements in conflict are sacred tradition and an upstart quest for pleasure and sensual satisfaction, ready to stake everything for the purpose. The old man had inherited a strain of his mother's blood and when he slew his father his heart cried out for all the glory lost through his recklessness. The supernatural which Yeats imports into the play and which represents an actual belief on the writer's part is acceptable

54. Ibid., p.689
because of its complete integration with what is presented. Time is a stream flowing inevitably towards the future and the cargo it carries may be poisonous to the generations to come. The old man's desire is to safeguard the future, sacrificing his and his son's present to it. The prayer he offered was chiefly addressed for the well-being of his mother and showed a largeness of soul while referring to "The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead." 55

14. "The Death of Cuchulain" (1939) has a prologue in prose though the rest is written in verse. In the prologue an Old Man declares his intention to produce a play on the death of Cuchulain, being the last of a series concerned with the hero's life and death. He is

55. It is important to note T.S. Eliot's comment upon this play. Praising Yeats's success in "Purgatory", Eliot observes: "It was only in his last play Purgatory that he solved his problem of speech in verse, and laid all his successors under obligation to him." "Poetry and Drama", Selected Prose (Penguin Books, 1953), p.75. W.B. Yeats wanted a suitable medium for his plays and his need was for a language which individualizes: "One must be able to make a king of Faery or an old countryman or a modern lover speak that language which is his and nobody else's, and speak it with so much of emotional subtlety that the hearer may find it hard to know whether it is the thought or the word that has moved him, or whether these could be separated at all." Explorations (Macmillan, London, 1962), p.108. In the short play all his aims seem to have been fully realized.
diffident about its reception because of the preference for realism in the play-going public, and openly declares his hatred of realism by saying: "I spit upon their short bodices, their stiff stays, their toes whereon they spin like pegtops, above all upon that chambermaid face." 56 In the play, Cuchulain receives a message from Eithne Inguba that his lands were being overrun and destroyed by Maeve and her "Connacht ruffians." 57 This is a situation which required that the hero should ride out and fight without delay. But a letter from his wife which was delivered to him by Eithne asked him to wait until a strong army came to his help the next day. Eithne's urgent summons did not represent the wishes of his wife. The Morrigu or the War Goddess appears on the scene with a bird's head. This was a warning that his death was approaching. Cuchulain, however, went forth, receiving six deadly injuries and was met by Aoife whose son by him he had killed by mistake. In revenge she wanted to take his life. But a Blind Man, promised twelve pennies for bringing his head, finally, takes his life with his willing consent. The head of Cuchulain and of six others are represented on the stage by parallelograms.

56. Collected Plays, p.694
57. Ibid., p.695
This mode of representation is preferred by the supposed author, the old man, for "if the dancer can dance properly no wood - carving can look as well as a parallelogram of painted wood."  

The play is brought to a close by a speech by the Morrigu and a song by a singer. The song contains a reference to the transformation of Cuchulain into a symbol whose relevance to modern time is easily seen. The heroes Pearse and Connolly were sustained by the heroic life of Cuchulain:

What stood in the Post Office
With Pearse and Connolly?  
What comes out of the mountain
Where men first shed their blood?  
Who thought Cuchulain till it seemed
He stood where they had stood?  

Yeats in his Cuchulain plays aimed at producing a coherent series. He was anxious not so much to depict the hero's life and action as to draw from both a view of what heroism can do for the glory of human life. This is a recreation of a myth and Yeats was interested in it far more than in the myth itself in its original form such as we may find in Lady Gregory's account, (Cuchulain of Muirthemne).

58. Ibid., p.694  
59. Ibid., pp 704-705  
60. Vide Peter Ure : Yeats the Playwright, p.61 Peter Ure comments upon the five plays forming the series.
Peter Ure draws attention to the nature of the achievement attested by the series: "Yeats's strategy for putting the mythological hero on to the modern stage was cautious and full of ironic reserve in this series of plays. This saved his subject from the Pre-Raphaelite and rhapsodic air that dates the earlier Abbey plays, and from other perishable simplicities, Ossianic or patriotic."61

In the plays which Yeats wrote he did not attempt a correspondence with everyday reality; his purpose, as discussed at the beginning of this section was never to hold the mirror up to life. The Old Man quoted above expresses a violent hatred even of Degas for his realism. This is also the view of Yeats and he had expressed his admiration for the Noh plays of Japan, ("Certain Noble Plays of Japan") and has felt persuaded that its technique could be applied by him and others for the entertainment of a European audience.62 The Japanese plays introduce the element of ritual which provides a symbolic language readily understood by the people. The language, however, cannot be followed elsewhere because of the difference in the historical background and tradition. Symbolism is itself somewhat opposed to dramatic representation and is likely to be an obstacle to adequate understanding.

61. Peter Ure's Yeats the Playwright (Routledge, 1963), p.83
Lady Gregory was a partner of Yeats in his Abbey Theatre venture. Her contribution to a knowledge of the country's past deserves great honour. She has also distinguished herself as a dramatist and several of her plays belong to our province of enquiry. She uses dialect with remarkable ease and effectiveness. In this she seems prompted by one or other of the following designs:

I) To produce a poetical effect by reverting to the simple elements of Irish speech.

II) To add vividness.

III) To achieve an effect of comedy.

IV & V) To represent a quarrel and to show the fertility and resourcefulness of the untaught Irish in its conduct.

Lady Gregory mostly introduces characters from the poorest classes and although she writes about love now and then, this by no means forms a major theme. Hers is a comic world and the business of life takes many twists and turns but does not normally land one in disaster. The plays she writes are about the contemporary world and represents no

63. Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The story of the men of the Red Branch of Ulster, arranged and put into English has been praised by Yeats: "I think this book is the best that has come out of Ireland in my time." Yeats: Explorations (London, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1962), p.3.
striking situation or adventure but her witty inventions like that of the raven on sale in South Africa give an idea of how an Irishman placed in a tight situation will wriggle out of it by the power of mother wit. Lady Gregory does not write symbolically, she does not seek to offer a vision of lasting value. What she gives amuses us; at any rate she preserves for us a picture of contemporary life whose value as a body of sociological material cannot be underrated. Her dramatic talent appears considerable; her sense of conflict which is the essence of drama does not seem to desert her anywhere. And the cause of conflict is often found in situations which seem to be peculiar to Irish life and the Irish outlook. In this sense she seems extraordinarily permeated by the Irish element.

15. The Full Moon[^64^] a detailed analysis of "The Full Moon" by Lady Gregory will be useful as a fairly adequate introduction to her technique. The nature of the men and women suggested in her short dedicatory note and described in the play itself is "naturally cracked or somewhat queer or ... gone wrong in the head."

There are eight characters composing the dramatic persons. The drama is held together by the slender thread of Hyacinth Halvey's fortunes, his expectation of marriage and

appointment as clerk of the Union. This honour to the unsophisticated villagers seems almost as great as that due to a Bishop. The simple people are all of them "half cracked" and the description in the note mentioned above is, therefore, correct. The full moon in the sky is seen in glimpses from a shade where they wait, near Cloon Station. The element of superstition attributes great powers to the moon, all agitations of the mind owe to this source according to it. In fact, it presides over human affairs and controls them in a very effective sense. Superstitious about the moon, these simple people have the most confused and vague notions about diseases and their treatment. Victims of rabies, for example, are to be smothered out-and-out "before the madness will work". If there is madness nobody will detect it better than a mad person. Thus cracked Mary becomes an authority in the diagnosis of madness. In all these talks two things stand out as of peculiar interest. One of them is Halvey's determination to escape from marriage and a settled life into the freedom of poverty and the road: "I'd sooner be among a fleet of tinkers, than attending meetings of the Board!" He is chained as a mad man but he wrests himself free with a cry of "bow wow wow!" This frightens everybody and he goes on the road as a freeman. The other is the poetical

65. Ibid., p.24
66. Ibid., p.34
character of cracked Mary and her brother's affection for her; he seems to develop an uncanny sixth sense so as to stand by her in need. Her own poetical character is very well rendered in the following speech put in her mouth: "Come on, Davideen, come out now, we have the wideness of the night before us. O golden God! All bad things quieten in the night time, and the ugly thing itself will put on some sort of a decent face! Come out now to the night that will give you the song, and will show myself out as beautiful as Helen of the Greek gods, that hanged herself the day there first came a wrinkle on her face!" 67

Apart from these two characters we find in varying degrees different kinds of human weaknesses. In Peter Tannian it is malice, in Mrs. Broderick it is superstition; the other members of the crowd join together discussing madly and absurdly the effects of dog-bite and the reported appearance of a dog at large, biting people and giving them rabies.

The situation has nothing very dramatic about it except as an occasion for the study of eccentricities of character and temper. This the author exploits with a keen sense of its possibilities and the result is highly comical. What contributes to it is not only a demonstration of the foolishness and naivety of the people gathered together but the result is also achieved by the turns of speech put

67. Ibid., p.31
into their mouths, whose English sound is set off by an Irishness which is unmistakable, appearing in the peculiarities of phrases and expressions. In these are reflected the character of a people who are both emotional and sensitive with a gift of natural wit.

16. Coats\textsuperscript{68} turns upon the incident of an accidental exchange of coats, and the discovery two editors make about their sentiments. Contrasting situations produce a comical effect. Professed friendship is followed by deepest anger. The opposite feelings of love and hatred are juxtaposed comically. There is also comedy regarding the editorial problem of finding adequate matter to fill up the columns. They write each other's obituary notices by way of meeting this hard demand and quarrel over doing such an uncharitable thing. The particular type of brain-wave they had, to solve the editorial problem seems very Irish indeed. Finally, the friends are reconciled and agree to print the praise contained in the notices without printing the news of death. For they are both friends now and expect to live for many years more as friends.

17. The Bogie Men\textsuperscript{69} - Two chimney sweepers who had been friends recognize each other as cousins. They were often told of a cousin of superior wealth and refinement and felt that if

\textsuperscript{68} Lady Gregory's \textit{Coats} (G.P.Putnam's Sons, London & New York, 1913)

\textsuperscript{69} Lady Gregory's \textit{The Bogie Men} (G.P.Putnam's Sons, London & New York, 1913).
they met such a man they would not know how to behave with him. Upon the discovery of their relationship and the rejection of this picture of a cousin as false they felt braced up by a sense of comradeship. They would go to America and do great things. Even if they should stay at home the view from the chimney-top would introduce them to the lofty designs of God Himself. It is notable that Lady Gregory in "The Workhouse Ward" and in this play, as well as in the preceding one gives great prominence to the theme of friendship.

18. The Wrens 71- The date of the play, January 22nd, 1799 is the date of the passing of the bill for the Union of Ireland with England. On this day a member of Parliament had asked his servant to call him up at the time of the voting in the House. The servant diverted by strolling singers forgets to do this and the bill is passed by the margin of one vote only. The occasion was one of excitement throughout the country, the servants sharing the passions of their masters. Occasionally, domestic and national issues were confused. If the bill met with success William Hevenor, the street singer, said he would never drink again. His wife Margy, who opposed the bill, changed her opinion and welcomed its passing as this


would ensure a non-alcoholic husband and a peaceful home. Although the bills meant much, the divisions were often made along arbitrary lines. Opposition was, apparently, dictated by personal considerations, irrelevant to the question. Lady Gregory has explained this comic element in the attitude of the people which often showed no concern for the broad questions of policy, being at the mercy of purely domestic or personal problems.

On the Race Course, is a rewriting of Lady Gregory's first play "Twenty-Five" by herself. The characters are only three in number, - Michelin, Julia and Steve Roland. The first two are husband and wife and the last an old lover of Julia. Driven by poverty the couple dress themselves as street singers; the husband assumes the garb of an old man. Such a contrast may be commercially profitable in their estimation. A stranger arrives who is no other than Steve himself, and plays a game of cards with Michelin, losing seven gold pieces with which he had hoped to set up home with Julia, should she still be unmarried. Julia thought this game very wrong but Michelin explained that he did not know which of them lost more.

"Michelin: ... If he parted with his earthly store, it is likely I may have parted with heaven.

Julia: Why did you win it so?

Michelin: ... To fill your little mouth with bees' honey and with bread." What is made admirable is the husband's love.

73. Ibid., p.26.
above that of the lover whose hopes and dreams were shattered. Lady Gregory thus indirectly pays tribute to the marital bond and upholds its sanctity. Julia's last words: "Well, men are a comical class!" establish the unsentimental element in the picture. That she could be the object of so much passion and sacrifice she denies, and suggests that the explanation lies in men's being funny and amusing, which is, of course, not a view the men themselves will subscribe to.

20. McDonough's Wife - A piper's wife held in little honour by neighbours because of allegations against her character, has no one to bury her and mourn her at her death. The scandal against her arose from her habit of roaming abroad at all hours. This practice her neighbours connected with her supposed assignations with people of all sorts. Her husband, however, has a feeling of genuine affection and no suspicion about her character. He wanted her to be buried with proper honour and ceremony. To oppose the feeling among the neighbours he resorted to a contrivance which proved effective. By playing on the flute he drew together an immense crowd of sheep-shearers who formed the funeral procession and mourners at the same time. By this means honour is paid to the dead woman. As a result the husband could claim that her memory would be preserved in the book of the people.

74. Ibid., p.26
"The Jackdaw" by Lady Gregory describes in the form of a delightful comedy the uproar created by a lie told by Nestor, one of the characters, for concealing how he came by ten pounds. This money was, in fact, left to him for Mrs. Broderick, now charged with a debt of the same amount, by her prosperous brother. He gave it to Nestor warning him not to give out his name, lest the sister should ask for more. The secrecy was urged also to avoid the intrusion of an element of sentimentality. Accordingly, Nestor had to resort to a lie; he explained that he had got the money by selling a jackdaw to a friend back from South Africa. Its help, it was pointed out, would be useful for going down into the mines which are ill-lighted or dark. After this story the whole town became crazy, trying to capture jackdaws. Even the donor of the money, Cooney, bagged a couple of birds and the trying magistrates left their benches to join in the hunt. Finally, the truth comes out when a visit is paid to Mrs. Broderick's small shop. There the author of the lie, the donor of the money and the sister, all try various devices to conceal themselves from the magistrates who come greatly worried, seeking the cause of the rumour and the trouble it had given

76. Lady Gregory's The Jackdaw (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons Ltd. n.d.)
rise to. The facts are, however, not disclosed at the end when the play closes but we can see that the situation being well in hand a showdown could no longer be avoided. The dialogue has a clear Irish tang and expresses effectively annoyance and anger. For these sentiments the Irish mode seems to be rich in vocabulary.

22. "The Travelling Man" by Lady Gregory is a miracle play as the author's sub-title declares. On the day the play opens a mother is recalling her past life to her child. She was turned out of a rich man's house many years ago and her character maliciously denigrated. She walked up to a hill near by, her body bleeding from the frequent falls in her attempt to climb. A travelling man came to her side, comforted her and brought her to the cottage where she had lived happily ever since. He asked her to go in and there she met the man she married. From him she received all the happiness she had known in her life. The present occasion was an anniversary of that meeting with the stranger whom she recognized as no other than the King of the World.

After the recital of the facts to her son she went out and on return found a poor ragged man playing

with her son; all the costly crockery did duty as toys and material for various constructions they were engaged in making. Annoyed by the son's behaviour she beat him in spite of the stranger's protests and hustled the latter off with rude words.

The stranger went away, followed by the little boy. As he arrived at the shore he walked on the sea as easily as if it were solid ground. The boy called him back to take the branch of a tree he had left behind. But the travelling man asked the boy to show it to his mother. The mother saw that the bough was not of earthly origin and was convinced that the stranger was, indeed, the King of the World. In many lands including India, the belief prevails that God may make his visit disguised as a poor man. In Brecht's play a visit of gods is also described. Lady Gregory uses the idea in this miracle play. She knows Irish life at its common level intimately and can use dialect with considerable grace and effectiveness. Her pictures grow life-like whether she uses dialect or the speech of the educated. Lady Gregory's plays are all based upon out-of-the-way-situations and upon her concern with the poor, who have to struggle even for a bare existence.

What is remarkable in such men and women is their response to nature and the use of poetical modes for self-expression. The dialect appears delicate and sometimes full of rhythm, reflecting a centre of imaginative life which belongs to the people as a whole rather than to an individual. The characters are often ignorant, ill-informed and superstitious. What she achieves has, nevertheless value, for they live as human beings, and the vitality of what they do and say seems unquestioned. We can indicate a similarity with a work like Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*. Here the servant-heroine learns with great labour things that were entirely untrue but her ignorance proves revealing. In her case as in that of the characters of Lady Gregory's plays the interest is psychological.

23. "Riders to The Sea"\(^7^9\) by J. M. Synge is in prose and hardly fills ten pages of print. Yet no tragedy by a British playwright in the present century has succeeded in evoking the tragic emotion in an equal measure. In praising the play T. R. Henn observes: "Riders to The Sea,

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one of the few effective one-act tragedies in literature, 
is of considerable technical interest, particularly .
in the light of Synge's solution of the problem of 
 obtaining sufficient momentum within a single act.80

The scene is laid in a cottage in Aran Island. 
Synge has himself explained the play's title: "When 
the horses were coming down to the ship an old woman 
saw her son, that was drowned a while ago, riding on 
one of them."81 The plural form of the word is based 
upon Maurya's horror-stricken account of Michael riding 
on a grey pony and Bartley on a red mare. As regards 
the supernatural element it seems especially to belong 
to the Irish atmosphere. There is another hint of the 
supernatural in the play. As Nora and Cathleen listen 
to their mother's dreadful experience, they seem to hear 
"something through the door that is half open behind them." 
Nora whispers half-paralysed: "Did you hear that, Cathleen? 
Did you hear a noise in the north-east?" Already there 
was a reference to a part of the quarter from which the

81. Synge's "The Aran Islands", see also Daniel Corkery: Synge and the Anglo Irish Literature (Longmans, 1931)
noise came: "for the tide's turning at the green head, and the hooker's tacking from the east." Nora had said this and the noise thus seems to come from the sea, the scene of the disaster and seems to indicate a flutter of the ghost, trying to bid farewell. The supernatural is so unobtrusively introduced that one has the feeling that one is transposed to a different world. Professor A. G. Stock observes, "the land is alive with spirits who are known and respected."\(^82\) Yeats in "The Celtic Twilight" wrote: "In Ireland this world and the world we go to after death are not far apart."\(^83\)

The play has a clear beginning, a middle and an end. The beginning describes the two sisters at the cottage discussing Michael's death, Bartley's proposed visit to the Galway fair, etc. Bartley goes away to the fair disobeying his mother who curses him with the words: "He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world."\(^84\)

The middle part describes Maurya's short journey with a walking stick so that she might meet her son and

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the ominous words may be withdrawn. The middle part ends with Maurya's return after her terrifying experience of a sight of her two dead sons "the riders to the sea." Then we have the tragic denouement, which contains an account of this experience, preceded by her moaning - she 'begins to keen softly'. Maurya has no future to look forward to and the food she prescribes for herself is hardly meant for human consumption: "it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and may be a fish that would be stinking."85 Her final prayer gives a sense of her deliverance from the bonds of the flesh: "May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn (bending her head); and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world."86

The last words she speaks indicate her complete detachment: "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied."87 The cathartic effect is seen in a sense of final freedom and an attained grandeur and majesty of the soul. The primitive setting contributes to this effect. There is also a further elevation for her

85. Ibid., p.23
86. Ibid., p.24
87. Ibid., p.24
from the nature of her antagonist. The sea is a relentless enemy and it had fought with her to the last. Now the battle was over: "it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time, surely." She was completely defeated but her defeat made her free, she passed into a spiritual dimension. In the death of her last son her personal life ended. When she prayed, therefore, she thought in terms of humanity.

The emotion of pity is deeply stirred, most of it by Maurya and in the references made to her. When she met Bartley's ghostly apparition, her voice was choked. "I tried to say 'God speed you,' but something choked the words in my throat." When the coffin makers came for their work, one expressed surprise that Maurya with her experience should have forgotten the nails. Pity is felt by Cathleen and Nora when they think of Michael dead at sea, alone, unmourned, a great rower and fisher who is now remembered by "an old shirt and a plain stocking."

The dialectal speech has a considerable poetry and it has primitive quality, expressing human feelings more directly and providing for human values a more transparent

88. Ibid., p.23
89. Ibid., p.21
90. Ibid., p.20
medium. The beautiful English spoken on the Aran Island Yeats observes, "takes its vocabulary from the time of Malory and of the translators of the Bible, but its idiom and its vivid metaphor from Irish." 91

The time factor seems worthy of comment. In examining it we notice a design which bears upon the play's structure. In a play as short as "Riders to the Sea" the occurrence of an expression for several times cannot be regarded as a piece of local mannerism of speech or a mere accident. "This day" is thus made to stand out as the great junction where one bids farewell to time. Maurya had said after recounting her experiences at the spring well where she stood saying a prayer to herself and later, catching a sight of her two dead sons, 'I won't live after them'. Although Maurya still stood before us surviving the children we feel that she is no longer a creature of flesh and blood. The horrors of "these days" are over: "They're all together this time," 92 "this time" suggests an over-present now, a moment of reunion, of being together, which will not be broken up. This is, in fact, a view of eternity expressed in terms of

harmonising with a simple unsophisticated attitude.

24. "Time to Go" by Sean O'Casey. The play has an elaborate stage direction. The purpose seems to be to show how miserably are the men and women involved in making "Filthy lucre", - the biblical phrase has an appropriateness, for the conception here presented is that of an old morality. The scene follows a fair which had just come to an end.

Farrell, proprietor of a general store, charges a couple at fantastic rates for refreshments supplied. They leave with critical remarks against the profiteers. The talk among the local people shows that the priests are just as mercenary as the businessmen. Widda Machree and Kelly from the Isle of Mananaun are introduced. Their standard is a contrast to the situation. They have known each other in a transaction over the sale of a cow; each thinks that some money is owing to the other because the rates charged were supposed either above the normal or below it. Their unexampled behaviour rouses the suspicion

of the profiteers and they are handcuffed and taken charge of by the police sergeant. But they both vanish unaccountably. Two barren trees in the background put forth leaves and blossoms. Some people notice the miracle and kneel down believing the couple to be saints and the visit a miracle. Mrs. Flagonson draws her husband away from such company and urges him to give attention to his business. The trees now wither away and what was a miracle is now thought by many to be no more than a mirage. The supernatural couple profess love for each other as brother and sister, finally, as sweethearts. Evidently, they were both lovers of Christ Jesus and their love, therefore, was a love of God. The earthly scene is crudely represented because what harms and destroys community is not always the design to make money or to drive a hard bargain. Jesus had driven out the money-makers from the temple with severity and an attempted expulsion or, at least, a criticism of money-makers may easily represent an orthodox point of view for a morality. The whole atmosphere is suitably made to resemble a mediaeval world except for a reference to the red or the Bolshevik party as an explanation for the indifference to money shown by the couple. The time of occurrence is indicated as the present because the truth of the view
incorporated in the picture has a timeless significance.

The play has some supernatural elements. They emphasize its character as a morality. The attitude which emerges is critical of the tendency to drive a hard bargain, and which is all too common in the present-day world. The sense that miracle is not impossible even in our modern surrounding has been suggested with due tact.

25. "Hall of Healing" by Sean O'Casey. The play is described as a farce but a serious and sincere one. The title is ironical. The surgery of a doctor in Dublin is crowded with patients but most of them are turned out of doors to shiver in the cold and are readmitted only on the basis of precedence and the production of a ticket. Among the patients several were in a critical condition and the father of a dying baby, the boy of a dying mother made impassioned appeals for help which the doctor did not care to heed. He gave cursory attention to the patients and refused to go anywhere on the ground of not being well himself. The baby's mother announced that it was dead, the doctor left the surgery coughing badly and saying, "Jasus, I'm in a terrible state!"

The caretaker of the dispensary sings merrily of rose-buds in summer and love. The view here given is of


95. Ibid., p.94
human callousness and indifference to others' suffering. The doctor's reference to his own health at the end shows that he himself may soon be called to account for neglecting his duties and for indifference to human affliction. To expose such weakness is not art because they seem to happen always and everywhere. But the situation, nevertheless, moves us to serious reflection since human beings fail thus to achieve a sense of community. Perhaps the playwright has chosen Dublin as the scene of the action as one can see here some of the worst weaknesses plaguing human nature. This is not to suggest that Dublin represents in miniature all the vileness which belongs to the human world. The dialogue is brisk and lively; the comments made by the old woman reveal a sense of a spiritual reality, transcending the business of daily living. They serve to redeem the gloom arising from the exposure.

26. "Bedtime Story" by O'Casey. A bachelor brings a girl to his flat at night, apparently, to read Yeats with her, then he wants to dispose of her before the other inmates of the house know of her presence. All of them know him to be extremely particular about his character. The girl holds the bachelor responsible for her predicament and exacts a huge amount of money before she leaves. The inmates wake up

but the bachelor cannot tell them what had actually happened — they take him to be a victim of somnambulism. The poor man does not know what to do in the situation. The loss of money worries him but he is unable to give the true facts. Lastly, he confronts the policeman, the doctor and the nurse who all come to look after him. The malady will be beyond their skill to discover, while the truth appears so shocking that the young man will never be able to disclose it. The attitude of the bachelor shows a degree of nervousness and embarrassment not compatible with the situation. The temper and behaviour both indicate a Victorian sensitiveness to the question of morals, which does not greatly disturb the present century.

27. "Friends" by Herbert Farjeon. The theme of the play is naïve. A doctor and an undertaker maintain an outward show of mutual dislike. The explanation is "'tis not a good policy, a doctor and an undertaker to be hail fellow and well met with one another." The assumption is a little ridiculous because it seems to suggest that death is hastened to advance the undertaker's business. All the same the two innocents dwell in the light of this belief and to prevent Father Murphy from knowing the actual state of things between them they even fight in right earnest. The

priest intervenes and assures them that friendship between the two will in no way be a financial loss for them. Friendship is thus restored, making everyone happy. This tale of quarrel and reunion bears witness to an unsophisticated society, rare elsewhere, at least in the western world. The nature of the compact is extremely amusing and one wonders if such a thing can ever be thought of outside the world where the scene is laid.

28. "In the Train" by Frank O'Connor is in Anglo-Irish dialect seen in the turns of the sentences rather than in the words used. The writer aims at a poetic style and the manner resorted to may be a successful evocation. The whole scene takes place in a train where a wife charged with her husband's murder and acquitted after due trial is travelling with a number of people. They want to know if actually the love of a young man had led her to the crime. She does not offer a direct answer but refers to the young man as: "He's no more to me than the salt sea." This would seem to imply that between the two the relationship was a bitter one or that the relationship was nonexistent.

98. Ibid., p.122.


100. Ibid., p.260.
But nothing is suggested to explain how the murder was caused.
The presence of a drunken man provides occasional passages of
comedy in the sombre atmosphere. The train journey is perhaps
a realistic mode of continuing some of the excitement of the
trial from which no one has yet fully recovered. At least such
a background has the attraction of novelty.

29. *"The Doctor from Dunmore"*\(^{101}\) by Thomas Patrick Dillon
and Nolan Leary. A play in prose giving a picture of Irish
social life, reflecting the people's sense of humour and also
their cunning. A doctor demands ten pounds as fee to treat a
poor patient and is ferried across a river. He examines the
patient and assures that the treatment so far has been along
right lines and that the patient was out of danger. The fee
offered represents in part the dowry of a girl but the doctor
is avaricious and does not mind how the money is raised. As
he wants to return he has no one ready to carry him across
the river. Finally, he parts with five pounds as a means of
overcoming the ill will against him. The sum is restored to the
girl. Further the ferrymen demanded the bell in the doctor's
parlour. The villagers sprung a surprise on him by producing
the bell. They had taken possession of it believing that the
doctor's consent would be available. The bell, they explained,

\(^{101}\) T.P. Dillon and N. Leary's *"The Doctor from Dunmore"*,
Ten Selected One-Act Plays (Harrap's Modern English
Series, 1959).
would be useful in inviting the villagers to the church service. The doctor could say nothing in the presence of fait accompli. What we see in this play is a simple religious attitude and a readiness to sacrifice self interest for promoting good neighbourly feeling, combined with an astute capacity for bargaining. There is also an enthusiasm for hearing stories which the old and young alike exhibited. The story of Medas is told by the village headman which all delight to hear although they had heard it before many a time. The doctor from Dunmore remained cold and distant because apparently, he belonged to a more sophisticated society. The element of dialect is not prominent although the sentences have sometimes an Irish cast.

30. "She was No Lady" is in two scenes by St. John Ervine. This is an amusing study in the failure to adapt oneself to the requirements of high society to which one obtains a passport through success. Sir Alfred Pickles is a very prosperous man, but he rose from poverty. His wife used to scrub, wash and bake for him. But in the Park Lane mansion he lives royally while she hungers for the old life and its habits. A friend arranged for her an empty house where she

could scrub and clean as in the past twice a week. She left home regularly on false pretexts for this purpose. The husband soon found out that she was not telling the truth in explaining her absence for hours. A private detective watched her and after much effort and enquiry tracked her down to the house and discovered her ludicrous appetite for menial work. The husband, however, had imagined a secret intrigue as explanation and had wondered what led to the collapse of a marriage which had lasted so long. She was in her middle life and the hypothesis of love intrigue did not seem to work. The result of the enquiry produces a comical effect from the deflationary conclusion to which it led. The husband made due provision for the wife's inveterate attachment to low life, unweakened by the prosperity of her later days. The cockney accents of the husband and of the wife tend to liveliness in the dialogue. There is a suggestion that some people cannot travel very far from their social origins without a psychological breakdown. As a theme it has a certain amount of freshness and is interesting because what is said here may be substantially true.