W. B. YEATS AND JAPANESE NOH PLAYS

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MS. RASHMI ATTRI

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Professor K. S. Misra

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Certified that "Mrs. Rashmi Attri completed her M.Phil dissertation entitled "W.B. Yeats and Japanese Noh Plays" under my supervision and that the work is done to the best of my knowledge, by the scholar herself.

[Signature]

Professor K.S. Misra
(Supervisor)
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It is a common knowledge of the students of Yeats that he kept on experimenting with his dramatic technique throughout his career. He pioneered the Irish Dramatic Movement, which favoured plays with realistic themes and conventional techniques used by Shakespeare, Boucicault and Ibsen. But Yeats continued to be dissatisfied with this type of commercial-theatre approach. He had envisioned plays which could reach the condition of Music where the effect of harmony is produced by the fusion of disparate notes. His encounter with the Japanese Noh plays proved a turning point in his dramatic career that earned him the credit of a great experimenter as well as proved inauspicious for him as a popular dramatist. Studies of Yeats's Noh plays have concentrated primarily on Yeats's failure as a dramatist because of his unwise yoking together a foreign technique and indigenous content.

It is proposed in the present study to establish that Yeats himself was conscious of the pitfalls of adapting an alien technique for dramatizing materials from a totally different cultural milieu. Through an analysis
of his *Four Plays for the Dancers* - *At the Hawk's Well, The Only Jealousy of Emer, Dreaming of the Bones* and *Calvary* - we have tried to conclude that Yeats did not totally discard the conventional dramatic devices but used them selectively, and judiciously, so that they could be interwoven into the general fabric of the Japanese Noh technique. The general critical allegation that these plays have mostly cerebral appeal has also been discussed and refuted.

The study is divided into six short sections. The first chapter - Introduction - deals with Yeats's biography, early influences, his contact with the Abbey Theatre, his dramatic theory culminating in his eventual turning towards the technique of the Japanese Noh plays, and the chief characteristics of the Noh plays. The four chapters that follow contain an analysis of the *Four Plays for the Dancers* - *At the Hawk's Well, The Only Jealousy of Emer, Dreaming of the Bones* and *Calvary*. The final section - Conclusion - is by way of recapitulating the general points that emerge from our analysis of these four plays. At the end a select bibliography of the primary and secondary sources has been appended.
I wish to acknowledge my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Professor K.S. Misra, for his ungrudging help and guidance in the preparation of the present study. I must thank Professor S.M. Jafar Zaki, Chairman, Department of English for his encouragement and assistance. My thanks also due to my teachers in the Department of English, AMU for their constant encouragement. I would also like to thank the members of the staff of Maulana Azad Library, AMU, Seminar Library of the Department of English, AMU for their cooperation and assistance.

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( Ms. RASHMI ATTRI )
W.B. Yeats was a pioneer in the establishment of the Abbey Theatre. Naturally, therefore, he tried to follow at least in his two Cathleen plays, the manifesto of the Irish Dramatic Movement which was an offshoot of the Irish Literary Renaissance. This Literary Renaissance itself was an integral part of the general Irish Movement for freedom from the British rule. Drama, being the most effective medium of reawakening nationalism among the people, received considerable attention from its pioneers, like Yeats, Lady Gregory, Brown and Russell.

The manifesto regarding its subject matter is succinctly stated by Yeats in the following lines:

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
All that we did, all that we said or sang
Must come from the contact with the soil
... We three alone in modern times had brought
Everything down to that sole test again,
Dream of noble and beggarman.¹

So the Irish playwrights were expected to write plays dealing either with contemporary life of Ireland or with its rich legendary and historical past. It was so, because Irish Dramatic Movement, by means of awakening the conscience of the Irish men was expected to contribute to the larger national interest of Ireland. It is in this context that Yeats declared, "Our Movement is a return to the people... The play that is to give them a quite natural pleasure should tell them either of their own life, or of that life of poetry where every man can see his own image." Yeats, regarding Irish legends and Myths as a rich mine of source material, announced that "from the Great Candle of the past we must all light our little tapers." He preferred a drama in which "common men shall have their share in imaginative art and culture."

To conform to the current national aspirations, the Dramatic Movement was faced with a three-pronged problem: (1) Subject matter; (2) Language; (3) Theatre. The

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subject matter, as stated above was to be Irish historical, legendary or contemporary life. Here Synge's remarks is noteworthy:

"In Ireland we have popular imagination, that is fiery, and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start by chance that in not given to the writers in places where the spring-time of local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only and the straw has been turned into bricks." 5

Having decided to dramatize the contemporary peasant life, Synge wrote about the life of people on the Aran Islands. Even his tragedies deal with the actual life of the islanders. But in dramatizing this actual life, he transformed it into something universal. Opposed to the Zola-Ibsen like naturalism, Synge preferred reality which is the breath of drama. It is hinted at in his letter to Stephen Meckenna, quoted below:

No drama can grow out of anything other than the fundamental realities of life which are never fantastic, are neither modern, nor unmodern, and as I see them rarely spring-

Lady Gregory, too, wrote about Irish folklore, drawing substantially upon its legendary resources and the actual speech idiom of the people. Her stand in regard to the main basis of drama is clear in her demand for realism in handling themes. Theatre, she believed, should be based on reality. In fact, she had a life-long affection for the Galway peasants whose stories she has presented in many of her plays. Yeats has said that she "was born to see the glory of the world in a peasant mirror."7

The Abbey Theatre had inherited the native Boucicaultian melodramatic and realistic traditions. Dion Boucicault, the well known nineteenth century Irish melodramatist, had established the tradition of heavy reliance upon spectacles, colours, farcical knockabout events. All this has been fully exploited by Synge in his The Thinkers Wedding and The Playboy of the Western World and by Sean O'Casey in his Dublin Triology: The Shadow of the Gunman, Juno and


the Paycock and The Plough and the Stars. In fact, this melodramatic tradition of Boucicault had been in vogue as late as the 1950s in plays like O'Casey's Cock-a-Doodle Dandy and The Beginning of an End.

Regarding the language for these plays, unanimous preference was given to English or Anglo-Irish, simply because of its wide use and acceptance. Yeats realizing the problem of intelligibility of Anglo-Saxon by Irishmen, advised to "translate into modern Irish all that is most beautiful in old and middle Irish, what Frank O'Conor and Gregory, let us say, have translated into English."8 Synge, contributing to this field also used the actual language of the peasants, but it has been re-minted into a highly poetic and yet dramatic medium. He says, "I have used very few words that I have not heard among the country people."9 He further says that vitality of this peasant drama resides in "English that is perfectly Irish in essence, yet has pureness and surety of form."10 Lady Gregory too preferred, like Synge, the use of Anglo-Irish

8. Ibid.
to Gaelic. Yeats, commenting on this, says that her translations were "in the dialect of neighbourhood, were one discovers the unemphatic candence, the occasional poignancy of Tudor English."\textsuperscript{11}

However it was Yeats who became the guiding force of the Abbey Theatre. He continued to be involved in the activities before, during and even after its establishment in 1904. Moore, in this regard, rightly says that "All the Irish Movement rose out of Yeats and returned to Yeats."\textsuperscript{12} Regarding the subject matter of his plays, he, too, like others, dealt with Irish legends and myths, but interpreted them in the context of the Irish struggle for freedom. In Countess Cathleen Yeats has tried to awaken the Irish men's patriotism by showing the sacrifice of the Countess. In his Cathleen ni Haulihan, he seems to be urging the Irish men to sacrifice their personal life for the redemption of their nation symbolized by Cathleen ni Haulihan. In a note appended to the play he declared "one night I had," a dream almost as distinct a vision, of a cottage where there was an old woman in a long cloak. She was Ireland herself.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Dramatic Personae, p. 86.
\item \textsuperscript{12} George Moore's "Vale" in Earnest Boyd, ed., The Contemporary Drama of Ireland (Dublin : Talbot Press, 1918), p. 47.
\item \textsuperscript{13} W.B. Yeats, ed., Where There is Nothing (London : Macmillan, 1903), p. 232.
\end{itemize}
However, while the activities of the Abbey Theatre along the realistic tradition were going on, Yeats grew increasingly dissatisfied with naturalism in any form, either in drama or in poetry. Yeats's early literary career shows his romantic leanings. Here he shows his desire to escape into a dreamworld of legends and the faeries from this materialistic day-to-day reality. According to John Stallworthy Irish legends gave support to his "romantic and sublime concept of the poet." The rich flora and fauna of the county of Sligo, and his own shy temperament corresponding to the generous surroundings, where nature was endowed with all the tenderness of soothing pleasures of uncontaminated pleasures, contributed to this poetry of escape during this phase of his poetic career. This escapist and romantic temperament found solace in esoteric and occult philosophy, which, simplistically stated, is a philosophy of magic and belief in supernaturalism. According to Yeats himself the Occult refers to the whole area of magic. Here he was deeply impressed by Walter Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel." Poems belonging to the period 1890s, which deal with this belief. It was

further supported by Theosophy which was regarded as a reaction against orthodox religion, and combined myth and antiquity. It got further impetus from Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society.

The Kabala and Samkari philosophy also worked on his mind. The Samkaric regards matter as a hindrance between the world and God, and the Kabala holds matter to be a ladder to reach God. His quest for faith, peace, enlightenment, truth and new unorthodox religion led him towards all these Occult, theosophical, Kabalistic, and Samkari beliefs. These supernatural and philosophic elements act as symbols for Yeats's exploration of the deeper reality of life, and of life beyond death.

Swedenborg was another strand in his creative mind. He held a concept that soul survives after death and dreams back to relive its earthly life. This belief in life after death we find in Yeats's plays such as: Clavary and The Dreaming of the Bones. Von Hugel (historian of Mystical belief), who was trying to revive Keirkegard, further strengthened his belief in spiritual life. Mohini Chatterji's

philosophy of Samkari, which rejects the desire even for emancipation, was significant influence on Yeats. Mohini Chatterji rejects reality as a mere dreamworld. This idea is present in Yeats's early poetry, especially in the "Wandering of Oisin".

Among the literary influences the symbolist Movement was the most notable. Its influence was felt in England in a significant way only after the publication of Arthur Symon's *The Symbolist Movement in Poetry*. The Movement emphasized indirect presentation of ideas through symbols, thus bringing both economy and precision in writing. Yeats also became the member of the Rhymers' Club of which Arthur Symons was a leading member. His love for symbols is traceable in his occultism. Yeats was a symbolist by his "natural direction," by virtue of his being a Celt whose profoundest instinct was the "desire to penetrate the unknown," and the "wish to know what lies beyond." He believes that symbol is "the only possible expression of


invisible essence."^® This invisible essence for him was deeper reality, discarded by realists.

Along side of these above stated influences, there continued to be present in his mind a growing dissatisfaction with Irish audience. It was due to their rebellious and unthinking reaction to his own Cathleen plays, to Synge's The Playboy and Seen O'Casey's The Plough and the Stars, which convinced him that there can not be any genuine appreciation of art in, what he calls, "the blind, bitter land, twisted and sustained by the hatreds of politics."¹⁹ Again, shouting at the rioters, who rebelled at the performance of Casey's The Plough and the Stars Yeats rhetorically asked "Is this going to be a recurring celebration of Irish genius" and that "Dublin has once more rocked the cradle of genius... once again Ireland has degraded itself."²⁰ He, in his poem, The People calls them "the drunkards, pilferers, dishonest crowd."²¹ He even criticizes the degenerated literary taste of these audience:

²⁰. W.B. Yeats's "Lectures" in Irish Times, For. 12 Feb., 1926.
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
And planned to bring world under a rule,
Who are but weasels fighting in a whole.22

The next important factor was Yeats's own sceptic view about the way the whole National Movement for independence was being guided and conducted. His disgust with this fanatic way is clear in the above quoted lines and in such poems as Easter 1916, On the Political Prisoners and The Leaders of the Crowd, where he has criticised the greedy, corrupted Irishman busy in their own affairs. One of the public events that enraged his mind was the 'Lane Controversy', about which B. Chatterji says "The bigotry and meanness of countrymen reflected in this controversy, deeply embittered Yeats's mind and in a series of poems he has given vent to his anger and scourged savagely the foolishness, fantacism and narrowness of ignorant mob."23

The next important factor was his own personal conception of drama. Yeats formed his own independent theory of drama, which had begun to shape itself by 1903, in such papers of Yeats as the "Samhian Papers," "Cutting of an agate"

22. Ibid., p.429.
and in his essay "The Tragic Theatre." It is based on his experiments, practical knowledge and on his method of trial and error. For the sake of clarity we can describe his dramaturgy under such heads as Stage, Subject matter, characterisation, language and function.

Regarding stage, he believed in simplicity, opposed to artificiality. He, in fact, makes it so simple as to turn it into a mere skeleton, devoid of all extravagant props. As a reaction to the Naturalistic stage decoration, he held that highly elaborate stage is a hindrance to the imagination of the audience; it is illusionary. He even declared that "Illusion is impossible and should not be attempted." He wanted to bring back the Elizabethan stage of statue-making, as opposed to the picture-making stage of modern commercial and Victorian type of scenery. What he required for his stage was just a curtain, simple enough to illumine the actors. In fact, he subordinated scenery to actor: "I have been," Yeats said, "the advocate of the actor as against the scenery... I would like to see poetical drama, which tries to keep at a distance from daily life that it might keep emotion untroubled,

staged but two or three colours." According to him "scenery should be little more than an unobtrusive pattern." He further pleaded not to submit to the "picture-making of modern stage." What he wanted was a proper balance between the actor and scenery. His "new arrangements served to strip away everything that would distract from the emotional and dramatic unfolding." His frustration against the decorated stage is recorded in Stanislavsky's outburst: "What business have I an actor with the fact that behind me hangs a drop curtain, that wonderful backdrop only interferes me." So under the influence of Gordon Craig he, rejecting decorated stage, preferred simple stage, symbolic but not spectacular.

Regarding the subject matter of his plays, he, too, like the others, belonging to the Irish Dramatic Movement, chose Irish themes dealing with daily life or with the legendary and heroic life of Ireland. But here he criticised the naturalistic type presentation of a 'slice of life'

25. Ibid., p. 133.
26. Ibid., p. 176.
and preferred, like Synge, the imaginative recreation of this 'slice of life'. So while it is identifiable with actual reality, at the same time it transcends its temporal meaning. 'Surface of life,' says Yeats, is not the whole of life, and though action on the stage includes few characters and is limited to a short span of time, it should suggest vaster phenomenon of life, my means of imagination. He further says, "All imaginative art remains at a distance," and "the arts which interest me while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of mind..." In his own philosophical system he intended to combine what Cleanth Brooks calls, "intellect and emotion." For this he advocated the plays in which "If the real world is not rejected; it is but touched here and there and into the places we have left empty we summon up Rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of the trance." His belief was that this distance gives


33. Essays and Introductions, pp. 243-5.
drama intensity and universality. Like Brecht his theatre was not of illusion but of detachment. So he wanted to dramatize the stories which were universal and could stir both intellect and emotion at the same time.

Thus Yeats replaced the caricatures of popular stage by the images of heroic legends, which he following Hyde defined as "de-misrepresentation of Ireland." 34 According to Yeats drama should not be merely a cheap source of entertainment but a serious discourse, by imaginatively honest exploitation of heroic material, through a new tradition of serious play writing. His theory of drama is a theory of tragic drama, which he regarded as the most befitting vehicle for his vision of life and his concept of Art. But this drama had to be tragic not in the Ibsenian or Shakespearean sense, but was to conform to his own theory of tragic drama outlined in his essays, "The Tragic Theatre." Here he defines tragedy as "drowning and breaking of dykes that separate man from man," "That Tragic art is passionate art, concerned as it is with the straining of the human soul against some obstacle that threatens its unity." 35 According to Yeats these moments,

35. Essays and Introductions, pp. 165-241.
entangle man into a mighty passion, and eventually we have none but this passion purified of all but itself. Even the audience feel the same exaltation, wherein death is defeated. Life lies in ashes and an energy so noble that "we laugh aloud and mock in the terror or sweetness of our exaltation at death and oblivion catches us." This 'reverie', 'trance' or 'tragic ecstasy' which causes our exaltation, is the climax in Yeats's tragedy. At this ecstatic moment, the hero transcending his limits overrides his defeat and identifies himself with a spiritual identity, and suffering gets transmuted into joy. As Yeats in 'On the Boiler' says "The arts are all the bridal chambers of joy. Not tragedy is legitimate unless it leads some great character to his final joy..." This idea we find in poetic form in his poem 'Lapis Lazuli':

They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay; Gaity transforming all that dread.

So in a Yeatsean tragedy, instead of feeling pity we feel as if our mind had expanded convulsively. According to James, W. Flannery what Yeats sought in his tragedy was

"to celebrate the soul by exulting in the natural energy of the body, which if achieved properly would provide us — the audience, the ultimate response — 'tragic pleasure and tragic ecstasy' — a moment of mystical vision at the climax of the play. All this elevated the personal fate to the perception of the transcendental unity." 39 (J.W. Flannery, W.B. Yeats and the Idea of the Theatre (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976), XX, 404). So to Yeats the outcome of tragedy is 'tragic joy,' a celebration of the spirit confronting terror and loss. It is the property and gift of a hero distinguished by the arrogant pride, yet submissive to his destined end. According to J.R. Moor: "Yeats wants us to experience a transcendence of limitation or at least the possibility and desirability of ascent to a region untouched by either tragedy or comedy." 40

This theory presupposes that the audience is to enjoy a play in its totality, where all the elements are so fused that drama emerges as a single purified flame.

The impact of drama on Yeats's mind was what Anand


Coomarswami called 'Mystical union'. Here the effect of Pater's 'unity of lyrical effect' is evident. Like Pater, Yeats claims that "all art aspires towards the condition of music" to present "one single effect to the imaginative reason, the final effect being unity of impression, of single passionate egaculation." But his concept of unity is larger that of Pater's, due to his faith in symbol "that expresses the joy of the whole being, body, intellect and emotions exemplified by his metaphor of a guitar player that applies both physical movements and mind to the total impact on the imagination." This tragic theory led him towards symbolism. For Yeats: "a play like a poem was to be apprehended as a whole and not through any structure of plot and character." This is akin to Coleridgean concept of 'organic unity' in a poem. Yeats sought a play in which "acting, scenery and verse were all a perfect unity." This theory coincided with his search for deeper reality and his belief "where there is nothing there is God and we perish into reality."
The remoteness that Yeats had sought influenced his art of characterization, and lured him to write plays devoid of anything called character. He regarded character as a hindrance and rejected the individualization of characters lest it should distract the audience's response from the dramatic vision that a play intends to produce. He holds character merely as a representation of emotion, or what he calls the "sleep walking passion." For Yeats character exists in comedy; in tragedy we find "nothing but unmixed passion and integrity of fire." In tragedy characters shake off their individuality and get transformed into pure passion that is universal, as he says: "the persons on the stage greatness till they are humanity itself," till their fate is "all men's fate." What Yeats upholds is passion, which makes up the tragedy. He defines tragedy as: "passions defined by the motives," and says "Tragedy is passion alone, and rejecting character, it gets form from motives, from the wondering of passions." In "Samhain," Yeats, presenting

49. Essays and Introductions, p. 225.
his tragic theory in the context of the absence of character and priority of emotions, says "The arts are at their greatest when they seek for a life growing always more scornful of everything that is not itself and passin into its own fullness." 52 Tragedy thus transcends the limits of time and persons. In fact for Yeats a play is an "ecstasy, which is from the contemplation of things vaster than the individual. The mask used in tragedy contain neither character nor personal energy. They are allied to decoration and abstract figures of Egyptian temples." 53 Yeats supports his argument by giving the examples of Racine, Corneille and Shakespeare. Yeats's subordination of character to the Plot. As Stoll says "Yeats was following Aristotle and Longinus." 54

Yeats's views about the language were also coloured by his dislike for realistic plays. Here Yeats, like Shakespeare, conceived of speech as paramount beacon of

52. 'Samhain', 1904, p. 88.
drama, a nodal point to which everything else is subordinate, as the only medium of developing the subtlety of expression needed to lay bare 'that which hides itself in the depth of soul.' Thus he pleaded to "restore the sovereignty of words."\textsuperscript{55} But the words were to be musical and vivid, because if language is not musical it becomes artificial. In this context he presents a beautiful analogy: "What the ever-moving, delicately moulded flesh is to human beauty, vivid musical words are to passion," and that "without fine words there is no great literature."\textsuperscript{56} The epithets that he uses for realistic language are: 'Bedridden, ailing and algebraical. According to him realistic characters spoke "as if they were reading newspapers."\textsuperscript{57} He wanted his characters to speak that language which is theirs and that "They should speak it with so much of emotional subtlety that the hearer may find it difficult to know whether it is the thought or the work that has moved him."\textsuperscript{58} So poetry should not be a mere embellishment, but must justify itself dramatically. Music is a means to reinforce the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \bibitem{55} \textit{Plays and Controversies}, p. 120.
\item \bibitem{56} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 47.
\item \bibitem{57} W.B. Yeats, \textit{Essays} (New York: Macmillan, 1924), p. 207.
\item \bibitem{58} \textit{Plays and Controversies}, p. 46.
\end{thebibliography}
words. So Yeats blended poetic language with ordinary passionate speech, one which he has described in 'A Coat' as 'Walked naked,' i.e. without embellishment and merely decorative trappings. But like Wordsworth he sought not any and every word, "but a powerful and passionate syntax, a special chanting, that stresses rhythm of verse speech, while preserving the integrity of words, so that audience hear every metre and word clearly." Though he prefers a passionate syntax, yet he rejects over-elaboration which he believes leads us to artificiality. He supports himself by giving the following example, "one does not add meaning to the word 'Love' by putting four O's in the middle or by subordinating it slightly to a musical note." What he wished for was a living language, but uncontaminated by the cheap press. He, naturally, turned to Anglo-Irish idiom, calling it "the beautiful English which is grown up in Irish speaking districts. Such an English though gathers its vocabulary from the times of Malory, but its idiom is Irish." He even says that "Theatre began in

ritual and cannot come to greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovereignty." He believed that "one can write well in that country idiom, without much thought about one's words; the emotion will bring the right word itself."  

Regarding Acting, he was influenced by the Fay brothers, who in turn followed the French masters. He liked French acting, for its moments of calm delight, and sought like this, simple and dreamlike movements, away from the melodramatic acting of professionals such as that of Sir Henry Irving which relies on fast and heavy movements. Yeats was charmed by the stillness of amateurs which consists of lesser and slower movements: "The actors must move, for the most part, slowly and quietly, and not very much, and there should be something in their movements decorative and rhythmical as if they were paintings on the Frieze." According to him a poetic play that needs full attention of the mind must be free from all such irrelevant gestures as weary the mind and become de trop in the flight of imagination to settle into

63. *Essays and Introductions*, p. 244.
trance and "the nobler movements that the heart sees, the rhythmical movements that seem to flow up into the imagination from deeper life," must be preserved. What he aimed at was 'the sleep-walking of passion,' necessary for the operation of collective unconscious. Later on he incorporated dance into acting, regarding it as an extension of acting, as part of secret ritual. This he did just to defend the proscenium stage of statue making, "which keeps its audience at a distance by reproducing an external scene." Total effect produced by this blending of movement and stillness was "that mysterious art, that is to be found in Medieval Mystery Plays."  

Such mysterious art required special type of audience, i.e., the audience available to Sophocles and Shakespeare, who are gifted with the imaginative faculty and were to be "all but as clever as Athenian audience." Thus he made a declaration: "We hope to find in Ireland ... imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion

66. Essays and Introductions, p. 223.
67. Explorations, p. 194.
68. Ibid., p. 173.
69. Ibid., p. 152.
of oratory and who believe that our desire to bring on stage deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a talented welcome...". He preferred a "fit audience though few." His audience had to be well learned, because his was a suggestive and symbolic drama.

Theatre for Yeats had a mission, its own function. As poetry facilitates a communion of real and 'surreal' through the symbols, theatre should also create conditions favourable to a contemplative mood in which imagination plays a creative role and joins the conscious mind with the collective unconscious. For him its function was to make theatre "a place of intellectual excitement — a place where the mind goes to be liberated as it was liberated by the theatres of Greece and England and French at certain great moments of their history, and as it is liberated in Scandinavia today." This indicates two aims of Yeats as a playwright: first to revive the vitality of undying legends of old Irish civilization; secondly to popularize the use of English as spoken by the Irishmen of countryside. He

70. Our Irish Theatre, pp. 280-431.
72. Ibid., p. 45.
wanted to habituate Irish subjects to the English language. Both these aims show his desire to restore the mind of Irishmen to their own culture freeing it from the foreign influence. Basically he wanted to go back "to the thought and speech of the common men." 73 So he reformed the drama in its theme, speech, acting, stage etc. For this the main guiding principles were those of simplicity and living imagination, which culminated in the works of Synge. Such Elizabethan type of drama could be equated, for him, with a poem, that gives its wisdom, not through division of entities as plot and character but through its unity. So the course of development is towards greater starkness, abstraction, gradual removal of all poetic embellishments as scenery, ornamental words, in favour of single unified image. To him "beauty is to be found not in any specific line but woven in the dramatic texture so that we fail to judge whether it is line that gives grandeur of drama that turns words into poetry." 74

So this dramatic theory of Yeats, as described above in nutshell should be taken as a pioneer in his

search for a novel technique of drama. The type of plays that he intended to present in his improvised small drawing-room theatre could not be written within the framework of the existing dramatic conventions. He sought something 'ideal, spiritual, remote,' which neither the Abbey Theatre nor any other existing theatre could provide. Luckily as well as unluckily for him his contact with Ezra Pound was the most significant turning point in his quest for dramatic technique. It was Pound, who introduced him to the Japanese Noh plays, and in the year 1914-15, Yeats, declared in his 'Note,' on the first performance of 'At the Hawk's Well': 'I have now found my first model in the 'Noh' stage of aristocratic Japan.' A brief description of the origin and the chief characteristics of the Noh are given below:

Noh drama emerged in Japan in the 14th century out of such rituals and Pantomimes as ancient ritualistic dance called Okina. Afterwards, under the patronage of Shogun Yoshumitsku, it became aristocratic art, the main propounders of which were Kanani and his son.

Semi Motokiya. Initially Noh was a religious performance at Shinto Temple, but it became a state ceremony during the Yodo Period.

Noh drama, also called aristocratic drama, was a sophisticated means of entertainment, chiefly for the elites of the society. This is why it was so called. It was a highly stylized and abstract form of drama, due to which Japanese term 'Noh,' which means 'accomplishment,' characterized this aristocratic form. Occasions on which Noh plays were performed were both religious as well as social. Different kinds of Noh plays, then in vogue, were: God plays (Wakino and Kanino), Warrior plays (Shuramino), Wiq plays (Kazarmino), plays based on the attachment of the dead of this world (Kyojannuno), and auspicious plays (Kiriono). Each of the five kinds is followed by a small pantomime called Kyogen, which is a comic interlude related to Noh, just as satire is related to Greek tragedies.

77. Essays, p. 274.
78. Encyclopaedia of World Drama, III, 322.
In a typical Noh play beating of drum announces its start. The play is arranged in such a manner as the first to appear on the stage is Shogun confined to the Noh of Gods. After this is performed Shura a battle piece. The third is a Wig Play (Kazula) which is a female performance. It is followed by Noh of the spirits or Oni Noh. Indeed, it was in keeping with the general belief that after battle comes peace-making. After this is staged, a play of moral deities called Zig, Gi, Rei. Lastly we have, Shogun again to congratulate the actors, marking the end of the play. 79

A Noh play includes a number of characters of which the important ones are: The hero (Shite), follower of the hero (Jaura), Guest usually a wandering priest (Waki), attendant of the guest (Wazdura), an insignificant man (Tomo), a young boy (Kogate), evil spirit (Hannya) and finally a sailor (Keyogenshi). 80

The typical themes to be dealt with in Noh plays are generally the mass of legends related to Buddhist or Shinto religion, for instance, the sin of killing, praises


80. Ibid., pp. 15-29.
of deities, hospitality to a priestly order, etc. 81
Shite carries on the theme of the play. More pronounced
conflicts and complicated dramatic situations, that in­
clude external events are done away with. Instead, here
we have recurrent abstract concepts of life realized
through experiences, that are depicted by means of a
unified medium of dance, rhythm, music and costume. 82
These different elements are "the main ingredients of
this drama." 83

The Noh characters appear in the following order :
As soon as the flute is played announcing the beginning
of the play, the first section (Jo), opens with the
appearance of Waki (2nd actor), who sings poetic intro­
duction and then a travelling song, which he ends at his
arrival at the destination. The second section (Ha) opens
with Shite (1st actor), usually a ghost or deity in guise.
Shite is accompanied by (Tomo), a supporting actor, who
singing an entrance song describes his situation. After
this both Shite and Waki appear together in an exchange

81. W.G. Aston, History of Japanese Literature (London:
William Heinman, before A.D. 700), pp. 199-203.
82. The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan, pp. 11-12.
83. P.G. O'Neill, "The Noh Theatre of Japan," The Times
of dialogue. Waki reappears, singing a song of waiting, in (kyo) or the last section. Shite also comes re-enacting some past event, following which is a dialogue between the Shite and Chorus. This is followed by a final dance, of twenty minutes. Dialogue between Shite and Chorus marks the end of the play.\textsuperscript{84}

Its typical stage is very simple; it needs no props, but for the white and green coloured curtains and a drum. Audience, occupying all of its four sides, form a circle. Traditionally earthen Jars are put under the stage so that the sound of the drum might reverberate. Light manipulations are also simple. Noh has a tradition of painting a simple pine tree at the back wall of its stage.\textsuperscript{85} Here indications of the scenery are carried on to the stage, by servant in black attire.\textsuperscript{86}

Music, occurring at the intervals between the beats of drum is an important part of Noh. Music here is a means of evoking ritualistic atmosphere and avoiding

\textsuperscript{84} Ashley Myles, \textit{A Critical History of W.B. Yeats as a Dramatist} (Selzburg: The University Press, 1981), pp. 76-7.


\textsuperscript{86} McGawan and Melnitz, \textit{The Living Stage} (Englewood N.J. Prentice Hall, Inc., 1955), 313.
naturalism, besides elevating the audience on to a lyrical place.\footnote{87}{Louis, Macniece, The Poetry of W.B. Yeats (London : University Press, 1945), p. 190.}

It is accompanied by dance, which though slow and stately is highly stylized.

Dance here evokes rather than expresses the emotional centre.\footnote{88}{Donald Keen, "No, The Classic Theatre of Japan" in Drama Review Journal, Vol.23, 1979 No.2-4, p.6.}

It conveys the motion of Yogun which Istobashi translates as 'Ideal beauty' and Pound as 'Mysterious Calm.'\footnote{89}{Hiro Ishibashi, W.B. Yeats and the Noh (Tokyo : Keio, University Press, 1956), p.5.}

Both music and dance contribute to distancing.

Mask too is an integral part of Noh. As these dancers are masked, they represent those profound emotions that exist only in solitude, purified of all but itself. Mask in fact annihilates the character's individuality and projects them as abstract symbols of emotions, feelings and experiences.

Chorus too is an important character which remains apart from the main action, but could be used to speak anything that otherwise, could not be represented on the stage. According to Fenellosa "Its function is poetical
comment." Chaturvedi, feels "that Chorus reinforces the theme." According to Yeats Chorus here "preserves the mood while it rests the mind by change of attention." Text in these plays was not allowed primacy over music, dance, costumes etc. It however did make solid statements on the central dramatic issue, which is worked out in collaboration with the above mentioned elements. Lexical meanings were intended to be gathered only in their rhythmic context. Since it lays emphasis on the rhythm, hence clear cut delivery of dialogue was subordinated to the stylization of gestures, e.g., slow lifting of hand implied weeping. Here, we see that language is intentionally enigmatic, lest it should draw undue attention of audience in preference to the other elements.

Noh play of the type briefly outlined above was of necessity to be short, requiring just an hour's performance on the stage and six or seven pages in print.

This was so because the concentrated fare of the type offered by Noh plays, could be attentively responded to, for a long time.

Such drama obviously required "only intelligent audience, who were highly receptive and well versed in the text." Such had to be so because here, attempt is made to make a play dramatically convincing. Here the message of communication, is not what was said, but what was not said. In other words, we can say that there silence is communicative. Donald Keen has rightfully remarked that "Noh makes great demands on the audience."  

Yeats's fascination for the Noh plays responded to his ideal of drama, were there is "a harmony of rhythm and speech, of voice, of instruments, of the body," a Drama "which works not by direct statement, but by suggestion."  

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97. Explorations, p. 255.
The scholarship available on Yeats, particularly in regard to *Four Plays for the Dancers*, have concentrated heavily on the philosophical and mythical elements in these plays such as Cuchulain cycle, Christ Myth, Deirdre legend known to all Irish-men. His mind was full of Gaelic stories and poems. He viewed literature in the context of his own native land, to awaken the masses to consciousness, to revolt against the intellectual slavery by reviving Irish folk-lore, love for Irish life and mythology and hence set Irish literary Renaissance in motion. But it was not mere patriotism, and reaction against Commercialism, but the recognition in these myths of something of universal value and significance.

Certain other critics have tried to connect the period when Yeats wrote these plays with the period of depression in life, following his rejection by Mouid Gonne in his amorous pursuit. For example Ashley Myles holds "The last five plays of the period emerge out of the guilt that his own idealism and critical intellect converted him into an unnatural man, ending Mouid's disillusionment with him and marriage with Macbride. The tragic fate of the Protagonists results from listening to the voice of apparent reason and neglecting the impetuosity of natural
instincts." Myles, as a proof of this depression in life quotes the following lines from *At the Hawk's well*:

> The water flowed and emptied while I slept.
> You have deluded me my whole life through,
> Accursed dancers, you have stolen my life.
> That there should be such evil in shadow.

He regards the above quoted lines as a "direct result of his wasted years and lack of accomplishment."99

There are scholars, who have concentrated to Yeats's growing starkness of style under the influence of the symbolist Movement of Ezra Pound. For example F.A.C. Wilson says: "Yeats went to the Noh as a result of his theory of drama, which is an extension of the theory of Symbolism. ...Convinced that there was a convention which passed by direct descent from Egypt to Agrippa's middle ages, and then to occultist ... and that this symbolism had a peculiar efficacy through *Anima Mundi*, he determined to avail himself of it."100

What has hitherto been missing in the study of these

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99. Ibid., p. 79.
100. F.A.C. Wilson, *W.B. Yeats and Tradition*, p. 34.
plays has been an adequate exploration of the Dramaturgy exploited by Yeats to convey his ideas which are intensely suffused with emotions and feelings. There is a need to explore how and with what success Yeats has tried to present through the dramatic medium ideas — philosophical as well as national — in a way that the plays appeal to the heart of readers or the audience. The dominant impression one gets from the various studies mentioned above is that Yeats was presenting intellectual plays through the technique of abstraction. The proposed study aims at showing that even though the technique used in these plays is that of the Japanese Noh plays, Yeats has considerably modified the technical devices of the Noh to suit his purpose of presenting a fusion of idea and emotion which, it is needless to emphasize, is the hallmark of great drama. Care has been taken in the following analysis to demonstrate that the grafting of an alien dramatic technique into the native soil of subject-matter does not construct what Yeats wanted to convey in his plays.
At the Hawk’s Well (1917) is the first of Yeats’s Four Plays for the Dancers, which illustrates his experiments with the Japanese Noh Technique. As with all the plays in this group the play under consideration also deals with native material. The central concern of the play is the search for immortality. The story of Cuchulain used here, was fairly popular both in Irish folklore and literature. It was also used in a number of plays, like Lady Gregory’s The Cuchulain of Muirtheme, Hyde’s, Beside the Fire, Morris’s The Well of the World’s End, etc.

The play deals with the story of a miraculous well. Its water was believed to have the magical power of bestowing immortality on the drinker. A lot of the drinkers have been trying to lay their lips on a drop of this water. But they have all failed. This is because the well is guarded by another mythical figure — Sidhe — who could assume mysterious forms of birds, like a hawk. The duty of the guardian of the well was to entice the seeker of the magical water away from his efforts. The
water of the well used to come to the brim only at certain moments. And the guardian had to ensure that the seeker must be tempted to fall asleep while the water flowed to the brim. The seeker used to wake up only to learn that the magical water had eluded him. The past seekers have been represented in the play through an old man who has been struggling to drink the water for several decades but has failed to attain any success. The main seeker Cuchulain arrives on the spot and is told the story of the well narrated above. Cuchulain is not deterred by the hawk figure of Sidhe. He resolves to overcome the hurdle by defeating the design of Sidhe.

It is clear from the above summary of the story of the play that the main theme of the play is search for immortality or what has been Yeats's concern all his life, perfection of the self. The typical conventional pattern of such a theme would be the seeker, the hurdles and finally triumph or defeat. The conventional treatment of the thematic concern of the play is provided by the story of the old man. He seeks, faces hurdle in the form of being tempted into sleep when the water flows up, and finally seems to be exhausted and frustrated. The main cause of his defeat seems to be his selfish concern which
is clear from his dissuading the young Cuchulain to go away lest he should succeed. This is also clear from the old man's desire to share Cuchulain's success without being determined like the latter to show a firm resolve and determination. The thematic patterning related to the old man offers an illuminating contrast with the young seeker, i.e., Cuchulain who resolves to fight, to finish the hawk which obstructs man's attempt at perfection and immortality. Cuchulain's resolve, contrasted with that of the old man, is unselfish though personal fulfilment is there.

The above themes have been dramatized within the technical framework of a Noh play technique, though Yeats has used certain conventional devices to make the thematic concern of the play clear and effective. The opening stage direction makes two things clear: one that Yeats's concern is not contemporary life, but some abstract theme. This is clear from the remoteness hinted at in the timing of the action, which is the 'Irish heroic age.' Secondly there is a deliberate use of the Noh technique: "The stage is any bare space before a well against which stands a patterned screen. A drum and a Gong and Zither have been laid close to the screen
before the play begins... We have two lanterns upon posts — at the outer corner of the stage giving — lighting we are most accustomed to in our rooms." The masked players who are the musicians appear on the stage and start unfolding the cloth. There is also on the back wall a 'black cloth' suggesting a hawk. While the musicians spread out the cloth the sing the following lines:

I call to the eye of the mind
A well long choked up and dry
And boughs long stripped by the wind,
And I call to the mind's eye
Pillor of an Ivory face,
Its lofty dissolve air,
A man climbing up to a place
The salt sea wind has swept bare."

The first eight lines of the song introduce the setting which has not been described in the stage direction and whose visual image is verbally evoked in the Musician's reminiscing the place. It is a 'well long choked up and dry.' The sea wind swept is desolate. Line seven of the

2. Ibid., p.208.
song introduces in a tantalizingly brief manner 'A man climbing up to a place.' In the remaining lines of the song:

What were his life soon done!
Would he lose by that or win?\(^3\)

The Musicians express their doubt about the success of the man going on a mission, which has not yet been explained to us. It also makes it clear that the struggle for the fulfilment of the yet unexplained mission may entail a life-long effort. Whether the effort is worthwhile and likely to be rewarded is left with a question mark. The two threads of the theme have been introduced: One an unidentified seeker of something connected with the well and secondly the possibility of frustration or reward.

"While the cloth has been spread out, the guardian of the well has entered and now crouching upon the ground. She is entirely covered by a black cloak."\(^4\) So the ambivalent symbolism of the guardian of the well is hinted at in the above stage direction. She may stand for purity and perfection which are covered with the blackness of

\(^3\) Ibid., p.208.
\(^4\) Ibid.
worldlines, materialism and man's inner rotteness. The
guardian now crouches upon the ground to act as a curtain
between the seeker and the well, the getting of water of
which symbolizes man's attainment of self perfection.
That the water of the well is going to rise and that a
vigilant spiritual state is needed to attain self perfec-
tion are made clear by the Musician in the concluding
lines of the song:

    The boughs of the hazel shake,  
    The sun goes down in the west,  
    The heart would be always awake,  
    The heart would turn to its rest. 5

These generalized lines seem to be a continuation of
pessimism of the earlier lines predicting the fate of the
old man. These lines offering a clue to the nature of
spiritual conflict of tension with a possible pessimistic
conclusion are linked with the old man. But they are
linked with the young man also because their message
applies to him as well.

Then the poet subtly uses 'speaking' for 'singing'
for the Musicians. This shows that here the chorus is not

5. Ibid., p.209.
just a commentator but acts as an actor also. Yeats seems to unite the Noh technique with that of the Greek in extending the function of the chorus. In this speech the first Musician further explains the deserted and desolate surroundings of the well. Withered leaves of the hazel covering half of the well create an impression of frustration. The picture of sea wind "that blows out of the sea:

       Turns over the heaped-up leaves at her side;
       They rustle and diminish,  

again evokes a mood of failure and frustration. In this speech the guardian of the well has been described as a vigilant and alert watcher on the well. Alertness on her part is clear from her heavy eyes that know nothing but look upon the stone. She is described as something frightening. The second Musician says "I am afraid of this place."  

That the quest is not only fraught with difficulty requiring perseverance but also with danger is explicitly conveyed in these lines of the second Musician. Followed

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
by this is the two musicians's choric commentary on the cause of the failure of a quester:

'Why should I sleep? The heart cries, For the wind, the salt wind, the sea wind, Is beating a cloud through the skies; I would wander always like the wind.'

After the theme of quest and the attendant difficulties have been established by the choric Musicians during their unrolling and rolling of the cloth we see an old man entering through the audience. The theatrical device of using the space for the audience for the entry of a character is Yeats's open rejection of the illusionistic, naturalistic drama. The Musician here introduces us to an old man described as 'climbing up,' showing his attempt to get something. The first Musician tells us that this man has been waiting for the last 'fifty years' fifty years not in mathematical sense, but implying a long period of life i.e., all his youth. This is beautifully conveyed in these lines:

He is all doubled up with age; The old thorn-trees are doubled so.

8. Ibid.
So here one of the questers has been introduced to us. The lines are well modulated and effectively narrated. Here at the technical level we see that Yeats by giving no particular name to this man and simply calling him 'an old man' has not individualized the character.

After this we are shown the old man moving on the stage to and from, to with the accompaniment of the taps of the drums. This is in keeping with Yeats's desire to unite all the element to produce a unified impression. The old man moves and lifts his hands, conveying, through these gestures the sense of making fire. This illustrates Yeats's taste for a drama 'that works by suggestion and not by direct statement.' This further corresponds to his belief in the simplified stage, with no such props as to present fire itself on the stage; and his belief in anti-naturalistic stage. After this the first Musician explains what the old man wants to convey through his gestures. He tells us:

He has made a little heap of leaves;
He lays the dry sticks on the leave...
He has taken up a fire stick and socket from its hole
He whirls it round to get a flame...10

10. Ibid.
In fact Yeats realized that since his audience were not well acquainted and well trained in such a symbolic technique, a kind of explanation was necessary to make the play clearer to the Irish audience. So here we see that Yeats has not merely copied the Noh technique; rather he has moulded it to suit his own advantage. At the level of technique we find here a slight deviation from the Noh technique and the simultaneous occurrence of narration, action, and introduction of character. This simultaneity is an important feature of the technique here.

After this we have a song:

O wind, O salt wind, O sea wind!  
Cries the heart, it is time to sleep;  
Why wander and nothing to find?  
Better grow old and sleep.\(^\text{11}\)

The above lines elaborate the conflict which was only hinted at earlier. They indicate that the failure in quest is because of the lack of an agile and alert will and perseverance, in the absence of which the quest of the old man is bound to be frustrated. These are the very qualities that are contrasted with the qualities of firm determination,

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
and dagged perseverance of the young man who appears later. Yeats followed exclusively the path of abstraction in his elitist Noh drama is not wholly true. As we have seen so far in the development of the action the technique of systematic unfolding of action is followed along with the Noh technique of symbolism, abstraction and use of music and gesture.

After this the old man personally comes on the stage and speaks "Why don't you speak to me? Why don't you say." The questions that the old man asks the musicians in his long twenty-one line dialogues, only reconfirm the old man's failure and frustration and his waiting in vain. The Sidhe who is the pervasive controlling power has been explicitly mentioned here. But the old man obviously has not understood the design of Sidhe. It would be relevant to pause here for a moment to explain the significance of Sidhe. According to Yeats himself Sidhe refers to "Irish Gods and Goddesses whom rich men call Tuatha-de-Denan or the tribes of the Goddess Danu, but the poor call them the Sidhe, Aes Sidhe or Sluagh Sidhe — the people of faery hills. However Sidhe is also a gaelic term

12. Ibid.
for wind, and surely Sidhe have much to do with the wind. They travel in whirling wind. The winds that were called the dance of the daughters of Herodias, in the middle ages. Herodians referred to some old Goddess.\textsuperscript{13} Yeats further explains the Sidhe symbolism in the play. She is a potent obstruction in the way of quest but she is not malignant. She is the controlling deity of the wind, sea and the hills. The Sidhe as it were stands for a catalytic agent to thrash out the crust on human self which stands in his way of spiritual perfection.

Next to appear on the stage is the young man, a second quester, who is the legendary Cuchulain. He unlike the old man directly makes his appearance before the audience. So here too we find blending of both Noh and conventional technique regarding the art of characterization, and entry of the dramatis personae. Here again it would be relevant to pause for a moment to briefly comment on the Cuchulain myth used by Yeats in this play. Though there is no such authority in the legends about the actual story for Cuchulain but Yeats's earlier introduction to Fighting the Waves gives further insight into his aim: "I have

\textsuperscript{13} See Yeats's, 'The Hosting of Sidhe,' in \textit{The Collected Plays}, p. 61.
written a series of plays upon certain events of Irish heroic age, set out in their chronological order. In *Deirdre* the hero Naoise holding 'the championship of the Red Branch' dies, making way for his successor in the championship, Cuchulain, to whom, I have given four plays! *At the Hawk's Well, The Green Helmet, On Baill's Strand* and *Only Jealousy of Emer...* O'Grady started us off by recreating Cuchulain in the Image of Achilles, and when Lady Gregory wrote her 'folk history plays' and I my plays in verse, we thought them, like the Greek plays; the simple fable, the logically constructed plot, the chorus of the people, their words full of vague suggestion, a preoccupation with what is unchanging and therefore without topical or practical interest.  

But Ure Peter is right saying that "Yeats has not romantically idealized the character. He laboured to awaken knowledge in his audience by giving them the oblique view and engendering his conflicts from a continuous interplay of Ironic meanings."  

The Cuchulain of this play stands for the quality..."  

i.e., heroic determination and perseverance in quest. In the first four lines that the young man utters, he tells us that he too is in quest of something not yet found: "I can not find what I am looking for." So here we notice Yeats' skill in economy and precision as far as the young man's speech is concerned. However, we are not told the thing, that the young man is seeking. It is deliberately withheld for the sake of suspense. The old man gives detailed account of the young man in which we are told that the young man has gold stucked in his coat, on his head and feet, which confirms that he is either a warrior or a legendary hero. They also indicate his delight in worldly affairs. Immediately the young man declares that he is Cuchulain, son of Saultim, belonging to an ancient household popular among Irish-men. But the intervening comment by the old man that 'he has never heard that name,' is symbolic of the justification of the old man's failure because he never knew firm determination and perseverance which the young man symbolizes. The old man associates him with battles and women, qualities of warrior and chivalry. Here we have a simple conversation between these two questers. It is in the nature of the

exposition of the introduction of a character through bringing out his attendants and present position. The young man himself tells us that he has come here looking for the miraculous well and asks the old man to lead him to it "wherein three hazels drop their nuts and withered leaves, and where a solitary girl keeps a watch among the grey boulders." He has heard that whosoever drinks the miraculous water of this well, becomes immortal. So the young man is in search of the same well, at the edge of which the old man has been waiting for a long time. He wants to drink its miraculous water to again immortality. Though presently he is at the well but it is so dried up and filled with leaves that he can hardly see it. What he sees is "A hollow among stones half-full of leaves." The following lines of the old man again convey a philosophy of constant struggle, despite all obstructions:

And do you think so great a gift is found
By no more toil than spreading out a sail,
And climbing a steep hill?

17. Ibid., p. 212.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
The old man here refers to his own long frustrating waiting at the well for its miraculous water. Here youthful quest is being contrasted with the failed quest of the old man. Thus the theme of quest which began earlier in mystery, is clarified by these two characters.

The theme develops further when the young man explains: "So it seems/There is some moment when water fills it." The old man, too, confirms this, and says that the well is filled with water at some secret moment, known to none but to the divine souls. But the young man, sure of his good luck, claims to succeed very soon. So he is opposed to the dismal failure of the old man. Here the old man and the young man are contrasted also through the language they use. While the old man's language is narrative, describing his failure and the mystery surrounding the water of the well, the young man's language is one of strong assertion as is evident in these lines: "I will stand here and wait. Why should the luck of Saultim's son desert him now? For never have I had long to wait for anything." In the following speech the old man narrates to the young man, his past bitter story of being cheated by

20. Ibid., p. 213.
21. Ibid.
the dancers, which prevented him from getting the miraculous water of the well, and finally led him to his failure in his quest for immortality. The old man says:

I came like you
When young in body and in mind, and blown
By what had seemed to me a lucky sail.
The well was dry, I sat upon its edge,
I waited the miraculous flood, I waited
While the years passed and withered me away.
I have snared the birds for food and eaten grass
And drunk the rain, and neither in dark nor shine
Wandered too far away to have heard the plash,
And yet the dancers have deceived me. Thrice
I have awakened from a sudden sleep
To find the stones were wet.22

These lines are a fine specimen of simple dramatic narration, conforming to Eliot's ideal of a verse in poetic drama, i.e., "A verse is not to see Through but to look At."23

Followed by this is the young man's speech showing his confidence in good luck, which is born out of his firm determination. As he asserts that If he grows drowsy he can pierce his foot. After this is heard a sudden cry of hawk.

22. Ibid., pp. 213-14.
The stage direction tells us that the guardian of the well gives the cry of the hawk. Even the young man feels its impact and wonders,

And though I have good hawks, the best in the world
I had fancied, I have not seen its like.24

The old man calls her "The mountain witch the unappeasable shadow," who, he tells "is always flitting upon his mountainside, to allure or to destroy."25 The hawk is presented as a hindrance as supernatural deity who curses 'all who have gazed in her unmoistened eyes.' She is associated with evil, and something fearful:

Look at her shivering now, the terrible life
Is slipping through her veins. She is possessed.26

The old man further informs that this shivering is the sign of the imminent coming of water. Hence he asks the young man to go away and leave the place for him, so that Cuchulain does not drink its entire water. His belief that the "young men are greedy, and if you drink the first you will drink it all" shows his lack of trust in the young man's

26. Ibid.
27. Ibid. p. 216.
intention. These lines show that though old man had waited all his youth vigilantly, but he had has such human weaknesses as selfishness, distrust and fear. This is why he "can not bear her eyes, they are not of this world."\textsuperscript{28} Contrasted this is the young man's fearless courage to face these eyes. It implies that to succeed in quest, courage and confidence are also required along with struggle. Here it is pertinent to remark that Yeats has subtly fused the mundane and the spiritual. The old man's greed, self-centredness, and selfishness are the lowly human instincts which must be overcome in order to attain to a higher stature of the self, which Cuchulain stands for.

After this the hawk woman is shown as rising. While the old man covers his head out of fear, the young man determines not to leave the place till he succeeds in his quest. This is followed by the guardian of the well shown as dancing and 'moving like a hawk.' Here dance is typical to the Noh pattern in forming the climax of the play. Indeed it is this dance that decides the fate of these two questers in the sense that if they overcome it they would be victorious.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
This is why these dancers have been called by the young man as 'that all others bless.' In fact only having overcome them can a man attain higher stature in life. This dance lulls the old man to sleep and produces its effect on the young man also as the first musician tells us:

The madness has laid upon him now,
For the grows pale and staggers to his feet.\(^{29}\)

Then we see the young man pursuing the bird. In the meantime, the musicians tell us that water splashed and went back. Now we are told that the guardian has left, and the young man drops his spear as if in a dream. The chorus describes this failure as follows:

He has lost what may not be found
Till men heap his burial-mound.\(^ {30}\)

Then the old man is shown 'creeping up to the well' and in his speech curses the dancers for deluding and cheating him throughout his life. This sense is conveyed by the young man also: "She has fled from me and hidden in the rocks."\(^ {31}\) The Musicians cry 'Aoife!' 'Aoife!' and strike a gang. Here by mentioning 'Aoife' Yeats seems to

\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 217.
\(^{30}\) Ibid.
\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 218.
be referring to the "Red Branch cycle of stories that narrate how Cuchulain after his betrothal to Emer, goes to Scotland. There he undergoes a training in arms under Queen Scathach, who sends him to make war on Aoife, a neighbouring queen. Cuchulain defeats her and makes love with her on the battlefield and even begets a son on her. Emer driven by her jealousy at Cuchulain's faithlessness commands his son to go and kill his father. But he himself becomes the victim, though Cuchulain was ignorant of the fact that he was his own son." This story is central to his play, On the Strands. The old man, too, in the lines "She has roused up the fierce women of the hills, Aoife, and all her troops, to take your life," refers to the vindictive Sidhe, determined to take Cuchulain's life for his past crime. So Sidhe here is a kind of disturbance of conscience for Cuchulain as she neither lets him live happily in his worldly life nor does she let him again immortality by drinking the water of this well. This subtle fusion of the story from the Red Branch Cycle and the theme of the play make the play's thematic structure more complex.


by bringing in the ideas of conscience, betrayal, and revenge. This makes the young quester's task truly formidable. The young man's heroism and firm determination are to be brought into a sharp relief through this suggested complexity in the theme. But the young man instead of running away, as suggested by the old man, determines to stay, saying "I will face them." He goes away now, no longer as if tranced, but shouldering his spear and announcing his coming:

He comes! Cuchulain, son of Saultim, come!  

Here in facing Sidhe he is facing himself. It is self-reckoning at the sin or wrong committed by him in the past which he was ignorant of. So hurdles are, in fact, internal, of conscience, sin and guilt. Man's determination to pursue the shadow may appear foolish for few people, but for a true quester it is the right wisdom. So the dominant idea put forth is abstract thought, i.e., soul's quest for immortality, transcendence and spirituality. The dominant mood, though it is of failure, but is not of giving in, rather pursuing. The play remains open-ended and it is not concluded as a conventional play. But the concluding quest

34. Ibid.  
35. Ibid.
is itself rewarding and worth pursuing though it is bound to be beset with struggle and attendant frustrations. The following lines from the song for the folding and unfolding of the cloth:

O Lamentable shadows,
Obscurity of strife!
I choose a pleasant life
Among indolent meadows;
Wisdom must live a bitter life. 36

is by way of the conclusion of the play. In fact, the very story is abstract with no well-made plot. Here is a fusion of music, action, dance and symbols, all giving a unified impression like a flame which Yeats desired to achieve in drama throughout his career. Critics have interpreted the play variously. As Dennis Donogue says that "It is an impulse to transcend one of the great limitations of the natural world. For this purpose the play includes in a traditional romantic quest." 37 He again says that the play revolves round the lines:

36. Ibid., p. 219.
He who drinks, they say,  
Of that miraculous water lives forever.  

But there is controversy regarding the fate of Cuchulain, whether he won or failed. For some critics the play dramatizes the failure of the Cuchulain and the old man. For example, Ure Peter says that the play is "a tragedy of heroic circumstances. It is about the courage without which there can be no heroic desire, but which is made the means to thwart it." Rajan too calls the play "a taut brief study of Anatomy of failure. The world in which it moves is akin to that of Wasteland. While old man is defeated through his prudence Cuchulain through his courage." Chaturvedi holds that "though its hero represents heroic courage it is defeated from its aim and thus frustrated." So by and large the play has been interpreted in terms of failure.

But what Yeats actually wants to say is that defeat is inevitable in struggle for higher life. It is this defeat

39. Ure Peter, *Yeats the Playwright*, p. 70.  
that makes Cuchulain heroic, as he, after this becomes all the more courageous, and firm in his determination to face the hawk. Professor Misra says that "Cuchulain asserts his self more obdurately, and retraces his steps in the sense of 'doing and suffering' which is called the world."  

Ure Peter too says that "The play ends, as do Deirdre and The Hern's Egg, in an assertion of Identity, and of heroic Name, as Cuchulain leaves the stage shouldering his spear: 'He comes! Cuchulain son of Saultim, comes.'"  

As it is clear from the assorted critical opinions given above, At the Hawk's Well dramatizes the theme of quest. But whether the quester has failed is left deliberately ambiguous because Yeats here is not following a conventional dramatic structure. He is rather interested in presenting an intense moment in the intellectual and spiritual domain of the hero's life. The hero remains determined to pursue his quest and conquer the hurdles both external as well as internal. This corresponds to Yeats's concept of 'Tragic ecstasy' i.e., the moment when the hero transcends his limits and overrides his defeat. What we

43. Ure Peter, Yeats the Playwright, p. 72.
notice is that though Yeats had declared his determined adherence to Noh dramatic technique, he has used in a very artistic manner selective devices of conventional dramaticurgy as well. Thus as the above analysis shows the play requires higher imaginative audience. This is why these plays were called Aristocratic and distinguished.
The Only Jealousy of Emer (1919) like At the Hawk's Well deals with the Cuchulain group of Irish sage. It is based on the Irish Saga of 'The Sickbed of Cuchulain.' Bjørsby's following account of the saga deserves an elaborate quoting to get a complete picture of Yeats's source material:

At Samhain - 1st November - the Ulstermen had gathered for their usual great festival, when suddenly a great flock of wonderful birds settled on the lake in front of them. All the women and above all, Eithne Inqua, Cuchulain's wife, wanted these birds to be given to them. Cuchulain was asked to go and catch the birds. One woman alone did not get any bird at all, Cuchulain's wife. Proudly she declared that this negligence meant nothing to her, because, whilst all the other wives were in love with Cuchulain, she alone loved her own husband, Cuchulain. After a while there came two beautiful birds, linked together by a golden chain. In spite of his wife's warning not to disturb these birds, Cuchulain could not be prevented from going out hunting them. For the first time in his life Cuchulain, so noted for this skillfulness with the sling, missed the
Downhearted he leaned against a stone pillar and fell asleep. In a dream he saw two women, one in green, the other in purple cloak, who, both smiling, beat him hard with their horsewhips. He felt as if half dead, and when he woke up, he could not tell what had happened, but he forbade the Ulstermen to carry him to Dundalgen, where Emer, his wife, was. He remained ill for a whole year. The day before the next Samhain, when the chief Ulster heroes and Eithne Inqua were sitting there round his bed, a man came and sat beside his bed, singing about Fand and her world. After having revealed that he was Aengus Mac Aeda Abrot and that Pand, the Queen of the Sidhe, intended to send her sister to Cuchulain as a messenger, he disappeared, a being from the otherworld. The whole thing ended by Cuchulain's going to the otherworld, where he spent a month with Pand. When he left, they agreed to meet again after some time. Then Cuchulain sent Laeg, his charioteer, who had been with him, to Emer his wife, to tell her that the fairies had put their spell on him. Emer came with fifty women to Pand's and Cuchulain's meeting-place armed with knives to kill Pand. Cuchulain told Pand he would defend her, and then he and Emer started a battle of words in which Emer blamed Cuchulain for slighting her. Cuchulain answered that he would always love her. But he did not
understand why she would not let him for sometime enjoy the company of a woman that had so many advantages as Fand. Then Fand became just as much afraid of losing Cuchulain as Emer was, and she bade him go with his wife. Fand's deserted husband Manannan Mac Lir came and saved her out of her Plight. Then a drink of forgetfulness was given to him as well as to Emer. For additional security, Manannan also shook his cloak between Fand and Cuchulain, to make them never meet again.¹

The play dramatizes this myth. But Yeats has omitted first half of the Saga, since he conceived of its action as succeeding upon the death of Cuchulain in On Bail's Strand. Emer, a main character of The Only Jealousy of Emer, conforms to the fact that its action takes place at sometime after the events of On Bail's Strand, that dramatizes Cuchulain's death while fighting the sea waves out of the deep sorrow of having killed his own son ignorantly. In the present play we see Emer and Eithne Inquba, Cuchulain's wife and mistress respectively, as attending upon his dead body lying on the sea shore. Both are trying to bring his soul back from Sidhe who has possessed it at the moment.

Sidhe has been presented as a dancer and an evil spirit or a supernatural power, as in the previous play. In this attempt to get hold of Cuchulain's soul Emer asks Eithne Inquba to cry out his name, believing, as suggested by her that he might respond to it. She even appeals to her to "call out dear secrets till you have touched his heart." Further she asks Eithne Inquba to kiss his lips so that the pressure and warmth of her mouth could reach him. After this Bricriu, the 'maker of discords' among Gods and men, comes in the figure of Cuchulain and puts the condition that if Emer gives up and renounces the hope of possessing her husband, he may be revived. Emer refuses to do so crying:

I have but two joyous thoughts, two things
I prize,
A hope, a memory, and now you claim that hope.

Soon Fand, the representative of the women of Sidhe, comes who, as Cuchulain's figure tells us, stands for those who "are dexterous fishers and they fish for men." Hearing this, and seeing Fand (Bricriu's enemy) drawing the Ghost of Cuchulain away into the life of immortal and inhuman

3. Ibid., p. 289.
4. Ibid., p. 290.
love, Emer cries out as the Ghost is about to yield: "I renounce Cuchulain's love for Emer." Immediately, Emer tells that the Ghost of Cuchulain has woken up calling Eithne Inquba, not Emer. Thus here we simply see that a story of sacrifice on the part of a wife for the sake of her husband has been dramatized.

The brief narration of the story shows the basic conventional technique of presenting a plot. But as in the preceding play, so here, too, the Noh elements have been deliberately used to present the above story in a way that it is satisfying both intellectually as well as emotionally. The play opens with the folding and unfolding of cloth along with the Musician's song typical to the Noh plays. Like the preceding play here also the Musician's act both as chorus as well as the actors. The song begins with a comment on the beauty of a woman, which is compared with a white frail bird and white sea bird which is lonely at a day break after a stormy night. The Musicians call it:

A strange, unserviceable thing,
A fragile, exquisite, pale shell.  

5. Ibid., p. 294.
6. Ibid., p. 281.
The initial choric commentary by the Musicians points to the tragic element which the play unfolds during the course of its development. The bird imagery is an ominous pointer to Emer's tragic predicament.

The stage direction is similar to that of *At the Hawk's Well*: "Musicians are dressed and made up as in *At the Hawk's Well*. They have the same musical instruments, which can either be already upon the stage or be brought in by the first Musician before he stands in the centre with the cloth between his hands, or by a player when the cloth has been unfolded. The stage, as before, can be against the wall of any room, and the same black cloth can be used as in *At the Hawk's Well.*"\(^7\)

As already stated, we see that the stage here, as in preceding play, is devoid of all such props as we find in a naturalistic stage. After this comment on the beauty of woman by the chorus, we see on one side of the stage "a man in his grave-clothes, wearing a heroic mask. Another man with exactly similar clothes and mask crouches near the front. Emer is sitting beside the bed."\(^8\) Here in these

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four, five lines three characters have been mentioned and shown though no details have been given about them. This is followed by the first Musician’s speech:

I call before the eyes a roof
With cross-beams darkened by smoke;
A fisher's net hangs from a beam,
A long oar lies against the wall.
I call up a poor fisher's house;
A man lies dead or swooning,
That amorous man... renowned Cuchulain,
Queen Emer at his side.9

In these eight lines we are given the locale of fisherman’s house in which a man called Cuchulain lies dead, attended upon by Emer, his queen. This short speech introduces us to two major characters referred to earlier: the ‘man in grave-clothes’ now named as Cuchulain and Emer his queen. The introductory anonymity of the characters is in keeping with the Noh device of abstraction. In a characteristically Noh manner, the characters are introduced not directly but through a chorus. In the remaining lines of the speech we are introduced to Eithne Inquba, who is described as Cuchulain’s mistress. The following lines describe the locale of the house which also foreshadow the

sad events to come:

Beyond the open door the bitter sea,
The shining, bitter sea, is crying out. 10

After this Emer appears on the stage in person and in her first speech invites Eithne Inquba to sit beside the bed, without any fear. Then we have a conversation between these two attendants, from which we come to know that Emer does not believe Cuchulain to be dead, for "the very heavens, when that days at hand, So that his death may not lack ceremony, will throw out fires, and the earth grow red with blood."11 Emer in her next speech narrates to Eithne Inquba how Cuchulain has come to this condition:

Towards noon in the assembly of the Kings
He met with one who seemed a while most dear.
The Kings stood round; some quarrel was blown up.
He drove him out and killed him on the shore.
At Ball's tree, and he who was so killed
Was his own son begot on some wild woman.
When he was young, or so I have heard it said;
And thereupon, knowing what man he had killed,
And being man with sorrow, he ran out;
And after, to his middle in the foam,
With shield before him and with sword in hand,

10. Ibid., p. 283.
11. Ibid., pp. 283-4.
He fought the deathless sea...
Until the water had swept over him;
But the waves washed his consolation image up
And laid it at this door.12

The above lines are an example of Yeats's highly dramatic use of the narrative technique in his play. In spite of the convincing and unambiguous narrative of Emer quoted above, Emer persists in her earlier belief that her husband is not dead and suspects that some supernatural conspiracy has been employed. She says:

An image has been put into his place,
A sea-borne log bewitched into his likeness.13

Eithne Inquba, who is convinced of the story Emer has narrated about Cuchulain, now suggests a device to bring back Cuchulain's soul. She asks Emer to cry out his name in the belief that:

All that are taken from our sight, they say,
Loiter amid the scenery of their lives
For certain hours or days, and should he hear
He might, being angry, drive the changeling out.14

Emer on the other hand asks Eithne Inquba to cry out since her voice is so sweet and enticing to him that he cannot help but

12. Ibid., p. 284.
13. Ibid., pp. 284-5.
listen. Eithne Inquba says that love of the women like her does not last long:

Women like me, the violent hour passed over,
Are flung into some corner like old nut-shells. 15

Now Emer first plans to throw new logs upon the hearth and stir these half-burnt logs till they produce fire as a device of frightening old Manannan's unbridled horses with their horsemen believing that: "all the enchantments of the dreaming foam/Dread the hearth-fire." 16

As the story progresses, we are shown Emer moving her hands to convey the sense of putting logs on the fire and stirring it into a blaze. Here gesture is used as a substitute for props or actions. Throughout these gestures the playing of drum, flute continue to heighten the dramatic effect.

When her exercising trick does not seem to work, Emer requests Eithne Inquba to utter secrets that might touch the heart of Cuchulain. Eithne Inquba obeys her. But, seeing no progress in this either, Emer asks her to kiss the image of Cuchulain and says:

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 286.
The pressure of your mouth upon his mouth
May reach him where he is.17

After this, a slight development in the story is noticeable
when Eithne, having kissed the image, reveals that Cuchulain
is in the possession of some evil spirit that dried her heart
as she touched his lips. Here we are being prepared for the
entry of one more character identified as some evil spirit.
Immediately, Emer tells us that by the pressure of Eithne
Inquba's lips Cuchulain has thrown this changeling away.
Now when Emer asks about his whereabouts this figure of
Cuchulain comes on the stage and directly tells us that he
is Bricrui "Maker of the discords among Gods and men, called
Bricrui of the Sidhe."18 So like the Cuchulain of At the
Hawk's Well Bricrui personally gives us all the details of
his own character. In the conversation that follows between
him and Emer, we come to know that he has got supernatural
powers. As Emer says:

You people of the wind
Are full of lying speech and mockery.19

Then we are told that he has come to enter into a treaty

17. Ibid., p. 287.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 288.
with Emer. According to this treaty Emer has to pay a price to attain the release of Cuchulain from him. The price demanded by him is that Emer must give up the hope that "some day she will be the apple of his eyes again." Emer blames him for exploiting her. She refuses to do so saying:

I have but two joyous thoughts, two things I prize,
A hope, a memory, and now you claim that hope. 21

Bricrui warns Emer that if she does not agree to his proposal Cuchulain would die of wounds and toils in the company of some strange women. So here one more character has been hinted at but not identified, like what happens in a conventional play for the sake of curiosity and suspense.

After this Bricrui makes Emer see Cuchulain by dissolving the dark that had hidden Cuchulain from her but retains the darkness that hides Emer from Cuchulain. Seeing Cuchulain crouching, Emer cries out, 'My husband.' Bricrui tells her that Cuchulain is a mere phantom, unable to hear any cries; he can only dream. Further, Bricrui says that in his dream though he assumed his familiar shape, yet he

20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., p. 289.
crouches, knowing nothing of his existence. Then the woman of Sidhe is showing entering and standing a little inside the door. Thus we see that a strange Woman mentioned earlier is now identified as Woman of Sidhe, the one we saw in the preceding play. A detailed account of her character is revealed to us in the conversation that follows between Bricrui and Emer. Bricrui, for example, tells us:

She has hurried from the country-under-wave
And dreamed herself in that shape that he
May glitter in her basket; for the Sidhe
Are dexterious fishers and they fish for men. 22

Emer goes on to state:

They find our men asleep, weary with war,
Lap them in cloudy hair or kiss their lips;
Our men awake in ignorance of it all,
But when we take them in our arms at night
We cannot break their solitude. 23

As in the preceding play, here also Woman of Sidhe has been associated with evil as an enchantress of men. Here also she is possessed, and "No knife can wound that body of air." 24

22. Ibid., p. 290.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., p. 291.
After this we see Woman of Sidhe dancing round the crouching Cuchulain. Her movements are accompanied by the sound of the flute, string and drum. In order to make her look more like an idol than a human being, her mask and clothes are so made that they suggest gold, bronze, silver or brass. Then we find Cuchulain inquiring about this woman of Sidhe, and soon he remembers and says:

Old memories: A woman in her happy youth
Before her man had broken troth,
Dead men and women. Memories
Have pulled my head upon my knees.25

Again he reminisces:

I know you now, for long ago
I met you on a cloudy hill
Beside old thorn-trees and well.
A woman danced and a hawk flew,
I held out arms and hands; but you,
That now seem friendly, fled away,
Half woman and half bird of prey.26

Cuchulain, too, confirms that she is the same Woman of Sidhe as in the preceding play. Here Cuchulain also seems to realize that she is a cheater who has already cheated him

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p. 292.
in the preceding play. This established by the lines quoted above. This is also evident when he says that now he is no longer that young and passionate man as he was in the earlier play. Though Woman of Sidhe variously lures him to kiss her, but, as in the earlier, as soon as he is about to kiss her, he overcomes this temptation and turns away crying: 'O'Emer, Emer.' But again she tries to lure him away from Emer:

Being among the dead you love her
That valued every slut above her
While you still lived.27

Thus provoked, we see Cuchulain asking for the mouth of Woman of Sidhe to kiss her and gets ready to follow her. At this very moment when Cuchulain seems to yield to Woman of Sidhe, Bricrui asks Emer to make haste in crying out that she renounces Cuchulain's love forever. He even tempts her saying that he is Fand's enemy (Fand is name of woman of Sidhe here) and has come to thwart her will and says: "Renounce him, and her power is at an end."28 Seeing Cuchulain ready to go with Fand, Emer eventually announces, "I renounce Cuchulain's love for ever."29

27. Ibid., p. 293.
28. Ibid., p. 294.
29. Ibid.
As soon as Emer announces this, we see Bricrui sinking back upon the bed. And Emer tells us that Cuchulain has awakened. Cuchulain awakens and addresses Eithne Inquba, not Emer who has brought him back to life. Then the first Musician is seen on the stage, and unfolds the clothes. They again sing a song while doing so, wherein they make general comments on the bitter rewards of love:

O bitter reward...
He that has loved the best
May turn from a statue
His too human breast. 30

However this last song has been seriously interpreted. Nathan interprets it as "anti-strophe, so to speak, to the play's opening song, which was devoted to introduce the beautiful Eithne Inquba — As Inquba, at one extreme form of woman, receives the musicians' first tribute, so Pand, at the other extreme, receives their last." 31 According to Herald Bloom "this song expresses Pand's bitter grief and Yeats's acute sense of his vision's limitations." 32 But simply speaking the song refers to the bitter rewards of love.

30. Ibid., p. 295.
We see that the theme of the play is an act of sacrifice on the part of a woman to save her husband from evil spirits. But she herself chooses this, thus rises above petty jealousy. So like Countess Cathleen, Emer makes self-sacrifice in the sense that she has to give up love for the sake of love. This is undoubtedly an ironic situation.

Ure Peter interprets this act of self-sacrifice differently, calling her deed 'self-delighting' and 'self-affrighting.' He holds that "Emer's heroic deed, like Cuchulain's in At the Hawk's Well, is an assertion of her identity, of her name as loving wife, and her only reward, like Deirdre's, is that the long-remembering harpers shall have matter for their song."33 Peter goes on to say that a loving wife must act so; for that is the ground of her being. But he says that her act is deliberate. She knows the results and chooses this destiny on her own. She does not, as Cuchulain in the previous play does, dare the curse as part of the adventure, but chooses to be cursed. So none of her acts is committed in ignorance. Though bargain is present, but her assent to it is intentional.

Ashley Myles interprets the play in terms of Yeats's

33. Ure Peter, Yeats the Playwright, p. 74.
philosophy of self and anti-self. According to this everyone has two selves: what we really are and what we pretend to be. The reality lies in the interaction between the two. "We use our real selves by certain screens which we wish to put up before others. The 'show-off' screens are the Masks. To show this clash of the self and anti-self, Yeats has summoned up the help of dramatic irony. It is in accordance with his doctrine of the ironical clash within oneself that we are shown Cuchulain's faithless self existing alongside his own anti-self fidelity."  

But co-existing with this theme of self-sacrifice is Yeats's concept regarding woman's beauty. Yeats himself admits that he has filled the play with "these little known convictions about the nature and history of a woman's beauty," which Robortes found in the Speculum of Gyraldus. In fact the opening song begins with the comment on the beauty of woman. But after this the play is totally devoted to the theme of self-sacrifice. Here Peter is right in holding that "the play is not about them, but about the acting-out of Emer's dilemma... Although Yeats enjoyed bringing into the

34. Ashley Myles, Theatre of Aristocracy: A Study of Yeats As A Dramatist, pp. 82-3.
play numerous echoes of the system, he had not much desire that they should seriously distract the audience from the business of his stage. The descriptions of Woman's or Fand's beauty in the terminology of the phases of the moon, which we find in the Musicians' songs, help to create the chill, lofty and allusive tone, which is a thing in itself, carried alive into the heart without need for glossing." Professor Misra, too, interpreting the play in terms of his philosophy in *A Vision* says that "Woman of Sidhe belongs to the fifteenth phase - of perfection - a symbol of eternity. Cuchulain to the twelfth phase - the heroes crescent, and can't reach her:

Old memories
A woman in her happy youth...
Memories have pulled my head upon my knees.

So the loyal wife who releases him binds his soul again to the wheel of time. Swinging of human life between time and eternity is its real core." Rajan, too, says that "once again we see the pattern of failure. But here the protagonist knows the pattern. Man cannot choose his particular

36. Ure Peter, *Yeats the Playwright*, p. 75.
happiness but he can choose his particular unhappiness."\(^{38}\)

However, despite all this criticism, the fact that Emer's act of renouncing her love for the sake of her husband is an act of supreme sacrifice cannot be denied.

As regards the technique, the play seems to be an advance over 'At the Hawk’s Well' because here we have a well-made story which develops gradually through suspense and curiosity. Here the play has a typical tragic pattern: The Protagonist, Emer, is faced with a dilemma. But the dilemma is not presented in the classical structural form at the beginning of the play. It is on the contrary developed in the tradition of a well-made play which Yeats disparaged so vehemently. The dilemma is Emer's choice between two solutions to her predicament. Her choice and decision are her own. In view of her supreme sacrifice she rises to a truly tragic pattern and invites our admiration and the other tragic emotions of pity and fear. Besides, here all the characters have been given particular names and identity. Even Woman of Sidhe has been identified by the name of Fand, while in the earlier play no such name was given to her. Technically the play is considered "to be most intricately plotted of the Yeatsian Noh plays."\(^{39}\)

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39. Ure Peter, Yeats the Playwright, p. 72.
CHAPTER IV

The Dreaming of the Bones

The Dreaming of the Bones (1919) differs from the earlier two plays in the sense that while they are based on the Cuchulain Myth, to which he was soon to come back in Calvary, here he finds a new system in another myth, that of the dreaming back of the dead. The play has affinity with The Words Upon the Window Pane and Purgatory that also dramatize this Myth. The Dreaming of the Bones was ostensibly written in keeping with the manifesto of the Irish Dramatic Movement. The story here is taken from Irish legendary history and has been brought to bear upon the contemporary political activities in Ireland. Yeats himself says:

The conception of the play is derived from the world-wide belief that the dead dream back, for a certain time, through the more personal thought and deeds of life. The wicked, according to Cornelius Agrippa, dream themselves to be consumed by flames and presented by demons; and there is precisely the same thought in a Japanese 'Noh' play, where a spirit, advised by a Buddhist priest, she has met upon the road, seeks to escape from the
flames by ceasing to believe in the dream
... The Judwalis [a fictitious Arab tribe
invented by Yeats] distinguishes between the
shade which dream back through events in the
order of their intensity — and the spiritual
being, which lives back through events in the
order of their occurrence, this living back
being an exploration of their moral and inte-
lectual origin. I have already put the thought
in verse:

He grows younger everyday second
that were all his birthdays reckoned
Much too solemn seemed,
Because of what he had dreamed,...
Jaunting, Joumeying
To his own dayspring...
Or put his heart into some game
Till daytime, playtime seen the same;

The shade is said to fade out at last, but the
Spiritual Being does not fade, passing on to
other states of existence after it has attained
a spiritual state, of which surroundings and
aptitudes of early life are correspondence...
At certain moments the Spiritual Being, is said
to enter into the shade, and during those moments
it can converse with living men, though but within
the narrow limits of its dream.1

1. W.B. Yeats, Four Plays for the Dancers, p. 129.
Further Yeats in 'certain upanishads' cited in *A Vision* describes "three states of the soul, that of waking, that of dreaming to dreamless sleep every night and when he dies." Here it is associated with the Indian philosophic thought of rebirth. Dissatisfied souls or in other words imperfected souls which are not redeemed of the cycle of rebirth, wander in ghosty forms, for sometime, while they inhabit purgatory. These Christian and Indian thoughts constitute the central thematic concern of the play. Referring to the Hindu belief in rebirth Yeats says:

> If a spirit cannot escape from its Dreaming Back to complete its expiation, a new life may come soon and be, as it were, a part of its Dreaming Back and so repeat the incidents of past life.

The plot of the play is based on the Noh play of spirits called *Nishiki*qi, Yeats has given its story in *Visions and Beliefs* as follows: Here, we see a priest, who, while wandering in an ancient village, meets two ghosts in old fashioned costumes. One is holding a red stick and the other a piece of cloth. Priest thinks them to be villagers. Ghosts sing a song 'We are entangled up — in this coarse cloth —

We neither wake nor sleep... In our hearts there is much, and in our bodies nothing.' They ask the Priest to listen to their story. In this tale they tell him of their past life spent in this village. They narrate that every night this young man used to give a charmed stick as a token of love to the girl at her window. But this girl pretended not to see him and continued her weaving. Both of them died and the young man was buried with this red stick. They could not marry during their life time and in death also they remained ununited. The Priest at first did not believe it to be their own story, and hence asked them to show the cave. He praised the tale and said that it would be a nice tale to narrate when he goes home. After this the chorus describes their journey. The lovers go in front while the priest follows them. After a hard toil, they reach the cave which is dyed with red stick of love to the colour of orchids. Then the two lovers slip in the shadow of the cave, the Priest is left alone. He decides to spend the night in the prayers for the union of these lovers. Surprisingly he finds the cave lighted up. People are talking and setting up looms for spinning the painted red sticks. Ghosts also creep out to thank him for the prayers. They say that through his pity 'the love promises of long past incarnations' find fulfilment in a dream. Afterwards the bridal
room and the lovers drinking from the bridal cup are shown to him. The time is that of dawn, which is reflected in this bridal cup. Now singers, cloth and stick, all vanish away leaving behind a deserted grave on a hill where morning winds are blowing through the pine.4 Besides the philosophical and the Mythical background, the play is deeply rooted in Irish legendary story:

Historically, Diarmuid MacMaurrough, King of Leinster, had carried off in 1152 Dervorgilla, daughter of the King of Meath, and wife of Tegman O'Rourke. He appealed for help to Henry II of England, who gave him army under strongbow in order to regain the Kingdom of Leinster, from which he had been banished. Dervorgilla, having outlived O'Rourke, Diarmuid, Henry and Strongbow, is said to have died at the Abbey of Mellefont near Drogheda in 1193 aged eighty five. 5

W.A. Henderson wrote out for Yeats the historical allusions to 'Dervorgilla'. According to this "Dermot and Dervorgilla are eternally condemned to Furgatorial 'dreaming back' unless they find another traitor who can pardon them for their having brought the Norman invader to Ireland to settle


a private feud."\(^6\) The story is made relevant to the immediate contemporary background where in the wake of nationalism any betrayal of patriotic cause was considered unforgivable.

Thus the play has a thick textured background source material based on Irish legend, contemporary history of Ireland, of 1916 Easter Rising and it is warped with the Indian philosophical thought. The two characters of the play are identified with Dervorgilla and Diarmuid, mentioned above. They are shown as dreaming back. They have been overthrown by the lady's husband. Consequently they with the wild fury of taking revenge 'brought the Norman in.' For this national betrayal they suffer the pangs of separation in union. Their condition is ironic and pathetic in the sense that, though they walk together, they cannot be united. As soon as they come together memory of their sin intervenes and separates them. Thus they are imprisoned in their own remorse, as Yeats himself has admitted: "The lovers in my play have lost themselves in a different but still self-created winding of the labyrinth of conscience."\(^7\) They while


\(^7\) W.B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 220.
wandering on the borders undergo penance to purify themselves of this sin. This is how Yeats here has fused together both the concept of 'dreaming back' and the great Irish Uprising of 1916.

Yeats has presented this story in the Noh technique. But use of conventional techniques is noticeable here also. We have a young man, a stranger, a young girl, and three Musicians, corresponding to the Noh chorus. All the characters wear masks in order to hide their identities. The action is stated to have taken place in 1916 (the year of Easter Rising). The stage, as in the preceding two plays, is "any bare place in a room close to the wall. A screen with a pattern of mountain and sky, can stand against the wall, or a curtain with a like pattern hang upon it, but the pattern must only symbolize or suggest. Musicians unfold the cloth as in 'At the Hawk's Well'."8

The play thus begins with the characteristic folding and unfolding of the cloth of the Noh play by the three Musicians. They on the borders of Galway and Clare, meet a young man — a revolutionary soldier. They narrate to him their story of sin, telling him that they can be relieved of their remorse:

If somebody of their race at least would say, 'I have forgiven them.'

The Young Man, however, refuses to forgive them for this sin. The play thus ends with the continuance of the suffering of the couple. Here the play differs from the story of 'Nishikigi' because there the ghosts had been relieved by the prayers of the priest; here the young man refuses to forgive these two ghosts. This slight deviation is because here the couple is 'dreaming back' as a consequence of their crime of national betrayal, which requires a penance. They living through passionate event, is an example of purgatorial expiation: Yeats says: "The toil of the living, is to free themselves, from an endless sequence of thoughts." It was this crime that led to the foreign army from across the sea, which eventually led to the Easter Rising of 1916. As a punishment they must undergo such penance. Then Musicians sing a song for this unfolding of the cloth. The stage direction, till now strictly follows the Noh pattern. This song makes reference to the basic theme of the play, its central idea, i.e., of 'dreaming back' in the following lines:

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9. Ibid., p. 442.
10. W.B. Yeats, Essays, p. 520.
Why does my heart beat so?
Did not a shadow pass?
It passed but a moment ago.

Have not old writers said
That dizzy dreams can spring
From the dry bones of the dead?
That all the valley fills
With those Fantastic dreams. 11

After this occurs the speech of the first Musician, which is highly dramatic. Blending of the Noh and Greek concept of chorus is seen here. The Musician acts as a commentator. This long speech tells us that the time is 'the hour before dawn,' and that place of action is the little village of Abbey. They tell us that the path leading to their destined place, i.e., the Abbey of Corcomroe, is 'covered up.' In the last four lines they introduce us to a young man with a lantern, dressed in such costume that makes him look like an Aran fisher. Here the chorus just refers to this young man. His particulars have deliberately not been disclosed in order to evoke suspense and curiosity in the manner of a conventional play. The young man is shown as praying in Gaelic which indicates that he is Irish.

11. Ibid., p. 434.
young girl "in the costumes of a past time... They wear heroic masks." In the conversation that follows between the young man and a stranger, we are given a detailed account of the young man. Here, following the technique of conventional plays, Yeats is revealing a character through conversation and dialogue. This makes the play more dramatic because dialogue constitutes an important element of a play apart from the action. Here opposed to Noh, which relies on gestures, reliance is on dialogue. We are told here that the young man is a soldier who fought in Dublin and had worked in the Post Office. The Police are following him. The young man thus intends to escape to the mountain and "keep watch until an Aran Coracle puts in at the rocky shore under Finvara." This conversation gives us an exhaustive account of the young man who no longer remains an abstraction. But conforming to the Noh pattern, he is not particularized by a name. He represents any patriotic Irish man fighting for national cause. In the following conversation the stranger suggests to him some hiding place, not known to any living man. Here the theme develops further. The stranger and the young man talk about 'dreaming back' and

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 435.
national betrayal:

But when a man
Is born in Ireland and of Irish stock,
When he takes part against us --

The concept of 'dreaming back' is discussed while the stranger suggesting him hiding places says:

No living man shall set his eyes upon you;
I will not answer for the dead.
For certain days the stones where you must lie
Have in the hour before the break of day
Been hunted.

Many a man that was born in the full daylight
Can see them plain, will pass them on the high-road
Or in the crowded market-place of the town,
And never know that they have passed.

The young man, clarifying that the dead by dreaming back undergo penance, says:

My grandam would have it they did penance everywhere;
Some lived through their old lives again.

This speech points out the general belief of death, penance and purification, stated above also.

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
After this, we see them proceeding towards the Abbey of Corcomroe. Here, the first Musician gives a commentary of their journey through the paths they have to cross. Technically, this commentary is a dramatic device to cope with the bare stage that merely provides an image of a thing and not the thing itself. They, as the stage direction reads, "go round the stage once," suggesting their journey through various paths. But here, Yeats, in order to make everybody grasp this sense, provides this type of commentary. This also lends economy and precision to the structure of the play.

After this commentary on their travelling through grassy fields, ragged thorn trees, the Musicians sing a song describing the locale of the place these people have reached:

Why should the heart take fright?
What sets it beating so?
The bitter sweetness of the night
Has made it but a lonely thing
................................

My head is in the cloud;...
The Dreaming bones cry out
Because the night winds blow
And heaven's a cloudy blot.

17. Ibid., p. 437.
Calamity can have its fling.
Red bird of the March, begin to crow! 18

Here, the song, conforming to the songs of the Noh plays, performs the task of evoking the feelings of awe, fear, mystery, loneliness and remoteness, in its reference to the 'dreaming bones that cry out,' and Red bird of the March, etc. After this the stranger informs us of their arrival at the Abbey of Corcomroe. In the discussion that follows between them regarding this place, the theme of national betrayal is discussed; they also refer to the tomb of Donoghue O'Brien who is said to have rebelled against the King of Thomond. Donoghue O'Brien here is identified with the historical figure of Donoghue O'Brien "who was one of the groups of the nobles who invited the Scots to invade Thomond and acquire it from its King. After their defeat Donoghue escaped from the battlefield and fell in 1317 near the Abbey of Corcomroe." 19 He was thus a traitor. The young man too thinks the same and says: "It was men like Donoghue who made Ireland weak." 20 He even curses him, and feels that he must undergo penance for this crime. Here,

there is a fusion of both the philosophical and political aspects in the young man's assertion. The young man suggests that to free himself of this crime, he must undergo penance by reliving his earthly life.

After this the young girl who, was earlier described as accompanying the stranger, comes on the stage. She has a long conversation with the young man in which she herself gives us details about herself. Her speech narrates the story of these rebels, telling us in the first five or six lines that they were common sinners. They, turned into rebels, either by some momentary impulse or the commandment of some petty king who hated Thomond. The next lines of her speech tell us of the bitter consequences of this rebellion. The young girl gives us more details about these rebels:

"And carry, now that they are dead, the image of their first youth, for it was in that youth their sin began." 21

Their pathetic condition, while they were undergoing penance, is presented in the following lines of the young girl:

Though eyes can meet, their lips can never meet.  
Who once lay warm and live the live-long night  
In one another's arms, and know their part...  
Their manner of life were blessed could their lips

A moment meet; but when he has bent his head
Close to her head, or hand would slip in hand,
The memory of their crime flowes up between
And drives them apart.\footnote{22}

These lines, give a detailed account of their sufferings
and pangs, but no where she tells us about their exact sin
that requires such a severe penance. In is intentionally
witheld to maintain curiosity and suspense. The story, thus
proceeds and unfolds itself bit by bit, but systematically
as in a conventional play. This crime is disclosed in her
next speech, she here says that:

\begin{quote}
Her King and lover
Was overthrown in battle by her husband,...
Being blind, and bitter and bitterly in love,
\textit{he brought}
A foreign army from across the sea.\footnote{23}
\end{quote}

Here, it is revealed that this was in fact, the story of
Diarmuid and Dervorgilla mentioned above. This fact is
clarified when the young man says, so \textit{"you speak of}
Diarmuid and Dervorgilla."\footnote{24} The young girl admitting
this says, \textit{"Yes, yes, I spoke of that most miserable, most}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] Ibid., p. 441.
\item[23] Ibid., p. 442.
\item[24] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
accursed pair."25 In this speech she also tells us of the remedy of their sin. They, she tells us, can be freed of this sin "if somebody of their race at last would say, 'I have forgiven them.'"26 At this, the young man's immediate reaction is not to forgive them. His following speech refers to the bitter consequence of war and of Easter Rising of 1916, which, he believes, were caused by their sin of bringing the Normans in.

Then, following the Noh technique, Yeats presents a dance of this young girl which shows her as possessed. The young man says: "who are you? What are you? You are not natural."27 These lines show that they are not what they have posed to be before us till now. And here when the young girl says "Seven hundred years our lips have never met,"28 their identity is revealed, and we immediately recognize them as Dairmuid and Dervorgilla -- two nationa betrayers. After this the young man informs us of their vanishing away. Thus the conventional device of creating suspense and maintaining it till the end has been followed here. However, dance is here for the purpose for which it is used in the Noh, i.e.

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., p. 443.
28. Ibid.
to lure the young man and thus make him forgive them. The dance, thus, forms the climax of the play, which is the characteristic feature of the Noh plays. However, the young man overcomes this enticing dance at the moment when he is about to yield, exactly like the Cuchulain of *At the Hawk's Well*. He himself says:

> I had almost yielded and forgiven it all -  
> Terrible the temptation and the place!"  

The couple is thus condemned to continue the sufferings of their past unforgivable sin of national betrayal. According to Ure Peter "They are like the girl in *Motomozuka*, whose 'ghost tells a priest of slight sin which seems a great sin because of its unforeseen and unforseeable consequences' or like 'the ghosts' in *A Vision* who must 'dream the events of its consequence.'" Ure Peter also comments on the technique and says, "This moment of 'almost yielding' in some ways intensifies the theme by offering and then withdrawing a hope of relief." Here again we find the conventional pattern of reversing the state of affairs and thus heightening the tension. This also seems to correspond to

29. Ibid., p. 444.
30. Ure Peter, *Yeats the Playwright*, p. 95.
31. Ibid., p. 96.
Aristotle's 'reversal of events' which he regarded as one of the two ingredients of a complex plot.

The play ends with folding and unfolding of the cloth characteristic to the Noh plays. It is accompanied by the song of three musicians referring, like the one sung in the beginning, to the general belief of 'dreaming back' of the dead.

Here, as is evident from the above analysis, Yeats has blended Noh technique with the conventional technique. Here, opposed to the abstraction of the Noh plays Yeats has achieved in *At the Hawk's Well*, we see the story element dominating the play. This story element is usually found in conventional plays. Like the conventional plays the story here unfolds, itself with interrupted regularity arousing both the feelings of curiosity and suspense. Even the characters are from contemporary life as in the usual conventional play and not exclusively from mythology. Still the fact that it has all the elements of Noh technique, such as dance, music, mask, symbols, cannot be denied. Characters are also representatives, and not particular men and women, conforming to the Noh plays. Here Unterecker is right in saying that "They possess something of universality of Dante's Paolo and Francesca with younger Yeats failed
to achieve."  

According to Ure Peter "it (is) nearest of the three to that 'pure presentation of the image in theatre,' which Frank Kermode sees as rationale of all Yeats's adoption of Noh."  

Regarding its technical success Yeats, in a comment, made in 1917, calls this "the best play he had written."  

Peter further says that the concentration and unity, that are the hallmark of the beauty and power of the Noh, in which all the elements are united to produce a single clarified impression are more noticeable here. According to him "it is achieved by its imagery, by the description of setting and locale, and by construction."  

He also says that the play, like the typical Noh plays, "dramatizes the meeting with ghost, God, or Goddess at some holy place or much-legended tomb, the supernatural stories which reminded Yeats of 'Irish legends and beliefs.'"  

This play, like other Noh plays, says Ure Peter, "is divided into two portions, separated by an interlude. But

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33. Ure Peter, Yeats the Playwright, p. 97.  
34. W.B. Yeats, Essays, p. 227.  
35. Ure Peter, Yeats the Playwright, p. 91.  
36. Ibid., pp. 90-93.
their unity depends on the way the Ghosts gradually reveal their identity and nature of their suffering. As in Nishikigi, the Ghosts tell their story but 'they do not say at first that it is their own story.' As in that play, the traveller does not seem to notice their ancient attire or their heroic mask. This is due to the darkness which is imaginatively rendered by the blowing out of the soldier's lantern. According to Peter this play, like Motomezuka, frequently referred by Yeats, ends with the dance of unappeased shades.37 To use Yeats's own words: "Instead of the disordered passion of nature there is a dance, a series of positions and movements which may represent a battle or a marriage, or the pain of a Ghost in the Buddhist Purgatory."38 B. Rajan regards the play as "the most successful of 'The Four Plays for the Dancers,' in assimilating the atmosphere of the Noh. The image cluster in the songs embody Yeats's understanding of the language of Noh as 'playing upon a single metaphor, as deliberate as the echoing rhythm of Chinese or Japanese painting.'39 Anniah Gowda, commenting on its technique, says: "Yeats gives the play, written for a 'theatre's antiself,' a local habitation by placing the scene in the ruined Abbey of

37. Ibid., pp. 92-94.
Corcomroe." About its language he says that "the conversation, couched in tough and matter-of-fact lines, characteristic of Yeats's later poetry, reveals to us the story of Civil War and their flight."⁴⁰

According to some critics such as Rajan and Ashley Myles, the play lacks a central action. But as our analysis of this play above has shown, the central action of sin and atonement is there. So the charge does not seem to be justiciable.

As regards the theme we can say that it is an amalgamation of the philosophical, the mythological and the contemporary. Some critics have interpreted it in political terms only. Ashley Myles says that "its theme is Irish patriotism."⁴¹ But these critics tend to ignore its philosophical aspect based on the promise that the dead relive their past to undergo penance. Here Ure Peter's interpretation is the most satisfactory. He says:

The antique story is tied to the present moments of flight and disaster because they proceed from it; the lovers inhabit a landscape of ruin which they make themselves; they address their hopeless


⁴¹ Ashley Myles, The Theatre of Aristocracy, A Study of W.B. Yeats As a Dramatist, p. 84.
appeal to the traveller whom, as revolutionary and fugitive..., they fathered... The soldier himself is caught inside this tight circle; he is one of the consequences of their transgression and cannot forgive the authors of evil which he fights and curses.42

This comment emphasizes the kind of fusion of the philosophical and political aspects which Yeats here has achieved.

Thus even a brief analysis of the play, given above amply confirms Yeats's own hesitation in following the Noh technique exclusively. He must have realized that a tiny abstract idea can very well be conveyed through a Noh play technique, where rhythm, imagery, setting, action, character, symbol can all be integrated into a unifying image. But where different dramatic situations are to be created, casual explanations are to be given for the events and the thought, or emotion is to be developed in a dramatic manner to its decisive conclusion, the conventional technique of presenting a plot cannot be completely done away with. However, Yeats did succeed in a negative manner in reducing some of the dialogues to abstractions which cease to be dramatically effective because they require great cerebral straining.

42. Ure Peter, Yeats the Playwright, pp. 95-6.
CHAPTER V

Calvary

Calvary (1921) is the last of Yeats’s Four Plays for the Dancers. The play along with The Resurrection dramatizes the Myth of Christ. Like The Dreaming of the Bones, which dramatizes the degeneration of the feelings of nationality, this play dramatizes the degeneration of religious feelings. The play gives us glimpses of Yeats’s philosophy of history and Christianity. As regards Christianity we can say that he saw the pagan world, chiefly that of Greece and Rome, as primary civilization; at the time of Christ’s coming it was drawing to its foreordained end in the cyclical movement of history and was becoming subject to the loss of control which heralded the birth of the next age. This next age, or Christian age, was antithetical to its predecessor. It begins with the Annunciation of God who seeks to live like a man while teaching that man must seek to live like God. This type of annunciation of God is present in this play. Here all the three characters — Lazarus, Judas, and the three Roman soldiers ask nothing of God. However, its main source is Oscar Wilde’s story, entitled The Doer of the God. It was narrated to Yeats by an actor as follows:

Christ came from a white plain to a purple city, and as He passed through the first street He heard voices overheard, and saw a young man lying drunk upon a window-sill. 'Why do you waste your soul in drunkenness?' He said. 'Lord, I was a laper and you healed me, what else can I do?' A little further through the town He saw a young man following a harlot, and said, 'why do you dissolve your soul in debauchery?' and the young man answered, 'Lord, I was blind, and you healed me, what else can I do?' At last in the middle of the city He saw an old man crouching, weeping upon the ground and when He asked why he wept, the old man answered, 'Lord I was dead, and you raised me into life, what else can I do but weep.'

This play dramatizes this sort of man's indifference towards God not through a well-made story as the preceding play, but through a series of situations dealing with the confrontation of Christ with personalities he cannot save. First to confront with Christ is Lazarus who had died, but now brought back by Christ in an attempt to give him life. But Lazarus, on the other hand, wants his death back because 'alive he could never escape Christ's love.' So he claims his right to die and says:

For four whole days
I had been dead and I was lying still
In an old comfortable mountain cavern
When you came climbing there with a great crowd
And dragged me to the light.²

The next is Judas, Christ's betrayer who sold Christ for
thirty pieces of silver. In his long conversation with
Christ, he says that he betrayed him to gain his superiority
over God and assert his individuality. So he betrayed,
believing that "if a man betrays a God, he is stronger of
the two."³ He proudly declares: "You cannot even save me."⁴

Last to have confrontation with Christ are the three Roman
soldiers. They tell us that they are the gamblers, who
plan to decide, by throwing the dice, as to who is to get
the cloak of Christ when the latter is dead. They too are
indifferent towards Christ's power, and are satisfied with
their fortune. The second Roman soldier conveys his sense
saying:

They say you're good and that you made the world,
But it's no matter.⁵

Further he ironically says:

One thing is plain,
To know that he has nothing we need
Must be a comfort to him.⁶

Thus Christ is left alone, pathetically pleading:

My father, why hast thou forsaken me?⁷

These episodes thus depict the helplessness of Christ to save those whom he wanted to save, and his eventual loneliness. Yeats has rendered this idea in the Noh technique as the analysis of the play given below demonstrates.

Here all the characters are masked, or wear such make-up of their faces that look like the mask. The stage like the stage of the preceding three plays is a "bare place, round three sides of which the audience are seated."⁸ Here, as in the Noh plays, the audience sit forming a circle. The play begins with the characteristic folding and unfolding of the cloth by the musicians accompanied by the song for this folding and unfolding of cloth. The song, beginning with these lines:

Motionless under the moon-beam,

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6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 449.
Up to his feathers in the stream;
Although fish leap, the white heron
Shivers in a dumbfounded dream.
Although half finished he will not dare
Dip or do anything but stare
Upon the glittering image of a heron,
That now is lost and now is there.\(^9\)

refers to the theme of solitude, and self-absorption. The
next lines of the first Musician introduce us to Christ, who
is a central character. He is described here as dreaming of
his passion through carrying a cross. The lines: "Now he
stands amid the mocking crowd,"\(^10\) and the lines which follow,
refer to Christ's helplessness and also the failure of Chris­
tianity. This has been conveyed through the crowd jeering
at him. The song thus introduces the main idea which the
play is going to dramatize. Here Yeats has used the conven­
tional technique of flashback. We see Christ dreaming his
passion through. We are thus being taken to some past event.
Ure Peter holds that Yeats has intentionally used this tech­
nique of flashback "in order to make the suffering remote
rather than actual."\(^11\) Herein blending of the Noh and
conventional techniques is patent. After this, the speech

\(^9\) Ibid., pp. 449-450.
\(^10\) Ibid., p. 450.
\(^11\) Ure Peter, Yeats the Playwright, p. 117.
of the Musician announces the coming of the next character who is described as frightening with 'deathly face,' who moves "like a young foal that sees the hunt go by/ And races in the field." The conventional device of arousing curiosity through suspense is found here. Here, just the physical appearance has been described and no names are given. But immediately after this we are told that "a player with the mask of Lazarus has entered." Thus the deathly face, just mentioned, has been identified here as Lazarus. Technically he has been individualized by the description of his physique and by naming him, while in Christ's case we find no such individualization; which conforms to the Noh pattern of presenting characters as representatives.

After this occurs a long conversation between Christ and Lazarus, revealing all that had happened between them. Here we come to know that Lazarus had died, lying peacefully in his grave. But Christ raised him up, dragging him to light. Lazarus, thus deprived of his death, claims his right to die, and even seeks Christ's death in exchange. He now asks for death because: "Alive he never could escape his love." In the following lines he further gives us

13. Ibid.
reasons for his death wish:

I thought to die
When my allotted years ran out again;
And that, being gone, you could not hinder it;
But now you will blind with light the solitude
That death has made; you will disturb that corner
Where I thought I might lie safe for ever. 15

Here reference is to the failure of Christianity to such an extent that people instead of finding any solace in it, want to escape it, finding it as a hindrance to their self-centredness. Death is preferable to religion. Then we have the first musician's speech. This prepares us for the entrance of the next character on the stage. This character has been given no name though a sense of fear is associated with this character also. He is depicted as: "The face that seems death-stricken and death-hungry still," 16 which is clarified by the description of the crowd as shrinking into the background. This sense of fear is further conveyed in the following lines of Christ:

Why has the street grown empty of a sudden
As though all fled in terror? 17

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 453.
17. Ibid.
Soon this character comes on the stage, and tells us that he is called Judas, and that he had sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver. So, like Lazarus, Judas has also been individualized 'as the face that seems death-stricken and death hungry.' Then in the following long argument between Christ and him, more light is thrown upon Judas. We are told that the reason behind his betraying Christ was that he wanted to become more powerful than Christ and wanted to assert his individuality and own identity. His belief was "whatever man betrays Him will be free." After this we see that "three Roman soldiers have entered." The first soldier then comes and speaks. Here, as in the case of Lazarus and Judas, we find no attempt to individualize them by the chorus. So a variety of techniques in the art of characterization, showing fusion of Noh and Conventional devices, is noteworthy on Yeats's part here. The stage direction says "Judas holds up the cross while Christ stands with His arms stretched out upon it." Here there is a long discussion that is chiefly among these three soldiers, with just two lines uttered by Christ in which we are told that these soldiers are gamblers who intend to take away Christ's cloak.

18. Ibid., p. 454.
19. Ibid., p. 455.
20. Ibid.
Having killed him, they are throwing their dice to decide as to who is going to possess this cloak. The rest of the conversation shows their indifference towards any religion, and their contentment with their present fate. They are just gamblers, but fully satisfied, asking nothing from Christ. The lines below show this attitude of self-satisfaction:

They say you are good and that you
Made the world, But it's no matter.21

They ironically say:

One thing is plain,
To know that he has nothing we need
Must be a comfort to him.22

Then we see the Roman soldiers dancing. Christ is now left all alone. Regretting his plight he says: "My father, why hast thou forsaken me."23 The play, conforming to the Noh technique, ends with the song of the chorus, for the folding and unfolding of the cloth, as in the beginning. Here, the song again emphasizes Christ's loneliness, showing his failure through the loneliness of the birds:

22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
Lonely the sea-bird lies at her rest,

The lake is empty; why do they fling
White wing out beside white wing?
What can a swan need but a swan. 24

Here Ashley Myle's comment is noteworthy. He says "It is then left to the Musicians to recapture the theme of the first lyric with a series of bird images like 'lonely sea-bird,' 'ger-eagle,' 'Cygnats,' 'Swan,' etc., and the second musician enchants by his choric repetitions, 'God has not appeared to the bird.'" 25 Chaturvedi, making comment on these images, says that "birds are the symbols of the same sense of Isolation from which the people who spurn salvation suffer. The songs in Calvary place the play within a formal framework and also provide its central burden which is 'God has not appeared to the bird.'" 26

The above analysis makes it clear that the play puts forth the failure of Christianity. This is conveyed to us through the failure of Christ, shown here as suffering at the cross, left all alone. Different critics have given

24. Ibid., p. 457.
25. Ashley Myles, A Study of W.B. Yeats As A Dramatist, p. 86.
different interpretations of the play. For example, Moor holds that "Christ's Calvary consists in the discovery of the limits of His power, even when that power is conceived as universal love. The saviour is impotent to impose his unity on the recalcitrant duality of the world." Norman Jaffers believes that "Christ's agony in the play is the agony of the man forced to relive in the act of dreaming his passion through," the consequences of His reincarnation, which includes his involvement in the world that is opposed to him. In Yeats's terminology He is 'out of phase,' thrust into an hostile world which, though he has created he cannot affect." To Anniah Gowda "here Yeats is preoccupied with the ritualistic interpretation of the Myth of Christ, later resumed in The Ressurection." Rajan, putting the same thing in a different manner, says that "the play is not necessarily an exposure of the failure of Christianity; but it is certainly a reminder that there will be many who require a different faith." 

However, some critics see the play in terms of his

philosophy of subjective and objective aspects of personality. For example Vendler says that "the play is concerned with the interaction of objective and subjective life, the double inter-locking Gyres. In other words, Judas cannot get free of Christ, nor can soldiers' indifference release them from Him; nor can He escape the consequences of His own actions. It is essential to bear in mind the double nature of Christ, as man and as God. As God Christ is primary... As man Christ is antithetical, we say of him because his sacrifice was voluntary that He was love itself, and yet that part of Him that made Christendom was not love but pity, not pity for intellectual despair... but primary pity, that for the common lot, man's death, seeing that He raised Lazarus, sickness, seeing that he healed many, sin, seeing that he died." Ashley Myles also thinking on these lines says "the play represents the eternal conflict between the subjective and objective man, which is so profound that it has turned even Christ into a tragic figure." Anniah Gowda suggesting this says "Yeats used the bird-symbolism to emphasise the objective


loneliness of Christ in His suffering on the Cross." Chaturvedi commenting on this says:

The contrast between the subjective and objective types of personality corresponding to the primary and antithetical gyres is brought out clearly between the characters of Lazarus, Judas, and Roman soldiers on the one hand and the majestic figure of Christ on the other. The former, in their self-centred insistence on their isolation and in their refusal to accept salvation through Christ, are examples of the subjective type, while Christ whose attention was always focussed outside himself in his effort to save humanity represents the objective type.

Indeed this conflict between the subjective and objective aspects cannot be ruled out altogether. Both the failure of Christ and this conflict have been fused to dramatize the defeat of Christ, his powerlessness that eventually corresponds to the failure of Christianity in Europe in these times. As Yeats himself says "I use birds as symbol of subjective life... Such lonely birds as the heron, hawks, eagle and swan are the natural symbols of

subjectivity, especially when floating upon the winds alone or alighting upon some pond or run, the beasts that run upon the ground, especially those that run in packs, are the natural symbols of the objective man. "35 Yeats has said,

I have used my bird symbolism in these songs to increase the objective loneliness of Christ by contrasting it with a loneliness opposite in kind that unlike His can be whether joyous or sorrowful, sufficient to itself. I have surrounded Him with the images of those He cannot save,... I have therefore represented in Lazarus and Judas types of that intellectual despair that lay beyond His sympathy, while in the Roman soldiers I suggest a form of objectivity that lay beyond His help.36

Ure Peter says: "In Calvary both Judas and Lazarus are conceived as relics of the elder civilization; they do not want to be completely God's object but to remain themselves; they want to keep their subjectivity and selfhood, their privacy and are not willing to 'sacrifice everything that the divine suffering might... descend into one's mind and soul,' and to allow, 'God... to take complete

36. Ibid., p. 459.
Commenting on this theme of failure of Christianity Oliver and Boggard says:

The play dramatizes the terror of ultimate human loneliness which is present in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*. It lays emphasis on every element that showed man living in the void of, between the natural and supernatural so that bird in the opening and last song of the chorus were not as Yeats conceived later on to be the symbols of objective life, but freed from the intricacies of remorse, betrayal, sacrifice and salvation.

One more point, not noticed by these critics, is Yeats's concept of history and objective cycle of civilization present here. His concept is based on Madam Blavatsky's philosophy that "divided the interminable periods of human existence on this planet into cycles, during each of which mankind gradually reached the culminating point of highest civilization and gradually relapsed into object barbarism." Yeats's own concept is of slow degeneration into abstraction, having attained the unity of culture. And finally the cycle reaches total violence. Viewed in these terms the play seems

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37. Ure Peter, *Yeats the Playwright*, p. 120.
to depict this final state of violence.

The play as evident from the above analysis has been rendered in the Noh technique, with all the formal characteristics of the Noh pattern such as the bare stage, masked actors, symbols, songs of the musicians, and the concluding dance. We also have an iterative image-cluster in the bird and animal which Yeats regarded as principal devices of the Noh technique. All the images used are very appropriate, that lead to the development of heightening of the plot. All of them imply the sense of Christ's loneliness which is the central action of the play. Conforming to the Noh pattern here all the characters have been introduced by the Musicians. However, all of them, except Christ, have been particularized by the description of their physique in a conventional manner. Their long speeches reveal their individuality. Again the character contrast between Christ and others conforms to the conventional pattern. While Christ represents the objective aspect of personality, seeking to change everything in his own image, others represent subjectivity as they are self-centred and content in their solitude.

The play is episodic in its structure. It has three episodes dealing with Christ's confrontation with Lazarus, Judas and the three Roman soldiers. Here the play follows the Noh technique, since the ideas do not develop dialectically.
Here the songs perform the function that is characteristic to Noh plays, i.e., of creating the atmosphere proper to the theme of the play. Here the songs create the impression of loneliness which the play actually dramatizes. But Ure Peter feels that "songs in Calvary have other functions to perform in addition to constituting the first variation on the common theme. It follows that they relate to that theme differently from the way in which the three self-contained episodes of Lazarus, Judas and three Roman soldiers relate to it. Their chill detachment expresses the 'subjectivity' of a world detached from Christ; it also holds the play within a frame and helps to give it the quality of 'distance' which Yeats admired in the Noh plays. The danger that the series will break down into arbitrary and inconsequential incidents is avoided by what the songs do."40 Songs as in the Noh plays are remote, impersonal, symbolic. Play conforming to the Noh technique is highly suggestive and symbolic. Each character symbolizes something or the other.

One criticism that the play carries is that it lacks any single action. Ure Peter, for example, says that "the play has no single central action, as The Dreaming of the Bones has, nor structural core, as The Words Upon the

40. Ure Peter, Yeats the Playwright, pp. 116-7.
Window Pane and Purgatory have..., and there is no 'working to a climax.' "41 But we can refute this charge saying that the play, as most of the critics do admit, is a play of ideas. Its main appeal is to the mind and not to the eye or the ear. Rajan rightly states that "Calvary uses Noh form for something approaching of drama of ideas. Its development is not argumentative; the positions presented in it are related to each other, rather than modified by a debate and the whole has to be held in mind and played back for its structure to be confirmed." 42 Ure Peter defending Yeats says "Calvary is successful in giving the 'feel' of the ideas upon which it is a play, although these are not given in the terminology of the metaphysical treatise. They are presented as a movement round a medial stillness, as vortices of intellectually active, death-hungry, or dancing selfhoods arranged about the God." 43

We can say that the play dramatizes Christ's myth in a form suitable to him. This he has gained by fusing the Noh and other conventional devices. He has strictly ordered the characters, songs, dances, words, images in order to

41. Ibid., p. 117.
42. B. Rajan, W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction, p. 103.
43. Ure Peter, Yeats the Playwright, p. 120.
present a unified impression of Christ's loneliness. These elements have been used not just for visual and auditory pleasure, but with a special appeal to the heart as well as to the mind.
CONCLUSION

Our analysis of the *Four Plays for the Dancers* in the foregoing chapters has amply demonstrated that Yeats during this period was striving to bridge the gap between the commercial stage and his aristocratic theatre. To say that he was totally disgusted with the larger audience of the commercial theatre and therefore turned his back on them and went in the direction of the other extreme is not wholly true. We have seen that W.B. Yeats did not completely discard the conventional techniques of dramaturgy in the *Four Plays for the Dancers* that we have analysed. All the four plays, in varying degrees, have substantial plot elements, dramatic developments of characters and dialogues characterised by the colloquial rhythm of the language. It is true that the plots of all the plays depend for their completion and comprehensibility on lots of details of the story. But this holds true of most of the ancient Greek plays as well, which were meant for large audiences. For example, the story of Cuchulain's cohabitation with an eventual desertion of Aoife, a neighbouring queen, whom he defeats and with whom he falls in love in the battlefield and begets a son on her, is required to explain the enmity of his deserted
wife in the form of Sidhe or the Hawk woman.

Similarly the story of Cuchulain's amorous relationship with Eithne Inquba which had embittered Emer is also required. In The Dreaming of the Bones the story of a number of deserters in the 1916 Easter Rising is expected to be recalled to understand the play. The details of the betrayal of the Christ and the vying for his cloak are well known facts to the students of Christian theology. It is valid to say that the prior knowledge of these background stories is of utmost importance in understanding these plays. However, Yeats's Irish audience, like the Greek audience, was expected not to have much difficulty on this account because these stories were well known to people.

Thus all his plays have classical structure in as much as they begin at climactic moments in the development of the complete stories. The antecedent details to facilitate the understanding of the plot are selectively included in the main action through either the choric narration of the Musicians or the interaction of characters. However, a non-Irish audience living in the present age may have difficulty in recalling the background details which are necessary to understand the central action of the plays. Moreover the difficulty is again increased when the dramatist suggests
these details through obtruse symbolism. A further difficulty in comprehending the plots may be stated as Yeats's inclusion of abstract and sometimes esoteric philosophical conceptions which are blended with the legendary and Biblical details. But what we propose to assert is that W.B. Yeats was conscious that a foreign dramatic technique — such as the Japanese Noh play technique — was to be used with great caution, particularly when themes and stories from an entirely different culture were to be represented. This assertion is evinced by the fact that Yeats tried to include conventional elements of plot construction like exposition, complication, suspense and eventual conclusion even in the short pieces, we have analysed in the preceding chapters.

Whatsoever some critics may say about his incomprehensible abstraction in these plays, the plot outlines are clearly comprehensible. This is also testified by the observation that these plays even in reading do hold our attention.

As we have mentioned in our Introductory chapter, in a typical Noh play characters are deliberately deprived of their human flesh and blood attributes. It was because of this that they were masked, because what was important was not their identity and individuality but the idea and emotion that they conveyed. Yeats followed that to
a great extent. But the dramatic personae were all
derived from Irish legends and folklore who were not mere
abstract ideas for Yeats but heroic figures endowed with
human qualities in exaggerated measure. It is because of
this that his central characters, inspite of the Noh mask
of annihilation of identity, appear personalities with
flesh and blood. Cuchulain in *At the Hawk's Well* is
obviously symbolical of typical Yeatsian quester. But we
have details about his heroic human past, his affair with
Eithne Inqua. Besides these biographical details which
are inextricably woven into the texture of the play, we
have Cuchulain's extraordinary determination, vehement
opposition of obstacles and his readiness for angry violence
which humanize his character, as well as individualize it.
This is also true of the Old Man. His regrets and expres­s­­sion of hopelessness of his pursuit are not in the nature
of presenting abstract ideas but profoundly human. It
will not be an exaggeration to say that even the Musician's
narratives sometimes are far from being dehumanized.

In *The Only Jealousy of Emer* both the characters
— Emer and Eithne Inqua — are full-blooded human figures,
the types of which we find in any serious tragedies. That
their characters are completely devoid of abstraction and
are highly individualized and full of emotional issues does not require much elaboration. The same thing holds true of *The Dreaming of the Bones*, where the tragic hopelessness of the two lovers living in the paradoxically separated union can be seen. Even the character of the young man, though pronouncedly representative, is considerably individualized. The central figure in *Calvary* i.e., Christ, is not endowed with religious implications so much as with the hard felt disillusionment at the meanness of humanity, for which he laid down his life. Thus we see that Yeats in his characterization has tried to strike a balance between the conventional and the Noh techniques.

Yeats has very often been criticised for writing undramatic dialogues for his characters. It is alleged that all his characters, low or high, speak in the same type of verse. But as our analysis of the plays earlier has established, we find that there is enough modulation and variety in his verse to take care of the corresponding ebb and flow, intensity and banality of feelings and emotions. For example, the Musician's narratives in all the plays are invariably at the philosophic level of abstraction so that the central themes are conveyed in the right perspectives. But the other characters' dialogue ebb and flow,
with the feelings and demands of the situation. We can give examples of conversation between Cuchulain and the Old Man in *At the Hawk's Well*, the young man and Diarmuid in *The Dreaming of the Bones* and the minor characters in *Calvary*, as illustrative of the dramatic verse of the dialogue. Here the verse is adequately colloquial and their rhythms distinguish the participants in the Speech act.

The other stock criticism against Yeats's *Four Plays for the Dancers* has been that they lack human interest. But our analysis has amply demonstrated that they are full of emotions, and profound feelings as those of the Old Man of *At the Hawk's Well*, lovers in the *Dreaming of the Bones*, Emer and Eithne Inquba in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, and Christ in *Calvary* who, though a religious hero, has been so presented that we take him as human being like ourselves and other characters of the play as Lazarus, Judas and the three Roman soldiers.

So Yeats did not follow the Noh technique as it was given to him. He had realized that he should modify it in such a manner that it satisfies all his theatrical creeds. Thus he presented a unique type of drama that is satisfying both to the intellectuals, because of its being symbolic and
philosophical, as well as to the groundlings, because of including such elements as songs, dance, music, spectacle etc. These elements have also given his plays a kind of universality, in the sense that dance, song and music have an appeal to the entire mankind. So whatever modifications and changes Yeats made in the characteristic devices of the Noh were for the better.
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