The Influence of Gaelic Sources on the Poetry of the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival

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THE INFLUENCE OF GAELIC SOURCES ON THE POETRY OF THE
ANGLO-IRISH LITERARY REVIVAL

By

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CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GAELIC REVIVAL

The position which Ireland holds in the literature of the world first came to be understood around the beginning of this present century. Up to that time, it was customary either to ignore the existence of any such literature, or to speak in slighting terms of it. This was due in great measure to the low state into which the Irish nation had fallen after the Cromwellian overthrow of the old Gaelic order, and in part to the official English attitude, summed up in the words: Can anything good come out of Ireland?

In the closing years of the nineteenth century, however, a literary renaissance began in Ireland which was destined to bring about a change in this situation, and to give Irishmen an opportunity of asserting their nation's place among the literature of the world. This was the movement that has come to be known as the Anglo-Irish revival.

Although this re-birth of literature in Ireland was mainly in the English tongue, it owed its inspiration to a contemporaneous movement taking place in the native language of Ireland, Gaelic. It will be the purpose of this chapter to trace the development of this latter movement and show its significance in influencing both the forms and content of literature written by Irishmen in the English language.

In very early times, Ireland had been able to act upon Anglo-Saxon
literature in several ways: first, by means of Irish scholars in the monasteries of Britain; next, through Norse literature, which, in turn, affected English literature; and finally, through the intermixture of the Celtic racial strain with Anglo-Saxon blood.

Matthew Arnold quotes the English Professor Morley as saying that

The story of our literature begins with the Gael.

... but for early, frequent, and various contact with the race, which, in its half-barbarous days invented Oisin's dialogues with Saint Patrick, and that quickened afterwards the Northman's blood in France and Germany, England would not have produced a Shakespeare.¹

A noted Gaelic scholar, Dr. George Sigerson, thinks that but for the influence of the Celtic spirit, Shakespeare would not have produced A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Tempest, or Macbeth; that the aerial beings which characterize the first-named plays and the somber, supernatural atmosphere of the third breathe the very spirit of Celtic literature.²

Another eminent critic, F. S. Boas, writing on the Celtic element in King Lear, says:

In this play, as in Macbeth, Shakespeare drew his chief materials from the storehouse of Celtic tradition, and he has sought to create a dramatic atmosphere that would harmonize with his subject. In Macbeth, he had dealt with the imaginative and mystical elements in the Celtic nature ... But in King Lear he singled out ... its uncontrollable and wayward passion ... ³

As evidence of the direct influence of Gaelic literature on Shake-

³F. S. Boas. Shakespeare and his Predecessors. 442. Quoted by Professor A. W. Verity in Notes to King Lear, Cambridge University Press, 1928, 121.
Dr. Sigerson points out that in *Henry V* mention is made of an old Gaelic song, "Cailín, cas tu re me?" which, according to Sigerson, is also given in Queen Elizabeth's Virginal Book, so that Irish music must have been known and admired at her court.  

"Teutonic poetry, in certain particulars," writes Dr. Sigerson, "appears to have germinated from the seed which fell from the ripe Irish harvest. The alliteration found in *Beowulf* ... seems a rather crude imitation." This theory, that alliteration came into Anglo-Saxon through the Gaelic, is based on the fact that Irish missionaries, who evangelized Northumbria and founded the great schools of Lindisfarne and Whitby, were the first teachers of the northern Anglo-Saxons. In fact, Dr. Sigerson ventures to say that

The kindred peoples of France and Spain were naturally not less influenced than the Teutonic races. The Romans did not give them rhyme; their own literature had perished; consequently they borrowed from the islands to which, in Caesar's time, the Continental Druids were sent for training. Assonance rhyme, found in some Anglo-Norman poems, was common in the Romance of Oc and all related dialects. "It is clearly the Irish Comharda" (correspondence), writes an English authority, Mr. Guest, "though not submitted in the Romance dialects to the nice rules which regulate its assonances in the Gaelic."  

Perhaps the first great English poet to derive inspiration from

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Gaelic sources was Edmund Spenser. In the Faerie Queen he immortalizes the beauties of Irish scenery and pays tribute to the ancient renown of the nation:

"Whilome when Ireland flourished in fame
Of wealth and goodness far above the rest
Of all that bear the British Islands name."

There can be little doubt that Spenser was greatly influenced by the spirit of the Irish countryside. Not only are the material beauties of Ireland—mountains, woods, and rivers—mirrored in the Faerie Queen, but its spiritual world also. The very name of Una is Irish, and the Gaelic Puca appears in trimmed English as "the Pouke," whom Shakespeare again introduces as Puck, just as the Gaelic Madb of legend becomes "Queen Mab."

Spenser shows that he not only admired Irish scenery, but was acquainted, to a certain extent, with Gaelic poetry. When Eudoxus asks:

"Have they any art in their compositions, or bee they anything wittie in or well savoured as poems should be?" Spenser (as Irenaeus) replies:

"Yes, truley, I have caused divers of them to be translated unto me, that I might understand them, and surely they savoured of sweet wit and good invention, but skilled not of the goodly ornaments of poetry."

It is quite understandable that the Gaelic poems should have lost a great deal of their metric subtlety and beauty of style in a prose translation. Yet Spenser concedes that "they were sprinkled with some pretty

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\[\text{Edmund Spenser. } "\text{A View of the State of Ireland,}" \text{ from } \text{A Collection of Tracts and Treatises Illustrative of the Natural History, Antiquities, and the Political and Social State of Ireland, 2 vols., } \text{Dublin, Alex. Thom and Sons, MDCCCLX, 498.}\]
flowers of their natural device, which gave good grace and comeliness unto them."\textsuperscript{8}

In view of Spenser's subsequent downfall and disgrace, it is interesting to note the tribute which he pays to the high esteem in which poets were held in the Ireland of his day. The poets, says Spenser, "are held in so high regard and estimation amongst them that none dare displease them, for feare to runne into reproach through their offense, and be made infamous in the mouths of all men."\textsuperscript{9}

Matthew Arnold was of the opinion that the magic romance of nature which characterizes certain of the English poets, notably Spenser and Keats, came into the language from Celtic sources. In The Study of Celtic Literature, he says

\begin{quotation}
The Celts quick feeling for that which is noble and distinguished gave his poetry style; his indomitable personality gave it pride and passion; his sensibility and nervous exaltation gave it a better gift still--the gift of rendering with wonderful felicity the magical charm of nature. . . . Now of this delicate magic, Celtic romance is so preeminent a mistress that it seems impossible to believe the power did not come into romance with the Celts; magic is just the word for it--the magic of nature; not merely the beauty of nature--that the Greeks and Latins had; not merely an honest smack of the soil, a faithful realism--that the Germans had; but the intimate life of nature, her weird power and fairy dream."\textsuperscript{10}
\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{8}Ibid., 498.
\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., 495.
\textsuperscript{10}Arnold, 120.
Having noted these early influences of the Celtic spirit on both the matter and form of English literature, it is now possible to come down to more recent times and to trace the development and significance of the movement known as the Gaelic revival on the forms and content of the literature of the Anglo-Irish Renaissance.

Strangely enough, the first notable influence of the Celtic spirit on English literature in recent times came from outside Ireland itself. This was the first intimation to the English-speaking world in general that an ancient Gaelic literature of heroic sagas existed, but the manner of its appearance was not very auspicious. In 1760, a strange and somewhat furtive genius, James Macpherson, published a volume entitled: "Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language." Soon afterwards appeared the so-called epics Fingal and Temora. These works purported to be prose translations from the Gaelic Homer, Ossian or Oisin, whose compositions had been transmitted orally from ancient times. For the most part, the so-called translations were but confused and cloudy versions of the Irish Fenian and Red Branch sagas, set forth in rhythmical prose. The appearance of these volumes gave rise to a storm of controversy; some argued that such a ponderous literature as Macpherson claimed could not have been transmitted orally, while the Scots supporters of the "translator" were enthusiastic in their support.

On this subject, a present-day authority on Gaelic literature, Aodh de Blacam, writes:
Whatever the truth regarding the originals, Macpherson's Ossian became one of the most influential books of the age, and one of the main sources of the Romantic movement. Not in the English-speaking world alone, but throughout the Continent, where Ossian was translated into many tongues, this wind from the Highlands blew the powder from polite perukes. Imaginative minds, ready to revolt against the stiff artificiality of the 18th century, found in Ossian a summons to the open-air, and learned from these curious pages a new and passionate delight in ocean and moor, and in the splendor of the tempest on the mountains... The wrong things are so numerous as to exasperate us, so that we fail to recognize how largely the Gaelic spirit did inform this work. When we read Professor MacNeils literal translations of Ossianic lays in Duanaire Finn, we are struck by many similarities, and are brought to realize that MacPherson certainly had heard lays of the same sort... Macpherson's Ossian is important to us for other reasons than that it was the first manifestation of the Gaelic genius in the English language. It exerted a curious reaction in subsequent Gaelic letters. An Irish "Ossianic Society" was founded, and it was as a result of the European Romantic movement, to which he (Macpherson) contributed so much, that Anglo-Ireland discovered in the 19th century an interest in Gaelic literature.11

At the time of Ossian's appearance, however, conditions in Ireland were so unsettled that any possibility of contact between English literature and the old Gaelic culture was rendered extremely unlikely. After the collapse of the native Irish world at Kinsale in 1642, the bardic schools, which were the forges and store-houses of Gaelic learning for

two thousand years, were scattered and destined to gradual but inevitable decay. Deprived of the patronage of the Gaelic chiefs, under whose aegis the national culture had flourished since prehistoric times, the bards, who ranked next to the king in the Gaelic order, now fell on evil days. Before passing from existence, however, they left to posterity a vast array of literary material which, according to de Blacam, would fill anything from 500 to 1000 printed volumes comprising

1. Native annals, histories, clan records and topographies.
2. A vast mass of heroic and romantic tales, beginning with mythological and heroic sagas, and developing down the centuries towards the form of the modern romantic novel and the short story.
3. A great volume of narrative, lyrical, and elegiac poetry.
4. Lives of Irish saints, homilies and translations of foreign works of Catholic devotion.
5. Native law tracts, and medieval works on philosophy, medicine, and science.
6. Gaelic renderings, generally very free, of classical and medieval literature.
7. An abundant folk-lore, masses of proverbial matter, epigrams, and anonymous sayings.12

After the passing of the bards, peasant scholars and poets were, henceforth, the guardians of a language and a literature which was destined to sink, likewise, to the level of the peasant mentality. But even this vestige of Gaelic culture was doomed to wage a long and bitter struggle for survival during the dark age of the Penal times in Ireland. The manner in

which it succeeded in escaping from oblivion is vividly described by Professor Daniel Corkery of University College, Cork, in one of the best works which have come out of modern Ireland. 13

Thus, while the Four Masters, a group of Franciscan friars of a Donegal monastery, were compiling their ponderous Annals, handing on to posterity the heritage of Gaelic culture enshrined in saga, legend, genealogy and sacred learning; and while such priceless monuments of Irish monastic manuscripts as the Leabhar Brea, the Book of Dun Cow, and the Yellow Book of Lecan were preserved for future generations on the shelves of the library of Trinity College, in the British Museum, or in some Continental university, the world which produced them, the old Gaelic society with its highly-organized bardic schools, the universities of Ireland, was falling before the ruthless onslaught of the Cromwellian armies.

Here, in the cabins of the downtrodden Gael, the native tradition lived on, though now only a vestige of its former self, inspiring the impoverished and despoiled country-folk with tales of Ireland's heroic past, giving them courage to endure their present misfortune, and filling them with that determination towards national survival which alone enabled them to resist the Anglicizing influences of the conquering race and preserve their racial identity.

Although it was outlawed from the official world of letters and, for

the most part, despised by the English, the old Gaelic language, together with its literature, did find a few friends and patrons among the new Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. At first, it was merely a curiosity on the part of philologists in the native tongue, such as they might have had in Sanscrit or some other ancient language. But this interest furnished a key to the treasures of the Gaelic past which opened to them a literature that both surprised and fascinated them.

Moreover, music-lovers found delight in the lays of the Irish minstrels, the official successors of the bards, and this in turn led to an investigation of the songs behind the music. The study of Gaelic folklore, with its background of heroic legend and mythology, induced Anglo-Irish scholars to seek further enlightenment in the vast array of native manuscripts which lay neglected on the shelves of Anglo-Irish and English institutions of learning.

Thus it came about that, after a century and a half of banishment from the official halls of culture, the old Gaelic learning began slowly, almost imperceptibly, to come again into its own. While we are not concerned here with the revival of Gaelic as such, but rather with its influence on the development of the Anglo-Irish school of poetry and drama, it is necessary to trace briefly the various stages of this revival since it owed its origin in great part to the interest and enthusiasm of Anglo-Irish scholars.

Before a survey is attempted of the revival in our own day, it will be found helpful to glance back at the movements and events which prepared the way for, and led up to it. In the Penal age, as has been pointed out, Gaelic authors were discouraged from literary endeavor by lack of patrons
and the means of publications. Any work which was attempted was done in manuscript form and circulated as such, or by oral transmission, among the peasantry who, with a typical Gaelic love of song and story, delighted in learning and reciting the poems which commemorated the heroic days of Celtic chivalry and romance, or recounted some joy or sorrow of the Irish struggle for the regaining of independence. It was from this rich fund of folk-lore and tales of "old, unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago," that Douglas Hyde and other Anglo-Irish scholars derived the material and inspiration for the launching of the Gaelic revival.

Here and there throughout Ireland, some one family of the old Gaelic stock succeeded in surviving the deluge of destruction which swept the countryside after the fall of Gaeldom, and it was from such as these that the impetus toward recovery of the native learning came in the 18th century. O'Connor of Belanagare, a gentleman of substance and a fine scholar, collected a large Gaelic library, and employed scribes for such tasks as the transcription of the *Annals of the Four Masters*.14

Among the Anglo-Irish, General Vallancey, an English state official, published in 1772 *An Essay of the Antiquity of the Irish Language* which sought to establish a connection between Gaelic and the tongue of ancient Carthage.15 He also published an Irish grammar, an account of Tara,

the ancient royal seat of Ireland, and notes on the Irish Brehon Law. His extravagant theories had at least the good effect of arousing curiosity on the part of his fellow Anglo-Irish. A Dublin antiquary of the Ascendancy group published in 1786 *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards*, a work which preserves for us interesting facts concerning the attire and manners of Irish harpers.16

Charlotte Brooke published in 1789 some stilted verse translations of the Ossianic lays and of some lovely traditional songs which, though they contain little of the spirit of the originals, were noteworthy as being the first rendering of the Gaelic lays into English by an Anglo-Irish writer.17

Early in the 19th century Gaelic literature found an able and distinguished patron among the Ascendancy in the person of James Hardiman (1782-1855). In 1831 he published two volumes containing a superb collection of bardic and popular poetry, annotated with the lore of a mind steeped in Celtic learning.18 This monumental work entitled *Irish Minstrelsy* proved to be a thesaurus of Gaelic learning which opened the way to the study of the ancient literature for a long line of scholars, including one of the founders of the Gaelic League and the leader of the 1916 Dublin Insurrection, Padraic Pearse.

Being himself unfamiliar with Gaelic, Hardiman engaged an Anglo-Irish Poet, Thomas Furlong, to supply translations, but such was the ignorance of Gaelic literature in Dublin of that time that Furlong was reluctant, believing that such poems as Hardiman had collected on his travels could be of little value. He was, however, finally prevailed upon to undertake the work, and says Hardiman: "After several explanations, and an examination of some of these neglected originals, his opinion began to change. He at length confessed that he discovered beauties of which, until then, he had been wholly unconscious."19

By this time, interest in the neglected Gaelic manuscripts was widely aroused and Hardiman, the humanist of this remarkable group of scholars, engaged a native Irish scholar, John O'Donovan, as a scribe. O'Donovan translated and edited the Annals of the Four Masters and the manuscripts containing the ancient Brehon law for publication. He also edited the Book of Rights, the Martyrology of Donegal and other important works which were preserved in the Royal Irish Academy and in Trinity College, Dublin.20

Another famous Irish scholar, who worked in collaboration with O'Donovan, was Eugene O'Curry (1794-1862). He it was, more than any other, who revolutionized the conception then prevalent concerning Gaelic literature. Having an unparalleled knowledge of ancient Gaelic, he translated

20 For detailed account of Irish manuscript material, see Eleanor Hull. A Text Book of Irish Literature. David Nutt, London. 1906.
and edited the many codices which were deposited in the Dublin libraries, and created a literary sensation by means of the lectures which he delivered on the manuscript materials of early Irish history and literature and the manners and customs of the ancient Irish under Newman's patronage in the Catholic University, Dublin, between 1858 and 1862.  

Although our subject does not call for a discussion of the writings of such men as the poet Goldsmith, the dramatist Sheridan, the novelists and essayists Swift and Steele, the orators Burke and Grattan, since in spite of their Irish birth, we search in vain for any trace of the Gaelic influence on their work, a word must be said, however, concerning that body of writers known as the Poets of The Nation. While some of these latter poets, such as Mangan, and Ferguson, call for special treatment, and will later be dealt with in reference to the sources of inspiration of Anglo-Irish poetry, mention must be made in passing of their influence as a body on the growing trend towards Gaelicism in English verse written by Irishmen.

The Nation, a newspaper founded by James Duffy, Thomas Davis, and John Blake Dillon, in Dublin, in 1842, became the organ of the Young Ireland Movement, a politico-literary body whose avowed aim was to arouse the national spirit and create in English a literature that accepted the whole Gaelic past. While much of the writings of this periodical was frankly political, and, from the point of view of literature, possessed

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defects which such material invariably reveals, it also produced a body of poetry which expressed a keen and intelligent interest in the literary treasures of early Ireland and an awareness of the Gael's cultural heritage. Of this group of poets the most noteworthy were James Clarence Mangan, who possessed both keen poetic vision and an ear for the Gaelic exuberance of sound and richness of fancy; Edward Walsh who made some of the earliest and finest translations from the Gaelic; and Sir Samuel Ferguson, who may be classified with the Young Ireland group, and who was a faithful interpreter of the classic Gaelic cycle of sagas.

Concerning this very important body of writers, the best modern authority on Anglo-Irish literature, Aodh de Blacam, says: "It cannot be doubted that, but for the Famine and its disastrous consequences, Davis' lead would have been followed, and the new Anglo-Irish school would have led the way back to a completely Gaelic Ireland. Anglo-Irish literature fell silent after the passing of this school until, in the nineties, Standish James O'Grady led a revival with his Bardic History and heroic novels."22

The work of The Nation poets inspired, almost recreated, Ireland; and it still continues to inspire Irishmen all over the world with its nationalizing spirit. Its poetry could not naturally be of a high quality, but it may be said to have recreated the poetic literature of Ireland. The editors of this newspaper received and published poems sent to them by

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peasants and struggling folk, hitherto voiceless, and extended in this way a love of literature, a knowledge of its ideals, and an opportunity to make it known, all over the country.

Although Thomas Moore is, perhaps, one of the best-known of the Irish poets of this period, he cannot be included among those who were influenced by the Celtic spirit, since, even when his subject-matter was Irish, he wrote almost invariably in the English tradition. Concerning Moore's best-known poems, the Irish Melodies, Stopford A. Brooke writes

> These songs have variety; they touch both tragedy and comedy. They drink, they dance and sing; they follow the patriot to the scaffold; they march to battle, they mourn over the dead; they sing the scenery, the legends, the sorrows, and the mirth of Ireland. But they do this work not in the best way possible. They have not the true Celtic touch either in joy or in sorrow. They are entirely devoid of mysticism; they never belong to fairy-land; and Moore did not conceive for a moment the haunted, obscure, and majestic darkness of the Celtic ancienity.²³

For this reason, therefore, Moore cannot be classified with those who prepared the way for the Gaelic revival, although by his sweet songs he has made Ireland known wherever the English language is spoken.

Passing on, then, from the consideration of The Nation poets and those associated with them, to a greater or lesser degree, we come to trace the growth of that movement which culminated in 1893 with the

founding of the Gaelic League, and which was so largely instrumental in the advent of Anglo-Irish literature to a new and fruitful source of inspiration.

As early as 1808, a "Gaelic Society" was organized in Dublin for the purpose of promoting interest in the translating and editing of Irish manuscripts. Later, in 1840, the "Archaeological Society" was founded and produced a number of valuable works of scholarship, chiefly the work of John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry. In 1853 the Ossianic Society was formed under the impetus derived from the translations of Macpherson's Ossian. These societies, however, were supported by wealthy patrons of learning and did not touch the life of the people. Their purpose was not to preserve or promote Gaelic as a spoken language, but to edit and publish Gaelic manuscripts.

The first society formed for the purpose of saving the language was the "Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language" in 1876.

One of the most momentous events in the Anglo-Irish literary world occurred during the last ten years of the century with the publication by Standish James O'Grady of Silva Gadelica, a collection of romances edited from manuscripts in the British Museum. This book contained the most spirited translations ever made from Gaelic prose. "His" (O'Grady's) flexible, vivid, whimsical English," writes de Blacam "brought home to his

readers the meaning and intent of Gaelic literature. He taught the Anglo-Irish what Gaelic contained. 25

Writing of this revival of interest in the ancient tongue, a recent biographer of Douglas Hyde has the following to say: "The philologist saw in the language a very highly developed tongue capable of expressing the nicest shades of meaning; the socialist, the bringing forward of ideas in which all Irishmen had an equal heritage, . . . the youths and maidens thought of the revival of Irish national life, with its dances and songs." 26

All this, however, was but the prelude to an event that had far-reaching effects on literature and which directed a new current of thought and feeling into Anglo-Irish circles—the founding of the movement known as "Gaelic League." The first meeting was held on the 31st of July, 1893 in Dublin with a great Anglo-Irishman and a pioneer in Gaelic literary research work in the chair, Douglas Hyde, a man to be honored and remembered forever for his services to the Irish cause.

The founding of the Gaelic League opened up a new avenue of national thought more purely intellectual and less political than any in the history of the country. That it did this was due in great measure to the genius and inspiration of Hyde who aroused in his countrymen an awareness of their literary heritage. In a lecture delivered before the National Literary Society in 1892 Hyde said:

26 Diarmuid Coffey. Douglas Hyde: President of Ireland, the Talbot Press, Dublin, 1938, 41.
If we take a bird's eye-view of our island to-day and compare it with what it used to be, we must be struck by the extraordinary fact that that nation which was once, as everyone admits, one of the most classically learned and cultured nations in Europe, is now one of the least so; how one of the most reading and literary peoples has become one of the least studious and most un-literary, and how the artistic products of one of the quickest, most sensitive, and most artistic races on earth are now only distinguished for their hideousness. I shall endeavor to show that this failure of the Irish people in recent times has been largely brought about by the race diverging during this century from the right path and ceasing to become Irish without becoming English.\(^{27}\)

Hyde, then, went on to show how Ireland had lost her national distinctiveness by giving up her Irish characteristics, names, customs, games, and language, and how her only hope of survival as a nation depended on her de-anglicization, not as a protest against imitating what is best in the English people, but rather against adopting pell-mell and indiscriminately everything that is English simply because it is English.

Continuing the same line of discussion, Hyde went on to say:

What the battle-axe of the Dane, the sword of the Norman, the wile of the Saxon were unable to perform, we have accomplished ourselves. We have at last broken the continuity of Irish life; and just at the moment when the Celtic race is presumably about to recover possession of its own country, it finds itself deprived and stripped of its Celtic characteristics, cut off from the

\(^{27}\)Ibid., 44.
past, yet scarcely in touch with the present. It has lost, since the beginning of this century, almost all that connected it with the era of Cuchulain and of Ossian, that connected it with the Christianisers of Europe. It has lost all that they had in language, traditions, music, genius and ideals. Just when we should be starting to build anew the Irish race and Gaelic nation—as within our own recollections Greece has been built up anew—we find ourselves despoiled of the bricks of nationality.28

Such words as these coming from one of themselves—for Hyde was an Anglo-Irishman, a Protestant, and a graduate of Trinity College, the stronghold of English culture in Ireland—made a profound impression on some of the more liberal-minded Anglo-Irish, among whom were William Butler Yeats, George Russell (A.E.), William Larminie, and others who are less known. It brought home to them the realization that they too were Irishmen, maybe not Gaels, but sharing in the heritage of literature and ideals which were enshrined in the language of their native land. The legends and sagas of the Gael opened up to their admiring eyes a new and rich vein of literary ore, from which poetic material of sterling worth might be quarried. Their background of liberal culture and wide acquaintance with the literatures of European countries enabled them to see, better than the more insular and less widely-educated Gael, the great possibilities of literary development contained in the rich deposit of Celtic myth and legend, and in folk-lore of the Irish country-side.

Meanwhile, the more profound reaches of Gaelic philology were being

28Ibid., 45.
investigated by Continental scholars. Zeuss in Bavaria established the place of Gaelic in the family of Indo-European languages. Around the same time, the Frenchman, D'Arbois de Jubainville, wrote on the stories of the Gaelic colonizers of prehistoric Ireland and traced in them a racial mythology. He, more than any other, emphasized the antiquity of Irish culture. A German philologist, Windisch, brought out a grammar of Old and Middle Irish, thus opening to scholars the rich and unexplored fields of literary material contained in the ancient manuscripts found in museums and monastic archives all over Europe. A Dublin scholar, Whitley Stokes, worked together with Windisch and between them they evolved what has become the canon of Old Irish in the volume, Thesaurus Palaeo-­hibernicus, subsequently used by many scholars in the translating of manuscripts. Zimmer and Stern in Germany, Pedersen in Scandanavia, Dottin in France, and Dunn in America—these and many others worked during the last quarter of the 19th century to bring to light the vast store of historical and literary material hidden in the pages of long-neglected manuscripts.29 By so doing they inspired a new movement in English literature—a literature that used the English language, adapting it to the Gaelic idiom and giving it Gaelic forms, while at the same time seeking inspiration in the far-distant reaches of the Celtic past and in the lore of the Irish countryside.

Thus it will be seen that but for this vigorous movement which had for its objective the restoration of the Gaelic language and all that was en-

29See de Blacam, Gaelic Literature Surveyed, 376-378 for account of work done by European scholars on Gaelic philology and metrics.
shrined in that language—myth and legend, saga and folk-lore, history and genealogy, manners, and customs—the Anglo-Irish group of poets would, in all likelihood, never have arisen. It was from the Gaelic Revival movement that Yeats and his followers caught the vital spark of inspiration and the dominant note of Celticism that gives originality and charm to their writings.

It will, therefore, be the purpose of this thesis to establish the indebtedness of the Anglo-Irish group of writers to Gaelic literature for both the spirit and subject-matter of much of their work, while at the same time bringing forth the claim that they cannot be accepted, unreservedly and without qualifications, as being the interpreters of the Gaelic tradition in literature, since there is much in their writings that gives an erroneous impression of the Celtic mind as revealed in the ancient literature of Ireland.
CHAPTER II

THE ANGLO-IRISH POETS AND THE GAELIC TRADITION
IN LITERATURE

It may seem strange to an outside observer that the re-awakening of interest in the Gaelic literature of the Ireland should have been brought about by a group of men who were, for the most part, of English lineage and education, or of what is known in Ireland as the Ascendancy class. In attempting to explain this anomalous position of the Anglo-Irish school of writers, it is necessary to present a brief sketch of the cultural background and relative political status of the Anglo-Irish and the native element of the population.

By way of explanation, one might draw an analogy between the Humanist and Traditionalist struggle at the time of the European renaissance and this conflict that arose in Ireland between the representatives of Anglo-Irish letters and the racial heirs of the old Gaelic stock. In both instances there are certain parallel situations and elements which seem to admit of an analogy.

In the first place, both movements owed their inspiration to the re-discovery of a culture and way of life that was at once classical and pagan. In both instances the traditional side was, as a general rule, identified with positive Christianity, whereas the Renaissance group sought its inspiration in a classical literature which was woven around a mythological era that colored its cultural and ethical values. The
pagan outlook on life that characterized the Renaissance scholars found an echo in the Irish revival in a certain tendency on the part of the Anglo-Irish poets to glorify and throw an aureole of glamor around the pagan figures of Irish legend, while comparatively neglecting the Christian saints and scholars who made the island famous in the sixth and seventh centuries. The Ireland which Yeats loved to picture in his verse was not the monastic centre of the world, whose crumbling ruins of ancient abbeys and venerable round towers still dot the Irish countryside, but the old, mysterious Ireland of legend, with its druidical altars, its heroic warriors and primitive grandeur.

To continue the analogy, it may be pointed out that, in both the European and Irish Renaissance movements, the impetus towards rediscovery came from contact with vitalizing forces outside of the society which was influenced; the stream of Greek culture in the case of the European renaissance, and the English and Continental streams of culture on the part of the Anglo-Irish revival.

The Humanist, vitalized by contact with the stream of Greek and Roman culture which flowed over Europe after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, and straining at the leash of Christian self-denial, was thrilled beyond measure to find a culture and school of thought that ministered to the desires of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life; and from it he drew inspiration to fashion a new world with the old aesthetic and ethical values.

On the other hand, the Traditionalist, strong in his conserva-
tism and distrustful of unchristian influences, was relatively untouched by this outside force, and, therefore, while prepared, like Thomas More, to adopt whatever could be made compatible with Christian principles, was disinclined to show unqualified enthusiasm for the glorification of a way of life and thought which laid Christian Europe open to the inroads of pagan ideals.

In Ireland, too, our analogy finds a somewhat similar situation. The Anglo-Irishman, unlike his Gaelic compatriot, was in contact, through English literature, with the Renaissance spirit in European culture. Unhampered by the conservative doctrinal and moral code of Irish Catholicism, his spirit found an echo in the far-off realm of Celtic mythology and sought kinship with the virile, heroic race of half-men, half-gods which peopled the classical literature of the Gael. But the native Irishman, the Celt, after almost two centuries of a fierce struggle for survival, and after having been denied access to liberal education for many generations, had become intellectually impoverished. What literature he possessed, though in the Gaelic tongue, had been confined by force of circumstances to the level of the peasant mentality, and had scarcely moved beyond the medieval folk-tale.

The rich store of Bardic literature lay hidden in the pages of manuscripts in the universities of the Anglo-Irish or of the foreigner, and his only knowledge of its herioc sagas and virile culture was derived from garbled and inadequate fragments, which like the originals of Macpherson's Ossian in Scottish oral transmission, had
survived in the memories of peasant poets and scholars after the collapse of the old Gaelic learning. The neo-Gaelic literature of the Irish-speaking country-sides was far removed from the ancient classical literature of Ireland, for the reason that the sagas belonged to the cultured classes, and that refinement of intellect which was necessary for the proper appreciation of their literary value could not be expected from a people who had been systematically deprived of every opportunity for liberal education for several hundred years.

Moreover, the native Irishman, with his strong attachments to the Catholic religion and his pride in the Ireland of Saints and Scholars rather than the mythological Ireland of heroic legend could not identify himself with its pagan spirit as readily as could the humanist Anglo-Irishman who could in fancy still see Cuchulain and Fiomn and Oisin walking the Irish hills like embodiments of the sunlight and the wind.

And so when we come to the literature of the Revival we find an anomaly. It was the Anglo-Irishman, Hyde, who was moved by the Gaelic past to write the first Literary History of Ireland.\(^1\) Anglo-Ireland, fertilized by Gaeldom, with its "speech of the people," pedantry and its pre-occupation with the mediocre poetry of the Penal

Ireland or with the few pleasing lyrics which Gaeldom has given during
the past fifty years, had produced nothing of literary value to compare
with Yeats' "Inisfree" or the lively verse of James Stephens.

It required a Hyde from Trinity College or a Pearse or a Macdonagh
(both half-English) to infuse that lively appreciation of the past from
which springs a romantic zest for the future. Even when the Anglo-
Irishman's interpretation of the Celtic past was more a figment of his
own imagination (though very beautiful) than a faithful picture of an-
cient Ireland, as was the case with George Russell (A.E.), it showed
a consciousness of the rich inspiration that was to be gained from
Ireland's classical literature that was conspicuously absent from the
writings of the modern Gaelic poets. Witness the following, quoted
from one of the many pamphlets issued by Russell in an attempt to arouse
the national mind to a realization of the necessity of a return to
tradition:

In Ireland, our history begins with the most
ancient of any in a mythical era when earth
mingled with the sky. The gods departed, the
half-gods also, hero and saint after that,
and we have dwindled down to a petty peasant
mentality; rural life and urban life alike are
mean in their externals. Yet the cavalcade,
for all its tattered habiliments, has not lost
spiritual dignity. There is still some incor-
ruptible spiritual atom in our people. We are
still in some relation to the divine order,
and while that incorruptible spiritual atom
still remains, all things are possible, if by
some inspiration there could be revealed to us
a way back or forward to greatness, an Irish
polity in accord with national character.  

Russell was aware of the "incorruptible spiritual atom" which characterized the bardic poetry of Ireland, and while he himself was not altogether successful in fanning it into flame in the glow of mysticism which he purported to draw from the Celtic past, he, at least, endeavored to make his generation aware of its literary heritage.

Indeed, it was from Anglo-Ireland that there came into the Gaelic world a quickening influence and the stimulus of modern culture, and from the time of Thomas Davis and The Nation poets down to our own day the great names in the Irish literary world have been, more often than not, of Anglo-Irish lineage: Ferguson, De Vere, Sigerson, Yeats, Russell, Stevens and a host of others.

Aodh de Blacam, writing on this subject, attempts to find a reason for the phenomenon by saying,

The explanation is perhaps, that those possessed of English (Anglo-Irish) education have imaginations trained to the appreciation of the spacious and the luxuriant, and the Gaelic classics belong to the richest period of Irish history. The impoverished life of the cottier cannot easily reach out to the Ireland in which exuberant young scholars made the songs they put in Oisin's mouth and the sparkling satires of MacConglinne. . . . It is because he sees the Irish epics and sagas with

a critical eye that the Anglo-Irish writer appreciates them, and is moved by them as the men of the renaissance were by the epics of Greece and Rome.⁢

Perhaps the blending of many racial strains in the veins of the Anglo-Irishman has been responsible for that intellectual vitality and enthusiasm which has characterized his writings for the past century or more. Thomas Davis must have had some such idea in mind when he said, concerning Irish literature, that

It must contain and represent the races of Ireland. It must not be Celtic—it must not be Saxon—it must be Irish. The Brehon law and the maxims of Westminster, the cloudy and lightning genius of the Gael, the placid strength of the Saxon, the marshalling insight of the Norman—a literature which shall exhibit in combination the passions and idioms of all, and in which we shall express the romantic, the religious, the forensic and the practical tendencies of our minds.⁴

Matthew Arnold has already been quoted (p.5) as holding the view that English literature was greatly influenced by the magic of nature which is found in Celtic writings. This idea of the debt which English literature owes to Celtic fancy is carried still further by a modern writer, Shane Leslie, who says that

In the British Isles, the Anglo-Saxon invaded not only the territory, but the imagination of the Celt, with happy results, in literature at

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⁴Thomas Davis, as quoted by Hugh Law, Ibid., Preface, xii.
least. Even the continuous Border scuffles bred the English ballad, while the Norman troubadour collected the material of Romance in the guard-fortresses of Wales. Out of this the Teutonic impulse wrought the legend of King Arthur and Sir Percival. Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Wagner's Parsifal must always remain supreme examples of the power of the dominant race to build with Celtic material.5

But the Celt could not be expected to take kindly to this invasion of his imaginative world any more than he did to the despoiling of his national territory. Wherever the Celt has succeeded in preserving his racial identity, as in the West and South of Ireland and in the remote corners of Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany, it has been at the expense of his economic and cultural welfare. But one thing he has invariably clung to with a tenacity that is truly remarkable—his language. There is a proverb in Gaelic which shows how much importance the Irishman attaches to his native tongue: "Tir gan teanga, tir gan anam." "A country without its language is a country without a soul." Indeed, it is to this firm grip which the Gael kept on his language that modern Anglo-Irish literature owes its existence; for without the impetus of the Gaelic Revival movement and the key which it furnished to the storehouse of Celtic myth and legend, the Anglo-Irish poets and dramatists would, in all likelihood, never have chosen Celtic subjects as the source of their literary inspiration.

Be this as it may, the preservation of the ancient Gaelic language as a living speech was of far more concern to the native Irishman, at the turn of this century, than was the inspiration offered by his country's heroic literature to a tongue which he despised as the symbol of the hated Saxon. The feeling of the native Irishman towards the Anglo-Irish writers who exploited his country's ancient literature for the embellishment of a foreign literature is well expressed in the words which Hugh Law quotes from "a writer in a well-known review" to the effect that "Yeats and his school are foreigners here ... They are worse than foreigners, they simply have no point of contact at all with Ireland except the very basest. They are distinguished by their rancorous hatred to the Irish people."6

This antagonistic attitude of the native Celt to the new Anglo-Irish group of writers was due to a genuine feeling of resentment on the part of the former. For, while he, the racial descendant of the old Celtic order, was struggling to preserve the heritage of national culture, enshrined in language, literature and tradition, handed down through the centuries from forbears who had suffered for the preservation of these ideals, the Anglo-Irishman would barter this precious heritage of national identity, while exploiting for the purposes of his art the heroic literature of the Gael. It was as if a Turkish invader of

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6Quoted by Hugh Law, Ibid., Preface, x.
Greece should rifle the treasures of ancient Hellenic culture for the enrichment of Turkish life, while at the same time standing for the political enslavement of the racial descendants of that civilization.

The native Irishman, therefore, was not entirely without a grievance. He rightly regarded himself as the heir to the Gaelic tradition, not only by reason of his racial lineage, but, more so because of his use of the language in which that Gaelic literature was composed. If anyone was to explore the riches of the old Celtic literature and make modern men aware that the Irishman had an ancient, honored culture to which he could proudly point as the heritage of his race, it was he who had fought and suffered for the political survival of that culture.

But the unfortunate part of the matter was that the Gael, as he was then constituted, was educationally unfitted for such a task, whereas the Anglo-Irishman had both the command of the English language, and the background of liberal culture necessary for a proper appreciation of the ancient Gaelic classics.

In having command of the English language, the Anglo-Irishman had the ear of the English-speaking world, and was thus in a far better position than the native Irishman to make known, generally, the spirit and content of Celtic literature. Moreover, because of his contact with the European world of letters, the Anglo-Irishman was quick to see how the old Gaelic epics and sagas could be used as the raw material for a modern literary treatment, as had been done in Norse and other European literatures.
But the Gaelic-speaking Irishman, at the beginning of this century, was the most insular of man. Culturally isolated for over two hundred years from the rest of Europe, waging a long and fierce struggle for political autonomy, which struggle engaged all his energies to the exclusion of those things that constitute normal, civilized life, the Gael was forced to sacrifice the pursuit of liberal culture in order that he might keep his national identity from being submerged in that of the English invader.

His brother Gael in Scotland bartered his national autonomy, together with his language and literature, for a share in the great tradition of British literature and culture, and as a result produced a Scott, a Burns, and a Carlyle. Whether or not he was justified by subsequent events is not a fit subject for discussion here, but the fact of the matter is that in so doing he forfeited, to a great extent, his racial and national identity and became just another kind of Englishman.

On the other hand, the Irish Gael succeeded in keeping himself from being absorbed by the Invader's civilization, but paid the price in economic and cultural impoverishment. The result was that, while he was forced to assume an inferior position in education and in liberal life generally, the more privileged Anglo-Irishman, not over-much concerned with political autonomy but attracted by the rich literary material which Celtic legend and folk-lore offered to his genius, drew from it inspiration to produce a new and vital literature. He poured the old wine of the Gaelic epics into new vessels and regaled the English-speaking world with its heady intoxication of sound and fancy, and the pastoral charm
that breathes the peace of the Irish countryside.

This, in itself, would not have provoked the ire of the native Celt, for he was liberal enough to share his heritage with the Anglo-Irishman provided the latter endeavored to interpret faithfully the spirit of Gaelic literature. But, in the estimation of the Gaelic-speaking scholar, this is exactly what the Anglo-Irish poets did not do. The impression of Gaelic literature given in the writings of Yeats and those who followed his literary leadership may, they say, be very beautiful and romantic, but it does not convey a true picture of the old Gaelic way of life and thought. In order then to ascertain whether this latter statement is warranted or otherwise, an attempt will be made in the next chapter to present the characteristics of Gaelic literature as a survey by one of the greatest of modern Gaelic scholars reveals them. In succeeding chapters, we shall have to consider to what extent the writings of the Anglo-Irish poets approximate to or differ from these characteristics.

From this brief survey of the relative cultural backgrounds of the Anglo-Irish and native -Irish literary groups, it will be seen that, in so far as the "Celtic Twilight" group of poets undoubtedly was largely instrumental in bringing to the attention of the English-speaking world the existence and excellence of the old Celtic literature, its writers deserve credit as the originators of the Anglo-Irish Renaissance. It remains to be seen, however, to what extent they have been successful in interpreting the "Celtic note" in literature. It will, therefore, be the purpose of the following chapter to analyze the characteristics
of this peculiar "Celtic note" and to estimate the faithfulness of its reproduction in Anglo-Irish literature.
CHAPTER III

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CELTIC NOTE IN LITERATURE?

Before an attempt is made to trace the influence of the Gaelic spirit in literature on the Anglo-Irish poets, a word must be said about this "Celtic note" itself. In what does it consist? By what criteria shall we judge whether or not a certain piece of poetry or drama possesses the true Gaelic characteristics? This is a question which must be answered satisfactorily before setting out to look for the Celtic influence in the writings of the modern Anglo-Irish poets.

In the first place, then, some erroneous conceptions must be cleared up as to the nature of Celtic literature, and next, the true characteristics of this literature will be outlined as discovered by eminent Gaelic scholars. Finally, in succeeding chapters the writings of some of the Anglo-Irish school will be examined as to their approximation or otherwise to the traditional characteristics of Celtic literature.

It has already been noted that the impression of the Celtic note given by McPherson's Ossian, while it was instrumental in bringing about the trend towards Romanticism in English literature, was unfortunate in that it set up a false notion of the Gaelic mode in literature. McPherson's cloudy prose, with its waterfalls of sound, its too exu-
Berant fancy, its vagueness of narrative, its sentimentality, and absence of the true Gaelic firmness and maturity, was a curious literary forgery not unlike Chatterton's. It was that most dangerous of deceptions—a half-truth. For, while it undoubtedly did echo some of the true Celtic richness of fancy and vocabulary, with its deep love of Nature in every mood; on the other hand, its exotic diction is but a crude blending of Biblical and Classical phraseology, and its vagueness of imagery is decidedly un-Gaelic. This latter statement may appear somewhat surprising in view of the notion prevalent as to the Irishman's picturesque exuberance of fancy. But the fact of the matter is that, although the Celt's imagination is rich, it is not vague nor cloudy but piercingly clear and vivid. The traditional Gaelic simile is strikingly concrete and down-to-earth, not lost in mazes of imagery as was McPherson's Osian.

To the student of Gaelic literature this particularity of description and absence of metaphysical abstractions is well-known. Unfortunately, however, the conception prevalent as to the nature of Celtic fancy seems to be that it has strong tendencies towards mysticism and abstruseness, and for this misconception, McPherson and some of the recent Anglo-Irish poets are largely responsible.

William Butler Yeats, the founder of the modern Anglo-Irish literary movement, while he has been foremost in leading the way back to the Celtic past for poetic inspiration and has made Irishmen conscious of the rich possibilities latent in their ancient Gaelic literature, has been chiefly responsible for this misconception as to the nature of Celtic literature.
It cannot be denied that his poetry owes certain characteristics to the influence of Celtic legends and folk-lore which he has made the theme of many of his poems and plays. But, it is contended, his indebtedness to the mystic poet, Blake;¹ to the influence of the new Romanticism; and to the mystic doctrines of Mallarmé and the French symbolists, with whom he came in contact during his student days in Paris,² is even more evident, and has given to his interpretation of Celtic literature an artificial and unreal flavor which has been widely accepted for what it is not.

Around a framework of legend, myth and folk-lore, Yeats has woven a fabric of dreams and fancy emanating from his own mystic creed but purporting to voice the unformulated mysticism of the ancient Celtic world.³ The effect of this blending of primitive Celtic mythology with his own mystic lore, colored, as it is, with a haunting, sensuous beauty and wistfulness, is invariably lovely, for Yeats was, above all else, an artist of the beautiful, but the impression it creates of Celtic literature is generally not faithful. On the contrary, it is transformed by his own subjective ideology to such an extent that, while it may be poetry of a high order, it must be said to be Yeatsian rather than Celtic. It will be the purpose of a succeeding chapter to offer evidence from the poet's works in support of this contention.

¹See Brooke and Rolleston, 497.
²See Ernest Boyd, 184.
³Brooke and Rolleston. See "Literary Introduction," by T. W. Rolleston, 496.
But, first, in order to substantiate this view of Mr. Yeats' poetry, an attempt will be made to show the nature of "the Gaelic mode" as Thomas MacDonagh termed it, in contrast to the "Celtic note" which has come to be identified with Yeats and his poetic disciples.

At the very outset, it is necessary to bear in mind that in ancient Gaelic literature there are two distinct cycles, each contributing its share to the national mind in letters: the older Red Branch cycle and the later Fenian cycle. The former is very definitely pagan, belonging to a primeval, barbaric age; the latter is more gentle, romantic, depicting a semi-military, semi-pastoral world in which Celtic paganism is making its last stand before the inroads of Christianity.

As the Anglo-Irish writers from Ferguson down to recent times have made the Red Branch cycle the theme of their most notable poetic and dramatic work, it calls for some discussion here. Aodh de Blacam says of this cycle of epic prose-narrative that

It is the most ambitious thing in our literature... It is wholly pagan and as barbaric as the Iliad. It pictures a world of chariot-riding warriors, who collect the skulls of their enemies as trophies, and it represents a tribal age before Tara was the capital of a united nation. The love of Nature and, indeed, of all the gentler sentiments is absent; but so too is absent all wistfulness and sentimentality. As in Homer, the lives of the heroes are poured forth ungrudgingly for an immaterial end, and death seems but the sinking of the brief wave back into the common tide. A terrific animal energy runs through the whole. Glory is the warrior's only goal, and glory he seeks with exuberant force. Often this energy breaks into wild, grotesque humor that shocks the sense of proportion of a tamer generation. Always, there is a high note of chivalry.
Cuchulain, the flower of the Red Branch, is chivalry's flower too.

The heroic virtues are nourished by these tales—truthfulness, loyalty, courage, fortitude. We are exhilarated as we read by the image of large, splendid men, living recklessly for honor's sake, and dying without complaint. Pearse ranked Cuchulain with St. Columcille as a model for the admiration of youth. If Cuchulain conveys nothing of the supernatural virtues, he stands, none the less, for a noble detachment from the world, and for the conquest of bodily fears. His saying "I care not if I live but a day, so only that my deeds live after me" sums up the heroic spirit in which a virile race perfected and enjoyed the Red Branch cycle.

It is from the pages of this epic cycle that Yeats and the Anglo-Irish writers have derived that atmosphere of stark, somber paganism which characterizes so much of their work. There is in it, too, a note of mystery and weirdness proper to such remote times when yet the old Celtic gods were worshipped in the land, but this characteristic, in its primitive naiveté, is a far cry from Yeats' recondite mysticism.

These notes of a primal age are exemplified in such incidents as the death of Cuchulain, where the hero, in the titanic gesture, bursts the bonds with which the physicians have bound his bloody body, at the sound of his king's shield screaming in battle. The circumstance of his final death-agony is one of dark, gathering, terrible, and inevitable doom, with a splendid defiant finish. As the hero lies mortally wounded, having seen his brave charioteer Laegh, and the Grey of Macha, his unsurpassable steed, lost in battle, he ties himself to the pillar-post and laughs, with his last breath, at the raven that slips in his gory life-blood, while the

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Gaelic Literature Surveyed, 36-37.
circling, victorious hosts for long dare not approach that feared figure.  

Strikingly like Matthew Arnold's Sohrab and Rustum is the tale of how Cuchulain unwittingly slew his own son,

who came to his death by hereditary stubbornness; and half-mystical, half-tragic is the story of his temptation to be disloyal to the fair Emer until Manannan (the Sea-god) shakes his mantle of oblivion (is it the trembling sea?) between him and the faery lover, Fand.

Side by side with this older cycle, there has come down to us the Fenian cycle, dealing with the Fiana, a body of warrior-huntsmen, who, under their leader Fionn McCual, are supposed to have lived during the reign of Cormac MacAirt in the third century. These poet-warriors were trained in great feats of physical endurance and had to master the contents of twelve books of poesy. A rigorous code of chivalry and of bodily discipline was observed among them, and to their daring was entrusted the defense of the national territory.

The tales that arose from the exploits of these warriors are credited by reputable historians partly to historic fact and partly to romantic invention during succeeding ages. Whereas the tales of the Red Branch were composed for a war-like body of aristocratic rulers, the Fenian romances were intended to entertain a whole nation since, in fact, they became, after the tenth century, the national literature par excellence.

As de Blacam, in contrasting the two cycles, writes:

The Fenian cycle was composed for a virile, agricultural race, which could enjoy tales

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7de Blacam, Gaelic Literature Surveyed, 33.
of enchantment that were born of contemplation of the stars in the mountain mist, and poems that recall the sweetness of the blackbird's song. Whereas the Red Branch cycle has a classical firmness, and relates every event to a single age, the Fenian cycle resembles a Gothic building, romantic and fluid in form, the creation of the people borrowing from every age.

This Fenian cycle was in process of composition when Saint Patrick arrived in Erin with the light of Christianity, and from this circumstance arose the famous legend of the Dialogues of Oisin and the great churchman. The debate between the last of the Fenians and the Christian bishop is one of the most characteristic features of Gaelic literature because it embodies in the delineation of the two figures—pagan and Christian—an allegory of the conflict that waged for many ages between the natural and the supernatural elements in the Irish national soul.

In these two figures—Patrick and Oisin—the two abiding types of the nation may be discerned. As the old Fenian John O'Leary well remarked, "In this country, a man must have on his side either the Fenians or the Church." From this circumstance de Blacam concludes that "the Fenian idea, or imaginative patriotism, and the Faith have always been the two great enthusiasms of Ireland, since all that the race has achieved has sprung from either the faith of Padruig or from the spirit of Oisin, the poet-warrior who loved Ireland more than Tir-na-nog—the Land of the Ever-Young.

Interwoven with both of these cycles and coloring each are memories of a much older and more shadowy era—the mythological. This remnant of

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9Ibid., 69.
primal Celtic Nature-worship is like an undertone that runs through all Gaelic literature, giving it that sense of enchantment and natural magic which some modern Anglo-Irish poets have sought to interpret as a kind of mysticism.

These echoes from the dawn of the race have never entirely ceased to influence the peoples' imaginative life, giving to the Gaelic mind that other-worldliness and keen sense of spiritual reality which have become typical of the race. When Saint Patrick christianized the Gael he used admirable tact. Whereas in the Roman Empire paganism stood for the vices of a decadent civilization which had to be purged by the fires of persecution and purified by the centuries in the desert, in Ireland paganism meant nature enlightened by revelation.

Saint Patrick did not sweep away with one ruthless gesture all that his Celtic converts had believed in and practiced for untold generations. Rather did he give them a Christian turn of meaning and coloring that made the change from the old religion to the new a process of evolution that has no parallel in the history of the conversion of nations.10

How else are we to account for the presence in the Gaelic literature that has come down to us from those remote times of so many elements that have their roots in the pagan past? The men who wrote down and handed on this literature were, almost without exception, Christian monks; and yet, in an age when Greek and Roman classical literature was yet waiting for the dawn of the Renaissance to emerge from its obscurity, the pagan literature

of the Gael was the delight of Christian Kings and bards and monks.

Celtic literature had its pantheon among an ancient legendary race that is supposed to have inhabited the island before the dawn of history—the Tuatha De Danann, or the People of the goddess, Dana. Dana was the mother of the gods, or the fruitful earth from which all life arises. The Dagda, droll and monstrous, was the Celtic Jupiter; Angus Og, his son, the god of youth and love. Dian Cecht was the god of healing, and Goibniu, the gods' artificer, the Gaelic Vulcan. Manannan, Son of Lir, was the sea-god, and Lugh of the Long Hand was the long-rayed sun. Harpies of the battle-field were Badb, Macha and the dreadful Morrigan.

In the myths and legends of the Gael these gods had an imaginative life only. They are not like the figures of the Greek gods who dwell apart on high Olympus ruling in dreadful awe over men's minds. Rather they are mighty but friendly beings who share with mankind the adventures of life on earth. Mr. de Blacam sums up the attitude of the Gaelic bards towards the pagan gods thus:

In effect, the Gaelic gods are at once as real and as fictitious as Pantagruel, Sancho Panza, Falstaff and Mr. Pickwick. They were shaped by men who never worshipped them. Writers of the Christian era took the vague, pagan sea-god and turned him into the vivid and lovable Carle of the Drab Coat. Men of science may regret that the record of some gross heathen rite had been lost in the moulding of a story to Christian tastes, but the pure lover of good stories finds literature enriched.11

Here is another point where Yeats diverges from the Gaelic literary

11Op. Cit., 20
tradition. Whereas in Celtic myth and legend the figures of the gods and heroes are always thought of as dwelling in the imaginative past, (that is exactly why the Church never regarded their presence in literature as a menace to the Faith) in the poetry of Yeats and Russell and some of their literary disciples, on the other hand, these figures take on an intensity of spiritual life which they never had in Gaelic literature. Witness the following passage from the pen of one of Mr. Yeats' biographers:

With Mr. Yeats, however, the gods and heroes are no longer far-off—they are here among us, "forms more real than living man." They are even so melted into the imagination of the poet that they emerge from it not as "symbols" of ideas "as the phrases of modern mysticism have it), but the very ideas themselves.]

However, before judgment can be passed on Mr. Yeats' interpretation of the Celtic sagas, a brief examination must be made of the literary style which Gaelic scholars have found to be characteristic of the Celtic genius and, further, of the spirit and atmosphere that pervade it.

In the opinion of the foremost living Gaelic scholar, Dr. Douglas Hyde, "the romantic, as opposed to the realistic, dominates Irish utterance from first to last." Allied to this romanticism, Dr. Hyde finds several characteristic qualities among which are, in point of literary style,

an exuberance of minute description and a love of adjectival thunder. The Gaelic love of rhetoric, its peculiar mode of hyperbole, and its copiousness of synonyms lends to early Irish literature a charm

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12Brooke and Rolleston, 494.
and a flavour that are wanting to early German, Anglo-Saxon, and Norman-French.
On the other hand, Irish writers, despite their weakness for a multitude of allitera-
tive adjectives, go fairly straight to the point. Their sentences are not obscure nor involved, and there is very little of mysticism or cloudiness about them. "Ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas francais," say the French, and the same with much truth may be said about the Irish.13

Dr. Hyde finds the naïveté of Gaelic similes very striking, having more of quaintness, originality, and humanity about them than the severe and self-possessed similes of the Greek and Latin epics. Thus in describing the appearance of Cuchulain, the romanticist exclaims in admiration of his white teeth, "it seemed as though it were a shower of pearls that were flung into his head." When his steeds have the reins flung 'loose upon their necks their career is "like a hawk's swooping from a cliff on a day of hard wind." The watchman who beholds Froech and his suite flashing past him in crimson and gold relates it to the listeners and adds "from the perfumed breeze that floated over them it seemed to me as if my head were over a vat of wine."14

Moreover, and this is significant in view of Yeats' pretensions to discover and formulate the latent mysticism of the Celtic legends, Dr. Hyde finds in early Irish literature "a disinclination to indulge in anything like generalization or metaphysical abstractions, even of the simplest kind, a disinclination which perhaps accounts for the particularity of description which is a marked feature of the sagas.15

14 Ibid., xv.
15 Ibid., xiv.
But the distinguishing mark, par excellence, of Celtic literature, according to Dr. Hyde, and one which sets it apart from the early literature of the rest of Europe, is "the marvelous way in which it is interpenetrated by the love of nature in all its aspects." One of the oldest and sweetest songs in Gaelic commemorating this typical love of nature, in all its moods, is the "Blackbird of Derrycarn," which Dr. Hyde gives (in a translation by Sigerson) as follows:

The tuneful tumult of that bird
The belling deer on ferny steep,
This welcome in the dawn he heard,
This soothed at eve his sleep.

Dear to him the wind-loved heath,
The whirr of wings, the rustling brake,
Dear the murmuring glens beneath,
And sob of Droma's lake.

The cry of hounds at early morn
The pattering deer, the pebbly creek,
The cuckoo's call, the sounding horn,
The swooping eagle's shriek.16

Here the poet Oisin (or Ossian as McPherson anglicised it) is supposed to describe to Saint Patrick the exquisite singing of the Blackbird of Derrycarn, and the delight which his father, Finn, had taken in listening to it.

A more somber note, characteristic of the melancholy which so often pervades Celtic literature, is struck in the following poem translated from the Gaelic original in Silva Gadelica by Dr. Sigerson. He entitles it "Solace in Winter": "Colloquy with the ancients. Circa A.D. 1200."

Chill the winter, cold the wind,
Up the stag springs, stark of mind;
Fierce and bare the mountain fells—
But the brave stag boldly bells.

He will not set side to rest
On Sliav Varna's snowy breast;
Echta's stag, also rousing
Hears wails of wolves a-wailing.

Gailte I, and Diarmid Donn
Oft with Oscar apt to run,
When piercing night was paling
Heard rousing wolves a-wailing.

Sound may sleep the russet stag
With his hide hid in the crag;
Him, hidden, nothing aileth
When piercing night prevaileth.

I am aged now and gray
Few of men I meet this day
But I hurled the javelin bold
Of a morning, icy cold.

Thanks unto the King of Heaven
And the Virgin's Son be given;
Many men have I made still,
Who this night are very chill. 17

In this poem, translated from the twelfth century Gaelic, but probably itself a rendering of a very much older original, we cannot fail to notice a trait already alluded to earlier in this chapter—the curious mingling of pagan and Christian sentiments in the poet's mind. Gailte, the speaker, harks back with nostalgic longing to the olden times when he and the other Fenian warriors "hurled the javelin bold". The prayer in the last verse strikes a grotesque note coupled with the old warrior's boast of his many killings. It is evidence of that conflict which long survived in the Celtic mind between the natural man, typified by the poet-warrior, Oisin, and the spiritual discipline of religion introduced by Saint Patrick.

17 Brooke and Rolleston, 340.
This Celtic love of natural scenes and sounds which appears to have intoxicated the early bards is often accompanied by an indefinable note of regret at the passing of the ancient Celtic world—the pre-Christian era of the Red Branch Knights, and of the Fianna which is looked back on as the Golden Age of Eire. Here is a verse, translated by Professor McNeill of University College, Dublin, from an Early-Modern Irish text, entitled the "Lay of Ben Gualann" which seems to voice this sentiment. The speaker is Oisin, the last of the Fenians.

A sorry story, Ben Gualann, Ben of shapely
summits—
er the Tonsured One was here 'twas
good to roam your hill-side
Many hounds and gillies were on your
slopes, Ben Gualann;
many a stalwart hero, many a sharp,
bright, bugle;
Beagles cried in your valleys when wild
boars were hunted;
every Fenian huntsman had lovely,
leased greyhounds;
Many a sweet-toned hand-harp sounded upon
your green-sod;
plentiful gold was given, rewarding
song and story;
Your herons' call at night-time, the
heather-hen on your uplands,
together made kind music, right sweet it
was to listen.
'Twould lift the heart within me to hear the
voice of your eagles,
the sweet noise of your otters, and the
calling of your foxes;
Your blackbirds and your thrushes, 'tis I am
lonely for them,
the doves in your thick tree-tops would
lift their grief from women.
And often-time were gathered, by the shining
Fenian women,
fragrant and tasty berries, among your
tangled brambles;
Bog-berries, brightly scarlet, cuckoo-flower
and cresses,
brook-lime, strawberries, raspberries, sloes
and honey-suckle—
These we gathered often in the days of Fianna Eireann; 
To-night I am old and withered; I lived of old right gaily.  

Dr. Hyde thinks this excessive love of nature among the early Irish all the more remarkable when we consider that it has always been believed that the Aryan races owe their appreciation of the beauties of nature to the introduction among them of Christianity. Here is what he says: 

Any esthetic sensibility, where nature was concerned, seems to have been practically unknown among the pagans of Greece and Rome. According to Humboldt, we discern the first faint traces of it in Cicero and the younger Pliny. But the Irish Pagan seems to have been penetrated with it to his profoundest depths, for there can be little doubt such descriptions as I have quoted do not take their color from Christianity, but are a real legacy from pre-Christian times.  

Another characteristic trait of Celtic literature is the gift of rendering with wonderful felicity the magical charm of nature. Mr. Yeats seeks to account for this characteristic by describing it as a relic of primitive nature-worship. He writes: 

The Celtic natural magic is but the ancient religion of the world, the ancient worship of nature and that troubled ecstasy before her, that certainty of all beautiful places being haunted, which it brought into mens' minds.  

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19 Hyde. Ibid., 11, xviii.  
Matthew Arnold, writing on the same subject, asserts that the delicate magic of nature came into romance through the Celts. Continuing, he says:

The forest solitude, the bubbling spring, the wild flowers are everywhere in romance. They have a mysterious life and grace there; they are nature's own children and utter her secrets in a way which makes them quite different from the woods, waters and plants of Greek and Latin poetry. 21

Even the animals in the Irish sagas have often an interest attached to them for their own sake, which may have had its origin, Dr. Hyde thinks, in the Druids once teaching a doctrine of metempsychosis. 22 Thus Bran, the hound of Finn MacCumlain, was no mere dog, and Oisin himself is descended from a mother who had once been a deer. Cuchulain's great warhorse, the Grey of Macha, knows when his master is going to his fate, and unwillingly allows himself to be yoked to his chariot.

Even the trees and plants have a mysterious life of their own—a feature in which some have thought to see a form of pantheism, but which more likely, was nothing more than the animism common to a great many early races. For instance, the mountain ash in which Diarmuid conceals himself (in the legend of the "Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne"), while the Fenians play at chess below, sprang from an enchanted berry. Even the billows of ocean are inspired with a spirit, and when a catastrophe is impending the

21 Matthew Arnold. Ibid., 120.
22 Irish Literature. 11, xvii.
Wave of Cliclim rolls in upon the shore in thunder. The air itself is tenanted by supernatural beings. When "the battle-winning hero Cuchulain" springs into his chariot, there shout around him "spirits and goblins and spirits of the air and demons of the air." 23

No account of Gaelic literature, however, would be complete without a mention of the elaborate and intricate system of meters evolved in the Gaelic literary world. Mention has already been made (in Chapter One, page 5) of the high esteem in which the bards were held; they ranked next to the king or chief himself in Celtic society. They were divided into two classes: Patrician and Plebeian, each of which was, in turn, sub-divided into eight grades, with special restrictions and laws. These shared between the three hundred or more meters which had been invented in pre-Danish times. 24

The claim has been made, not by any Irish writer, but by one of the greatest of European philologists, Zeuss, that the Gael taught Europe to rhyme. He has this to say on the subject:

The form of Celtic poetry, to judge both from the older and more recent examples, appears to be more ornate than the form of any other nation, and even more ornate in the older than in the modern ones; from the fact of which greater ornateness it undoubtedly came to pass that at the very time that the Roman Empire was hastening to its ruin, the Celtic forms—at first entire, afterwards in part—passed over not only into the songs of the Latins, but also into those of other nations and remained in them... We must believe that the advance made by the Anglo-Saxons in the introduction

23 Ibid., 11, xix.
24 Ibid., xviii.
of rhyme into their Latin hymns came from the Irish, as did the arts of writing and of painting and of ornamenting manuscripts, since they themselves, in common with the other Germanic nations, made use in their poetry of nothing but alliteration.25

According to Dr. Hyde, "the elaborateness of the system which the Gaels evolved, the prodigious complexity of the rules, the subtlety, delicacy, and intricacy of their poetical code, are astounding, and wholly unparalleled by anything that the rest of the western world has produced."26

The contribution made by the Gael to world literature may, therefore, be regarded as two-fold; in substance, a romanticism that is expressed in the "natural magic" which pervades its dealing with the beauty of creation, together with a certain intangible spirit of mystery emanating from mythical sources; and in form, a peculiar metrical subtlety and charm which comes from the Celtic manner of expression and idiom.

Contrasting Gaelic literature with English literature, Aodh de Blacam remarks that

Whereas, in English literature, the writings of every generation mirror some philosophical change, Gaelic literature intellectually is a literature of rest, not of change; of intensive cultivation, not of experiment. It is moreover the image of a civilization, half- heroic, half-pastoral that continues down to the present day.27

This antiquity and changelessness of Gaelic literature is one of its chief fascinations for the learned world, for, in the older portion of Celtic literature, is found a window into the early Iron Age wherein European

25 Quoted by Hyde in Irish Literature, II, xviii.
26 Ibid., xix.
civilization was founded. "Nowhere else but in Ireland," writes Dr. R. A. S. Macalister, "do we find a literature that comes down to us right out of the heart of the La Tene period ... Ireland shows us the living makers of that period, and tells us something of what they did and how they thought."\(^{28}\)

It is this latter aspect of Celtic Literature that seems to have fascinated the writers of the modern Anglo-Irish school of poets: the air of antiquity and remoteness, of shadowiness and mystery that surrounds the half-legendary figures of the Celtic past afforded a suitable literary background for the expounding of a semi-pagan, mystic philosophy. The figures of Celtic mythology, who were portrayed by the Christian poets of Ireland in a half-humorous manner, are given a reality and intenseness in the poetry of Mr. Yeats, and of George Russell such as they could only have had in the minds of men who actually believed in them and worshipped them.

However, it yet remains to be seen to what extent the writings of these latter poets can be said to reproduce the spirit and flavor of Gaelic literature such as it has been presented in the foregoing pages. And as this entails a somewhat detailed comparison of Anglo-Irish and Gaelic literature, it calls for separate treatment, which it will be the purpose of succeeding chapters to supply.

\(^{28}\)Quoted by de Blacam, Gaelic Literature Surveyed, xiii.
CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCE OF GAELIC LITERATURE ON THE EARLY WRITERS OF THE
ANGLO-IRISH REVIVAL

In a previous chapter, the movement which led up to the revival of interest in the Celtic past was traced over a long period of years. Here we come to a consideration of those more immediate influences which inspired the utterance of the Gaelic spirit in the English tongue.

We have already seen how antiquarian scholars, such as Hardiman, O'Curry, and O'Daly opened the way to the study of Gaelic literature by their translations of the ancient codices and manuscripts. It yet remains to show how these dry translations blossomed into life in the stirring lines of Mangan's lyrics, in the stately verses of Ferguson's epic renderings, in O'Grady's colorful histories, and in the Bardic and Folk poetry of Sigerson and Hyde.

Passing over such figures as Callanan, Walsh, and Aubrey de Vere, who, although they voiced the Gaelic strain in English verse, did not make their influence widely felt, we shall confine our attention, in the first place, to two men, Mangan and Ferguson, who, first among the Irish poets, made Anglo-Ireland and the English-speaking world abroad aware of the existence of a Gaelic literature.

These two were the first major Irish poets to break away from the English literary tradition, which was followed by such notable Irishmen as
Thomas Moore, Davis and the "Nation" poets, who, even when they were intensely national in their sentiments, invariably wrote in the English literary vein.

Mangan and Ferguson, on the other hand, first among Irish poets, sought their inspiration in the Gaelic past. They were not political poets like Davis and his contemporaries who strove to awaken the nation to the ideal of independence. They had vision and understanding above their fellows which enabled them to recognize that nationhood is not dependent upon forms of political government, but rather is constituted by ways of life and thought. For this reason they pointed to the Gaelic past as the spiritual home of the race, as the only source from which Irishmen could derive that stimulus of culture and mark of distinctive civilization capable of preserving their individuality as a people. In the interpretation of the Celtic spirit they found a truer and more vital expression of Irish nationality.

To James Clarence Mangan, the poet of dreams and longings, of an ideal rapture and a perfect beauty, the history of Ireland appealed with a personal force. Being himself of a melancholy temperament, the sorrows of his country's past seemed to echo his own sad story. As Lionel Johnson writes,

The laments, the prophecies, the dauntless defiances, the radiant hopes, in a word the various "passions" which he found in the history and literature of the Gael came home to him. . . . As he broods over the lamentations of ancient bards, raising the "keen" over Ireland derelict and desolate, over Irish princes exiled or dead, over Irish hopes frustrated and Irish chivalry
in defeat, his own immense melancholy kindles into a melancholy of majestic music. . . . His "Dark Rosaleen" ranks with the great lyrics of the world; it is one of the fairest and fiercest in its perfection of imagery and rhythm; here is the chivalry of a nation's faith struck of a sudden into the immortality of music. The "Ode to The Maguire" burns with a noble ferocity in lines of the highest Homeric simplicity and grandeur.¹

Mangan, however, was more concerned with the dark ages of Ireland's history rather than with her heroic age. He is filled with sadness at the sight of his "Dark Rosaleen's" unhappy lot:

All day long, in unrest,
To and fro do I move.
The very soul within my breast
Is wasted for you, love!
The heart in my bosom faints
To think of you, my Queen,
My life of life, my saint of saints,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!
To hear your sweet and sad complaints,
My life, my love, my saint of saints,
My Dark Rosaleen!

But, in the final verse, he is swept away by a fierce cry of passionate love and undying loyalty which echoes the feelings of a nation for its Motherland:

Oh! the Erne shall run red
With redundance of blood,
The earth shall rock beneath our tread,
And flames wrap hill and woods,
And gun-peal and slogan-cry
Wake many a glen serene,
Ere you shall fade, ere you shall die,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!

¹Lionel Johnson. Post Liminimum, quoted in "Introduction to James Clarence Mangan," Brooke & Rolleston, 220.
The Judgment Hour must first be nigh,  
Ere you can fade, ere you can die,  
My Dark Rosaleen!2

These beautiful lyric lines owe as much to Mangan's own fine poetic feeling as they do to the Gaelic original from which they are a translation. In Mangan's poem the emotion of the original, composed by some unknown bard at the time of Elizabeth, takes on new pathos and beauty. Ernest Boyd, writing of this poem, says:

As the poem departs more and more from the text, it comes nearer and nearer to the conception of the Gaelic poet, and becomes at the same time an original creation. . . . In short, he treats his subject as the moderns have treated theirs. The latter, absorbing the legends and stories of their country, have identified themselves with the spirit of Ireland's past, and renewed the tradition of Irish literature.3

Thus, in his "Dark Rosaleen," in "O'Hussey's Ode to The Maguire" and in The Poets and Poetry of Munster, Mangan set a precedent which later generations of Irish poets were to follow. Boyd, summing up Mangan's place in the revival, says: "In him the authentic voice of Celtic Ireland was heard for the first time in Anglo-Irish poetry, and he indicated the way of escape from the dominance of England, which his successors have followed."4

Sir Samuel Ferguson, the next great name in Anglo-Irish literature, was himself a distinguished Gaelic scholar. Whereas Mangan had to depend

\[2\]Brooke & Rolleston, 251  
\[3\]Op. Cit., 18  
\[4\]Ibid., 19.
upon translations given him by his friends, O'Daly and O'Curry, Ferguson had direct access to the treasures of Gaelic literature by means of his archaeological studies. He was one of the first to turn the ancient Gaelic epics into English verse in the volume, *Lays of the Western Gael*, published in 1867. This was followed in 1872 by a more ambitious work, the epic, *Congal*, also a rendering of the Red Branch cycle, the most ancient of Celtic sagas. Ernest Boyd regards the publication of this volume as the starting point of a new literature. "Here," he writes, "for the first time in Anglo-Irish poetry, is outlined the tragic history of the House of Usnach, of the loves of Naisi and Deirdre, the Helen and Paris of Ireland's antiquity, and the mighty deeds of Cuchulain, who dominates Irish bardic history as Achilles dominated the Greek epic."5

Ferguson's ambition was to found a national literature in the English tongue based on the classical epic literature of the ancient Celtic world. He himself had the poetic vision and breadth of view necessary for such an undertaking because of his wide classical learning and his antiquarian studies over a long period of years. Moreover, an epic literature requires a great subject and, in the heroic literature of the Celt, Ferguson found such a subject. Like Mangan, he was altogether detached from the political strife of his times, but, unlike him, he was of the Ascendancy group whose members had been for generations antagonistic to everything Gaelic.

Yeats had a great admiration for Ferguson, whom he regarded as one of the Founders of the Revival. Witness the following tribute which he pays to him:

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Ibid., 21.
The author of these poems is the greatest poet Ireland has produced, because the most central and the most Celtic. Whatever the future may bring forth in the way of a truly great and national literature—and now that the race is so large, so widely spread, and so conscious of its unity, the years are ripe—will find its morning in these three volumes of one who was made by the purifying flame of national sentiment the one man of his time who wrote epic poetry—one who, among the somewhat sybaritic singers of his day was like some aged sea-king sitting among the inland wheat and poppies—the savour of the sea about him and its strength.

This last statement of Yeats takes added significance when it is considered that Ferguson was alone in his generation the pioneer of a literary movement which found but little popular support at the time.

Arthur Percival Graves, one of the new literary men who appreciated Ferguson's genius, mentions that he himself once spoke to the poet with regret of the neglect of all but political issues in Irish literature of the time, and adds that Ferguson acknowledged his regrettable fact, but, with a quiet expression of confidence said that "his time would come." 7

Gaelic Ireland, which, at that time, was recovering from the centuries of oppression, was fortunate to find in Ferguson a champion who raised her up from the oblivion into which tyranny and misfortune had flung her, and who proudly devoted his talents and high position to the regeneration of Celtic learning. Succeeding generations have amply repaid Ferguson for the neglect with which his work was treated at the time. There are few

6William Butler Yeats. Quoted by A. P. Graves in Literary Introduction to Sir Samuel Ferguson, Brooke & Rolleston, 287. 7Ibid., 278
more loved and honored names in Anglo-Irish literature today than his, and the greatest tribute which Gaelic Ireland can pay to Ferguson is that he did not merely borrow the sagas and legends of the Gael for the expression of a personal poetic philosophy, but strove to present the heroes and their mighty deeds in all their pristine vigor and simplicity, such as they were in the literature that has come down from those early times.

Professor Dowden has called Ferguson an eighteenth-century poet. In a letter written by him to the poet assuring him of the ultimate success of Congal, which had lately been published, Dowden says:

A poem with epic breadth and thews is not likely to be popular now. A diseased and over-sensitive nerve is a qualification for the writing of a poetry at present, much more than a thoughtful brain or strength of muscle. . . . What seems to me most noteworthy in your poems is the union of culture with simplicity and strength. Their refinement is large and strong, not curious and diseased; and they have spaces and movements which give one a feeling like the sea or the air on a headland.8

The simplicity and strength of Ferguson's poetry comes from the fact that he strove to reproduce the spirit of the original Gaelic sagas. It has a solemnity of measure that re-echoes the ancient bardic chanting of Old unhappy, far-off things
And battles long ago.

In his poems, rather than in the cloudy phrases of Macpherson's Ossian, is found the authentic voice of the Celtic world, with its Homeric figures and colorful background of pagan grandeur. Giant figures of Celtic heroes stalk through his pages, speaking and acting with the strength and simplicity

Ibid., 279.
ty of a primal age. Here is no recondite philosophy or mysticism such as Mr. Yeats put into the mouths of his heroes. All is as one would expect it to be, rude—perhaps at times—barbarous, but always strong, manly, and simple.

A magnificent romanticism, such as Dr. Hyde defines as the essential note of Celtic literature,\(^9\) pervades Ferguson's verse. Not the vague, dreamy world of *The Wanderings of Ossian*, with its shadowy figures and dim background of foam and vapor and mystery, but a well-defined, vigorous, clear-cut picture of colorful warriors, mighty battles, love and hate and primitive passions.

Whenever Ferguson introduces the note of wonder which is so characteristic of Celtic romanticism in literature, he does so with a naturalness that befits his narrative. In the epic *Congal*, which deals with the last great struggle of Celtic paganism against the new religion, the giant figures of Celtic mythology loom up with vivid force. They fit naturally into the background of superstitious wonder, which survived the advent of Christianity to Ireland, and which gives that peculiar note of weirdness to Celtic fancy, that sense of unseen presences which is, undoubtedly, a relic of primitive nature-worship.

In *Congal*, the prince of that name stands for the cause of paganism in a fierce struggle against the Christian Domnal, king of Ireland. In the ensuing battle the giant figure of Manamann mac Lir, the Celtic sea-god, stalks at night through the camp of the pagan army:

> For all the night around their echoing camp
> Was heard continuous from the hills a sound

\(^9\) See *Irish Literature*, 11, xiii.
as of the tramp
Of giant footsteps; but so thick the
white mist lay around
None saw the Walker save the King. He
starting at the sound,
Called to his foot his fierce red hound;
athwart his shoulders cast
A shaggy mantle, grasped his spear, and
through the moonlight passed
Alone up dark Ben-Boli's heights, towards
which above the woods
With sound as when at close of eve the
noise of falling floods
Is borne to shepherd's ear remote on stilly
upland lawn,
The steps along the mountain-side with
hollow fall came on.10

Then, "through the haze, huge as through mists at sea" the king descries
"a monstrous Shape, striding impatient, like a man much grieved, who walks
alone."

At the ford of Moy-Linny the army encounters another weird spectre of
Celtic mythology, the terrible "Washer of the Ford"

   Mid-leg deep she stood
   Beside a heap of heads and limbs that swam
   in oozing blood
   Whereon, and on a glittering heap of raiment
   rich and brave
   With swift, pernicious hands she scooped and
   poured the crimson wave.11

There is something Homeric about the giant figure of the "Walker-in-
the-night" that recalls the huge Cyclops of the Odyssey, while the gruesome
"Washer-at-the-Ford" embodies the note of eeriness that is a characteristic
feature of Celtic legends. Ferguson, more than any of the poets who have
come after him, caught the primitive atmosphere, the epic breadth, and the

10 Sir Samuel Ferguson. Congal: A Poem in Five Books. Edward Ponsonby,
Dublin, 1872, 53.
11 Ibid., 54.
strength, full of movement, which pervades the old sagas. His poems breathe the air of Celtic ancientry because they sprang from his own deep knowledge of Gaelic literature; they bear the stamp of authenticity because he had no other aim in all his writings than to re-create for his own generation the epic literature of the Gael.

Just about the time that death put an end to the labors of Sir Samuel Ferguson on behalf of Anglo-Celtic literature, another great Gaelic scholar was ready to take the torch from his grasp and carry it on for many years until his countrymen were fired with enthusiasm for the glories of their ancient literature. This was Standish James O'Grady, sometimes called the Father of the Revival.

Already, by the closing quarter of the nineteenth century, Irishmen had been made aware of a new trend in literature. Mangan and Ferguson had shown them that a rich mine of literary material lay unworked in the legendary history of their country, but something more powerful than the intermittent flashes of Mangan's genius, something more ardent than the deep scholarship of Ferguson was needed to illumine the vast field of Celtic antiquity with the vivifying flame of poetry and romance. This spark which inflamed the mind of the nation was, strange to relate, not a great poem or novel or drama, but a history--O'Grady's History of Ireland: Heroic Period, published, 12 shortly before Ferguson's death, in 1878.

This work, with its concluding volume in 1880, must, according to Boyd, be regarded as the real starting-point of the Literary Revival. Here are

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That a great stream of poetry should have its fountain-head in a work of prose, and a prose-history, moreover, may be sufficiently unusual to explain the prevailing ignorance of the authentic origin of the poetic renaissance of Ireland. ... The growth of this literature has been a departure from the normal process of evolution. Ireland already possessed the literary forms perfected and handed down both by English and Gaelic writers, so that it was not a question of evolving the framework of literature, but of renewing the substance which was to be poured into the existing mould. ... In the circumstances, therefore, we need no longer be surprised that two volumes of historical prose should prove the starting-point of a rich vein of poetry. It was not the form but the matter and spirit of literature that were changed, in order that Ireland might be adequately expressed in the language which has supplanted her own tongue.\(^{13}\)

O'Grady differed a great deal from Ferguson in his treatment of the Celtic bardic literature. Ferguson was himself a modern bard, scholarly, pains-taking, always viewing his subject-matter objectively, keeping his heroes and their deeds in the realm of the legendary past. There is a dignity and restraint about his epics that echoes the chanting of ancient bards, telling of heroes long dead, their mighty battles, their loves, their hates, their glory that passed away. The very spirit of bardic literature breathes through his pages.

O'Grady, on the other hand, inaugurated a new conception of legendary history, which set a precedent that the Anglo-Irish school of writers later followed. That is why he may, with justice, be called the Father of the

\(^{13}\)Op. Cit., 28.
Revival. However, O'Grady differs from his followers in that, while he sought always to present a vivid, glowing picture of his heroes, he did not attempt to exploit his subject for the exposition of a subjective literary or poetic philosophy.

His ambition was the "reconstruction by imaginative processes of the life led by our ancestors in this country,"14 For him, the heroic age was no longer legendary; Cuchulain, Emer, and the mighty men of old became living men like himself, moving about the same country, treading the same earth--his ancestors, as they are of every Irishman.

O'Grady's interpretation of the Celtic sagas was based on a disregard for historic and geographic accuracy, which, while it enhanced the romantic charm of his narrative, had the effect of opening the way for later misconceptions of Celtic literature on the part of the Anglo-Irish group of poets, who drew largely from his imaginative presentation of the Celtic past. As he himself wrote, in the Preface to the History of Ireland, regarding the legends and their significance in the life of the people, "They are that kind of history a nation desires to possess. They betray the ambition and ideals of the people, and, in that respect, have a value beyond the tale of actual events and duly recorded deeds."15

As Ernest Boyd writes,

Standish O'Grady sees the gods and demi-gods, the heroes and kings of Irish history with the eyes of an epic imagination. He is not concerned with deciding the exact point at which the legends merge into history, but embraces the whole epoch,

15Ibid., "Preface," xii.
assimilating all that is best and most lordly in the bardic compositions with the knowledge gleaned from all manner of sources... The result is an astonishingly vigorous narrative, which rolls along with a mighty sweep, carrying the reader into the very midst of the life of the heroic period. The past lives again in these pages, lit up by the brilliance of a mind stored with a wealth of romantic vision. 16

In other words, O'Grady was prepared to sacrifice faithfulness to historic truth for the charm of a romantic tale. His chief aim was to arouse enthusiasm for the Celtic past, its heroes, its ideals, its romantic appeal. In order to achieve this objective, he was willing to depart from the accepted concept of history, and, drawing irrespectively on many sources, to reconstruct a flowing, vivid picture of the ancient Celtic world. This literary device of glamorizing and adapting the legendary figures of Ireland's past, of bringing the heroes out of the mists of time into the clear light of the present day, and of putting into their mouths the speech of the Irish country-side had the effect of popularizing Gaelic literature, but at the same time, it was bound to give rise to certain misconceptions as to the nature of the Celtic literary characteristics.

This came about later by the subjective element which each succeeding imitator of O'Grady introduced into his interpretation of the Celtic legends. O'Grady himself, although he infused a large imaginative element into his renderings of the sagas, succeeded in remaining substantially faithful to  

the original, and, moreover, he confined himself to merely external additions, such as flowing descriptions, colorful characterization and imaginative details intended to fill in the bolder outline of the legendary narrative.

On the other hand, the Anglo-Irish poets, who were inspired by his presentation of the Gaelic heroic age, were not equally conservative in their use of Celtic material. The "Celtic Twilight" group, as they came to be known from Yeats' book of the same name, were not historians endeavoring to reconstruct a vivid picture of Ireland's heroic age; they were poets who saw in the vast and rich field of Celtic mythology and legend a ready store of material, capable of being adapted for the expression of their poetic philosophy. Absorbing the stories and legends of Celtic literature, they transformed and colored them with their own subjective interpretations. The realm of poetry was undoubtedly the gainer, as a result of this procedure, but it was inevitable that the native Gaelic scholars and writers of Gaeldom, who regarded the field of Celtic literature as their province, should protest against what they regarded as a travesty and misconception of the Irish literary tradition.

Thus O'Grady, while rendering great service to the cause of Gaelic literature through his vigorous and colorful presentation of Ireland's heroic age, was unwittingly the instigator of a literary vogue that was destined to make Ireland's name known for the first time abroad as the home of a new trend in English poetry and drama, but, at the same time, was to give rise to a bitter and long-standing controversy at home.

Standish O'Grady, however, remains as one of the great figures of the
Revival. Though he may not be always trustworthy as a historian, his contribution to romance and poetry outweighs his inaccuracies. He lit up the distant realms of legendary history with the fire of a brilliant imagination and awoke enthusiasm among his countrymen for ideals of an heroic age. Nor did his services to Irish literary history end here. Besides his *Bardic History*, which drew from an English reviewer an enquiry as to why Irish poets had left unwrought "this rich mine of the virgin poetry of their country," and why someone did not arise among them "aspiring to do for these legends what Tennyson has done for the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table," 17 O'Grady wrote a great many other books dealing with the various epochs of Irish history, notably the age of Elizabeth, when the old Gaelic order was breaking up under the onslaught of a foreign civilization.

His *Red Hugh's Captivity* and *The Flight of the Eagle* gave to Irish literature one of its most spirited and beautifully written romances, dealing with the capture and escape from Dublin Castle in the reign of Elizabeth, of young Hugh O'Donnell, the dashing and picturesque chieftain of the North. *The Bog of Stars* and *In the Wake of King James* are likewise romantic novels which did for the Elizabethan and Stuart epochs in Ireland what the *Bardic History* had already done for the heroic age.

Summing up O'Grady's place in the history of the Revival, Ernest Boyd thus acknowledges the movement's debt to him:

> There is not an important writer of the Revival but has acknowledged his debt to Standish O'Grady, more particularly

17 Quoted from *The Spectator* by Boyd, 39.
the generation springing up when his best work appeared. A. E., whose mind and work are perhaps most akin to his, shows continual traces of O'Grady's influence, and has repeatedly testified to the importance of the Bardic History; Todhunter's Three Bardic Tales are the direct result of the contact thus afforded with Irish legend, while W. B. Yeats has directly and indirectly admitted his obligation to the same source.18

It was further given to O'Grady to foster the growth in Ireland of Anglo-Irish literature, both as a publisher and editor. He founded in 1900 and conducted for six years the All Ireland Review, the only purely literary journal in Ireland at that time. This periodical attracted the attention of some of the leading writers in Irish letters and became the center of culture and ideals among the Anglo-Irish literary group.

Thus, Standish O'Grady, historian, dramatist, novelist, editor and publisher stands out as one of the greatest figures in the Anglo-Irish Renaissance. He exerted a tremendous influence over the Anglo-Irish mind in literature by means of his glamorous and romantic interpretation of the old Celtic world, and prepared the soil from which, some years later, the ripened fruits of the Literary Revival sprang.

Before passing on to a survey of the Renaissance movement at its height, however, there yet remain two great names to be dealt with--names which stand for the purely Gaelic, rather than Anglo-Irish, elements in the Revival, although, paradoxically, neither of the two was of Gaelic stock, for one, Douglas Hyde, came of an old Anglo-Norman family, while the other, George Sigerson, sprang from Norse ancestry.

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18 Ibid., 53.
Both of these men exerted great influence on the course of the literary movement as translators of ancient Gaelic poetry and of the popular folk-lore of the Irish-speaking country-side. Their work was very important because, in the translations which Sigerson furnished of the old Bardic poems, and in the English renderings of folk songs which Hyde contributed, there was revealed a multitude of references to Celtic myth and legend which could be understood only by having recourse to the epic prose sagas in the ancient manuscripts. They, moreover, furnished Anglo-Irish writers with a new literary medium.

What O'Grady did for the epic prose legends of ancient Ireland, Sigerson did for Bardic poetry. One of the earliest workers in the field of Celtic research, George Sigerson, as far back as 1860, published the second volume of *Poets and Poetry of Munster*, the first part of which was contributed by Mangan and published posthumously in 1850. This first volume of Sigerson's contained the texts of about fifty very beautiful Gaelic poems, together with a metrical translation of each, in which the author reproduced, with wonderful felicity, the peculiar heptasyllabic measure of the Gaelic originals.

As President of the National Literary Society, Dr. Sigerson devoted his deep archaeological skill and vast enthusiasm to the work of rendering into metrical English verse translations of the ancient poetry of Ireland. With the co-operation of John O'Daly of Dublin, who did such splendid work in translating Gaelic manuscripts of Early and Middle Irish writers, Sigerson labored for many years in the compilation of the work which played a large part in the Celtic Revival movement—Bards of the Gael and
This latter volume was published in 1897 at a time when the Revival was coming into flower. It was dedicated to his fellow-laborers in the field of Gaelic scholarship: Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, President of the Irish Literary Society in London, and Dr. Douglas Hyde, the President of the Gaelic League. Thus it served to synthesize the labors of the two great movements which were working for the restoration of Celtic learning—one in the native tongue of the Gael and the other in the language of the Gall, or foreigner.

The contents of Bards of the Gael and Gall range from the earliest times down to eighteenth-century folk-lore and embrace a period of no less than two thousand years. It shows the great continuity of Gaelic learning and a literary tradition that stretched into the pre-Christian era. This fact, in itself, was a powerful stimulus to the growth of the movement for a distinctly Gaelic culture and literature.

Commenting on this sense of Irish nationality in literature, Ernest Boyd writes:

With such an ancestry, the poets were emboldened to proclaim themselves as voicing something more than a mere province of England. The material of Gaelic literature and history had been released by the magic touch of O'Grady; Hyde, Sigerson and others were kindling the torch of Gaelic civilization, and drawn to the service of the language many of the younger writers. A literature was in process of formation, which attached itself directly to the stem of national culture. This new branch,

though its outer covering was of a different texture from the parent tree, derived its sap from the same roots. The spirit was Celtic, if the form was English. 20

Sigerson and O'Grady, besides being contemporaries, were complementary of each other in their contributions to Celtic studies. For, while O'Grady had given the content and spirit of Bardic literature, Sigerson showed the Anglo-Irish poets the structural characteristics of Gaelic verse. Already (in Chapter Three, page 47, of this thesis) mention has been made of Sigerson's renderings from the Gaelic, and an examination of the verse-structure of the poem quoted will reveal that typical love of recurrent and interwoven vowel sounds and assonances which later became the distinguishing mark of Anglo-Irish verse, and which is but a survival in the English-speaking Irishman of the verse traditions of his race.

In all the one hundred and forty or more translations from the bardic originals and from folk-songs one may notice the characteristic traits of Gaelic literature; that intimate feeling for nature, suggestive of ancient nature-worship; the spirit of mystery or wonder which is never absent from the Celtic mind; and the note of sadness that seems to echo the regret of pagan Ireland at the passing of the heroes of old—Cuchulain, Fionn, Oisin, and the warriors of the Red Branch and Fianna. Their great exploits are told with vivid and forceful phrase; always there is the quaint, peculiarly-Gaelic simile and the characteristic Gaelic alliteration:

Sword-hilts gold and iv'ry gleam
On our barks with banners high;
Hung on hooks the Bucklers beam,
Sheaves of spears are standing high... . .

Ne'er did Finn or Fianna know
Gallant chiefs of deeds more grand,
Nor could Erin braver show
Than this fair-haired battle band...

There we pierced the foreign foes
As the stinging serpent goes;
Sore we smote them, men and lords,
With our thin, sharp, shearing swords.

These verse-translations, in short, supplied the models and patterns, characteristic of Gaelic literature, which the Anglo-Irish were later to adapt, thereby giving the peculiar un-English flavor to their lines, which, even more than the spirit and content of their poems, sets them apart from other English verse.

In the Introduction to the volume, Sigerson gives a scholarly account of Gaelic verse and vindicates the greatness and antiquity of Celtic culture. He voices the claim, supported later by Zeuss, of Irish literature to have created a system of versification completely different from that of Greece and Rome. The first poem in the volume, a translation of a very ancient Druidical incantation, reveals the existence of rhyming verse in Ireland at a time when such forms were, so far as scholars can discover, unknown in other countries. The poem which is found in the Book of Invasions, one of the earliest of Gaelic manuscripts in Trinity College, Dublin, is of particular interest, not only for its evidence of metrical verse developed at a very early period, but even more so for its content. Professor John MacNeill gives another translation of the poem, in which he follows D'Arbois de Jubainville, the French philologist who sees, underlying it, a form of

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1 Sigerson, 47.
22 Ibid., Preface, iii.
Hugh de Blacam finds in this incantation of the Druid-poet Amergin those peculiarly Celtic characteristics already noted. He writes:

The poem is charged with that natural magic that always is the most fascinating quality of Irish verse, and the legendary Amergin is the prototype of those poets down the ages, who, in their poetry, have mixed their souls with Ireland's mountains and water, her woods, and her tribal hostings on the hilly places.

All the great epochs of Irish legend and history are represented in Sigerson's anthology; the age of Cuchulain and the Red Branch, the Fenian cycle, the Dialogues of Oisin and St. Patrick, the Norse-Irish period and the later poems composed when the old Gaelic world was making its last stand before the Elizabethan and Cromwellian campaigns. This inspiring volume of skillful metrical renderings from the dawn of Celtic literature down to the folk-ballads of the last century made the Anglo-Irish writers aware of the heritage which was theirs as the interpreters of an old and honored literary tradition.

"One of the most remarkable traits of Gaelic literature," writes de Blacam, "is that it deals, so to speak, with a continuous present. The same life, the same mode of thought appear in the eighteenth as in the eighth century." This was the life and mode of thought that the new Anglo-Irish poets were called upon to express in a language, whose forms and idiom they were to mould into a new form of verse. It was the dis-

Ibid., "Author's Foreward," xiii.
tells of his having to take the prescribed Latin oath in order to gain permission to read in the College Library.

The oath was, as usual, administered by the Provost, Dr. Jellett. When Hyde read out the oath the Provost said: "You learnt your Latin on the Continent?" "No, Sir," said Hyde. "You did," replied the Provost, "or where did you get your pronunciation of Latin?" "By analogy with Irish," Hyde answered, to which the Provost's only reply was: "Leave the room, sir."²⁶

Such was the atmosphere in official literary circles when Hyde began his life-long campaign to restore Gaelic learning and culture in his native land. That he succeeded in accomplishing his objective, and thereby inspired many of his fellow-Anglo-Irish with a love and enthusiasm for Gaelic literature, is sufficiently attested to by another ceremony that took place a few years ago in the Dublin Castle when Douglas Hyde read the oath in Gaelic by which he became President of Ireland.

Such was the anti-national spirit on official circles when Hyde began his crusade to "de-Anglicize" Ireland that the "Board of Education" went so far as to obliterate Scott's lines:

\[
\text{Breathes there a man, with soul so dead} \\
\text{Who never to himself hath said,} \\
\text{This is my own, my native land!}
\]

from the pages of school-books, and substituted in their stead the following lines, written for the occasion by Archbishop Whately, the Church of Ireland Primate:

\[
\text{I thank the goodness and the grace} \\
\text{That on my birth has smiled,} \\
\text{And made me in these Christian days} \\
\text{A happy English child.²⁷}
\]

²⁶Diarmid Coffey, Douglas Hyde: President of Ireland, 16.
²⁷Ibid., 32.
Hyde, however, for all his enthusiasm for Gaelic, was no Anglo-phobe. He wrote several of his most note-worthy books on literature in English and even when he gave the text of the Gaelic poems which he was translating, he invariably gave a skillful metrical rendering of the same in English. When he spoke of the necessity of "de-Anglicizing" the Irish nation, he meant it

not as a protest against imitating what is best in the English people, for that, he said, would be absurd, but rather to show the folly of neglecting what is Irish and hastening to adopt pell-mell and indiscriminately everything that is English simply because it is English.

As a student in Trinity College, Hyde showed his deep knowledge of and enthusiasm for Gaelic literature by writing several poems, which were inspired by themes from the Red Branch cycle, one entitled "Deirdre," another "The Children of Lir," which contains the germ of the idea that Shakespeare dramatized in King Lear, and a third entitled "The Fate of the Children of Tuireann."

His greatest contribution to Anglo-Irish studies, however, came with the publication of The Literary History of Ireland in 1899. This scholarly volume, the fruit of years of research in the manuscript material of Gaelic, answered once and for all, the objections of Hyde's literary opponents that the Irish Language did not repay study because it had no

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28 Ibid., 43.
literature. It gave Gaelic learning a place for the first time in realms of serious academic study and, coming on top of O'Grady colorful Bardic History and the Sigerson's Bards of the Gael and Gall, it formed a trinity of scholarship that could no longer afford to be ignored by those who hitherto belittled the claims of Gaelic literature.

Besides this valuable work on behalf of ancient Gaelic literature, Hyde contributed several outstanding volumes dealing with an aspect of the Revival in which he may be said to have been a pioneer—the field of folklore. In order to reach a wide reading public, he adopted the plan of giving parallel versions of the folk-songs which he collected and published, Irish on the one side and English translations on the other. This work included three volumes: Beside the Fire, the Love Songs of Connacht and the Religious Songs of Connacht.

Beside the Fire, a collection of folk-tales taken down from West of Ireland peasants, had an important bearing on the forms of the Anglo-Irish literary movement because it did away with the ludicrous dialect of English which had come to be associated with the "stage Irishman" of Charles Lever and Samuel Lover and their imitators, and established the true Gaelic idioms as they have been introduced into English by the Irish people.

Hyde succeeded in giving the natural Irish flavor to his translations; he avoided all tenses not found in Gaelic, and by using those similarly wanting in English, as well as the phrases commonly substituted for the unfamiliar tenses, he produced a pleasant sense of reality.

In Anglo-Irish drama, especially, Hyde's work on behalf of folk dialect has been of great importance. His version of the idiomatic speech
used by the Irish people came to be the literary medium of Anglo-Irish drama as written by Yeats, Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, Synge and others. Witness the following lines from the pen of Hyde; they might well be spoken by one of the characters in Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*:

> If you were to see the sky-woman and she prepared and dressed
> Of a fine sunny day in the street, and
> She walking,
> And a light kindled out of her shining bosom
> That would give sight to the man without an eye.
> There is the love of hundreds, in the forehead of her face,
> Her appearance is as it were the Star of Monday,
> And if she had been in being in the time of the gods
> It is not to Venus the apple would have been delivered up.\(^30\)

Writing on this subject of Hyde's evolving a new literary medium which reproduced the speech of the Irish countryside, Boyd comments:

> Here he (the student of Contemporary Anglo-Irish literature) will find the source of what has come to be regarded as the chief discovery, and most notable characteristic, of the drama of the Literary Revival, the effective employment of the Anglo-Irish idiom.\(^31\)

This, however, was not Hyde's only service to the Revival; his labors in the collecting and editing of the old Gaelic songs—sacred and profane—which had come down through the centuries by oral transmission are as great, if not greater, than his fashioning of a new literary language.

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\(^{31}\) Boyd, 76.
These songs, published in serial form in The Nation and in the Weekly Freeman and later in book form as the Love Songs of Connacht (1893) and Religious Songs of Connacht (1906), did for folk-lore in the West of Ireland what Mangan and Sigerson had done for the South. Their importance in Anglo-Irish literature rests on the beautiful verse renderings of the songs, reproducing the rhyme and meters of the originals, which Hyde; in imitation of Sigerson, appended to each volume. The English translations of the Gaelic songs opened to Anglo-Irish scholars a new and fruitful field of literary activity to which is attributable the emphasis on folk-lore that later became one of the characteristic features of the Literary Revival.

Thus, although Hyde’s all-absorbing devotion has been for the cause of Gaelic literature and folk-lore, he has vast importance in the Revival movement, not only for what he has written, but even more so for what he is. He, more than any other poet or scholar during the past half-century, sensed the distinctive contribution which Gaelic culture could make to the life and thought of the Irish Nation. It is to his tireless labors and boundless zeal that the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival owes, in great part, its contact with Celtic literature and all that this has meant to the movement.

A closing tribute to Hyde from one who has come to be regarded as the chief poet of the Revival, William Butler Yeats, will show the esteem in which his work for the cause of Anglo-Irish literature was held by his contemporaries. Forty years ago, when Yeats and Hyde were collaborating on the formation of an Irish drama, the former wrote:
These plays remind me of my first reading of the Love Songs of Connacht. The prose parts of that book were to me, as they were to many others, the coming of a new power into literature... I would have him keep to that English idiom of the Irish-speaking people of the West. It is the only good English spoken by a large number of Irish people today, and one must found good literature on a living speech.32

Such, then, were the pioneers of the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival. Each of the five writers, whose contribution to the movement has been outlined in the foregoing pages, had something individual and characteristic to give to the development of a new literature in the English tongue.

Mangan, earliest among the poets, sought inspiration in the Gaelic poems of Ireland's past; Ferguson, the scholar and antiquarian, laid the foundations of an epic literature in English that embodied the heroic legends of the Gael; O'Grady, gifted with ardent imaginative power, wove around these legends the glamor and color of romance; Sigerson, the master of metrical translations from the Gaelic, gave new forms to Anglo-Irish verse; and, finally, Hyde, the Gaelic enthusiast and collector of folklore, inspired his fellow Anglo-Irish with admiration for all things Gaelic and gave them a new literary medium that was to become the distinctive mark of the drama of the Revival.

It yet remains to trace the influence of these writers, and of the contribution which each made to Anglo-Irish literature, on the poetry of the "Celtic Twilight" group, between whom and the Gaelic past they acted as a bridge, connecting an age-old literary tradition with its recent

manifestation in the English tongue. Succeeding chapters will be devoted to show, together with whatever exceptions may be noted, the influence of the old literature upon the new.
CHAPTER V

A VIEW OF THE WRITINGS OF WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS IN THE LIGHT OF

GAELIC LITERATURE

In dealing with the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival of 1890's, a recent critic comments that it is as neat a piece of irony as history has to offer that when Catholic Ireland, "after centuries of silence concerning the things closest to her heart did at length become gloriously articulate, her message was scarcely distinguishable from that daily heard in the Café Royal or in the Paris Latin Quarter." This he attributes to the fact that the Anglo-Irish writers, for the most part, fell in line with the "new Romanticism" which was then everywhere in the ascendancy.

That such was the case must be attributed without hesitation to the influence of the poetical movement known as the "Celtic Twilight--that lovely and not-to-be-regretted deception," as Sean O'Faolain, a present-day Irish writer, has called it. Yeats and the poets who followed his literary leadership, while focusing the attention of the world on Ireland, and of extracting from it the admission that she was producing artists

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2 Quoted by Calvert Alexander, 188.
comparable to any in Europe, failed to reveal the real soul of Ireland in their verse because they were content to ignore, for the most part, what, in spite of the early contention between bard and saint, has been her most characteristic trait for a thousand years—her Catholic religious heritage.

With the possible exception of Katherine Tynan and Lionel Johnson (who was an Englishman), the Revival poets found it suitable to their art to ignore the vast store of legend dealing with saints and religious themes, which the Irish people had gathered for over a thousand years, in order to emphasize an aspect of Gaelic literature which afforded a convenient vehicle for the expression of their art—its heroic legends and pre-Christian period.

As the writer already quoted comments, "the wistful sadness of the early pagan bards, their vague but charming nature—worship and loose mysticism, fitted in better with the times which saw the second revival of Romanticism." Moreover, the literary training of not a few of the new writers predisposed them in favor of the neo-Romantic spirit of "art for Art's sake." The leader of the movement, for instance, William Butler Yeats, spent his early years in Paris learning the art of Mallarme and the French symbolists.

Writing at the beginning of this century on the reaction then setting in against mere sensuousness or materialism in literature, Stoppford A. Brooke comments:

3Ibid, 181
In France both the mystic and religious elements of this spiritual movement are represented in combination; and there is one class of Irish poets who have added to their work... a lively leaven of Neo-Platonism, with a modern Celtic addition of their own.⁴

But the spiritual element in the Revival poetry was not the traditional note characteristic of Gaelic literature, which for all its traces of pre-Christian survivals, is always intensely Catholic, centering round saint or hallowed shrine. It is what Stoppford Brooke calls

the religion of the greater poets--not their personal religion which is often limited--but that which poetry of its own will creates; which answers to the unformulated aspirations of the soul towards eternal love.⁵

In other words, it is the vague mysticism which Yeats and Russell and their followers, to a lesser degree, made one of the essential marks of their "Celtic Twilight."

To quote once more from Calvert Alexander's book, "the almost exclusive attention given to the dead pagan tradition rather than to the living Catholic tradition proved unfortunate from a literary standpoint. It sent the Revivalists to texts rather than to people, with the consequent loss of reality and freshness."⁶ It is true Douglas Hyde went to the people and gathered their religious lore, but this work of his belongs rather to the Gaelic than to the Anglo-Irish Revival.

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Ibid., 22.
Op. Cit., 187
Before entering on a survey of the Revival poetry, therefore, it must be borne in mind that this is its essential point of departure from the Gaelic tradition—it magnifies, for the purpose of art, what it sees fit to call the antagonism of bard and saint, substituting fairy tales for the deep religious faith of the people, and passing over the living Ireland to dwell with sadness in an ancient dream world that had once been a reality.

The Revival poets, however, performed for Gaelic literature one great service: by using its themes and forms in their verse, they freed Celtic Ireland from the stigma of artistic inferiority to which a generation of more nationalistic, but less gifted poets had condemned her. That they were an exotic growth on Irish soil time has proved, but it yet remains to be seen why this was so. It will, then, be our purpose here to endeavor, by a study of the writings of the most representative Revival poet, William Butler Yeats, to trace in them those characteristics attributable to Gaelic influences, together with other extraneous influences, and, in conclusion, to estimate their true relation to Irish life and thought.

The remote and proximate preparation for the Literary Revival of the 1890's has already been traced in preceding chapters. For close on a century previous, a movement had been gathering force, under the impetus of the reviving national spirit, to return to a de-anglicised and more Gaelic mode of thought. The various Gaelic and Irish Literary societies, the scholarship of O'Curry and O'Donavan, the poetic works of Mangan and Ferguson, and finally the immediate influence of O'Grady, Sigerson, and Hyde brought about in Ascendancy circles an interest in Celtic culture as something altogether different from the prevailing British mode of life and thought.
This, however, was an entirely academic interest. It had little or no relation to the Irish independence movement; and, while emphasizing the distinctive notes of the Celtic temperament, as revealed in Literature and art, it sought to placate British officialdom in Ireland by selecting for the expression of its art, a more remote, and therefore less controversial, aspect of Irish history—the myths and legends of the past, and the harmless folk-lore of the countryside.

In this way, it avoided implication in the two all pervading interests of Irish life—religion and politics—and, consequently, was left free by the authorities who saw in it a harmless, academic fad and by the people (who were far more busily engaged in the fight for political freedom) to go its way unmolested, dwelling in an imaginary past and out of touch with the realities of Irish life.

Thus it happened that, in 1888, when the little book of poems entitled Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland was published, the birth of a new literary mode went unnoticed for the simple reason that the poems had to do, not with the new Ireland which the people were endeavoring to build up, but with an ancient Ireland of pre-Christian legend.

The bulk of the volume was the work of younger writers—W. B. Yeats, T. W. Rolleston, Douglas Hyde, Katherine Tynan, Rose Cavanagh, and John Todhunter. Of these, Hyde alone was in touch with the living Gaelic tradition, while only Katherine Tynan upheld the Catholic note in literature. Both of these, subsequently, drew away from the influence of Yeats, Hyde to become the interpreter of Gaelic religious poetry and love songs, Miss Tynan to write her lovely lyrics on the beauties of earth and the simple faith and devotion of her Irish people.
Others were later to fall under the spell of Yeats' literary fashion—William Larminie, Nora Hopper, and, to a lesser extent, Ethna Carberry and Moire O'Neill; while, at the same time, the group which came to be known as the "Dublin Mystics," George Russell, John Eglington and others, began to infuse into the movement that note of mysticism which later became its predominant characteristic.

It is not possible to do justice to more than a few of the writers who were foremost in the Literary Revival. Of those already mentioned, Yeats, Russell and Katherine Tynan are undoubtedly the most representative, while of the poets who were subsequently to become associated with the Revival, Padraic Colum, and James Stephens stand for a more realistic and nationalistic trend in Irish poetry, a reaction against the excesses of the "Celtic Twilight" group.

As the leader of the movement and its most important poet, William Butler Yeats calls for first and chief mention; for, if any literary movement was ever associated with the name of one man, the Anglo-Irish Revival was with his. Poet, dramatist, essayist, artist—he stands out as the dominating figure of his age in Irish literary circles, and whatever the judgment of posterity on his work may be, his influence for good, or otherwise is too important to be passed over lightly. In the present instance, our treatment of him will be confined to his work as a poet.

As it is our main objective to show the influence of Gaelic literature on the poetry of Yeats, or rather, since this is widely admitted, to indicate the extent to which the Gaelic spirit may truly be said to inform his poetry, and point out other characteristics which can only be called pseudo-Celtic, little need be said about his poems which deal with non-Gaelic subjects.
Of these latter poems, the chief early examples are *Mosada*, a twelve-page brochure published in 1886, and *The Island of Statues*, published some years earlier in the *Dublin University Review*, together with shorter poems which first appeared in the volume *The Wanderings of Usheen* in 1889 and later were included in a separate form in *Crossways*. Of these early poems, Yeats said years later in 1925:

> Many of the poems . . . certainly those upon Indian subjects or upon shepherds and fauns, must have been written before I was twenty, for from the moment that I began *The Wanderings of Usheen*, which I did at that age, I believe my subject-matter became Irish.7

Aside from the few poems, bearing a Celtic impress, which appeared in *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland*—"The Madness of King Goll" and "The Stolen Child"—this long poem, "The Wanderings of Usheen," may be said to mark the starting-point of Yeats' Celtic inspiration. Henceforth, although occupied with other thoughts and fancies, his best work is done in the realm of ancient Celtic mythology, heroic legend, and in the fairy-lore of the Irish countryside.

If one were asked to name the poem which first struck the note that was to become the dominant motif of Yeats' verse, "The Madness of King Goll" would be the answer. It breathes something of the real spirit of Celtic poetry—its delight in varying moods of nature, in natural scenes and sounds—and sound seems to have been dominant in the Celt's attitude to nature—its note of melancholy, its sense of mysterious presences all


The old king, in his madness, "hears the voices of superhuman presences in the crying of the wind and the rolling of the waters, he feels the breath of the elemental powers, and the tramping feet of superhuman beings—all the mystery of nature as sensed by the Celt." Once he had been a mighty king

I sat on cushioned otter skin;
My word was law from Ith to Emen,
And shook at Inver Amargin
The hearts of the world-troubling seamen.
And drove tumult and war away
From girl and boy and man and beast.

Then, with the usual fate of the brave but ill-starred Celt, he is struck with disaster at the height of his glory. In the thick of battle, while repelling the assaults of the Dane, he is afflicted with a sudden madness.

But slowly, as I shouting slew
And trampled in the bubbling mire,
In my most secret spirit grew
A whirling and a wandering fire:
I stood: keen stars above me shone,
Around me shone keen eyes of men:
I laughed aloud and hurried on
By rocky shore and rushy fen;
I laughed because birds fluttered by,
And starlight gleamed and clouds flew high,
And rushes waved and water rolled.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

The "whirling and wandering fire" in his brain drives him from the presence of men into the solitude of nature where the beasts of the forest admit him to their kin.

9 Boyd, 124.
10 Yeats, 77-78.
And now I wander in the woods
When summer gluts in the golden bees,
Or in autumnal solitudes
Arise the leopard-colored trees;
Or when along the wintry strands
The cormorants shiver on their rocks;
I wander on, and wave my hands,
And sing, and shake my heavy locks.
The grey wolf knows me; by one ear
I lead along the woodland deer;
The hares run by me growing bold.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter
round me, the beech leaves old.

There is something here reminiscent of Lear,
Contending with the fretful elements;
Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,
Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main,
That things might change or cease; tears
his white hair,
Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless
rage
Catch in their fury, and make nothing of.\textsuperscript{11}

In Yeats' poem, as in the play of Shakespeare, which undoubtedly
voices a Celtic myth,\textsuperscript{12} a mad king, in whose brain burns a "whirling and
wandering fire," seeks in the fellowship of nature the comfort which is
denied him by a cruel fate. "The Madness of King Goll" has none of that
abstruse philosophizing and attempts at mysticism which make Yeats' later
poems largely incomprehensible. The supernatural element pervading it is
ture to Celtic type—the primitive belief that all natural agencies are
haunted by mysterious presences of either good or evil.

The year 1895, which saw the publication of \textit{The Wanderings of Usheen},
is however, generally regarded as the starting point of Yeats' career as

\textsuperscript{11}Shakespeare. \textit{King Lear}. Act III, Sc. i., 4-9.
\textsuperscript{12}King Lear is based on the Celtic legend of Gorboduc, king of the Britons,
who divided his kingdom between his sons, Ferrex and Porrex. Sackville
and Norton, in 1562, wrote the first English tragedy on the same subject.
as a Celtic poet. It must not, however, be thought that Yeats was the
founder of a new movement in national verse, for he himself was but the
outcome of a movement already launched by such men as Mangan, Ferguson,
and O'Grady.

Yeats was, for several years previous to this, a poetic disciple of
Ferguson, for whom he had a great admiration. In 1886, he wrote in the
Dublin University Review urging acceptance of Ferguson's verse renderings
of the old Celtic legends as the ideal to be followed in national poetry
rather than the politico-literary verse of the Nation writers. "If some­
body could make a style," he wrote, "which would not be an English style,
and yet would be musical and full of color, many others would catch fire
from him."13

It was, evidently, with this idea in mind that Yeats ventured to write
this first epic upon an Irish subject, the material of which was furnished
by O'Grady's work on Early Bardic Literature. The poem, "The Wanderings
of Usheen," which is a favorite subject in Gaelic legend, tells of Oisin,
a Fenian warrior poet, who went, with his faery-lover, Niamh, to the "Land­
of-the-Ever-Young" where he dwells with her for three hundred years in per­
ennial youth and happiness. Returning to Eire, at the end of that time, to
see again his old-time warrior friends, he accidentally falls from his
faery steed and immediately becomes an old, old man, bowed with weight of
three centuries. He meets Saint Patrick and, in a long dialogue with him,
recalls his adventures and the ancient days of the Fianna.

The framework of the legend is preserved in Yeats' poem, but, as if
setting a precedent for his subsequent writings, it is pervaded with a

13Quoted by Boyd, 128.
strong tinge of that symbolism which was later to dominate his verse. Starting from the idea of a clash between Celtic paganism and Christian-
ity, which he claimed to discover in the writings of the old Gaelic bards, Yeats weaves a tale of enchantment and mysterious adventure against a color-
ful background of Celtic imagery.

Here, he formulates the chief tenets of his creed as a Celtic poet: that, with the advent of Christianity to Eire, the ancient glory and mys-
terious beauty of the land passed away. He lauds the primitive pagan vigor and warrior prowess of the Fianna as the ideal of national manhood, and scarcely veils his contempt for what he infers to be the effeminate virtues of Christianity.

Saint, do you weep? I hear amid the thunder
The Fenian horses; armour torn asunder;
Laughter and cries. The armies clash and
shock
And now the daylight-darkening ravens flock.
Cease, cease, oh mournful, laughing Fenian
horn.
... And for a hundred years so warred, so
feasted, with nor dreams nor fears,
Nor languor nor fatigue; and endless feast,
And endless war.

But now two things devour my life;
The things that most of all I hate;
Fasting and prayers.14

The Christian virtues of meekness and patient suffering are derided.

Mananan, the mighty sea-god

... cried to all
The mightier masters of a mightier race;
And at his cry there came no milk-pale face
Under a crown of thorns and dark with blood,
But only exultant faces.

In ancient times the Fenian heroes

... sang the loves and angers without
sleep
And all the exultant labours of the strong,
But now the lying clerics murder song
With barren words and flatteries of the
weak.

Finally, in a cry of impotent rage at his fallen state, the old pagan
warrior exclaims:

If I were as I once was, the strong hoofs
crushing the sand and the shells,
Coming out of the sea as the dawn comes,
A chant of love on my lips,
Not coughing, my head on my knees, and
praying, and wroth with the bells,
I would leave no saint's head on his body
from Rachnin to Bera of the ships.15

This glorification of paganism and all it stood for in pre-Christian
Ireland, with its thinly-veiled contempt for the milder virtues brought by
Saint Patrick, runs through practically all of Yeats' verse. Oblivious to,
or choosing to ignore, the fact that the sagas and legends were, more like-
ly than not, composed by Christian monks and bards and were certainly pre-
served for posterity in the monasteries of Eire for a thousand years of
more, Yeats seems to delight in exaggerating, if not exploiting for the
purposes of his poetic creed, this so-called antagonism of bard and saint.
While over-emphasizing the martial traits of the race, which are embodied
in Oisin, warrior and poet, Yeats failed to do justice to the religious
instincts of a people whose first loyalty, for fifteen centuries, has been
to the faith of Patrick.

It is this inability or unwillingness of Yeats to interpret the dual

15Ibid., 28, 31, and 46.
religious and national characteristic of Gaelic life and thought that has alienated him from the common people of the nation, from whom the inspiration towards a truly national literature should spring, and has rendered him incapable of expressing the traditional aspirations of the Irish race. This seems to be the conviction of reputable Anglo-Irish writers of the present day as echoed in the words, already quoted, of Sean O'Faolain who characterized Yeats' interpretation of the Celtic world as a "lovely and not-to-be-regretted deception."¹⁶

Despite these deficiencies of Yeats' verse from the nationalistic point-of-view, the publication of The Wanderings of Usheen established him as a poet of considerable talent and inspired a fashion in literature which saw the blossoming on all sides of so-called "Celtic" poets and essayists. These, for the most part, sought to echo the characteristic notes of Yeats' verse and, while some few attained to distinction, none succeeded in reproducing the exquisite melody and imagery of the Gaelic originals as he did.

Following the publication of The Wanderings of Usheen and Crossways, which dealt mainly with Indian and pastoral themes, Yeats' next volume of poems appeared in 1893 under the title of The Rose. As its title indicates, this collection of lyrics and ballads, dedicated to Lionel Johnson, contained, moreover, the lovely lyric, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," and several longer poems dealing with Celtic legends.

¹⁶See Chapter IV, p. 84 of this thesis.
The period from 1893 to 1899 was devoted entirely to prose and drama. During this period, too, Yeats edited the writings of William Blake and this fact, undoubtly, accounts for the increased tendency towards mysticism and symbolism which is notable in his next volume of poems published under the title of *The Wind Among the Reeds* in 1899. Here, the Celtic element which colored his earlier verse gives place, with the exception of a few beautiful poems inspired by the faery-lore of the countryside, to his preoccupations with the "Rose" and stanzas addressed to his "Beloved."

In 1903, however, he returned to Celtic themes with "The Old Age of Queen Maeve," and "Baile and Ailinn," both of which voice the mystery and charm of ancient myth and legend. From this time onwards until 1921, when he ceased publishing verse, Yeats devoted himself more and more to formulating his poetic philosophy which, as it became more involved, called for copious explanatory notes. For instance, in the explanatory notes to *The Wind Among the Reeds*, he feels called upon to inform his readers that

Hanrahan is the simplicity of an imagination too changeable to gather permanent possessions, or the adoration of the shepherds; and Michael Robartes is the pride of imagination brooding upon the greatness of its possessions, or the adoration of the Magi; while Aedh is the myrrh that the imagination offers continually before all that it loves.

In all the six volumes of verse which he published between 1904 and 1921 there are, nevertheless, a good many poems which either deal with Celtic themes or else contain allusions to Celtic mythology, legend, or

18 Ibid., Notes, 2.
folk-lore. In fact these figures from the pages of Gaelic manuscripts, or from the vivid imaginations of the country-folk became his stock symbols of ideas in much the same way as the gods and heroes of Classic mythology and the pastoral nymphs and graces entered into the composition of Renaissance verse.

Mananan, the Celtic sea-god, replaced Neptune; Aengus, the Master of Love, was the Gaelic Cupid; Deirdre, whose fatal beauty brought exile and inevitable doom upon the Sons of Usna, is the Celtic counterpart of Helen of Troy; Cuchulain and Fergus, mighty warriors of the epic "Tain Bo Cualnge" are the Hercules and Achilles of Irish legend; these, with the heroic figures of the Fianna: Fionn and Oisin, Oscar and Caolte and Conan, blend into the poetry of Yeats with the shadowy figures of the Sidhe, the Faery Host of the Air, giving it an air of romance and mystery totally different from the effect produced by the figures of Classical antiquity.

Over and over again, Yeats acknowledges his indebtedness to Gaelic legend and folk-lore for his poetic inspiration. In the Notes to "The Wanderings of Usheen" he says, "I got my hound and deer from a last century Gaelic poem about Oisin's journey to the country of the young." "The Host

Oscar was the grandson of Fionn and the son of Oisin. He was considered the strongest man of all the Fianna. Napoleon delighted to read of his prowess in McPherson's prose renderings of the Celtic sagas, and chose him as a model warrior. When he was asked to be god-father to the son of the Scandinavian King, Charles XIV (the erstwhile Marshal Bernadotte of the French Army) Napoleon agreed on condition that the young prince be called Oscar. The name, Oscar, has since become so popular with Scandinavians that many think the original Oscar was a Viking.
of the Air," we are told, "is founded upon an old Gaelic ballad that was sung and translated for me by a woman at Ballisodare in County Sligo."

The influence of his predecessors is acknowledged in "The Secret Rose." He writes, "I have imagined Cuchulain meeting Fand 'walking among flaming dew' because, I think, of something in Mr. Standish O'Grady's books." Of "The Hosting of the Sidhe" he says, "I forget, now, where I heard this story, but it may have been from a priest in Collooney."

In fact, his indebtedness to Gaelic sources is so evident that to elaborate upon it would only be to stress what must be obvious to the most casual reader of his verse. What is not equally clear, however, is that Mr. Yeats' use of Gaelic material is arbitrary and tends, in some respects, to give an entirely false impression of Celtic literature.

As has been pointed out in an earlier chapter of this thesis, the traditional characteristics of Gaelic literature, according to Dr. Douglas Hyde, are: first, an intense romanticism; second, an exuberance of minute description with an accompanying predilection for copious synonyms, hyperbole, and striking similes; third, a disinclination for mysticism or cloudiness, a directness of speech which, in spite of a weakness for alliterative adjectives, goes fairly straight to the point. As Mr. Hyde remarks, the saying, "Ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas Francais," is as applicable to Gaelic as it is to French. Fourthly, he enumerates, as being most characteristic, "the marvellous way in which it is inter-penetrated with a love of Nature in all her moods." This is what Matthew Arnold called "the magic charm of Nature" the traces of ancient nature-
worship which survives in the Celtic feeling that all beautiful places are haunted by unseen presences. It is this element of mystery that gives to the Celtic mind in literature and folk-lore that keen sense of the supernatural which Yeats has interpreted as mysticism. Finally, Gaelic verse has a characteristic rhythm or metrical arrangement which is derived, partly, from alliteration and internal assonance, and, partly, from the peculiar Gaelic idiom. George Sigerson has a translation of the fourteenth century Gaelic "Dirge of Cael" from a Bodleian MS. which echoes this characteristic. Here are some stanzes from it:

Heron hoar
'Mid the moor of Dromatren
Found the fox her young attack
Bleeding, drove him back again.

Sore the sigh
Sobs the stag from Drumlis nigh
Dead the hind of high Drumsailin,
Hence the sad stag's wailing cry.22

Now, of whose characteristics Mr. Yeats' poetry echoes some. His verse is, undoubtedly, intensely romantic from first to last. As one literary critic wrote, "I do not think he has ever written one feeble or worthless passage—one that is not alive with the life of the imagination, and that does not echo in some degree the music at the heart of things."23

His poetry, likewise, voices the characteristic imagery of the Celt—romantic, colorful, mysterious, wistful. It has the Gaelic rhythm, too, its alliterative adjectives, its copious synonyms and quaint similes. Instances could be multiplied from his verse illustrative of this characteristic, but

22 Brocke and Rolleston, 338.
23 Ibid. See Introduction to W. B. Yeats by Rolleston, 495.
The drowsy water rats;  
There we've hid our faery vats,  
Full of berries,  
And of reddest stolen cherries.  
Come away, 0 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.25

The note of melancholy which frequently characterizes the Celtic  
attitude towards nature—the reflection, perhaps, in the mood of the  
poet of the grey skies and misty rain that so often hangs over the Irish  
landscape—this, too, is present in the verse of Yeats. Here are some  
lines from "The Wanderings of Usheen" that must have been inspired by  
some scene familiar to the poet on the wind-swept, western coast of Eire.

And we rode on the plains of the sea's  
edge; the sea's edge barren and  
grey,  
Grey sand on the green of the grasses  
and over the dripping trees,  
Dripping and doubling landward, as  
though they would hasten away  
Like an army of old men longing for  
rest from the moan of the seas.26

The simile expressed in the last line is typically Celtic, having  
about it what Dr. Hyde called the "quaintness, originality, and humanity"27  
which distinguishes the Gaelic simile from the more severe and self-  
possessed simile of the classical epics.

The Celtic ear for natural sounds is as keen as its eye for the various  
shades in scenery. Dr. Sigerson's translation of "The Blackbird of Derry-  

25Ibid., 80.  
26Ibid., 36.  
27See Ch. III, p. 46 of this thesis.
"The song sung by Oisin to the Fianna, is remarkable for its emphasis on sound:

Dear to him the wind-loved heath
The whirr of wings, the rustling brake;
Dear the murmuring glens beneath,
And sob of Droma's lake.28

Yeats' verse frequently echoes this Celtic love of natural sounds and nowhere better than in the lovely lyric, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." Such lines as "live alone in the bee-loud glade," "Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings," and "evening full of the linnet's wings" are expressive of the poet's sensitiveness to the charm of sounds in nature, but it is in the last stanza that he most beautifully expresses the music at the heart of things:

I will arise and go now, for always night
and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds
by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.29

Since Celtic literature deals, in great part, with mythological and legendary eras, it is only natural that there should be about it an air of enchantment and magic. Reference has already been made30 to the traces of pantheism or animism in Celtic myths, which leads Dr. Hyde to suspect that the druids taught a doctrine of metempsychosis. Mr. Yeats makes frequent mention of feats of enchantment and magic induced by druidical spells. In "Fergus and the Druid,"

28Irish Literature, IV, xvi.
29Yeats. Later Poems, 114.
30Ch. III, p. 51.
he has lines which seem to echo Dr. Hyde's view already referred to:

I see my life go drifting like a river
From change to change; I have been many things,
A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,
A king sitting upon a chair of gold.31

It is, however, when one seeks in the pages of Celtic literature for the source of Yeats' mysticism or symbolism that the essential dissimilarity of his genius and that of the Gaelic bards becomes apparent. One of the principal ideas in mind in the writing of this thesis is to indicate the extent to which Gaelic sources may be said to have influenced the writings of the Anglo-Irish poets, especially Yeats, while endeavoring to show the wide divergence between the traditional simplicity and naivete of Gaelic literature and the profound and conscious symbolism that characterizes the utterances of Yeats and his "Celtic Twilight" contemporaries.

In the preceding paragraphs, it has been shown that Yeats's verse does, undoubtedly, show distinct evidences of Celtic influence both in the matter and form of his poetry. Because of the presence of these Celtic notes in his verse, Mr. Yeats has been widely accepted as a true interpreter of the Gaelic mind in literature; more so, however, abroad than in his own country where he has been subjected to considerable criticism from the traditional Gaelic school of thought. Objection has been made to his predilection for the non-Christian aspects of Gaelic literature: myths, legends and folk-lore, with their background of paganism and superstition;

and his failure to do justice to the deep and abiding influence of the Catholic religion in the life and thought of the Irish people.

The supporters of Mr. Yeats might answer that, since he was primarily an artist and since the purpose of art is to help us to live—not to live well or ill, but simply to live—he was justified in choosing to present those aspects of Celticism that suited his art and in ignoring its religious characteristics. To this contention the critics of Mr. Yeats would reply that if art induces unwholesome and bewildered moods, as they maintain much of his poetry does, then it is helping us not towards life, but towards death.32

Whatever be the right or wrong view in this discussion, there can be little doubt concerning the reasonableness of the second objection made by the traditional Gaelic school against Yeats' claim to voice the unformulated mysticism of the Celtic bards.

The traditional view is that the Gaelic bards and saga-writers were simply tellers of old tales, skillful and colorful weavers of romance. They composed their prose epics and verses for the entertainment of princes and warriors gathered at the table of the banqueting-hall or in the glow of the camp-fire's light. Later, the Fenian cycle of verse-tales came into being because of the demand for romance and adventure rather than the more war-like mood of the older Red Branch cycle.

This utter unpretentiousness and naïveté of Gaelic literature is one of its greatest charms. Because of the fact that Ireland was cut off from major contact with Renaissance learning by the life and death struggle for

32 See Brooke and Rolleston, 499.
her national existence with which she was engaged for two or more centuries, she succeeded in preserving the simplicity of thought and manner of life proper to the Middle Ages. Commenting on this characteristic of Gaelic literature, an authority on the subject, Aodh de Blacam, has the following to say:

Proper to an open-air life is an intellectual simplicity. Ireland is little troubled by the perplexities of the study. An all-pervading faith, too, we shall find as one of the marks of Gaelic literature. In the combination of vigor and simplicity we shall trace, perhaps, the charm by which Ireland has enchanted men from the days of the Northumbrian Alfred to those of the American tourist, absorbing Norsemen and Normans and generations of English soldiers and settlers. 33

De Blacam, moreover, finds Gaelic literature "as intensely Catholic as that of Spain, as intensely racial as that of Israel." 34 Of these two essential traits, Yeats choose to deal with only the racial aspect. Because this racial side of Celtic literature lays great emphasis on the heroic legends of the past, there is about it an air of remoteness and mystery proper to the shadowy regions where history loses itself in the mists of time. Enchantment, traces of nature-worship, vague druidical lore--these things are woven into the fabric of all ancient literatures that tell of times when gods and heroes were supposed to have walked the earth.

Speaking of the place held by the gods in Gaelic myths and legends, de Blacam writes,

They are not god-like in the Greek sense.
If ever they ruled in dreadful awe over

34 Ibid., xv.
men's minds like the outraged gods who pursued the house of Atreus to its doom, the memory of that time is lost. As we find them, they are mighty but friendly beings who share with mankind the adventure of life. . . . They were shaped by men who never worshipped them.35

This traditional concept of the Celtic gods was distorted by Yeats, who gave them an intensity of spiritual life that could only be conceived as existing in the minds of men who actually worshipped them.

Commenting on this aspect of Yeats' verse, T. W. Rolleston says,

With Mr. Yeats, however, the gods and heroes are no longer far-off--they are here among us, 'forms more real than living men.' They are even so melted into the imagination of the poet that they emerge from it not as 'symbols' of ideas (as the phrases of modern mysticism have it), but the very ideas themselves.36

Yeats, then, may be said, not only to have ignored the intense Catholic tone of Gaelic literature, but to have misrepresented, consciously, or otherwise, its racial characteristics by creating the impression that its gods and heroes were symbols of an unformulated pagan mysticism. He has woven into the themes of his Celtic poems an abstruse and difficult symbolism, seeming, thereby, to imply that he is voicing the inarticulate message of her myths and legends.

That such is the impression he has left in the mind of his contemporaries is evidenced by the following passage from the pen of T. W. Rolleston:

It is indeed fortunate that Irish mythology, in attracting Mr. Yeats' imagination, laid hold of something which that

36 Brooke and Rolleston. Introduction to Yeats by Rolleston, 494.
mythology had never found before—a great artist to absorb and interpret it. . . . The Gaelic bards and sages men had the creative touch and musical utterance, but next to no sense of the profound rhythms of life and thought. 37

This is tantamount to saying that Mr. Yeats' artistry succeeded in discovering the latent mysticism of Celtic myths, but that the Gaelic bards who, as Aodh de Blacam maintains, shaped these gods of Celtic mythology, were incapable of doing so, because they lacked Mr. Yeats' mystic insight.

The fact of the matter is that Mr. Yeats' attitude towards the Celtic myths was entirely different from that of the Gaelic monks who were, as de Blacam points out, "the transcribers and preservers of the heroic tales." 38

The Christian poets and epic-writers looked for no mystic or symbolic interpretation of the pagan myths which came down to them from their heathen ancestors. They saw in them merely the material for heroic or humorous tales which, while preserving for posterity the memory of ancient greatness, did so without injury to the integrity of their new-found faith in Christ. According to de Blacam,

Writers of the Christian era took the vague, pagan sea-god and turned him into the vivid and lovable Carle of the Drab Coat. Men of science may regret that record of some gross heathen rite has been lost in the moulding of a story to Christian tastes, but the pure lover of good stories finds literature enriched. 39

37 Ibid., 495.
38 *Gaelic Literature*, 21.
39 Ibid., 20.
Mention has already been made in a previous chapter of the manner in which the Celtic writers differed from other European nations in the treatment of their ancient gods. Commenting on this, de Blacam adds:

> In the Roman Empire, paganism meant the vices of a decadent civilization. The Church would allow no truck with the memory of gods whose names gave names to horrid sins. The centuries in the deserts and the suspension of classical learning were necessary to purge the nations of the Empire from corruption. Paganism in Ireland meant nature enlightened by revelation. It is true that a certain jealousy between pagan scholarship and the church is traceable during many centuries, but this was the resistance of the natural man to the discipline of religion. There was little deliberate conflict with the Faith. . . . Certainly, Christianity caused no set-back to Irish imaginative life; for the great stories, as we shall see, gain final dramatic point from Christian additions.40

Mr. Yeats, on the other hand, choosing to see a definite antagonism between bard and saint, set about interpreting the Celtic myths, seemingly, in the light of his own poetic philosophy. It would seem that Yeats coming under the influence of the Gaelic Revival soon after his return from the Paris Latin Quarter where he had studied under Mallarme and imbibed a taste for symbolism, saw in the myths and legends of Gaelic literature a fertile field for the development of his newly-acquired art. Henceforth, in the rich soil of Bardic literature opened up for him by the labors of O'Grady and Ferguson, he was provided with an inexhaustable source of literary raw-material which was to be transmuted by the alchemy of his poetic genius into the gold of his lyric and epic verse.

40 Ibid., 20-21
It has already been pointed out how this intellectual and imaginative process was employed by Yeats in the "Wanderings of Usheen." The romance and faery magic of the Celtic legend are made the vehicle for the propounding of the Neo-Romantic love of escapism. Oisin's flight to the Land-of-the-Ever-Young with his faery lover, Niamh, symbolizes and embodies the poet's attempt to flee from the realities of an uncongenial world into an imaginative dream world of romance. The first inklings of Yeats' poetic philosophy are noted in the following lines from "The Wanderings of Usheen:

Men's hearts of old were drops of flame
That from the saffron morning came,
Or drops of silver joy that fell
Out of the moon's pale twisted shell;
But now hearts cry that hearts are slaves,
And toss and turn in narrow caves;
But here there is nor law nor rule,
Nor have hands held a weary tool;
And here there is nor Change nor Death,
But only kind and merry breath,
For joy is God and God is joy. 41

The mystic doctrine of the pursuit of Eternal Beauty, which was already germinating in the mind of the poet, was as time went by to become the Leitmotiv of Yeats' thought. He symbolized it in his verse as the "red-rose-bordered hem," or "The Rose." It is not unlikely, considering his indebtedness to Gaelic influences, that, in choosing such a symbol, Yeats was influenced by the fact that the Gaelic poets had, for centuries, idealized and symbolized their country as the "Roisin Dubh," which Mangan anglicized as "Dark Rosaleen" and Aubrey de Vere as "The little Black Rose."

Concerning his use of this symbol, Yeats wrote, in the Notes appended to a later edition of his works, "the quality symbolized as the Rose differs

41 Yeats. Early Poems, 15.
from the Intellectual Beauty of Shelley and of Spencer in that I have imagined it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar." 42

In the collection of poems published in 1895 under the title of "The Rose," Yeats, for the first time, addresses himself to the idea which was gradually to dominate his poetic expression:

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:
Ouchulain battling with the bitter tide;
The Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;
And thine one sadness, whereof stars, grown old
In dancing silver sandalled on the sea,
Sing in their high and lonely melody.
Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,
I find under the boughs of love and hate,
In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal beauty wandering on her way. 43

Here the imagery has the Celtic note: romantic, wistful, beautiful with the magic of nature, but there is woven into it something that the Gaelic bards never had: what Rolleston called "a sense of the profound rhythms of life and thought," 44 or what came to be known as "Celtic mysticism."

Perhaps no better example of this abstruse mystic creed and, at the same time, no more beautiful lyric could be found in all Yeats' verse than

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42 Yeats. Later Poems, Notes, 527.
43 Yeats. Ibid., 99.
44 Brooke and Rolleston. Introduction to Yeats by Rolleston, 496
the following poem entitled "The Rose of the World."

Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?
For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
And Usna's children died.

We and the labouring world are passing by:
Amid men's souls that waver and give place,
Like the pale waters in their wintry race,
Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,
Lives on this lonely face.

Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode;
Before you were, or any hearts to beat,
Weary and kind, one lingered by His seat;
He made the world to be a grassy road
Before her wandering feet.45

Here again, there is a vague Celtic atmosphere, but the profound, one might say unintelligible, symbolism of the lines is far removed from the naive wonder and natural magic of Celtic romance. Referring to the vagueness of intellectual content in the symbolism of Yeats, typical of this lovely lyric, Ernest Boyd writes:

Mysticism to Yeats is not an intellectual belief, but an emotional or artistic refuge. His visions do not convince us, because they are obviously "literary" rather than spiritual. The concepts which are realities to Blake, or to Yeats contemporary, A. E., are to him symbols, nor do they strike the reader as being anything more. Of symbolism— even mystic symbolism—there is plenty, but of mysticism hardly a trace.46

45 Yeats. Later Poems, 109
46 Op. Cit., 139
As another of his critics said, "Mr. Yeats' work is for the most part done on the frontier of life. He has followed up doubtful gleams, interpreted mysteries, made himself a philosophy of dreams." He sees, however, behind Mr. Yeats' 'wizard song' "a keen, questioning, co-ordinating intellect at work—like Baudelaire, he tills his plot of ground 'avec le fer de la raison.'"47

Those who see in Yeats' verse this "keen, questioning, co-ordinating intellect at work" may delight in the intellectual gymnastics involved in the translation of his poetic philosophy, but lovers of good literature will wish that the poet of "Lake Isle of Innisfree" had preferred to write in the beautiful, yet simple lyrical vein which he could do so well.

Yeats, in fact, had extraordinary versatility. The same poet whose enigmatic utterances about the "red-rose-bordered hem" leave the enquiring mind floundering helplessly in a sea of symbolism, could write such charming lays as the "Ballad of Father Gilligan" or "The Song of the Old Mother."

I rise in the dawn, and I kneel and blow
Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow;
And then I must scrub and bake and sweep
Till the stars are beginning to blink and peep;
And the young lie long and dream in their bed
Of the matching of ribbons for bosom and head,
And their day goes over in idleness,
And they sigh if the wind but lift a tress;
While I must work because I am old,
And the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold.48

47 Brooke and Rolleston, Introduction to Yeats by T. W. Rolleston, 496
48 Yeats. Later Poems, 14
All through his career as a writer of verse Yeats, whenever the occasion demanded or a change of mood impelled him, could write lines which showed he was, by no means, altogether removed from the realities of life. Occasionally, when angered by adverse criticism or the inability of his country-men to appreciate his verse, he could be bitterly scornful. Witness the following lines, ironically entitled "The Scholars:"

Bald heads forgetful of their sins,
Old, learned, respectable bald heads
Edit and annotate the lines
That young men, tossing on their beds,
Rhymed out in love's despair
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.

They'll cough in the ink to the world's end;
Wear out the carpet with their shoes
Earning respect; have no strange friends;
If they have sinned nobody knows.
Lord, what would they say
Should their Catullus walk their way? 49

Again, when Yeats' friend's, Synge's "Playboy of the Western World" was hooted off the Abbey Stage in Dublin in 1907 he dipped his pen in vitriol and wrote "On Those That Hated 'Playboy of the Western World,' 1907":

Once, when midnight smote the air,
Eunuchs ran through hell and met
On every crowded street to stare
Upon great Juan riding by:
Even like these to rail and sweat
Staring upon his sinewy thigh. 50

During the first World War, when he was asked to write a war poem, he replied in verse;

I think it better that in times like these
A poet keep his mouth shut, for in truth
We have no gift to set a statesman right;
He has had enough of meddling who can please

49Ibid., 255.
50Ibid., 202.
A young girl in the indolence of her youth,  
Or an old man upon a winter's night.  

It is to Yeats' credit as a patriot that, at the time of the 1916 Easter Revolution when most of the Anglo-Irish had little sympathy with nationalist aspirations, he could write such lines as these on Ireland. The Revolutionary leaders, Pearse and Connolly, are discussing how the soul of the nation, symbolized as "The Rose Tree," can be made to bloom again:

"O words are lightly spoken,"  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
"Maybe a breath of politic words  
Had withered our Rose Tree;  
Or maybe but a wind that blows  
Across the bitter sea."

"It needs to be but watered,"  
James Connolly replied,  
"To make the green come out again  
And spread on every side,  
And shake the blossom from the bud  
To be the garden's pride."

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

However, despite his nationalistic sympathies and the strong Gaelic influence which colored so much of his verse, Yeats sensed his own isolation from the main current of Irish life and thought. The difficult symbolism, with its vague intellectual content, which characterized his poetry more and more as time went by, placed his verse beyond the reach of all but the small coterie of intellectuals who shared his literary and philosophical ideals.

\[51\text{Ibid.}\, 287\]
\[52\text{Ibid.}\, 338\]
Yeats was not unaware of this and sought, in his apologia entitled, "To Ireland In Coming Times," to identify himself with the great names in Anglo-Irish literature whose writings were in closer contact with the national mind in letters.

He wrote:

Know that I would accounted be
True brother of that company,
Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song;
Nor be I any less of them,
Because the red-rose-bordered hem
Of her, whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan,
Trails all about the written page... .

Nor may I less be counted one
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
Because to him, who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
Of things discovered in the deep,
Where only body's laid asleep.

Whatever the verdict of posterity be on this claim of Yeats to be a national poet, there is no denying that he did more than any other Irish writer to make the literary heritage of his country known and admired abroad. While no one doubts the sincerity of his life-long desire to interpret the national mind in literature, as he saw it in the mystic light of his poetic philosophy, it would seem that the Ireland, to whom he addressed his touching apologia, has through the verdict of her literary leaders, rejected his interpretation of the Celtic world as "a lovely and not-to-be-regretted deception."

It may be said, therefore, in conclusion, that in the poetry of Yeats

Ibid., 134
two great influences were at work: the stream of Celtic myth and legend; and the neo-Platonic philosophy of the New Romanticism. But, of these two, the influence which exerted the greater effect was, in all probability, the former. Yeats, it is true, sought consistently to inculcate a poetic philosophy into verse. T. W. Rolleston attempted to translate this philosophy of his by saying that

Mr. Yeats--like the Oriental mystics who formulated their creed, and the Celtic mystics who did not, regards the outer world as a creation of spiritual activity--bids us cultivate the inward life, the inward vision, as the sure path to truth and peace.54

But this doctrine of Yeats was nothing new or original in an age when neo-Platonism was in fashion. What gave it life and beauty was the rich vesture of imagination with which he clothed it, and this vesture his genius wove from the colorful threads of Celtic myth and legend.

Symbolism must be vitalized by the imagination, otherwise it will lose itself in the dreary wastes of intellectual abstractions. Whatever of life and charm and natural magic the poetry of Yeats may be said to possess, it owes to the skillful use which the poet made of the material supplied by Celtic literature. If future generations will continue to read the poetry of William Butler Yeats, it will be for the enjoyment of the lyrical beauty which he clothed with Celtic imagery, rather than for the message of his poetic philosophy.

In this sense, therefore, the Gaelic Revival may be said to have exercised a great influence on the development of Yeats' poetic genius. There

54 Brooke and Rolleston. Introduction to Yeats, 496.
were elements coming from non-Gaelic sources which the poet sought to gloss over with a Celtic coloring thereby tending to give a misleading notion of the heroic literature which inspired much that is unforgettable in his verse. But, in so far as he wedded to the lyrical beauty of his verse her gods and heroes, the music of her mountains, streams, and woods, Ireland, whom he loved and enriched with his genius, will, perhaps, be not ungrateful.
CHAPTER VI

GAELIC INFLUENCES IN THE VERSE OF GEORGE W. RUSSELL (A. E.)

Coupled with the name of Yeats in the Anglo-Irish Revival and, in some respects, surpassing him, is that of George W. Russell, generally known under his pen-name of A. E.

Yeats and Russell, together with John Eglinton, Charles Johnson and Charles Weekes, were drawn to one another by a common interest in the study of mysticism. As Yeats himself recounts, in a biographical sketch of A. E. written in the year 1900:

Some dozen years ago a little body of young men hired a room in Dublin, and began to read papers to one another on the Vedas and the Upanishads and the Neo-Platonists, and on modern mystics and spiritualists.¹

These meetings were held, for the most part, in little rooms on the back streets of the city, but eventually came under the notice of the eminent Professor Dowden of Trinity College who initiated the Theosophical movement that was destined to give to the little group of poets and writers the aura of mysticism which became its dominant characteristic.

It was at Dowden's home that Yeats heard read two books which influenced the early development of his poetic genius: A. P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* and *The Occult World*. His early interest in Indian subjects as is evidenced in such works as *Mosada* must be traced to such sources.

¹Brooke and Rolleston, 485.
This interest in Oriental mysticism led to the founding of a "Hermetic Society," which was later to become the first Dublin lodge of the Theosophical Society and was eventually to merge into the "Universal Brotherhood."

The Theosophical movement became a vital factor in the evolution of the Literary Revival because it provided a literary, artistic, and intellectual center for the spread of those ideals and enthusiasms with which its members were imbued. It has even been regarded as sharing with O'Grady's monumental works on Bardic Literature and the History of Ireland the credit for the launching of the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival by such an eminent critic as Boyd.²

In 1892, the movement became known to the public when the "The Irish Theosophist" made its appearance in Dublin. This "monthly magazine devoted to the Universal Brotherhood, the study of Eastern Literature and occult science"³ played a large part in the Literary Revival as the official organ of the little group of mystics, essayists and poets until its editorship passed out of Irish hands and came under outside control with a new title of "The International Theosophist."

While our interest in A. E. must be restricted by the demands of our thesis to the discussion of the influence of Gaelic sources on his writings, no treatment of his poetry can be complete, or even intelligible, without taking into consideration the mystic philosophy which underlies his entire outlook on life. He drank deep of the learning of the East, of the Vedas,

³Ibid., 216.
and the Upanishads, and was a devoted student of Plato and of the mystical philosophers. Like his friend, Yeats, he was an admirer of the works of William Blake and also of Emerson, Thoreau, and Walt Whitman.

The mysticism of A. E., however, is entirely different from the symbolism which has given Yeats the name of being a mystic. What were shadows to Yeats were to him realities. There are depths of thought in A. E. that make the pseudo-mysticism of Yeats look very shallow indeed. One may not agree with A. E.'s pantheistic mysticism, but that does not preclude an admiration for the beautiful idealism of his poetic philosophy and the lyrical charm of his verse.

His fundamental mystic creed was enunciated clearly in the Preface to the first published volume of verse entitled *Homeward; Songs by the Way* 1894, in these words:

I moved among men and places, and in living I learned the truth at last. I know I am a spirit, and that I went forth in old time from the Self-Ancestral to labors yet unaccomplished; but, filled ever and again with homesickness I made these homeward songs by the way.

A. E.'s mysticism is distinctly Oriental; there is nothing nebulous or vague about it as there is in Yeats. He had definite intellectual convictions beneath his symbolism: man's identity with the Divine Power, his quest for eternal union with the Universal Spirit; Earth is the Great Mother to whom we must return and deity is everywhere.

His poems are generally in the form of visions into which the poet is

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rapt at the mystic hours of dawn or twilight. While not such an artist in words as Yeats, A. E. is a master of colorful imagery. His landscapes have the natural magic and air of enchantment which has come to be associated with the Celtic mind in literature; dusky valleys and twilight fields folded in the soft beauty of the Irish countryside. Here are some typical lines revealing this quality:

It's a lonely road through bogland to the lake at Corrowmore,
And a sleeper there lies dreaming where the water laps the shore.
Thought the moth-wings of the twilight in their purples are unfurled
Yet his sleep is filled with gold light by the masters of the world.\(^5\)

There is this essential difference between the landscapes of Yeats and A. E.: that, whereas with the former the image, the rich vesture of imagination, the lyrical quality is everything, A. E. holds the reader by the thought of A. E.'s verse especially in such lines as these from "Symbolism:"

Wondrously near and clear the great warm fires
Stare from the blue; so shows the cottage light
To the field laborer whose heart desires
The old folk by the nook, the welcome bright
From the housewife long parted from at dawn--
So the star villages in God's great depth withdrawn

Nearer to Thee, not by delusion led,
Though there no house-fires burn nor bright eyes gaze;
We rise but by the symbol charioted,

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\(^5\)Ibid., "Divine Vision," 74.
Through loved things rising up to Love's own ways;
By these the soul unto the vast has wings,
And sets the seal celestial upon all mortal things.6

As A. E., himself, says, commenting on the vagueness of Yeat's symbolism,
"I am more interested in Life than in the shadows of Life."7

Mr. Stephen Gwynn, noted Anglo-Irish scholar, says of the poetry of A. E.:

In this poet's philosophy the way to the highest beauty is through pain, the love-liness of earth and sky, of flowers and mankind, being only the phantoms of illusion. And, since no poet was ever more alive to external beauty, there are poems in which the lower, more human beauty is chosen before the cold heights and prim­eval stream of quiet. But the essential characteristic of them all, whatever their tenor, is a sense of living power that pervades and permeates the earth.8

Here it is that the point of contact between A. E.'s poetic philosophy and the natural magic of Celtic literature becomes evident. The Celtic feeling of all beautiful places being haunted by living presences, that survival in the Bardic mind of ancient nature-worship, is what attracted the attention of A. E. to Gaelic legend and folk-lore. Mr. Gwynn goes on to say:

For A. E. the dumb universe, "bruta tellus" is charged with unspeakable properties, rife with voices. Sometimes we catch sight in his verse of a belief that all the pageant of past life is again enacted by shadowy forms, visible to the eyes that can see . . . The conception is one essenti­ally Celtic, for to the Celt's mind, earth

7"Poet of the Shadows" from Some Irish Essays by A. E., Cuala Press, Dublin, 1906, Preface, ii.
and sea have always been quick with life, whether he puts that feeling in the shape of a fairy myth, or merely is conscious of it in the drawing back again to the hills and waters that he first knew. And perhaps no Celtic poet has given to the soul of his race an expression more beautiful or more characteristic than this anonymous singer.  

The explicit pantheism of A. E.'s verse is, however, as is the symbolism of Yeats, far removed from the vague, almost unconscious feeling of the Celtic mind for the spiritual presences that folk-lore attributes to land and sea and sky. As was seen with reference to Yeats, the gods and heroes of Gaelic myth and legend are "mighty but friendly beings who share with mankind the adventures of life. They were shaped by men who never worshipped them." The supernatural element in folk-lore: the Sidhe, the fairy host of the air with which the popular imagination peoples the haunted places of the countryside, is but a dim trace of the ancient religion of the land that still colors the Christian beliefs of the peasantry, and in no way detracts from its ardent Catholicity.

Professor John MacNeill of the National University in Dublin notes that the Gaelic authors, themselves Christians, who record the ancient Celtic myths and legends are frequently at great pains to guard against appearing to claim credibility for pagan beliefs. He writes

Of this attitude of mind there are innumerable examples in Irish medieval literature. Eochaid O'Flainn, a noted poet-historian who died A.D. 1003, wrote a poem on the Irish gods, in which he debates whether they were Demons or

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9 Irish Literature, VIII, 2988.
10 De Blacam, Gaelic Literature, 20.
mortals, finds the verdict that they were of human race, but endowed with supernatural powers, and ends with the protest, "I adore them not." Many other early Irish poems which relate quite harmless antique traditions conclude with an abrupt profession of Christian faith, apparently apropos of nothing in particular. The poets evidently knew well that the traditions they recorded were derived from pagan mythology.\(^{11}\)

A. E., on the other hand, transforms these vague, shadowy beings into living presences, and pictures the awakening of the people, called "to a temple not built with hands, sunlit, starlit, sweet with the odour and incense of earth... to the altars of the hills, soon to be lit up as of old, soon to be the blazing torches of God over the land.\(^{12}\)

It seems that he would have the Catholic people of Ireland forsake the faith of Patrick and return to the ancient paganism of Oisin, or rather to his own exotic pantheism. Yeats, A. E., John Eglinton and others of the Dublin mystics seriously contended that Irish Catholicism was an exotic, wholly out of sympathy with the natural aspirations of the Irish race. This was the thesis of an essay by John Eglinton entitled _The Island of Saints_,\(^{13}\) and is based on the alleged antagonism of bard and saint.

That there was a certain amount of friction in the early ages between the custodians of the ancient learning, the Bards, who handed down the


\(^{12}\)Russell. _Ideals in Ireland_: Priest or Hero. Cuala Press, Dublin, 1910.

\(^{13}\)See Boyd, 250.
ancient myths and legends by oral transmission and the Churchmen is widely admitted. But it must be borne in mind that these same Churchmen preserved for posterity a vast fragmentary record of Heroic Literature in the pages of the manuscripts compiled in their monasteries. The Bardic oral tradition was lost when the old Gaelic order fell under the onslaught of invasion, but the treasures of Celtic literature were safe in the hundreds of manuscripts scattered throughout the length and breadth of Europe wherever the fleeing inhabitants of the monasteries took them in the dark days of religious persecution.

The eminent French philologist, M. d'Arbois de Jubainville, has noted 133 existing MSS., "all of them over three hundred years old, and some over 1000 years, and the whole number found existing in public libraries on the Continent and in the British Isles was 1009."14 Jubainville, moreover, quotes a German philologist as estimating that the literature produced by the Irish monks before the seventeenth century, and still existing, would fill a thousand octavo volumes.

In the pages of these manuscripts are found the hundreds of sagas, legends, and Bardic poems which O'Curry, O'Donovan and O'Grady translated and made accessible to the mystics of the Anglo-Irish school. Because these latter writers were obsessed by their own preconceived notions on the subject of mysticism, they were incapable of viewing the myths and legends, together with the folk-lore of the countryside, through the eyes of the

14 Irish Literature, "Early Irish Literature," II, x.
15 Ibid., xi.
Catholic Celt who saw no incompatibility in the fusion of his primitive natural religion with the Christian revelation which enlightened it. According to de Blacam, "Some hold that the Druidical schools, by a doctrine analogous to that of Plato, actually prepared the race for Christianity." 16

As Boyd points out,

... the people, and more particularly the peasantry, have associated the Bardic divinities and heroes with the saints and wonders of Christianity. Sacred and profane legends have become so identical a part of the belief of the rural population that the one has infused the other with a certain breath of poetry... The presence of the Gaelic language guaranteed the survival of the Bardic tradition, and the heroic figures of antiquity naturally amalgamated with those of sacred history. 17

Yeats, A. E., and the "Celtic Twilight" group, on the other hand, because of their non-Christian leanings, were incapable of understanding this peculiar Celtic synthesis of natural and revealed religion, and this, more than anything else, accounts for their failure to reveal the real soul of the Irish people in literature.

Boyd, speaking of the wide divergence between the traditional, Gaelic-speaking folk of the countryside and the few cultured groups in the cities who were working for the restoration of the ancient tongue, writes,

The latter, being more deliberate, were naturally more radical in their return to the origins of nationality and of national literature, and quickly dis-associated the fundamental traits of the Celtic spirit from the extraneous

16 De Blacam, Gaelic Literature, 21
agglomerations of Catholicism. Hence on the one hand, *The Religious Songs of Connaught* by Douglas Hyde and on the other the poetry of A.E., W.B. Yeats and the writers associated with them.18

The soil of Ireland was sacred to A.E., not because it was hallowed by the feet of saints and reddened with the blood of patriot and martyr, but because of its common divinity as the source of life and especially as the Mother of the Celtic race of whom were born, when the earth was young, the gods and heroes of the dawn.

The wonderful deeds of Finn and Cuchulain and Ossian and Oscar and the other Irish heroes have absorbed his thoughts and have been a revelation to him of the spirit of Ireland . . . For him Ireland, because she has been the mother of such heroes and because he feels as he wanders up and down her haunted hills and enchanting valleys that Tir-ne-n'Ogue, the country of imm mortal youth, is still very near, peopleed with the spirits of these mighty dead yet to him ever living ones, and also by forms young and beautiful with a shining and undying beauty--because of his belief in these things, Ireland is a holy land for him and the story of Ireland is the sacred book of his race--the book from which he has drawn his highest inspiration.19

A.E. identifies his Mother Earth with the pagan goddess, Dana, the "mater deorum" of Celtic mythology, from whom were sprung the god-like race of the Tuatha De Dana, the People of the Goddess Dana. In his poem "Dana" the goddess speaks

> I weave
> My spells at evening, folding with dim caress
> Aerial arms of twilight-dropping hair,

18Ibid., 110.
19Irish Literature, VIII, 2986.
The lonely wanderer by shore or wood,
Till filled with some vast tenderness
he yields,
Feeling in dreams for the dear mother
heart
He knew ere he forsook the starry way,
And clings there pillowed far above the
smoke
And the dim murmurs from the duns of men;
I can enchant the trees and rocks, and
fill
The dim brown lips of earth with mystery,
Make them reveal or hide the god. I
breathe
A deeper pity than all love, myself
Mother of all, but without hands
to heal,
Too vast and vague--they know me not.20

Celtic legend affords him inspiration. Like Yeats, he saw in it
the unformulated mysticism of the race. In The Voyage of Bran, Standish
O'Grady told the story of

Sinend, daughter of Lodan Lucharglan, son
of Ler, out of the Land of Promise, who
went to Conna's Well, which is under the
sea, to behold it. That is a well at
which are the hazels of wisdom and inspira-
tions, that is, the hazels of the science
of poetry, and in the same hour their fruit
and their blossom and their foliage break
forth, and then fall upon the well in the
same shower, which raises upon the water a
royal surge of purple.21

This thread of legend, A.E. wove into the fabric of his mystic creed
in the poem "Conna's Well."

A cabin on a mountain-side hid in a grassy
nook,
With door and window open wide, where
friendly stars may look,
The rabbit shy can patter in, the winds
may enter free--

21Irish Literature, VIII, 3001.
Who throng around the mountain throne
in living ecstasy.

And when the sun sets dimmed in eve,
and purple fills the air,
I think the sacred hazel tree is dropping
berries there,
From starry fruitage waved aloft where
Conna’s well o’er flows;
For, sure, the immortal waters run through
every wind that blows.

I think, when night towers up aloft and
shakes the trembling dew,
How every high and lonely thought that
thrills my spirit through
Is but a shining berry dropped down
through the purple air,
And from the magic tree of life the fruit
falls everywhere.22

In the voice of the Sidhe, the fairy host of the air, which the Gaelic
peasantry pictures as wandering over the twilight country-side, A. E. heard
the voice of Earth, the Great Mother calling her children to the Land of
Youth. Folk-lore for him is but the dim echo of the ancient religion of
the world: the pantheistic Nature-worship which is the basis of his own
mysticism. Yeats wrote some lovely lyrical lines on the same subject in
"The Hosting of the Sidhe."

The host is riding from Knocknarea
And over the grave of Clooth-na-Bare;
Caolte tossing his burning hair
And Niamh calling 'Away, come away:
Empty your heart of its mortal dream.'23

But, whereas Yeats’ vague symbolism depends entirely for its appeal on
imagery and the musical quality of his lines, A. E. in "A Call of the Sidhe"
uses such things only as a medium for the expression of thoughts that go

22Ibid., 3001.
23Yeats. Early Poems, 3.
much deeper than the lyrical appeal of Yeats' lines.

Tarry thou yet, late lingerer in the twilight's glory:
Gay are the hills with songs: earth's faery children leave
More dim abodes to roam the primrose-hearted eve,
Opening their glimmering lips to breathe some wondrous story.
Hush, not a whisper! Let your heart alone go dreaming.
Dream unto dream may pass; deep in the heart alone
Murmurs the Mighty One his solemn undertone.
Cans't thou not see adown the silver cloudland streaming
Rivers of rainbow light, dewdrop on dewdrop falling,
Starfire of silver flames, lighting the dark beneath?
And what enraptured hosts burn on the dusky heath?

'Come thou away with them, for Heaven to Earth is calling.
These are Earth's voice--her answer--spirits thronging.
Come to the Land of Youth: the trees grow heavy there
Drop on the purple wave the ruby fruit they bear.
Drink: the immortal waters quench the spirit's longing.
Art thou not now, bright one, all sorrow past, in elation,
Filled with wild joy, grown brother-hearted with the vast;
Whither thy spirit wending flits the dim stars past
Unto the Light of Lights in burning adoration? 24

At its highest and best, such as in these stately lines, A.E.'s verse
is without parallel in the poetry of the Literary Revival. His poems combine

24 Russell. Ibid., "The Divine Vision," 76
the gifts and beauties of the painter, the musician, and the seer. For, besides being a poet, essayist, and mystic, A.E. was, moreover, an artist of renown. He painted pictures of his visions of the Enchanted Gardens in Tir-na-n'Ogue and of the spirits of the ancient gods and heroes of Ireland. Writing of his paintings, he says he sought to paint landscape "as if it had no other existence than as an imagination of the Divine Mind; to paint man as if his life overflowed into that imagination; and to paint the 'Sidhe' as mingling with his life--the unity of God and man and nature in one single being; an impossible idea to convey in paint."25

Even more than Yeats, A.E. was directly influenced by the spirit of Celtic literature. The great deeds of Finn, Oisin, Cuchulain and the other Celtic heroes, the beauty of earth and sky are dear to him because

Every heroic deed is an act of the spirit, and every perception of beauty is vision with the divine eye, and not with the mortal sense. The spirit was subtly intermingled with the shining of old romance, and it was no mere phantasy which shows Ireland at its dawn in a misty light thronged with divine figures, and beneath and nearer to us demi-gods and heroes fading into recognizable men.26

The process by which the gods and heroes of Celtic mythology were woven into the fabric of his own mysticism is outlined for us in his personal conception of the Gaelic Bards and their way of thinking:

The bards took cognizance only of the most notable personalities who preceded them; and of these only the acts which had a symbolic or spiritual significance; and these

25Irish Literature, VIII, 2989.
26Ibid., quoted from "Nationality and Imperialism," 2989.
grew thrice refined as generations of poets, in enraptured musings along by the mountains or in the woods, brooded upon their heritage of story until, as it passed from age to age, the accumulated beauty grew greater than the beauty of the hour, the dream began to enter into the children of our race, and their thoughts turned from earth to that world in which it had its inception.27

It would seem as if the wish were father to the thought in these lines. The bards were the song-makers of the people: they sang of the mighty deeds of heroes, of hostings in the tribal places, of hunting and feasting and love-making. They caught at the threads of ancient myths and legends that came down to them from a remoter age and wove them into the pattern of their songs. What more natural than that they should weave their songs of "notable personalities." Hugh de Blacam calls them the newspapermen of their day.28 As reporters and biographers of their clans it was politic and profitable for them to deal with names that were "good copy."

If there was anything symbolic or spiritual in the acts which they recorded in their sagas or verses, it was not in the mystic sense which A.E. implies. There was, undoubtedly, a recognized usage whereby certain names or characteristics stood for types or symbols of the race or of Celtic idealism.

De Blacam writes

It is well said that Irishmen always think of their country as a living person; numerous names could be cited under which Ireland is personified—Banba, Fodhlan Roisin Dhu, etc. . . . liberty is raised to an imaginative plane, and is represented not as something that will make men richer, but as a spiritual consummation. The poets sing of the sweetness

27Ibid., 2990.
28Gaelic Literature, 92.
of life in Eire, of the bitterness of exile
and of the union, as between lovers, of the
Island and the race. 28

The same writer shows how the outstanding military and religious lead-
ers became, in the evolution of bardic thought, the types or living embodi-
ments of the race. The Fenian cycle, which had its origin in a blood-feud
between two clans, was reduced to a dramatic ingredient and served as a
means to exhibit the chivalry and valor of the race.

The character of Finn has been adapted.
He has become, under the story-makers' hands, a great leader of men. The final
Finn is true to a type that often appears among kings and captains. He yields to
selfishness, yet always he can command de-
votion . . . Meanwhile the character of
Oisin and Padruig developed in the same
fashion. We have suggested that in the
Fenian and the Saint the natural and super-
natural virtues may be seen embodied.
There is yet more than this facile allegory
in the delineation of the two figures. Two
abiding types of the race are represented.
Throughout Irish history Oisin and Padruig
may be discerned as the dual leaders of the
nation . . . The Fenian ideal, or imaginative
patriotism, and the Faith have always been
the two great enthusiasms of Ireland. 30

In this sense it may be said that the acts of the "notable personalities" of whom A.E. speaks, had a symbolic or spiritual significance. But it
was in his own "enraptured musings along by the mountains or in the woods"
that the dream of mysticism began to enter into his mind and turned his
thoughts from earth to the contemplation of that world in which he con-
ceived the race as having its inception.

29 Ibid., 6.
30 Ibid., 69.
A.E., however, unlike Yeats was no mere dreamer. His mystic Ireland

the high and holy Eri of prophecy, the
isle of enchantment, burning with druidic
splendours, bright with immortal presences,
with the face of the everlasting Beauty
looking in upon its ways, divine with
terrestrial mingling till God and the world
are one.31

was but a beautiful and fanciful dream; while his mystic philosophy rendered
him incapable of understanding the characteristic spirituality of the Gael
which, despite its traces of an older religious heritage, the dim echoes
from the dawn of the race, is always intensely Catholic, and hence irreconcilable with the pantheistic mysticism which inspired his literary and national idealism.

He had, nevertheless, a very practical side to his genius, and through
his efforts to organize the farmers of Ireland into co-operative societies
and to found co-operative banks under the supervision of the Agricultural
Organization Society, A.E. rendered singular service to Irish economic
and rural interests. His essay, The National Being, achieved the fame and
popularity of a national gospel.

A. E.'s literary and philosophic ideals have not taken root on Irish
soil, while the mystic Ireland he conjured up for the admiration and emulation of his countrymen has been rejected by them as a beautiful illusion. Nevertheless, he will be remembered as a gifted and, according to his lights, a patriotic Irishman.

Poets, essayist, mystic, artist, and economist, George W. Russell stands
out as one of the great figures of the Literary Revival; and though he can

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31 Quoted by Boyd, 233.
not be regarded as expressing the traditional Gaelic mind, or the thought and feelings of his countrymen in his contribution to Anglo-Irish literature, his broad sympathies, his sincere, if misguided, literary enthusiasms, and the excellence of his melodious verse have ensured him a prominent place in the annals of Anglo-Irish literature.

Of the other poets and writers whose names are associated with Yeats and Russell, and who may be classified as belonging to the "Celtic" school, little need be said since they were, for the most part, imitators or devotees of the cult of Celticism rather than poets gifted with original inspiration. Foremost among them were John Todhunter whose Three Bardic Tales is adapted from the mythological cycle; T. W. Rolleston who is chiefly to be remembered as the joint editor with Stopford Brooke of the very valuable Treasury of Irish Poetry; and William Larminie, who, outside of Yeats and A. E., was most profoundly influenced by Gaelic sources which are very evident in his epic poems, Fand and Moytura.

One of the anomalies of the literary Revival appears in the person of Lionel Johnson, an English poet who was associated with Yeats and Russell in the Irish Literary Club in London. Whereas the Anglo-Irish poets were attracted to Celtic sources by an enthusiasm for the pagan aspect of its myths and legends, Johnson, an Englishman and a convert to Catholicism, was drawn to a love of things Irish by his newly-found faith only to be alienated later by the paganism which inspired the writers of the "Celtic" school.

The only other noteworthy Catholic figure of the early Revival period is Katherine Tynan Hinkson who will be dealt with in a concluding chapter, as her literary and religious ideals have little in common with her con-
temporaries in the movement for a distinct national literature.

It will be the purpose of a concluding chapter to trace the reaction which set in the first decade of the new century against the exoticism of the Yeats-Russell group, and to estimate the relative merits, from the point of view of their respective contributions to Anglo-Irish literature, of the latter group and of the younger generation of writers who have sought to divert the stream of verse into more realistic and nationalistic channels.
CHAPTER VII

REALISTIC AND NATIONALISTIC TRENDS IN ANGLO-IRISH POETRY

"Life is greater than art" someone has said, and this, without a doubt, accounts for the failure of the "Celtic" poets to express the real feelings of the Irish people in their verse. Following the neo-Romantic maxim of "art for art’s sake," they divorced art from life and succeeded in producing nothing more than a beautiful deception, vested with Celtic imagery and color, but informed by an alien spirit.

One great service they did, however, perform, for Anglo-Irish verse: the high literary standards and exquisite workmanship of their poems served to stimulate and discipline the artistic efforts of the younger generation of poets who were trying to voice the thoughts and feelings that were hidden in the heart of the Irish people, and to wean them away from the influence of the politico-literary verse of the "Nation" writers.

However, before going on to treat of this younger generation of poets who initiated the reaction against the Yeats' school while, at the same time, benefiting from the literary artistry of the older poets, another and an earlier figure of the Revival calls for mention. She is Katherine Tynan Hinkson.

Mrs. Hinkson was among those who collaborated with Yeats and Russell in Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland. She was one of the pioneer members
of the Literary Movement. But, whereas their mystic enthusiasms sent the Yeats school to ancient texts, to the dead pagan tradition which fitted in better with their pantheistic philosophy, Mrs. Hinkson's Catholicity and vibrant nationalism kept her in touch with the living voice of the people.

There are three notes discernible in Mrs. Hinkson's poetry which are characteristic of the living tradition: "love of country; a religious feeling at once deep, sincere, and glowing; and an intimate appreciation of the beauty and essence of external Nature."¹

Her Catholicity is that of the Irish peasant, what Boyd calls the "naive faith, that complete surrender to the simpler emotions of wonder and pity which characterize the religious experiences of the plain man."²

Katherine Tynan Hinkson is the most Irish of the early Revival poets because she understood the things that were in the hearts of the Irish people. To her, their picturesque legends, in which strands from the ancient religion of the land were interwoven with Christian beliefs and practices; their feeling of all beautiful places being haunted by supernatural presences; their intimate feeling for nature in every mood, were not mere "agglomerations of Catholicism"³ on the racial and religious origins of the Celt, but the natural evolution of the Celtic mind which, like a living organism, absorbed into its cultural system the mysteries and legends of the Catholic faith without losing its own primeval racial characteristics.

Whereas Yeats and Russell sacrificed freshness and reality by passing

¹Brooke and Rolleston, 409.
³Ibid., 110.
ever the living tradition in order to go directly to the origins of nationality and primeval religion, thereby ensuring their own eventual rejection because of their artificiality, Mrs. Hinkson wrote like Wordsworth "with her eye on the subject."

In doing so, she struck the note of realism and nationality which was to awaken responsive chords in the hearts of other young Irish poets who were otherwise in danger of being led astray by the Yeatsian will-o'-the-wisp. Better a literature of inferior craftsmanship founded on true inspiration than polished artistry based on an illusion--this seems to have been the literary gospel of Mrs. Hinkson.

Not that she lacked poetic talent--many of her lyrics have the essentials of great poetry: inspiration, sincerity, insight, and real melody--but it cannot be denied that her charming but simple lyrics suffer in comparison with the exquisite artistry of Yeats or the sonorous melody of A.E. However, what she lacks in depth of thought or technical skill she makes up for in sincerity and freshness.

She sang her unassuming songs rich with the fragrance of the countryside and lovely with the charm of natural loveliness:

All in the April morning,
April airs were abroad,
The sheep with their little lambs
Passed by me on the road.

The lambs were weary and crying
With a weak human cry,
I thought of the Lamb of God
Going meekly to die ... 4

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Where Yeats saw only the haunting beauty of the Sidhe, Mrs. Hinkson saw the deep supernatural sensitiveness of the Irish peasant. "De Profundis" voices the pious belief of the country-folk that the souls of departed loved ones who are in need of spiritual assistance return to earth to seek it by means of prayers and masses:

You must be troubled, Ashtore,  
Because last night you came  
And stood on the moonlit floor,  
And called again my name  
In dreams I felt your tears,  
In dreams mine eyes were wet;  
O, dead for seven long years!  
And can you not forget?  
Are you not happy yet?

The mass-bell shall be rung  
The mass be said and sung,  
And God will surely hear;  
Go back and sleep, my dear.5

Her early poems show the influence of the Gaelic Revival on her themes. "The Children of Lir" tells the story of an old Celtic legend:

Woe for Lir's sweet children whom their vile stepmother  
Glamoured with her witch-spells for a thousand years;  
Died their father raving--on his throne another--  
Blind before the end came from his burning tears.  
She--the fiends possess her, torture her forever,  
Gone is all the glory of the race of Lir,  
Gone and long forgotten like a dream of fever:  
But the swans remember all the days that were.6

Perhaps her best narrative poem is "Waiting" in which the legend is related of Finn and the warriors of the Fianna who lie in frozen sleep in a cave of the Donegal mountains biding the time when they shall be awakened to do battle for Ireland at the hour of her redemption.

5Ibid., 3455.  
6Ibid., 3460.
In a grey cave where comes no glimpse of sky
Set in the blue hill's heart full many a mile,
Having the dripping stone for canopy,
Missing the wind's laugh and the good sun's smile,
I, Fionn, with all my sleeping warriors lie... .

I was king in ages long ago,
A mighty warrior and a seer likewise,
Still mine eyes look with solemn gaze of woe
From stony lids adown the centuries,
And in my frozen heart I know, I know.

Her attitude towards the figures of the legend, as well as towards the gods, is very different from that of the "Celtic" poets. In her verse, they are not "forms more real than living man," but dim figures far off in the shadowy past.

The fierce old gods we hailed with worshipping,
The blind old gods, waxed mad with sin and blood,
Laid down their godhead as an idle thing
At a God's feet, whose throne was but a Rood;
His crown, wrought thorns; His joy, long travailing.

Finn and his warriors felt the mountain heave and sway when the Saviour died on Calvary. When Patrick came with the glad tidings,

The happy children sang from morn to night,
The blessed church bells rang, new arts were born,
Strong towns rose up and glimmered fair and white.7

7Brooke and Rolleston, 418-421.
How different this is from Yeats' conception of the advent of Christianity to Ireland! Yeats' Usheen saw

no milk-white face
Under a crown of thorns and dark with blood,
But only exultant faces. 8

In the verse of Katherine Tynan Hinkson the living Catholic spirit of Ireland spoke. Alone among the pioneer poets of the Revival, she sought to interpret the thoughts and feelings of the common people of Ireland. Her simple lyrics breathe the quiet beauty of the Irish country-side, or voice the poetic religious emotion of the peasantry. In her earlier verse, she shows the influence of the Gaelic Revival Movement, but in a manner entirely different from its manifestations in the poetry of Yeats and Russell. It is evident that she had little sympathy with the "Celtic" school, as her writings, after the early poems published in Poems and Ballads, move away from the legendary and mythological sphere and dwell on themes taken from the living traditions of the people.

She did not write great poetry, but she wrote with sincerity and charm. In choosing to write of the things which her countrymen could understand and appreciate, she set a healthy precedent for the poets of the younger generation and led the way to a more realistic conception of Irish literature.

By one of those paradoxes which are a commonplace of Irish life, the first murmurings of the coming revolt against the literary dictatorship of the "Celtic" school were heard in a volume of verse entitled New Songs in which A.E. introduced to the public a group of young poets who had gathered

round him and were preparing, under his influence, to inaugurate the next phase of Anglo-Irish poetry.

Of these, the most important were Padraic Colum and Seamus O'Sullivan. Another young poet whose name did not appear in New Songs, but who was a literary protege of A. E. was Stephens. He made his debut as a poet with the volume of verse entitled Insurrections in 1909, five years after the publication of New Songs. These three, together with the Easter Week poets, Pearse, MacDonagh and Plunkett, may be said to represent Ireland's most noteworthy contribution to verse during the first two decades of this century.

This group cannot be said to form a school of verse in the sense of the "Celtic" school, whose poets were distinguished by common characteristics. Although all of them were, to a greater or lesser extent, disciples of Yeats and A.E., in the sense that their literary endeavors were encouraged or inspired by the fostering care of the older school, yet, as individuals they strike the note of originality in their verse that disassociates them, as well from one another as from those who preceded them in Anglo-Irish literature.

Of this group, Colum and Stephens seem to merit particular mention as standing for a more realistic and nationalistic conception of Anglo-Irish verse, and will be dealt with in some detail in order that their essential dissimilarity from the poets of the "Celtic" school may become apparent.

When Padraic Colum published his first book of verse entitled Wild Earth in 1907, he established himself as the most outstanding candidate for the literary leadership of the new group of poets. Writing of the new trend in Anglo-Irish verse which Colum introduced, Calvert Alexander says:
The vivid, rough impressionism, the rugged meter, the repetitions, the straining after the 'aliquid novi', all speak eloquently of the New Poetry, but of a type quite removed from the soft symbolism of the Celtic Twilight. Colum, in fact, from the beginning moved deliberately in an opposite direction to the feminine charm of this last stand of the dying Romanticism, green twilight, neo-Platonic mysticism, and the rest.9

Colum's inspiration springs from the earth, not in the sense of A.E.'s pantheistic mysticism, but in that it derives color and strength from the elemental things that are close to the soil. No city-bred esthete, no dabbler in the occult sciences, Colum made poetry, as he himself says of Robert Burns, "out of his own works and days."10 Birth, life, death, the land; the wet hills, the sky, the men who drive cattle to fairs, the women who rock the cradle and spin and knit—these are the themes of his verse. Commonplace and humble enough as are the things he makes his subject-matter, they take on grandeur and importance because he shows us that they are the elemental things, the springs of daily living.

Although by his dedication of Wild Earth to "A.E. who fostered me" Colum seems to imply a literary discipleship, there is not the slightest trace of imitation anywhere in his verse. The opening lines of the volume, stark etchings of the primordial elements of civilization, create the mood in which the best of Colum's poetry is written:

Sunset and silence! A man; around him earth savage, earth broken; Beside him two horses, a plough.

Earth savage, earth broken, the brutes, the dawn-man there in the sunset,

10Ibid., 270.
And the plough that is twin to the sword,
that is found of cities.

As if in mockery of the "Celtic" school's exaltation of the gods, and
of A. E.'s pantheistic worship of Mother Earth, he asks:

Surely our sky-born gods can be nought to
you, earth-child and earth-master--
Surely your thoughts are of Pan, or of Wotan,
or Dana?

Yet why give thought to the gods? Has Pan
led your brutes where they stumble?
Has Dana numbed pain of child-bed, or
Wotan put hands to your plough?\[11\]

The tang of the earth, the familiar scenes from the Irish country-side
take the place, in Colum's verse, of the shadowy landscapes and haunted
twilight of Yeats' and A. E.

O the smell of the beasts,
The wet wind in the morn,
And the proud and hard earth,
Never broken for corn!

Then the wet winding roads,
Brown bogs with black water,
And my thoughts on white ships
And the King of Spain's daughter.\[12\]

After listening for so long to verses celebrating the "pearl-pale, high-
born" beauty of Maeve and Deirdre of the golden hair, readers of Anglo-Irish
poetry must have welcomed some lines that told of the loves and longings of
peasant girls and boys such as in the poem "She Moved through the Fair,"
which Colum tells us is "a restoration of an Irish traditional song of which
one or two lines were in existence.\[13\]

\[12\]Ibid., 84.
\[13\]Ibid., Notes, 213.
My young love said to me, "My brothers won't mind
And my parents won't slight you for your lack of kind."
Then she stepped away from me, and this she did say
"It will not be long, love, till our wedding day."

She stepped away from me and she moved through the fair,
And fondly I watched her go here and there,
Then she went her way homeward with one star awake,
As the swan in the evening moves over the lake.14

The pageant of Irish country life, quaint, colorful, plaintive, rejoicing, close to the wild earth which is the heritage of the Gael, wends its way through the pages of Colum's verse. He tells of "Girls Spinning," and "Old Men Complaining;" of "The Knitters," "The Tin-whistle Player," and "The Mountaineer." He recalls "Lilac Blossoms" and "Laburnums" and "Fuchsia Hedges in Connacht." He tells the legend of "The Bird of Jesus" and of "The Burial of Saint Brendan." He sings a cradle-song of the Irish mother:

O men from the fields!
Come gently within.
Tread softly, softly,
O men coming in.

Mavourneen is going
From me and from you,
Where Mary will fold him with mantle of blue!

From reek of the smoke
And cold of the floor,
And the peering of things
Across the half-door.15

14Ibid., 109.
15Ibid., 111.
The Gaelic mood of Colum's verse springs, not from the dead pagan past, but from the living traditions of the Irish-speaking countryside which bring the medieval mind into modern verse. Of "Sojourning and Wandering" he tells us: "The autumn piece is a translation of an Irish medieval poem, and the spring piece translates the opening of a well-known eighteenth-century Gaelic poem--Raftery's "County Mayo." An Drinaun Donn" we are told is "a translation of a famous song which is given in Dr. Douglas Hyde's Love Songs of Connacht, that collection of folk-poetry of the West of Ireland to which I owe a great deal."

There are numerous translations and variations from the living Gaelic tradition which show the strong influence of the Gaelic Revival movement on Colum's mind. Unlike the Yeats' school who, if they knew Gaelic at all, knew it only from brief contacts with the Irish-speaking country-folk of the West and South, Colum grew up in a countryside that was steeped in Gaelic traditions. The Gaelic flavor of his phrases, the un-English constructions, the preference for assonance rather than rhyme--these indicate a new trend in Anglo-Irish verse. "Breffne Caoine" is a typical example of this. Colum writes that "the period of this lament would be the fifteenth century. The Breffne that was the O'Reilly territory is the modern county Cavan--'The Brenny' of the English historians." Columbia weeping over a lord of the English. Do I weep--A cry that scarcely stirs the heart!

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16 Ibid., Notes, 213.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 215
I lament as it is in my blood to lament—
Oastle and stronghold are broken,
And the sovereign of the land beside the
lake lies dead—
Mahon O'Reilly!
In his day the English were broken:
I weep beside Loch Sheelin and the day is
long and grey.19

Colum's Catholicity is as apparent as his nationality. He does not, however, wear his religion on his sleeve. It is not the passionate avowal of a Huysmans or a Dowson turning to Christ after many doubts and wanderings. It is the deep, abiding faith of the Irish peasant whose religious allegiance does not need avowal because it is something that is taken for granted. It is the element in which he moves.

It enters into his verse in the natural manner that is characteristic of Irish Catholicity. Christ and Mary, Padraic, Brigit and Columcille—these are household names in Gaelic folk-lore and songs as they are in Colum's verse. In the legend of "The Burial of Saint Brendan" he tells the story of the Gaelic saint whom tradition credits with being the first European to set foot on the soil of the New World.

I, Brendan, had a name came from the sea
I was the first who sailed the outer main,
And past all forelands and all fastnesses!
I passed the voiceless anchorites, their isles,
Saw the ice-palaces upon the seas,
Mentioned Christ's name to men cut off from men,
Heard the whales snort and saw the Kraken!20

Occasionally, however, Colum's deep faith becomes explicit as in the "Vrases for Alfeo Faggi's Stations of the Cross," which, he tells us, are

19 Ibid., 200.
20 Ibid., 48.
in bronze in St. Thomas's Church, Chicago.

Prince, by thine own darkened hour,
Live within me heart and brain;
Let my hands not slip the rein!

Ah, how long ago the hour
Since a comrade rode with me;
Now, a moment let me see . . .
Thyself, lonely in the dark,
Perfect, without wound or mark! 21

When in "The Old College of the Irish, Paris" he writes:

Our order broken, they who were our brood
Knew not themselves the heirs of noted masters,
Of Columbenus and Erigena:
We strove towards no high reach of speculation,
Towards no delivery of gestated dogma,
No resolution of age-long dispute.
Only to have a priest beside the hedges,
Baptizing, marrying,
Offering Mass within some clod-built chapel,
And to the dying the last sacraments
Conveying, no more we strove to do--
We, all bare exiles, soldiers, scholars, priests, 22

he told of Ireland's bitter choice to suffer the loss of every cultural privilege at the price of holding on to her ancient faith. Commenting on these lines, Calvert Alexander writes:

Colum's achievements in modern poetry are sufficient evidence that the Irish in striving to do no more than this have chosen the better part. 23

Padraic Colum, more than any living Irish poet, has expressed the feelings and aspirations of his countrymen. The sounds and scenes of

21Ibid., 199.
22Ibid., 192.
Ireland's countryside are in his verses, the elemental things that still make Ireland a haven of the spirit where men who are weary of the tinsel of our glittering civilization may find the things that a materialistic age has thrown away.

The poet who shares with Colum the claim to represent Ireland in the field of modern verse is James Stephens. Stephens presents a paradox to the literary critic, for although he is widely known for the "Celtic" characteristics of his prose works, notably *The Crock of Gold* and *Irish Fairy Tales*, yet in his verse the so-called "Celtic conventions" are noticeably absent. However, as Boyd remarks,

James Stephens is as truly Irish in *Insurrections* as if leprecauns, banshees and fairies, and all the other adjuncts of accepted Celticism, abounded in every page.  

As Boyd points out, it is as unreasonable to expect an Anglo-Irish poet to fit into a pre-conceived conventional pattern as it would be to expect an English or French poet to conform to a national convention. Because of the dominance of Yeats and Russell, foreign critics have come to believe that Irish poets must necessarily turn out rhyme according to some hard-and-fast "Celtic" convention! But, to quote Boyd again,

Strange as it may seem, our poets do not manipulate "cliches" with a view to obtaining "Celtic effects."  

The title of Stephens' first volume of verse, *Insurrections*, was in itself significant. It symbolized the revolt of the younger generation of

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24 Ibid., 267.
25 Ibid., 267.
writers against the accepted literary views and outlook on life of the
dominant Anglo-Irish school. The Ireland that Stephens pictures in his
verse differs widely from that painted by Colum in his rustic pageantry
of Irish life, and yet it is every bit as characteristic of the real
Ireland. According to Boyd,

The quintessence of James Stephens is
in his combination of the grotesque and
profound, all part of that naive irrever­
ence with which the poet contemplates ter­
restrial and cosmic phenomena. 26

Strange as it may seem, this "naive irreverence" is as characteristic
a quality of the Irishman's attitude towards religion as his picturesque
faith, and is only possible with a people who feel on such intimate terms
with the Almighty that they can afford to make bold with the outward show
of reverence expected of less privileged persons.

Grotesque humor and light treatment of the most profound themes is as
characteristic of the saga literature as it is of folk-lore and the ballads
of the last century. In the greatest of the Gaelic epics, the Tain Bo
Cuailnge, the dying warrior, Cuchulain, who has lashed his wounded body to
a pillar-stone so that he may face his foes even in death, laughs with his
dying gasp at the raven who slips in the gory life-blood that oozes into
the sod where the hero stands. 27 Bardic literature affords many examples
of this kind of grotesque humor.

The Dublin ballads of the last century show how this strange Gaelic
trait manifested itself likewise in Irish urban life. That piece of poetic

26__Ibid., 269.
27__See Eleanor Hull. A Text Book of Irish Literature. David Nutt, London,
  1906, 93.
ribaldry known as "The Night before Larry was Stretched" describes how the cronies of the condemned Larry paid him a visit on the night before his execution to joke and play cards and "warm his gob 'fore he died," as the quaint slang of the period puts it.

The boys they came crowding in fast,
They drew all their stools about him,
Six glims round his trap-case were placed,
He couldn't be well waked without 'em.
When one of us asked could he die
Without having duly repented,
Says Larry, 'That's all in my eye;
And first by the clergy invented,
To get a fat bit for themselves.'

This kind of jocular treatment of the most profound themes is matched only in Gaelic and early Anglo-Irish literature by another characteristic trait: the way sacred and profane beliefs and practices are mingled in that complex religious mentality which is, without a doubt, a heritage of Irish Catholicism from the days when the ancient Druidic religion ruled the land. Saints mingle with the fairy Sidhe; Christian rites and practices take on an incongruous aspect from the admixture of folk superstitions with the result that the Catholicism of the Irish peasant is characterized by a naive irreverence that tends to shock strictly orthodox believers.

There is the Elizabethan Gaelic poet who wrote:

Three things are waiting for my death.
The devil who is waiting for my soul
and cares nothing for my body or my wealth; the worms who are waiting for my body but care nothing for my soul or my wealth; my children, who are waiting for my wealth and care nothing for my body or my soul. O Christ, hang all three in the one noose!

28 Brooke and Rolleston, 8.
Yeats tells of "An old man in the slopes of Ben Bulben, who found the devil ringing a bell under his bed and went out and stole the chapel bell and rang him out." 30

Instances could be multiplied from Gaelic legends and folk-lore which show that Stephens' grotesque humor and naive irreverence are no less characteristic of Irish life than are the sincere piety and piquant charm of Colum's verse. Both are facets of the complex national character, part of that curious paradox which James Joyce exploited so malevolently in "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" and in "Ulysses."

In contrast to Colum who wrote of the countryside, Stephens, at least in his earlier poems, dealt with city life. He is a realist in the sense that he paints the familiar and oftentimes drab scenes from daily life with unabashed candor. But, whereas others, such as Joyce, saw only the squalor and incongruity of Irish life, Stephens' Gaelic buoyancy and optimism saves him from becoming a cynic.

Joyce could have written these lines from "The Street Behind Yours":

There is the doorway mean and low!
And there are the houses drab and brown!
And the night's black pall!
And the hours that crawl!
And the forms that peer and frown!
And the lamp's dim glare on the slush below!
And the gutter grumbling down! 31

but he was incapable of writing such a lovely lyric as "To the Queen of the Bees."

Bee! tell me whence do you come?  
Ten fields away, twenty perhaps,  
Have heard your hum . . . .  
If you are from the south, you should  
Have seen a little cottage just  
Inside a wood.

And should you go back that way, please,  
Carry a message to the house  
Among the trees.

Say— I shall meet her at the rock  
Beside the stream, this very night  
At eight o'clock.  
And ask your queen, when you get home,  
To send my queen the present of  
A honeycombe.

The scenes that Stephens paints bear out what he said of himself in  
"The Twins":

Good and bad are in my heart  
But I cannot tell to you—  
For they never are apart—  
Which is better of the two.

I am this! I am the other!  
And the devil is my brother!  
But my father He is God!  
And my mother is the Sod!  
I am safe enough, you see,  
Owing to my pedigree.

In Stephens' verse, there are ghastly pictures like this from "Where  
the Demons Grin":

A bent old man was climbing slow;  
With weary step and plodding pace,  
That savage hill; and wild did blow  
A bitter wind in headlong race,  
Harsh from the sea below . . . .

He held a rope; and as he trod,  
Pressing against the furious wind,  
He muttered low and sneered at God.

32 Ibid., 43.  
33 Ibid., 160.
And said he sure was deaf or blind,
Or lasing on the sod!

And what was done I will not tell.
There is a bent tree on the top
Of that low hill, there you can see
The sequel to this mystery . . .
Beneath the moon . . . I dared not
stop . . .
My God! — a demon up from hell
Jab-jabbered as the old man fell. 34

There are charming rustic scenes as in "Seamus Beg.":

A man was sitting underneath a tree
Outside a village; and he asked me what
Name was upon this place; and he said that he
Was never here before—He told a lot

Of stories to me too. His nose was flat!
I asked him how it happened, and he said—
The first mate of the Holy Ghost did that
With a marling-spike one day; but he was
dead;

And jolly good job too; and he'd have gone
A long way to have killed him—Oh, he had
A gold ring in one ear; the other one—
"Was bit off by a crocodile, Bedad!"—

That's what he said. He taught me how to
chew!
He was a real nice man! He liked me too! 35

The note of grotesque and audacious humor is apparent in very many
of Stephens' poems, especially those dealing with diabolical themes which
seem to have fascinated him, as, for example: "What the Devil Said" and
"The Devil's Bag." But for sheer audacity and fantastic wit "Mac Dhoul"
is without parallel in Anglo-Irish literature. A tramp, Mac Dhoul,

With two weeks' whisker blackening lug
to lug

34 Ibid., 158-159.
35 Ibid., 169.
With tattered breeks and only half a shirt

manages to slip into the abode of God and His angels.

I saw them all!
I could have laughed aloud
To see them at their capers;
That serious, solemn-footed,
weighty crowd
Of Angels—or, say, resurrected drapers!

Suddenly, Mac Dhoul,
... scooting through the glaring, nerveless host.
All petrified, all gaping in a hush!

Came to the throne, and, nimble as a rat,
Hopped up it, squatted close, and there I sat.
Squirming with laughter till I had to cry,
To see Him standing there:
Frozen with all His angels in a stare!

Finally,

He raised His hand!
His hand! 'Twas like a sky!
Gripped me in half a finger,
Flipped me round, and sent me spinning high
Through the screaming planets! Faith, I didn't linger
To scratch myself ... And then adown I sped,
Scraping old moons and twisting, heels and head,
A chuckle in the void! Till ... here I stand
As naked as a brick!
I'll sing the Peeler and the Goat in half a tick!36

36 Ibid., 145-145.
begins to manifest itself. **Reincarnations**, a handful of exquisite variations upon themes of the later Gaelic poets, was the fruit of years of deep study of Gaelic literature. The effect of his Gaelic studies is, however, chiefly evident in his prose works. Commenting on the increasingly Gaelic flavor of Stephens' later writings, notably "Irish Fairy Tales" and a translation of the epic "Tain Bo-Cuailgne" Boyd remarks,

> The rhythm of this prose, this delight in words, this grotesque humour of each detail, are at once characteristic of the style of James Stephens and of the Gaelic storytellers. His study of Irish and prolonged absorption in the old literature have heightened the colour and strengthened the movement of his prose. 37

Variations of Gaelic themes in **Reincarnations** are, almost without exception, from medieval and traditional sources, scarcely ever from mythology. They include such popular Gaelic verses as "County Mayo" and "Mary Hynes" by the blind eighteenth-century poet, Antoin O'Rafftery, whose love for the beautiful Mary Hynes Yeats celebrated in "Dust Hath Closed Helen's Eye" from *The Celtic Twilight*. Yeats says of him

> The poet who helped her to so much fame has himself a great fame throughout the West of Ireland. Some think that Raftery was half blind, and say, 'I saw Raftery, a dark man, but he had sight enough to see her.' 38

The poem which has the most characteristic Gaelic flavor in Stephens' variations is "Nancy Walsh." Gaelic idiom is skillfully duplicated here

37Op. Cit., 420  
38Irish Literature, IX, 3671.
as it is in his prose works.

I, without bite or sup,
If thou were fated for me,
I would up
And would go after thee
Through mountains!

A thousand thanks from me
To God have gone,
Because I did not lose my
senses to thee,
Though it was hardly I
escaped from thee,
O Ringleted One!39

In common with most of the Anglo-Irish poets, Stephens celebrated the tragic beauty of Deirdre, the Gaelic Helen. Here again the Gaelic mode of repetition, so like the Hebrew poetry of the Psalms, heightens and colors the lines with a peculiar non-English flavor.

Do not let any woman read this verse!
It is for men, and after them their sons,
And their son's sons!

The time comes when our hearts sink
utterly;
When we remember Deirdre, and her tale,
And that her lips are dust . . .

More than two thousand years it is since
she
Was beautiful: she trod the waving grass;
And saw the clouds . . .

But there has been again no woman born
Who was so beautiful; not one so beautiful
Of all the women born . . .

No man can bend before her! No man say--
What could one say to her? There are no words
That one could say to her!

Now she is but a story that is told
Beside the fire! No man can ever be
The friend of that poor queen! 40

"Egan O' Rahilly" and "O' Bruadar" commemorate two Gaelic poets of
Munster who wrote during the dark days of the Penal Age in Ireland, while
"The Wave of Glion" and "Anthony O'Daly" are laments made by Gaelic bards
upon the passing of their chieftains who were patrons of learning under the
Irish tribal system.

The plaintive cry of the Gaelic Ireland at the overthrow of the old
Celtic order at the time of the Cromwellian conquest is heard in the lines
of "Inis Fal":

Now may we turn aside and dry our tears!
And comfort us! And lay aside our fears,
For all is gone!
All comely quality!
All gentleness and hospitality!
All courtesy and merriment

Is gone!
Our virtues all, are withered every one!
Our music vanished, and our skill to sing!

Now may we quiet us and quit our moan!
Nothing is whole that could be broke! No thing
Remains to us of all that was our own. 41

Everything considered, James Stephens is, without doubt, one of the
outstanding living poets in contemporary Anglo-Irish verse. Because he
did not allow himself to be tied down by the ties of the "Celtic conven-
tions" but rather permitted his genius to range at large over a wide ex-
panse of themes, he has given to Anglo-Irish verse a cosmopolitanism and

40 Ibid., 70-71.
41 Ibid., 198.
universality of appeal that it lacked under the restricted inspiration and conventional limitations of the "Celtic" school.

Stephens sums up his contribution to Anglo-Irish verse when he says of himself in "The Pit of Bliss":

When I was young  
I dared to sing  
Of everything,  
And anything!  
Of joy, and woe, and fate, and God!  
Of dreaming cloud, and teeming sod!  
Of hill, that thrust an amber spear  
Into the sunset! And the sheer  
Precipice that shakes the soul  
To its black gape--I sang the whole  
Of God and Man, nor sought to know  
Man, or God, or Joy, or Woe!  
And though an older wight I be,  
My soul hath still such Ecstasy  
That, on a pulse, I sing and sing  
Of Everything, and Anything!  

It is because he sings so whimsically of "Everything and Anything" that James Stephens symbolizes the revolt against the artificial literary pattern which the "Celtic Twilight" group set up as the ideal of Anglo-Irish literature. Together with Padriac Colum, from whom he differed so much, and Katherine Tynan Hinkson, James Stephens stands for a more realistic interpretation of the Irish mind in literature.

In tracing the reaction, outlined in this chapter, against the "Celtic conventions" imposed on Anglo-Irish verse by the literary prestige of Yeats and A. E., Colum and Stephens have been selected, in preference to others such as Seamus O'Sullivan, Joseph Campbell or Thomas MacDonagh, because it

\[42\] Ibid., 253.
was felt that these two best typify the contemporary trend away from the neo-Platonic mysticism and general exoticism of the earlier group of poets.

For the purpose of this thesis, a limited number of writers who are regarded as typical of the movements of which they are a part have been dealt with at some length in preference to a more cursory treatment of a larger number of writers from the same movements. Yeats and Russell were obvious choices to represent the Celtic note in the early stages of the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival. Colum and Stephens, and to a certain extent, Katherine Tynan Hinkson, were chosen on the basis of their wider popularity, to illustrate the second stage of the Revival.

In both instances, it has been the endeavor of the writer to indicate the extent to which Gaelic influences may be said to have affected, remotely or proximately, the inspiration and literary forms of the two movements which are traceable in the Literary Revival since its inception in the closing decades of the last century.

Before concluding, a brief reference to current trends in Anglo-Irish literature will not be out of order. At the present time, it would seem as if Irish literary trends are moving towards an increasingly national and realistic mode of expression. It has been the ambition of educational authorities under the national government since its inception in 1922 to promote a bi-lingual status, similar to that existing in Belgium, where Gaelic, as well as English, would be the medium of expression, not only for the purposes of social intercourse, but, moreover, in the writing of the novel, of verse, and of the drama.

Whether this will divert the energies of the younger writers away from
the further development of the literary trend represented by the verse of Colum and Stephens into more completely Gaelic channels is something that it is not now possible to foresee. It would seem, however, from a glance at the names of those who represent current activities in Irish literature—Daniel Corkery, Sean O'Faolain, Lord Dunsany, Brinsley McNamara, Sean O'Casey, T. C. Murray, Lennox Robinson, Liam O'Flaherty, Denis Johnson and others—that the drama and the novel, rather than verse, are engaging the energies of modern Irish writers.

Whatever the future may have in store in the way of a truly national literature, the importance of the part played by the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival cannot be over-emphasized.

However flattering the widespread popularity of the cult of "Celticism" may have been to those who hailed it as the expression of the racial and spiritual ideals of the Celt, time and the more mature judgment of a generation removed from its literary standards have come to regard it as no more a genuine reflection of the traditional Gaelic mode in literature than was, for instance, McPherson's Ossian.

Nevertheless, just as the popularity of Ossian was instrumental in creating widespread interest in the mystery and charm of a by-gone age (to the extent that it is credited with having played no small part in bringing about the Romantic Revival in English Poetry) the cult of "Celticism" may, likewise, be said to have played a somewhat parallel role in awakening among Irishmen, that lively appreciation of the past from which springs a romantic zest for the future.

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43 See Moody and Lovett. A History of English Literature, Chas. Scribner's New York, 1918, 244.
For it must be borne in mind that Anglo-Irish literature, as a whole, has not grown up to meet the demands of the devotees of "Celticism" but rather to meet the need of Ireland as a nation for self-expression. The main purpose of the Literary Revival has been, not to contribute to the great tradition of English literature, but to create a body of verse, drama, fiction and other forms of literature which would express, in the language forced upon Irishmen by an alien culture, the facts, the traditional mode of life and thought, and the complex mentality of the Gael, while, at the same time, awakening in the hearts of Irishmen an enthusiasm for the national and spiritual heritage of the race.

It has been the endeavor of the writer in the preceding pages to show that the verse of the literary Revival has a marked degree of originality in respect of form and content, deriving from the influence of Gaelic sources, and sufficient to warrant its acceptance as the utterance of a distinct national mind in literature as opposed to the mind of other English-speaking peoples.

It is, likewise, hoped that sufficient evidence has been brought forward to show that the verse of Yeats and A. E. , whose literary prestige would seem to entitle them to recognition as representing the genuine Celtic note in literature, cannot be taken unreservedly as interpreting the true nature of that literature.

It is the writer's contention that the extraneous influences of neo-Platonic mysticism and the effeminate mood of the dying Romanticism, while they may have enhanced the charm and the literary merit of their verse,
have given to the writings of the Celtic school of poets an un-Gaelic and artificial flavor, and that, for this reason, they do not truly represent the characteristic manifestations of the Gaelic mind in literature.

It is maintained, in addition, that the verse of the younger generation of poets, represented in these pages by Padraic Colum and James Stephens, comes nearer to the genuine conception of the manner in which the Gael has expressed his characteristic mentality in literature, because it derives inspiration from the living Irish tradition rather than from the dead, pagan past, while being, at the same time, more in keeping with the Gaelic outlook on life and in harmony with the spiritual aspirations of the Irish race.

If this much is apparent from a perusal of the foregoing pages, the purpose which the writer had in mind in putting them together has been accomplished.
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(Periodicals)


The thesis submitted by the Reverend Daniel Sheehan has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

November 19, 1944

James J. Young

Signature of Adviser