A COMMENTARY ON
THE COLLECTED PLAYS
OF W. B. YEATS

Also by A. Norman Jeffares

A COMMENTARY ON THE COLLECTED POEMS
OF W. B. YEATS
TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN: DRAWINGS AND
DESCRIPTIONS
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OLIVER GOLDSMITH
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SWIFT
FARQUHAR, THE RECRUITING OFFICER
SCOTT'S MIND AND ART
RESTORATION COMEDY

Also by A. S. Knowland

SIX CAROLINE PLAYS (editor)

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A. Norman Jeffares
and
A. S. Knowland

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1975

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First published 1975 by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
London and Basingstoke
Associated companies in New York
Dublin Melbourne Johannesburg and Madras

SBN 333 12042 6

ISBN 978-1-349-01078-3

ISBN 978-1-349-01076-9 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-01076-9

*For Frank Wynne
and all our friends in Sligo*

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Preface

THIS commentary is intended to assist the reader of Yeats's *Collected Plays* (page references to this work are given in the margin in bold face type). Yeats's poetry and his prose have been quoted where they throw light on the meaning of particular plays: thus his notes to various editions are included as well as passages from his critical and autobiographical prose and from his letters.

Readers will be able to supplement the bibliographical information by referring to *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats* (ed. R. K. Alspach). *A Concordance to the Plays of W. B. Yeats* (ed. Eric Domville) affords a quick means of comparing the language, the images and symbols used by Yeats. A useful guide to published criticism of Yeats's work is *A Bibliography of Yeats Criticism 1887-1965* (ed. K. G. W. Cross and R. T. Dunlop).

Stirling
Oxford
1974

A. NORMAN JEFFARES
A. S. KNOWLAND

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Abbreviations

BOOKS BY YEATS

<i>A</i>	<i>Autobiographies</i> (1955)
<i>AV</i> (A)	<i>A Vision</i> (1925)
<i>AV</i> (B)	<i>A Vision</i> (1937)
<i>CK</i>	<i>The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics</i> (1892). (In <i>Poems</i> (1895) and subsequent printings the spelling <i>Countess Cathleen</i> was used)
<i>Comm</i>	A. N. Jeffares, <i>A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats</i> (1968)
<i>CP</i>	<i>Collected Poems</i> (1933; 2nd ed., with later poems added, 1950). References are to the second edition unless otherwise stated.
<i>CPI</i>	<i>Collected Plays</i> (1934; 2nd ed., with additional plays, 1952).
<i>CT</i>	<i>The Celtic Twilight</i> (1893)
<i>CW</i>	<i>Collected Works</i> (1908)
<i>DP</i>	<i>Dramatis Personae</i> (Dublin, 1935; London, 1936). The latter edition includes <i>Estrangement</i> , <i>The Death of Synge</i> and <i>The Bounty of Sweden</i> .
<i>DWL</i>	<i>Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley</i> (1940; reissued 1964). References are to the 1964 reissue.
<i>E</i>	<i>Explorations</i> (1962)
<i>E & I</i>	<i>Essays and Introductions</i> (1961)
<i>EPS</i>	<i>Early Poems and Stories</i> (1925)
<i>FMM</i>	<i>A Full Moon in March</i> (1935)
<i>FPPD</i>	<i>Four Plays for Dancers</i> (1921)
<i>KGCT</i>	<i>The King of the Great Clock Tower</i> (1934)
<i>L</i>	<i>Letters</i> , ed. Allan Wade (1954)
<i>LHD</i>	<i>The Land of Heart's Desire</i> (1912)
<i>M</i>	<i>Mythologies</i> (1959)
<i>MS</i>	<i>Memoirs</i> , ed. Denis Donoghue (1972)

OTB	<i>On the Boiler</i> (1939)
P (1895)	<i>Poems</i> (1895)
PAIT	<i>Plays for an Irish Theatre</i> (1911)
PASL	<i>Per Amica Silentia Lunae</i> (1918)
PC	<i>Plays and Controversies</i> (1923)
PPV	<i>Plays in Prose and Verse</i> (1922)
RPP	<i>Responsibilities: Poems and a Play</i> (1914)
SSY	<i>The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats</i> , ed. Donald T. Torchiana (1960)
TCM	<i>The Cat and the Moon and certain poems</i> (1924)
TSR	<i>The Secret Rose</i> (1897). There was an enlarged and revised edition in 1902. References are to the 1897 edition.
VE	<i>The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats</i> , ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (1957)
VPI	<i>The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats</i> , ed. Russell K. Alspach (1966)
W & B	<i>Wheels and Butterflies</i> (1934)
WR	<i>The Wind Among the Reeds</i> (1899)
WWP	<i>The Words upon the Window-pane</i> (1934)

OTHER BOOKS

AL	Lady Wilde, <i>Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland</i> (1887)
CM	Lady Gregory, <i>Cuchulain of Muirthemne</i> (1902)
ED	Richard Ellmann, <i>Eminent Domain</i> (1967)
ICL	Birgit Bjersby, <i>The Interpretation of the Cuchulain Legend in the Works of W. B. Yeats</i> (1950)
IDM	Una Ellis-Fermor, <i>The Irish Dramatic Movement</i> (1954)
IP	D. J. Gordon, <i>W. B. Yeats, Images of a Poet</i> (1961)
IY	Richard Ellmann, <i>The Identity of Yeats</i> (1954)
J	<i>Lady Gregory's Journals, 1916-1930</i> , ed. Lennox Robinson (1946)
LT	T. R. Henn, <i>The Lonely Tower</i> (1950; rev. ed. 1965). References are to the 1965 edition.
LTHS	John Butler Yeats, <i>Letters to his Son W. B. Yeats and others</i> (1944)
MLD	John Rees Moore, <i>Masks of Love and Death</i> (1971)

PYP	George Brandon Saul, <i>Prolegomena to the Study of Yeats's Poems</i> (1957)
PYP/	George Brandon Saul, <i>Prolegomena to the Study of Yeats's Plays</i> (1958)
RI	Frank Kermode, <i>Romantic Image</i> (1957)
S&S	Thomas R. Whitaker, <i>Swan and Shadow: Yeats's Dialogue with History</i> (1964)
SQ	Maud Gonne MacBride, <i>A Servant of the Queen</i> (1938)
TD	Leonard E. Nathan, <i>The Tragic Drama of W. B. Yeats</i> (1965)
WBY	J. M. Hone, <i>W. B. Yeats 1865-1939</i> (1942; rev. ed. 1962). References are to the 1962 edition.
WMA	Giorgio Melchiori, <i>The Whole Mystery of Art</i> (1960)
Y	Harold Bloom, <i>Yeats</i> (1970)
Y&GI	Donald T. Torchiana, <i>Yeats and Georgian Ireland</i> (1966)
Y&T	F. A. C. Wilson, <i>W. B. Yeats and Tradition</i> (1958)
YCE	<i>W. B. Yeats 1865-1939 Centenary Essays</i> , ed. D. E. S. Maxwell and S. B. Bushrui (1965)
YCI	B. Rajan, <i>W. B. Yeats. A Critical Introduction</i> (1965)
YI	F. A. C. Wilson, <i>Yeats's Iconography</i> (1960)
Y:M&M	Richard Ellmann, <i>Yeats: the Man and the Masks</i> (1948; rev. ed. 1961). References are to the 1948 edition.
Y:M&P	A. Norman Jeffares, <i>Yeats: Man and Poet</i> (1949, rev. ed. 1962). References are to the 1962 edition.
YTDR	David R. Clark, <i>W. B. Yeats and the Theatre of Desolate Reality</i> (1965)
YTP	Peter Ure, <i>Yeats the Playwright</i> (1963)
YV	Helen Hennessy Vendler, <i>Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays</i> (1963)
YVP	S. B. Bushrui, <i>Yeats's Verse Plays: The Revisions 1900-1910</i> (1965)
YW	Curtis Bradford, <i>Yeats at Work</i> (1965)

JOURNALS

DUM	<i>Dublin University Magazine</i>
ELH	<i>Journal of English Literary History</i>
NO	<i>National Observer</i>

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PMLA *Publications of the Modern Language Association of
America*

REL *Review of English Literature*

RES *Review of English Studies*

SO *Scots Observer*

Chronology of Yeats's Life

- 1865 William Butler Yeats, the son of John Butler Yeats and his wife, Susan (*née* Pollexfen), born at Georgeville, Sandymount Avenue, Dublin, 13 June.
- 1867 John Butler Yeats moves with his family to 23 Fitzroy Road, Regent's Park, London. Robert (d. 1873), John Butler (Jack), Elizabeth Corbet (Lolly) were born here. Susan Mary (Lily), the elder daughter, was born at Sligo. Frequent visits were made to Sligo to Mrs Yeats's parents, the Pollexfens.
- 1874 The family moves to 14 Edith Villas, West Kensington.
- 1875 Yeats goes to the Godolphin School, Hammersmith. Holidays spent in Sligo.
- 1876 The family moves to 8 Woodstock Road, Bedford Park.
- 1880 John Butler Yeats's income from lands in Kildare ceases because of Land War. Family returns to Ireland, is lent Balscadden Cottage, Howth, Dublin. W. B. Yeats goes to the High School, Harcourt Street, Dublin (until 1883).
- 1881 Family moves to Island View, small house overlooking Howth Harbour. Yeats thinks himself in love with his cousin Laura Johnston.
- 1883 W. B. Yeats enters School of Art, Dublin.
- 1885 Family moves to 10 Ashfield Terrace, off Harold's Cross Road, Dublin. First published poems and an article on esoteric Buddhism appear in the *Dublin University Review*. Founder member of Dublin Hermetic Society. Becomes friend of Katharine Tynan and John O'Leary.
- 1886 First experience of séance. Attacks Anglo-Irish, begins

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- to read Irish poets who wrote in English and translations of Gaelic sagas.
- 1887 Family moves to 58 Eardley Crescent, Earls Court, London. Mrs Yeats has two strokes. W. B. Yeats visits William Morris at Kelmscott House. Joins London Lodge of Theosophists.
- 1888 Family installed in 3 Blenheim Road, Bedford Park (J. B. Yeats's home till 1902). Last of Yeats family land sold in accordance with Ashbourne Act (1888). Contributions to American journals. Visits Oxford to work in Bodleian. Joins esoteric section of Theosophists.
- 1889 Mild collapse. Prepares selections for Walter Scott. *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems*. Visits W. E. Henley, meets Oscar Wilde, John Todhunter, York Powell, John Nettleship, and Edwin Ellis (with whom he decides to edit Blake's poems). Edits *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*. Meets Florence Farr. Maud Gonne visits Bedford Park; he falls in love with her; offers to write *The Countess Cathleen* for her.
- 1890 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'. Asked to resign from Theosophists. Initiated into the Order of the Golden Dawn.
- 1891 *Representative Irish Tales*. John Sherman and Dhoya. The Rhymers' Club founded in London. Friendship with Johnson and Dowson. Asks Maud Gonne to marry him. She goes to France. He meets her on her return on ship with Parnell's body. Writes poem on Parnell. Founds London-Irish Literary Society with T. W. Rolleston. Founds National Literary Society in Dublin with John O'Leary as President.
- 1892 *The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics*. *Irish Fairy Tales*.
- 1893 *The Celtic Twilight*. *The Works of William Blake* (ed. Ellis and Yeats, 3 vols).
- 1894 First visit to Paris; stays with MacGregor Mathers and

- proposes to Maud Gonne again. Sees *Axel*. Meets 'Diana Vernon'. Revises *The Countess Cathleen* in Sligo while staying with George Pollexfen and conducting experiments with symbols. *The Land of Heart's Desire* produced. Visits Gore-Booths at Lissadell.
- 1895 *Poems*. Not on good terms with Dowden and Mahaffy. Lionel Johnson drinking heavily. Shares rooms in the Temple with Arthur Symons for a few months (between 1895 and 1896, date uncertain).
- 1896 Takes rooms in Woburn Buildings; affair with 'Diana Vernon' lasts a year. Visits Edward Martyn with Arthur Symons, meets Lady Gregory, visits Aran Islands. Meets Synge in Paris, when there to found order of Celtic Mysteries. Member of I.R.B.; forms idea of uniting Irish political parties.
- 1897 *The Adoration of the Magi. The Secret Rose*. Disturbed by effects of Jubilee Riots in Dublin. Visits Coole; collects folklore there with Lady Gregory; writing *The Speckled Bird* (unpublished novel).
- 1898 Accompanies Maud Gonne on tour of Irish in England and Scotland. Forms idea of creating Irish Theatre with Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn.
- 1899 *The Wind Among the Reeds*. In Paris, again proposes marriage to Maud Gonne. *The Countess Cathleen* and Martyn's *Heather Field* produced in Ancient Concert Rooms, Dublin, as programme of Irish Literary Theatre.
- 1900 Proposes marriage to Maud Gonne in London. Leaves I.R.B. (probably in 1900). Forms new order of Golden Dawn after trouble with Mathers and Aleister Crowley. Helps George Moore to rewrite Martyn's *The Tale of a Town*, which became *The Bending of the Bow*.
- 1902 Lectures on the psalteries. *Diarmuid and Grania* written in collaboration with George Moore. Becomes President of Irish National Dramatic Society. *Cathleen ni Houlihan* performed in Dublin with Maud Gonne in title role.

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- 1903 Maud Gonne marries John MacBride. *The Countess Cathleen*, *The Pot of Broth* and *The Hour Glass* produced in visit of Irish National Dramatic Company to London. First lecture tour in U.S., arranged by John Quinn.
- 1905 Abbey Theatre opens with Yeats as producer-manager. *The King's Threshold* and *On Baile's Strand*.
- 1905 Limited company replaces National Theatre. Co-director with Lady Gregory and Synge.
- 1906 *Stories of Red Hanrahan. Poems 1895-1905.*
- 1907 Crisis over Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. Visits Italy with Lady Gregory and her son. Works on *The Player Queen*.
- 1908 *Collected Works* (in 8 vols). Stays with Maud Gonne in Normandy. Father goes to New York.
- 1910 Resigns managership. Crisis in affair with unmarried woman. *The Green Helmet and other poems.*
- 1911 Accompanies Abbey players to U.S.
- 1912 Stays with Maud Gonne in Normandy. Meets Ezra Pound.
- 1913 Receives Civil List pension of £150 p.a. *Poems Written in Discouragement* (dealing with Lane Gallery controversy). Stays at Stone Cottage, Holmans Hatch, Sussex, in autumn with Ezra Pound.
- 1914 Visits U.S. (January). Returns for Ezra Pound's marriage to Mrs Shakespear's daughter. Investigates miracle at Mirabeau with Maud Gonne MacBride and the Hon. Everard Fielding (June). *Responsibilities: poems and a play*. Becomes interested in family history; finishes *Reveries* (first part of *Autobiographies*).
- 1915 Hugh Lane goes down with *Lusitania*. Refuses knighthood.
- 1916 With Ezra Pound (winter). First of the *Plays for Dancers*

produced in Lady Cunard's house, London (March). Easter Rising. Writes 'Easter 1916'. In Normandy proposes marriage to Maud Gonne. Reads French poets with Iseult Gonne.

- 1917 Buys Castle at Ballylee. Proposes to Iseult Gonne. Marries Georgie Hyde-Lees on 21 October. *The Wild Swans at Coole*.
- 1918 They stay at Oxford, then Glendalough, then visit Sligo; stay at Coole (and supervise restoration of tower), later at 73 St Stephen's Green (Maud Gonne's house) until December. *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*.
- 1919 Anne Butler Yeats born (26 February) in Dublin. Summer at Ballylee. Winter spent in Oxford in Broad Street.
- 1920 American lecture tour until May. Yeats in Ireland in autumn.
- 1921 Michael Butler Yeats born (22 August). *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*. *Four Plays for Dancers*.
- 1922 Buys Georgian house, 82 Merrion Square, Dublin. J. B. Yeats dies in New York. D.Litt. of Dublin University. Spends summer at Ballylee. *The Trembling of the Veil*. *Later Poems*. *The Player Queen*. Becomes Senator of Irish Free State.
- 1923 Nobel Prize for Poetry. Visits Stockholm in December for award of Nobel Prize.
- 1924 *Essays*. *The Cat and the Moon and certain poems*. Year mainly spent in final work on *A Vision*. Reading history and philosophy. High blood pressure. Visits Sicily (November).
- 1925 Visits Capri, Rome, Milan (February). May at Ballylee. Reading Burke and Berkeley. Speech on divorce in Senate. *A Vision* (dated 1925, published January 1926).
- 1926 *Estrangement*. Chairman of Coinage Committee in Senate.

- Visits St Otteran's School in Waterford ('Among School Children').
- 1927 Ballylee in summer. *October Blast*. Congestion of lungs (October). Algeciras, Seville (lung bleeding). Cannes.
- 1928 Cannes (till February). *The Tower*. Rapallo (April). Dublin house sold. Ballylee (June). Furnished house at Howth (July). Last Senate Speech (July).
- 1929 Rapallo (winter). Summer in Ireland, in flat (Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin), at Coole and Ballylee, then at Howth. *A Packet for Ezra Pound* (August). *The Winding Stair* (October). Rapallo. Malta fever (December). Ezra Pound and George Antheil at Rapallo.
- 1930 Portofino (April). Writes 'Byzantium'. Renvyle, Connemara (June). Coole. *Words upon the Window-pane* produced at Abbey Theatre (November). Visits Masefield at Boar's Hill, Oxford, thirtieth anniversary of their first meeting. Spends winter in Dublin, in furnished house on Killiney Hill.
- 1931 Writes 'The Seven Sages'. D.Litt. at Oxford (May). Writes much verse at Coole in summer. Broadcast B.B.C. Belfast (September). Spends winter at Coole, reading Balzac; Lady Gregory dying.
- 1932 Works on 'Coole Park and Ballylee 1931'. Winter and spring at Coole. Lady Gregory dies. Foundation of Irish Academy of Letters (September). Last American tour (October). *Words for Music Perhaps and other poems* (November).
- 1933 Leases Riversdale, Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin. Interested in O'Duffy's blueshirt movement. *The Winding Stair and other poems* (September). *Collected Poems* (November).
- 1934 Steinach operation. Rapallo (June). Rome (autumn). *Wheels and Butterflies*. *Collected Plays*. *The King of the Great Clock Tower*.
- 1935 Majorca (winter). Shri Purohit Swami collaborates in

translation of *Upanishads* there. *Dramatis Personae. A Full Moon in March* (November).

- 1936 Seriously ill; heart missing beat (January); nephritis. Returns to Riversdale. Broadcasts on modern poetry, B.B.C., London (summer).
- 1937 Elected member Athenaeum. Broadcasts B.B.C. London (April, July, September). *A Speech and Two Poems* (August). Visits Lady Gerald Wellesley. *Oxford Book of Modern Verse (1892-1935)*. *A Vision* (October). Mentone (winter). *Essays 1931-1936* (December).
- 1938 *The Herne's Egg* (January). Visits Sussex, stays with Lady Gerald Wellesley, and with Edith Shackleton Heald. *New Poems* (May). Sussex (June). Last public appearance at Abbey Theatre for performance of *Purgatory* (August). Maud Gonne visits him at Riversdale (late summer). Sussex (September).
- 1939 Dies 28 January, buried at Roquebrune. *Last Poems and Two Plays* (June). *On the Boiler*.
- 1948 Body reinterred at Drumcliffe Churchyard, Sligo.

The Contents of the Collected Plays

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Ballylee (W.B. Yeats)

Sandymount (Yeats's birthplace)

Rathfarnham (Yeats's last Irish residence)

Aran Islands (J.M. Synge)

Coole Park (Lady Gregory)

French Park (Douglas Hyde)

Tulira (Edward Martyn)

Lissoy (? *The Deserted Village*)

Moore Hall (George Moore)

Elphin (Oliver Goldsmith)

Cloyne (Bishop Berkeley)

Ballyshannon (Wm. Allingham)

YEATS'S IRELAND

YEATS'S SLIGO