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THE EVOLUTION OF YEATS'S 'THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN'

I

Yeats wrote towards the end of his first period as playwright:

Every one who has to interest his audience through the voice discovers that his success depends upon the clear, simple and varied structure of his thought. I have written a good many plays in verse and prose, and almost all those plays I have rewritten after performance, sometimes again and again, and every re-writing that has succeeded upon the stage has been an addition to the masculine element, an increase of strength in the bony structure.¹

Describing Yeats's evolution as a playwright would be a simpler business than it is if this and similar observations could be taken as a safe guide through the labyrinth of the different versions of *The Countess Cathleen*. All that it would then be necessary to do would be to look for and acclaim the gradual emergence of structural order out of the monotony and effeminacy and 'strained lyricism' for which Yeats in the same passage censured William Morris, contrasting *The Earthly Paradise* with *The Canterbury Tales* and blaming Morris for being 'too continuously lyrical in his understanding of emotion and life'. And much later, Yeats described the 1899 version of *The Countess Cathleen* as 'ill-constructed, the dialogue turning aside at the lure of word or metaphor, very different, I hope, from the play as it is today after many alterations, every alteration tested by performance'.²

The history of *The Countess Cathleen*, so far as it can be examined by means of the printed texts, does not entirely confirm this version of events. There were in the revisions of the play more indirection and resistance and regression than will admit of any very clear progress from lyrical effeminacy to masculine strength. Sometimes, indeed, the expected process seems to go into reverse; a structure originally simple and clear might become blurred with afterthoughts or strained out of shape by fresh insights. It is a story of loss as well as gain. The gain is hardly to be measured by any version, even the final version (if finality was ever reached) of *The Countess Cathleen* itself, but by what Yeats achieved when he tackled fresh themes and abandoned for the time the Countess's singularly obdurate story.

The version which was watched with such intentness and aroused such passions in the Antient Concert Rooms in 1899 was the second of four major revisions. The record of revision, extending over nearly thirty years,³ is lengthier than that of *The*

¹ *Plays and Controversies* (1923), pp. 186–7.

² *Dramatis Personae* (1936), pp. 34–5.

³ Yeats planned out and began to write *The Countess Cathleen* in February/March 1889 (*Letters*, pp. 108, 114), and it was first printed in *The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (1892). In March 1894 *The Land of Heart's Desire* was presented in London as a curtain-raiser for *Arms and the Man*. It was the first play by Yeats to be produced on any stage. In the light of this experience Yeats revised and expanded the earlier play and printed this version in *Poems* (1895). The play was again revised for the Dublin production in 1899; this version, the third, was printed for the first time in *Poems* (1901). A copy of *Poems* (1899) in the Huntington Library preserves the autograph revisions made for the performance, and the Huntington also has the typescript of the enlarged third Act: see Parkinson, *W. B. Yeats: Self-Critic* (p. 188). This version appeared in *Poems* (1904) in *The Poetical Works of William B. Yeats* (New York,

Shadowy Waters or of any other play by Yeats. Only an edition which printed all the *varia* could justly show the full extent of the minor alterations, which are by no means confined to the four occasions, in 1895, 1901, 1912, and 1919, when the play underwent major recensions. (The dates are those of the first appearance *in print* of these four revisions.) But I shall confine this discussion mostly to the first version and to its four major successors. The table on pages 14–15 is a convenient, if graceless, way of providing a basis for considering how much, and how little, the alterations affected the story, shape, and construction of the play.

Its genesis was laborious, from March 1889 until October 1891. Various references to it in the letters show that it was from the first conceived as a stage-play, never as a purely lyrical drama. There were two other matters that influenced its design in 1889–92. The first of these was the idea of it as a contrast to the recently published *Wanderings of Oisín* (1889). In 1892 Yeats wrote of the play as

an attempt to mingle personal thought and feeling with the beliefs and customs of Christian Ireland; whereas the longest poem in my earlier book endeavoured to set forth the impress left on my imagination by the Pre-Christian cycle of legends. The Christian cycle being mainly concerned with contending moods and moral motives needed, I thought, a dramatic vehicle. The tumultuous and heroic Pagan cycle, on the other hand, having to do with vast and shadowy activities and with the great impersonal emotions, expressed itself naturally—or so I imagined—in epic and epic-lyric measures. No epic method seemed sufficiently minute and subtle for the one, and no dramatic method elastic and all-containing enough for the other.¹

The writing and thinking here seem clumsy, but Yeats did not lightly abandon anything having to do with *The Countess Cathleen*, a play which gave him ‘more pleasure in the memory than any of my plays’.² The cumbrous antilogies of the 1892 Preface took fire nearly half a century later in the majestic counter-truths of ‘The Circus Animals’ Desertion’:

What can I but enumerate old themes?
First that sea-rider Oisín led by the nose
Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,
Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,
Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems,
That might adorn old songs and courtly shows;
But what cared I that set him on to ride,
I, starved for the bosom of his faery bride?
And then a counter-truth filled out its play,
The Countess Cathleen was the name I gave it . . .

The play, then, at its earliest stage was to be dramatic, not epic-lyric; Christian, not Pagan; and was to deal with subtle actions and personal and moral emotions. Here a second influence on its design needs to be taken into account. ‘He started’, writes Mr Henn, speaking of the year 1889, ‘*The Countess Cathleen* . . . the first projection

1907), in *Poems* (1908) and, for the last time, in volume III of the Stratford on Avon *Collected Works* (1908). The fourth version—which is sometimes erroneously described as the final version (for example, by Henn, *The Lonely Tower* (p. 30))—was first printed in 1912 as volume I of ‘Dublin Plays’ and in *Poems* (1912). After this the play was revised again: the texts in *Poems* (1919) and *Plays and Controversies* (1923) represent this fifth version.

¹ *The Countess Cathleen* . . . (1892), pp. 7–8.

² *Plays and Controversies*, p. vi.

REVISION OF 'THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN'

1892 <i>Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics</i>	1895 <i>Poems</i> (1895 and 1899)	1901 <i>Poems</i> (1901, 1904, 1908); <i>Poetical Works</i> (New York, 1907); <i>Collected Works</i> (Stratford on Avon, 1908)	1912 'Dublin Plays' edition; <i>Poems</i> (1912)	1923 <i>Plays and Controversies</i> (1923); <i>Collected Plays</i> (1934, etc.)
SCENE I The inn of Shemus Rua called 'The Lady's Head'; the starving family (Shemus, Mary and their son Teig); the entry of the two Demon- Merchants and their offer to buy souls	ACT I Adds entry of the Countess with Aleel; her charity; Aleel's song (<i>'Impetuous heart, be still, be still'</i>)	ACT I *A	SCENE I *A <i>Completely rewritten, but with episodes as in 1895</i>	SCENE I *A New song for Aleel (<i>'Were I but crazy for love sake'</i>) replaces 'Impetuous heart, be still, be still'
SCENE II The Castle Hall; the Countess and Oona; servants bring news of theft and disorder; two peasants bring news of the traffic in souls; the Countess instructs her steward to sell her lands and distribute her money to all suppliants	ACT II [Part i]	ACT II	SCENE II *A <i>Completely rewritten, using episodes of 1892 in shorter form.</i> Adds new scene for Aleel, Countess and Oona in place of passages for Countess and Oona only	SCENE II *A

*A This indicates scenes in which Aleel (Kevin in 1892) appears.

REVISION OF 'THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN' (cont.)

1892 <i>Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics</i> SCENE III The Castle Hall; the Demon- Merchants discuss their progress so far; they rob the treasure- house and summon spirits and lost souls to aid them in carrying away the bags of treasure; the Countess enters and talks with them about the state of the land; but their identity is not recognized until the theft is discovered after they have left; the Countess gives her last directions to her servants	1895 <i>Poems</i> (1895 and 1899) ACT II [Part ii]	1901 <i>Poems</i> (1901, 1904, 1908); <i>Poetical Works</i> (New York, 1907); <i>Collected Works</i> (Stratford on Avon, 1908) ACT III <i>Adds</i> (at beginning of the Act) the love-scene for the Countess and Aleel	1912 'Dublin Plays' edition; <i>Poems</i> (1912) SCENE III <i>Robbery scene rewritten in shortened form</i>	1923 <i>Plays and Controversies</i> (1923); <i>Collected Plays</i> (1934, etc.) SCENE III <i>Robbery scene cut to a few words and actions— all supernatural aides eliminated</i>
SCENES IV and V <i>Scene IV</i> : Merchants and Peasants traffic in souls; Kevin attempts to sell his soul but it is refused; the Countess enters and sells her soul; the scene ends with the triumphant disappearance of the Merchants (<i>'Leap, feathered on the air...'</i>) <i>Scene V</i> : Oona's vision	*A ACT III	*A ACT IV	*A SCENE V	*A Demon-Merchants replaced by song for Aleel (<i>'Impetuous heart, be still, be still'</i>)

[No scene division]
*Completely rewritten as
Aleel's vision*
[Modified for 1911 revival]

*A This indicates scenes in which Aleel (Kevin in 1892) appears).

of his own love and despair.¹ Yeats in 1938 would have agreed with him, for the stanza in 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' continues:

The Countess Cathleen was the name I gave it;
She, pity-crazed, had given her soul away,
But masterful Heaven had intervened to save it.
I thought my dear must her own soul destroy,
So did fanaticism and hate enslave it . . .

Hone, too, writes, dating the incident in 1891, that Yeats read to Maud Gonne 'his unpublished *Countess Cathleen* and told her that he had come to interpret the life of a woman who sells her soul as a symbol of all souls that lose their peace, their fineness in politics, serving but change'.² It is true that Maud Gonne, whom Yeats met for the first time on 30 January 1889, at Bedford Park, shortly after the publication of *The Wanderings of Oisín*, was very much present at the inception of the play, on which work was started in March. She was perhaps the unnamed 'actress' to whom on 6 May 1889, as Yeats told John O'Leary the following day, he read 'a scene' of the new work: 'she seemed to think it suitable in all ways for the stage. I think you will like it. It is in all things Celtic and Irish. The style is perfectly simple and I have taken great care with the construction, made two complete prose versions before writing a line of verse'.³ Much later, according to Maud Gonne, he was still hoping that she would play the part:

That evening Willie Yeats was sad and tried hard to persuade me to act the part of Countess Kathleen. 'I wrote it for you and if you don't act it we shall have to get an actress from London to take the part', which eventually he did, with no marked success.⁴

The dedication of 1892 went even further: '...To My Friend, Miss Maud Gonne, At whose Suggestion It was Planned out and Begun...' The statement, though, conflicts with an earlier one, made in another letter to John O'Leary on 1 February 1889, perhaps even before Yeats had met Maud Gonne, that he had 'long been intending to write [a poetic drama with a view to the stage] founded on the tale of "Countess Kathleen O'Shea" in the folk lore book'.⁵

The difficulty about accepting Henn's or Hone's or Yeats's own interpretations (whether of 1891 or 1938) simply as they stand is that none of the versions of *The Countess Cathleen* offers us a protagonist whose selling of her soul can possibly be interpreted as self-destruction through fanaticism or hate; nor can the Countess's bargain, in its context, easily be read as a symbol of the loss of peace and fineness through political activity. Whatever the part played by 'personal thought and feeling', as developed in Yeats's relation to Maud Gonne, in *The Countess Cathleen*, it was much less forthright than 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' suggests and much more gradually infiltrated into successive versions than the story of the play's origin between 1889 and 1891 at first sight implies. Had the play resembled its description in the poem more closely it might have proved a more powerful and lasting work. Had the 'personal thought and feeling' been accorded franker recognition in the text from the beginning, instead of gaining admission to it by stages, it might have

¹ Henn, *The Lonely Tower* (1950), p. 24.

² J. M. Hone, *W. B. Yeats 1865-1939* (1942), pp. 87-8.

³ *Letters*, ed. Wade, p. 125.

⁴ Maud Gonne, *A Servant of the Queen* (Dublin, 1950 ed.), p. 169. This was in 1891, according to Maud Gonne.

⁵ *Letters*, p. 108.

been an altogether better piece of architecture. And the 'soul-making' Yeats of the later period may well have permitted his repugnance at the idea of anyone's actually giving her soul away 'under any circumstances' to blind him to what he had written.

II

A comparison of the 1892 version with its source makes some things clear. Yeats adopts most of its details with some significant changes of direction: the appearance of the demon-merchants in a poverty-stricken land, their ostentatious display of wealth, Ketty O'Donnor's decision to save the peasants by selling all her treasure, and the consequent frustration of the demons, who decide, therefore, to rob her:

Aidés par un valet infâme, ils pénétrèrent dans la retraite de la noble dame et lui dérobèrent le reste de son trésor. . . en vain lutta-t-elle de toutes ses forces pour sauver le contenu de son coffre, les larrons diaboliques furent les plus forts. Si Ketty avait eu les moyens de faire un signe de croix, ajoute la légende irlandaise, elle les eût mis en fuite, mais ses mains étaient captives — Le larcin fut effectué.¹

The Countess has no resource left but to sell her own soul for the highest price she can get.

The powerful and self-consistent structure of this fable is present in Yeats's play but the weight of scene and incident rests only lightly upon it. Thus, the passage which has just been quoted seems to provide an obvious opportunity for a dramatist. Even if the rendering of the conflict with the demons as the physical struggle implied in the source might have appeared too external a way of treating it, the plot seems to call here for some surge of the protagonist's will against demonic outrage. Instead, the Countess remains passively in her oratory while the merchants rob her treasure-house, nor does she discover her loss and their identity until after they have left the scene. The robbery scene itself, as preserved through several rewritings until it is virtually eliminated after 1912, is an elaborate affair during which the water-spirits and lost souls (sheogues, tevishies, and sowlths—there are variant spellings) carry away the bags of treasure under the compulsion of the demons. That this kind of thing should be substituted for the more direct encounter with the Countess (and that that suggestive figure the 'valet infâme' should disappear altogether) is in part a concession to Yeats's desire to make his drama 'in all things Celtic and Irish'. This was undoubtedly one of the factors that influenced his treatment of his source.

But, perhaps more important, the Countess's altered role here points directly at an element in the play for which Yeats had no warrant in his source. The original story stresses conflict between the saint and the demonic powers. It was open to Yeats to dramatize this as an outward and inward struggle in and for the soul and body of his protagonist, and in particular to represent her final decision to sacrifice her soul as the outcome of a profound and agonizing *προαίρεσις*. This is what the critics of the play were dismayed to find largely missing from it. Yeats must have known what was said by the first man to write a book about him, who affirmed in 1904, with (presumably) the version of 1901 in mind, that there was

no obstinate struggle of opposing notions in the soul of Cathleen herself, and no stirring dramatic conflict between the forces of good and evil. . . . The dramatic knot is tied and untied in the simplest way. . . . the climax scene is not made the most of dramatically.²

¹ *Plays and Controversies*, p. 287.

² H. S. Krans, *W. B. Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival* (New York, 1904), p. 142. Cf. E. A. Boyd, *Ireland's Literary Renaissance* (1923 ed.), pp. 146–7.

But this criticism misses the point in so far as it fails to observe how Yeats was deliberately reshaping his material. For his Countess the interior conflict is not between the need to sacrifice and the desire to save her soul; her trouble begins at an earlier stage. It has to do with the war between dreams and responsibility, between the land of pagan images of Fergus and Adene, Usheen, young Neave and the Fenians on one side and the 'burden of the world's wrongs', the famine, and the starving peasantry on the other. It is in this sense that *The Countess Cathleen* is a 'counter-truth' to *The Wanderings of Oisín*. In that poem Oisín finally chooses the Fenians and rejects St Patrick; in the play the Countess reverses this choice. In the 1892 version her reluctance to do this is rendered in Scene ii:

O, I am sadder than an old air, Oona,
My heart is longing for a deeper peace
Than Fergus found amid his brazen cars:
Would that like Adene my first forebear's daughter
Who followed once a twilight piercing tune,
I could go down and dwell among the Shee
In their old ever-busy honeyed land.

But her peace is interrupted three times: by the Gardener with his news of pillaged orchards, by the Herdsman with his news of stolen sheep, and finally by the peasants with their news of the Mephistophelean bargaining. When once her peace has been destroyed by this last manifest claim for succour, such 'struggle of opposing notions' as is allowed for by the design is over. Her charity takes a plain course and surmounts the ultimate test of it; we hear no more about that in herself which alone could have made it falter—the longing for, in Oona's words in the 1895 version, 'a soft cradle of old tales, And songs, and music'. The dramatist interprets his task, after her first and last renunciation has been made, as simply to render as veraciously and spiritedly as possible the tale of the demon-merchants and how they are finally cheated of the Countess's soul.

This is unexpected, but it has a pace and logic of its own. It is the element in the play which is most easily to be identified with the 'personal thought and feeling' mentioned in the 1892 Preface. Flight into the artifice of dream 'under quiet boughs apart' is a constant theme of the lyrics in the volumes of 1889 and 1892. There is little reason to suppose that the first version of *Cathleen* would have been any different had Yeats and Maud Gonne never met. For what the Countess there embodies is thematic material which had already found expression in the lyrics. If she is to be identified with anyone it is with those fictive voices rather than with a living woman.

But with later versions it is another matter. Yeats had begun by introducing an emphasis alien to his source and by refusing suggestions that might have appealed to a dramatist less concerned with the personal and the subtle. It was this remaking of the 'conflict between the forces of good and evil' into a hinted choice between dreams and responsibility that was to grow progressively into a much more elaborate structure. It changed and expanded until it can fairly be said that some symbolic adumbration of Yeats's notions about Maud Gonne and about beautiful women who betray themselves by climbing on wagonettes to scream can, by the eye of faith, be discerned in it. It can at least be said that the Countess, who began as a *persona*, in some degree, of Yeats himself, began to look much more like a heroic mask modelled from Maud Gonne's noble lineaments. But for the critic of the play this is not the

primary issue: his task is rather to decide whether the new growth did not mortally injure the old tale. Its roots begin to intercalate the old foundation, as a tree grows upon a ruin. Did the foundations, already rendered dramatically less robust than they might have been, simply crack, and bring themselves and their parasite down in mutual disorder?

III

It should immediately be premissed that the new element, as it expanded, did not merely amount to Yeats's yielding to an appetite for what bore upon 'personal thought and feeling' without regard for his structure as a whole and for the needs of the theatre as he came to understand them better. The changes in 1895, indeed, relate as much to the attempt to devise a better final scene and a more sequential narrative as to any further emphasis on the 'personal' element.

The entry of the Countess, Aleel, and the Musicians in Act I was written into the 1895 version and this episode was retained in all subsequent versions, although it was entirely redrafted along with the rest of the Act in 1912. While it does not tell us very much about the new characters, and while the necessity it imposes upon the Countess to call on one of her cottagers in order to find the way to her own Castle is a trifle grotesque, the episode can be justified on two levels. The difference between these levels gives the measure of the curious economies practised by Yeats in the work of revision. On one level, the entry of the Countess and her crowd of 'fantastically dressed musicians' into the hunger-bitten cottage, her charity (ineffective), and Aleel's lyrical insouciance, as well as the whole pictorial stage-contrast between real rags and gorgeous livery, foreshadow the alternative ways that later offer themselves to the Countess: retreat into the artifice of fable or acknowledgement of a land where people die of hunger, their mouths 'green with dock and dandelion'. Here is an early example of the counter-truth module which Yeats never wearied of using. On another level, it must have seemed a theatrical advantage to introduce the Countess at an earlier stage than the opening of the second Act. This risked breaking up the action that, in the 1892 version, leads straight from starvation-induced despair to the entry of the demon-merchants: a parable, complete in itself, about the irruption of supernatural evil into the heart and hearth. But Yeats apparently preferred to interweave his first and second Acts more efficiently at the cost of losing some sharpness of effect within the first Act itself. This cannot have been his only motive for the alteration. For this new episode is also related to the new ending of the 1895 version of the play.

Scene v in 1892 concludes with Oona's vision of the angelic spirits. In 1895 this was transformed into the far more elaborate war-in-heaven and apotheosis, and these are mediated to us not by Oona but by Aleel. As the 1895 version stands, the only previous appearance of Aleel before the last Act was in the new episode of the first Act. His place there is justified because it would never have done for Aleel to be introduced to us for the first time at the end of the play, because curiosity about this new personage would have deflected our attention from the visionary scenes of which he now becomes the agent and interpreter. As, in versions after 1895, the part of Aleel is expanded still further and he appears in more and more scenes, this argument in defence of the new episode in Act I becomes much less cogent. By 1901 we have already seen quite enough of Aleel in the earlier part of the play to accept him as the visionary of the last Act without wondering how he comes to be there at all or who

he is. Yeats could have afforded, so far as the coherence of his narrative was in question, to eliminate in later versions the new episode in Act I and give back to the Act the driving unity and sinister logic that make the 1892 version of it structurally better than any of the later ones. This is an example of a feature which seems at one stage of the revision to be acceptable and necessary, but at another to become, in the course of the play's evolution, something that we could do without.

The new ending of 1895 was, apart from a few minor changes, retained in all subsequent versions. In so far as it gratifies expectation by giving the Countess a death-bed and not just a funeral, it is undoubtedly more effective than the final scene was in the 1892 version. But in lyrical elaboration, mythological allusions, and scenic effects it far surpasses anything in that earliest version, and moves away from simplicity and 'masculinity'. Just as does the new episode in Act I, with its pictorial contrast between rags and splendour, so this scene, with its knightly angels 'as impossibly tall as one of those figures at Chartres Cathedral',¹ reminds us of Arthur Symons's belief, shared at this time by Yeats,² that

if we take drama with any seriousness, as an art as well as an improvisation, we shall realize that one of its main requirements is that it should make pictures.³

All this proved too much for the stage at Yeats's disposal. For the revival of 1911 he was forced to produce something less elaborate.⁴ And although Lennox Robinson thought well of it,⁵ the result seems timid and constrained, simplified rather than simple, and marked by vulgar concessions, such as the substitution of Belial for Balor. Yeats did not print this more practical solution in his text, but relegated it to an appendix. Why did he not go back, at least for theatrical purposes, to the version of 1892? It has certain virtues, even though the speeches of the Angel about the Countess's acceptance into heaven have not yet attained their classic form. There is much to be said, so far as dramatic suggestion goes, for the way Oona finds the owl-feathers of the demons scattered upon the steps of the oratory:

some bird
Some hawk or kestrel, chased its prey to this.

This conveys, with pleasing economy, the war of demon and angel which, in the later versions, Aleel's speeches insist upon with something of the 'strained lyricism' that Yeats found so objectionable in Morris. But in 1911 Yeats could not go back to the 1892 version and to Oona's vision because by then Aleel had become too important in the body of the play for him not to have his place at the end of it. Here again the expansion of one element in the course of the revisions has to some extent tied Yeats's hands as a theatrical craftsman and forced him to write for the stage something he could not bring himself to print in the received text. The writing of a 'stage version' and a 'reading version' was a solution Yeats adopted on other occasions as well; but in this case it amounts to little less than a desperate admission of failure as a dramatic poet.

The enlargement of Aleel's role is of course the most striking feature common to all the revised versions. In 1892 he makes (under the name Kevin) a momentary

¹ They were suggested by an (unidentified) French drawing: see *Pages from a Diary Written in 1930* (Dublin, 1944), p. 19.

² *Poems* (1912 ed.), p. vi.

³ Symons, *Plays, Acting and Music* (1909 ed.), p. 167.

⁴ This alternative version was first printed in *Poems* (1912 ed.), pp. 315-19.

⁵ Robinson, 'The Man and the Dramatist' in *Scattering Branches*, ed. S. Gwynn (1940), p. 87.

appearance in Scene iv, and tries to sell his soul to the merchants, and, a little later in the scene, he tries to prevent the Countess selling hers:

You shall yet know the love of some great chief,
And children gathering round your knees. Leave you
The peasants to the builder of the heavens.

Out of these hints Yeats gradually developed the part. He added his entry with Cathleen in Act I and his vision in Act III (1895), the love-scene with Cathleen in Act III (1901), another similar scene in Scene iii (1912), until eventually in the final version there is no single scene of the five in which he does not appear. Aleel is the chief means through which the element of 'personal thought and feeling' achieves progressively fuller expression. What was in the versions of 1892 and 1895 simply the Countess's vain longing for a peace breathed forth by Oona's tales of 'the Danaan nations in their raths' becomes in the third version objectified in the relation with Aleel. As poet, dreamer, and lover, urging her retirement to the Druid forest, to the subjective life of peaceful beauty away from the objective life of self-sacrifice and war, Aleel has many links with Yeats's later verse. The invention and development of Aleel's and Cathleen's duologue is Yeats's way of contriving a more theatrical method for representing the old quarrel between St Patrick and the Fenians, or 'dreaming' and 'grey Truth'.

In expanding this element Yeats was doing no more than submit to the logical consequences of his first departure from his source. Already, when the Countess listens to Oona's tales and songs, the possibility of a choice between dream and action, self-absorption and self-sacrifice, her own 'good' and her own 'evil', is hinted at. The scheme of the play, which shows her final sacrifice as an act of uncomplicated exaltation, seems to suggest that once she has made the sacrifice of the self entailed upon her by taking action at all, all other sacrifices, even the surrender of her soul, unresistedly ensue. In the revisions of 1901 and 1912 Yeats was moving nearer and nearer to a pattern of this kind.

Thus it is significant that nowhere in the revision does he attempt to lay any greater emphasis than he had in 1892 on what in the source is the natural dramatic climax of the fable: Cathleen's offer of her soul. And Aleel himself finally becomes, in the last version, a complete and successful symbol of the subjective life, messenger of Aedh and Aengus, bearer of the 'unchristened heart'. From the moment when he is first heard of wandering and singing on the border of the woods 'wrapped up in dreams of terrors to come' until his last vision of Cathleen's transfiguration 'smitten of God' he serves to convey more richly than anything in the 1892 and 1895 versions what was written in the Yeatsian 'books of numberless dreams'. The Aleel scenes, also, by the kind of contrast they make with the rest of the play, help to outline this pattern. The love-scene in Act III (added in 1901) and the episode before the Castle in Scene ii (added in 1912), like the passages for Oona and Cathleen which it replaces, are slow-paced, lyrical, and evocatively full of pagan imagery. They turn aside, indeed, 'at the lure of word and metaphor' because such turning-aside is appropriate to Aleel's role as the poet who repudiates the 'day's war' with the demons and 'all things uncomely and broken'.¹ The scenes strive to be timeless moments of suspended action:

I thought to have kept her from remembering
The evil of the time for full ten minutes.

¹ 'The Lover Tells of the Rose in his Heart', *Collected Poems* (1950), p. 62.

Each is deliberately juxtaposed to other scenes that rapidly forward the perturbations of the play as it advances towards the demonic bargain: the arrival of Teig and Shemus with their gold, which moves the Countess to expend her treasure for the salvation of her people; and the robbery, leading to the Countess's 'stern resolve' and farewell to her hope of heaven. Christian images are plentifully scattered here. These contrasts of time's speed with time's suspension, of lyrical meditation with dramatic event, and of mythology with piety actualize Cathleen's two worlds and underline in a substantially theatrical way the opposition between them.

But, although Yeats makes us alive to this pattern of counter-truths, it does not achieve full expression because Cathleen's character is not sufficiently modified to accord with it. The place where the divergent truths might have come to life remains unfilled. No struggle between self and soul, subjective and objective, in the single personality occurs. In the scene with Aleel the Countess has little to do except to bring out *his* symbolic status. It is a story and a sorrow which do not touch her except with pity. It is never admitted to her imagination as a temptation which, by awakening a response in the depths of her own nature, can weaken her resolve or make her actions in other episodes appear the issue of the soul's triumph over the self. We do not see in her what Yeats called 'the two halves of the soul separate and face to face'.¹ Yet the theme, as Yeats's later treatments of it show, requires for its completion some such objectification in crisis, where Artist and Saint confront each other, either as two antithetical personages or as two contrary elements in the same personality. The difficulty which Yeats failed to master was that his fable cast Cathleen for the Saint's role only. When he rejected the opportunity which the story offered him of making the issues divide between a lesser, selfish piety and a sainthood which gives 'not as the world giveth' Yeats failed to impose his own more personal interpretation of the protagonist's role, and so, as it were, missed both his chances. As Saint and *dévoté* Cathleen seems too ready-made and too low-tempered. As Yeatsian Self and Soul she hardly begins to exist, although, in the versions from 1901 onwards, this antithesis is sufficiently present elsewhere in the play to make us uncomfortably aware of what is missing in the protagonist. The revisions injured the play, but make it more interesting as a forerunner of later work.

The answer to the question asked earlier in this paper is therefore unexpected. The foundations in the fable, even though they were weakened by Yeats's refusal for the sake of the expression of 'personal thought and feeling' to seize all the dramatic chances offered by his story, proved too strong and too logical to admit Yeats's progressive redesigning of them. The tree that plants its roots amongst them did not grow very tall, and its stunted condition rather piteously suggests what it might have been.

Elsewhere in the last two revisions Yeats's object was to tighten rather than to expand his construction. The most striking example of this is what happens to the robbery scene from the going-out of the Countess until her re-entry to discourse with the merchants. In the first three versions this is very elaborately rendered and filled with Celtic colour and local pieties, such as the story of how the demons killed the good priest but could not entrap his soul. It dwells much also upon the nature and ambience of the demons themselves. In 1912 the scene, which had constantly attracted a good deal of minor tinkering, was completely rewritten in a much compressed form, with only one set of servant-spirits. They are now supplied with lyric chants of a vapidly astonishing at this stage of Yeats's development. In the final

¹ *Plays and Controversies*, p. 218.

version this rewriting was scrapped, leaving only half-a-dozen lines and a few stage directions.

Yeats judged soundly in other ways too. The complete redaction of Scenes i and ii, accomplished in 1912, while it scarcely alters a single one of the old incidents and retains (with the exception of the new scene for Cathleen and Aleel in Scene ii) the episodes in their old order, makes both scenes both tougher and faster. Scene ii, for example, had remained virtually unaltered since 1892, except for minor adjustments and the rewriting of two or three lines here and there. When he rewrote it Yeats adopted a less formalistic way of showing how things happen, economized on characters, and improved narrative articulation. Thus it is Teig and Shemus, characters already introduced in the first Act, and not a couple of anonymous peasants, who convince Cathleen of the true nature of the evil that is abroad by showing her their infernal gold. An anxious steward brings news of the thieving and disorder in the demesne, whereas in the previous versions a Gardener and a Herdsman occupy two long passages by somewhat repetitiously conveying the same point. Similar adjustments, on a smaller scale, are found elsewhere, such as the passage added in 1912 preceding the Countess's entry in Scene v, when the peasants are panicked by the old woman's scream of hellish pain and try to revoke their bargains. This adds spirit and movement to the moment of Cathleen's arrival, which is slack and undramatic in earlier versions.

Throughout the revision Yeats sedulously watches out for the worst archaisms in modes of address and speech, gradually eliminates the more self-conscious spots of local colour and the weaker and more automatic lapses into Jacobean rhythms. Much of this work, in those parts of the play which were not completely rewritten in the last two versions, had already been done by 1895. Especially in the last scene the more famous speeches had by then attained a form with which Yeats was apparently reluctant to meddle. Yet he did sometimes do so, and in making them swifter and sparer eliminated some beauty as well as some nonsense. This is the first form of a well-known passage:

First Merchant. Five hundred thousand crowns; we give the price,
 The gold is here: the spirits, while you speak,
 Begin to labour upward, for your face
 Sheds a great light on them and fills their hearts
 With those unveilings of the fickle light,
 Whereby our heavy labours have been marred
 Since first His spirit moved upon the deeps
 And stole them from us; even before this day
 The souls were but half ours, for your bright eyes
 Had pierced them through and robbed them of content.
 But you must sign, for we do all in order
 In buying such a soul. Sign with this quill;
 It was a feather growing on the cock
 That crowed when Peter had denied his Master.
 'Tis a great honour thus to write with it.

In 1895 the end of this speech, which was otherwise untouched, attained the classic form which caused such concern to Dublin defenders of the papal honour:

But you must sign, for we omit no form
 In buying a soul like yours; sign with this quill;
 It was a feather growing on the cock
 That crowed when Peter dared deny his Master,
 And all who use it have great honour in hell.

But the last version of all reads:

First Merchant. Five hundred thousand crowns; we give the price.
 The gold is here; the souls even while you speak
 Have slipped out of our bond, because your face
 Has shed a light on them and filled their hearts.
 But you must sign, for we omit no form
 In buying a soul like yours.
Second Merchant. Sign with this quill.
 It was a feather growing on the cock
 That crowed when Peter dared deny his Master,
 And all who use it have great honour in Hell.

The Fay brothers would have found the last version easier to speak on the stage. A preference for the intermediate version would have to meet the objections that the metaphors about 'light' seem unrelated and that a damned soul could hardly become less damned through being discontented.

These alterations are not of the sort that affect construction or change the kind of play *The Countess Cathleen* is. Throughout the thirty years' history of revision Yeats remained substantially faithful to the design which he had described to John O'Leary. If the play does not quite give us the sense of being 'laboriously constructed scene by scene', it is devised episode by episode. Yeats continued to work with these small units in all his revisions, rehandling them, or intercalating them with fresh ones on the same scale. But these new episodes—especially the two Aleel scenes of 1901 and 1912—are not out of quite the same box as the old ones. They hint at another kind of play, one which consists not of episodes linked together but of a single episode explored in depth. The story of Aleel and Cathleen moves towards such a design, but, because it is rooted in a play conceived as a cumulative succession of episodes, does not achieve it.

Amongst the plays of the Abbey Theatre period there are two which develop these contrasting principles in a specially instructive way. *The King's Threshold* is once more fashioned out of many units but they 'grow, or are wrought, together', in Ben Jonson's phrase, much better. *Deirdre*, on the other hand, is a more perfect example than *The Shadowy Waters* of a play of the other kind, a single episode more exigently explored. *Deirdre*, of all the earlier plays, has most bearing on Yeats's future as a playwright. But the curious history of *The Countess Cathleen* perhaps permitted him to observe that there were, at the least, two kinds of play for him to write, and even, as *The King's Threshold* suggests, that he could have another try at writing both kinds at once.

PETER URE

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE