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The Irish Peasant in the Work of W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

by

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* * * * *

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Introduction

An understanding of the Irish or Celtic Renaissance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century necessitates a study of the literature written about Irish peasants, for one central idea of the Renaissance was the revivication of Irish culture. In their very different ways, W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge, the two most important figures of the Irish Literary Revival, which can be seen as part of the larger Irish Renaissance, were engaged in this revivication. Because of their literary importance, I have chosen to look exclusively at their works rather than undertake a more comprehensive study of other noted writers of the Revival who also wrote about peasants—among them Padraic Colum, Lady Gregory, and Douglas Hyde. Yeats's peasant poems and Synge's plays, as well as their extensive prose works, were instrumental in the creation of a new literature for Ireland written in English. The literary treatment of the peasant played a crucial and controversial role in the emerging sense of Irish national consciousness in the early twentieth century.

One question which must be asked is whether Yeats and Synge, who were both middle-class Protestants, were capable of presenting an accurate picture of peasant life.
Yeats wrote in his *Autobiography* that his happiest childhood days had been spent in Sligo, yet later in his life, his visits to the west of Ireland were brief when compared with his time spent in London and Dublin. Synge loved to walk the roads and fields of Ireland's remote counties and talk with the peasants, yet he lived during most of his adult life in Dublin and Paris. Synge wanted to record the rhythms of the peasants' spoken language and to present dramatically their courage and spirit. Yeats wanted to create new myths for Ireland and to develop an Irish literature which would earn the respect of the world.

Another question to be considered is whether those who live in close contact with nature and who earn their living by working on the land are necessarily more virtuous and clear-sighted, and less materialistic, than those who live in towns and cities. Does their folklore endow the country people with greater insight than even scholars may acquire through disciplined study? The belief that in past ages people were nobler, stronger, more virtuous, and more civilized than the present is an important literary theme often associated with ideas about the virtue of country people's traditional way of life. Yeats and Synge would remind us that if the peasants' culture represented a mystical and virtuous tradition, that culture too has suffered from the degradation of modern times. And yet,
even though their way of life is threatened by the outside world, the country people display courage and the ability to endure.

Yeats's and Synge's different but complementary ways of looking at Irish peasants helped to establish a new sense of cultural and linguistic identity in Ireland by transforming Irish folklore into art and by capturing the rhythms of the Anglo-Irish dialect. Synge was concerned with the peasants of his time, especially those he met in Wicklow, Kerry, and Connemara and on the Aran Islands. Yeats saw the peasants primarily as inheritors of Celtic tradition. Their folklore and legends were essential for the development of a national literature. Different as they were, the motives of these two writers overlap. Synge employs the peasant idiom in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, which is drawn from Irish legend, because he saw the peasants as the descendants of the ancient Celts. Yeats as well as Synge celebrated what he saw as the robustness and spirit of the country people. Both realized the literary potential of the peasant as archetype or poetic mask.

In this study I have examined Synge's six major plays and selections from his prose works on peasant life and culture and some of his writings, both published and unpublished, on art. I have included poems from all periods in Yeats's canon, and looked at passages from his
many essays about Irish folklore and the necessity of the artist to be familiar with the folk culture and ancient literature of his own country. I have excluded Yeats's plays because of their essentially aristocratic viewpoint and Yeats's development of his dramatic characters into types rather than individuals. A longer study of the image of the Irish peasant in Yeats's work might include *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), *Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and *Where There is Nothing* (1902), *The Pot of Broth* (1904), *The Unicorn from the Stars* (1908) *The Hour-Glass* (1914), *A Full Moon in March* (1935), and *Purgatory* (1939), as well as the Cuchulain plays in which peasant characters are renegades or outcasts from society.

Peasant culture was Synge's major theme, and was one of Yeats's major themes. Synge's peasant characters have been more widely written about than Yeats's, but critics have focused on Synge's use of the language and his dramatic technique. Previous works on Yeats and Synge have not studied the use of the peasant as a suitable subject of and audience for art or analyzed the significance of peasant characters in the literature of the emerging Irish nation. Critics have described the landscape of art—the wild countryside of Sligo and the Aran Islands—and Yeats's role in shaping the Irish Free State, but not the
peasant as one of Yeats's poetic masks or the literary implications of the desire to return to the land.

My first chapter provides background on the social, political, and economic situation of Irish peasants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a definition of the term "peasant," and Yeats's and Synge's ideas about bringing to the attention of the urban middle class the native Irish culture and folklore. The second chapter discusses C. G. Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and Yeats's belief that the peasant culture was a repository of ancient wisdom, and Yeats's and Synge's use of the literary convention of the "Noble Savage." The following four chapters discuss Yeats's and Synge's poetic treatment of the peasants--their relationship to nature, which may mean freedom, peace, and virtue or confinement, loneliness, and destruction; the peasant and love, and the influence on Irish literature of the songs of the blind peasant poet Raftery; the peasant as vagrant and exile, as prophet, seer, or hermit, as poetic device to convey the poet's philosophy as contrasted with the convention of the peasant who possesses quaint and homely wisdom; and, finally, the peasant as suitable subject of and audience for poetry.
Chapter One
Irish Peasants and Anglo-Irish Writers

One of the artistic aims of the writers of the Irish Renaissance was to reacquaint the Irish people with their lost culture, to restore to Ireland its sense of national unity through poetry and drama, through themes borrowed from Irish folklore and the ancient heroic stories. Like Carl Gustav Jung, W. B. Yeats believed that the human spirit was part of a collective unconscious, a *Spiritus Mundi* in which the soul was no longer individual, but one with the world. Yeats also believed in the existence of a racial collective unconscious, images from which could be used by poets to inform and enrich the national culture. He wrote:

> Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology, that marries them to rock and hill? We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering for the work's sake what I have called "the applied arts of literature," the association of literature, that is, with music, speech, and dance; and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and day-labourer would accept a common design? 1

Unlike Douglas Hyde, who envisioned Ireland as a nation of Gaelic-speaking peasants, AE, who wanted to transform it into a visionary utopia, and James Connolly, who worked for
a socialist republic, Yeats believed that Ireland could become a land directed by pastoral mythmakers, inspired by images of past nobleness and greatness. Their purpose would be to create a new sense of nationhood in Ireland by drawing from older conventions and creating a new, national art inspired by tradition. He wrote in 1904: "We must grope our way toward a new yet ancient perfection."2

Both Yeats and John Millington Synge despised the modern, industrial world and believed that modern literature was passionless. They saw in the Irish peasantry a primitive aristocracy possessed of the vitality that could restore Ireland's imaginative and spiritual life. Yeats wrote that the peasants were the inheritors of Ireland's cultural memory, and that their rich folklore--ballads and legends, the true beginnings of literature and the arts--could provide symbols for poetry. He felt that a poet should recover through art the ancient, heroic consciousness of the world. Yeats's enchantment with folk literature was inspired by its passion and vitality; he described an idea for a poem which was to have been a dialogue between a "portentous professor" and a "melodious tinker," and which would have conveyed the superiority of the latter through his lively imagination and speech (Letters 307). Synge, on the other hand, valued what he saw as the peasants' lack of self-consciousness and freedom from urban social convention. To him, they were the people who could tell his Dublin audience about its own
country. Both writers used peasant speakers to create a sense of primitive--and hence, universal--emotion, and celebrated what they perceived as the peasant's liveliness and individuality, his relationship to nature, his imagination, his dialect. Synge wrote in *The Aran Islands* that "these men of Inishmaan seemed to be moved by strange archaic sympathies with the world. Their mood accorded itself with wonderful fitness to the suggestions of the day, and their ancient Gaelic seemed so full of divine simplicity that I would have liked to turn the prow to the west and row with them forever."  

For both Yeats and Synge, the countryman or peasant is free from the modern world's corruption and possesses secret wisdom, consciousness of his own cultural identity, and knowledge of nature. In Synge's poetry and drama, the peasant is the tenant farmer of Wicklow, the Aran Islands, or the Congested Districts (Nora and Dan Burke and Patch Darcy of *The Shadow of the Glen*, the characters in *Riders to the Sea* and *The Playboy of the Western World*) or the wandering beggar or tinker (the Tramp in *The Shadow of the Glen*, Martin and Mary Doul of *The Well of the Saints*, and the family in *The Tinker's Wedding*). Yeats further develops the myth: beggars, hermits, wanderers, madmen and madwomen--who are usually country people--are spokesmen for his poetic ideas. Red Hanrahan, important in Yeats's fiction as well as in his poetry, is a peasant "hedge schoolmaster" and wandering
poet; Owen Aherne and Michael Robartes are wandering mystics; Crazy Jane, patterned on a peasant woman of Sligo and a character from a traditional ballad, represents the peasant's practical morality and lusty personality. "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner" was taken from a song Yeats heard from "an old Irishman" (Letters 158), and many of his other poems were suggested to him by popular ballads and songs of the country people (e.g., "The Ballad of Father Gilligan," "An Hour Before Dawn," "Three Songs to the One Burden," "Beggar to Beggar Cried," "Running to Paradise," "The Ballad of the Foxhunter," "The Madness of King Goll," "Down by the Salley Gardens," "The Fiddler of Dooney," "The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland").

Yeats also used peasant characters and idiom to help inspire a sense of Irish national tradition. He wrote in 1890:

There is no great literature without nationality, no great nationality without literature. The first thing needful if an Irish literature more elaborate and intense than our fine but primitive ballads and novels is to come into being is that readers and writers alike should really know the imaginative periods of Irish history. It is not needful that they should understand them with scholars' accuracy, but they should know them with the heart... You can no more have the greater poetry without a nation than religion without symbols. One can only reach out to the universe with a gloved hand--that glove is one's nation, the only thing one knows even a little of. 4

In 1937 he wrote in "A General Introduction for My Work" that he wanted to "cry as all men cried, to laugh as all men
laughed," and that the Young Ireland poets, when they were not writing "mere politics," had the same desire. Yeats respected them because they were not "separated individual men" but "spoke or tried to speak out of a people to a people; behind them stretched the generations." He admired the writers of The Nation not only for their dedication to Irish nationalism but also for their ability to speak to and for the common people. When describing his revision of The Shadowy Waters in 1905, he wrote that "It is full of homely phrases and of the idiom of daily speech. I have made the sailors rough, as sailors should be . . . I believe more strongly every day that the element of strength in poetic language is common idiom, just as the element of strength in poetic construction is common passion" (Letters 462).

Yeats was convinced that in order to create a national literature, Irish writers must be familiar with Irish folklore and legend. To AE he wrote that if they (the poets) would express Ireland they must know the nation's heart: the unleisured class had its ballads and legends, upon which the writers must draw, for they were the beginning of literature and art. He wrote that Irish writers must be national (as opposed to nationalistic) and should write seriously of Irish life, that Ireland was ripe for a national literature and theatre. While folklore-collecting among Irish peasants, described in "A Ballad Singer," he discovered stories about
the "wild oak man in flannel" who could change a pack of cards into a hare and hounds and about Mary Hynes, the peasant girl made famous by blind Raftery's song. To Yeats, nationalism was the servant of art, not the other way round: "Creative work always has a fatherland" (New Island 74).

The treasury of Irish folklore and legend should be collected, translated, and published in order that a new national and artistic consciousness could come into being. According to his own account, Yeats persuaded Synge to believe the same, and to go to the Aran Islands: "I had just come from Aran, and my imagination was full of those grey islands where men must reap with knives because of the stones" (CW II: 63-4).

Synge lived on the islands, and Yeats knew the Irish folk poets and nationalist poets very well. And yet these Anglo-Irish writers had difficulty speaking to the people and being accepted by them. They themselves were sometimes ambivalent toward their own subjects: Yeats wrote that the peasants had great courtesy and yet also referred to them as "serious, reserved, and suspicious" (New Island 91). Synge described his own sense of isolation from the people of Aran:

In some ways these men and women seem strangely far away from me. They have the same emotions that I have, and the animals have, yet I cannot talk to them when there is much to say, more than to the dog that whines beside me in a mountain fog.

There is hardly an hour I am with them that I do not feel the shock of some inconceivable idea, and then again the shock of some vague emotion that is
familiar to them and to me. On some days I feel this island as a perfect home and resting place; on other days I feel that I am a waif among the people (The Aran Islands II, CW II, 113).

The fact is that a wide gulf created by differences in background, education, language, religion, and expectations—in short, by differences in culture—separated W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge from the peasants they chose to write about. They were Anglo-Irish—people of remote English descent in Ireland. Synge was also a member of—and Yeats tried to identify himself with—the Ascendancy, the group of Protestant landowners created by three conquests and land confiscations which prospered in the eighteenth century but whose power diminished in the nineteenth century.

Frank O'Connor, in The Backward Look, explains that the tension between Anglo-Irish writers and their audiences was created by insurmountable differences in culture, that as Protestants they were suspect in the eyes of the natives. Birth did not guarantee "Irishness," writes O'Connor: one qualified on the basis of descent, religion, politics, or a combination of these. However unfair this prejudice was to people whose families had lived in Ireland for generations or to those Protestants who, like Thomas Davis and Charles Stewart Parnell, had abandoned Unionism, the native Irish were (and are) instinctively resentful of those whose ancestors had prospered from repeated conquests of Ireland and exploitation of its native people. This was how the Catholic natives felt, and how many of them still feel.
Furthermore, any attempt by the educated to try to interpret to the people, so lately come from the country, the life of the nation through the lives of country-dwellers was received with some animosity and resentment. The Irish in the early part of the twentieth century were becoming a nation of town-dwellers by choice, not because of industrialism or high wages; the countryside ("beyond the lamps," it was called) to them represented poverty and ignorance. Dublin, writes O'Connor, is the only city in Europe where the town-dweller does not pine for a little plot of land where he can garden and keep hens.

Another native Irishman who criticized the Anglo-Irish writers, Patrick Kavanagh, wrote that one phrase of Joyce was worth all the writing of Synge because Joyce conveyed the real life of the people while Synge romanticized, and thus idealized, a way of life that was devoid of romanticism and idealism. Kavanagh accused Synge of falsifying the story of the peasants' lives by making their suffering seem beautiful; he said that a true peasant woman would never have the imagination to desire the hero, as Pegeen Mike does in The Playboy of the Western World. The entire Irish Renaissance, wrote Kavanagh, was "a thoroughgoing English-bred lie." St. John Ervine, furthermore, called Synge a "faker of peasant speech."?

Daniel Corkery's analysis of Synge's writing is more positive but still distrustful. Corkery, one of the first
critics to assess Synge's contribution to Anglo-Irish literature, described a national literature as one written primarily for its own people: "... every new book in it--no matter what its theme, foreign or native--is referable to their life, and its literary traits to the traits already established in the literature" (2). Where the writer lived was less important than who his chosen audience was; although many Irish writers lived in exile, among them Padraic Colum, John Eglinton, Austin Clarke, James Joyce, James Stephens, Sean O'Casey, George Moore, and Liam O'Flaherty, the typical Irish expatriate continued to find his subject matter in Irish life, and although his audience undeniably included many non-Irish people, his task was to express Ireland to itself. (Corkery excluded Yeats from his list of expatriates because, he wrote, it was Yeats's practice never to spend the whole of any year abroad.) The Colonial writers, on the other hand, (the most notable of whom was Maria Edgeworth), wrote for their kinsfolk in England; their subject was usually the quaintness and inferiority of the native Irish people, described to a public that thought of itself as sophisticated and "normal." All over the world, this "quaintness" was the major theme of Colonial literature written by spiritual exiles. These writers had no chance to express the people of Ireland to themselves because they had no share in the Irish native memory. Thus, the Irish during Colonial rule were without self-expression in literary
form, except for the little-known writers in Irish, because any true Anglo-Irish literature would have been written for the Irish people who could not accept the "insolence" of the Ascendancy mind.

The writers in a "normal" country, Corkery wrote, are "one with what they write of" (13). They endow the mass of people with a new significance. According to Corkery, all that an English child learns buttresses and refines his emotional nature. The literature he reads and the instruction he receives focuses for him the mind of his own people. Later, he seizes all that he reads in it with an English mind; he has a national consciousness by which to estimate its value for him. The Irish child derives no such identity from literature, Corkery wrote in 1931:

No sooner does he begin to use his intellect than what he learns begins to undermine, to weaken, and to harass his emotional nature. For practically all that he reads is in English--what he reads in Irish is not yet worth taking account of. It does not focus the mind of his own people, teaching him the better to look about him, to understand both himself and his surroundings. It focuses instead the life of another people. Instead of sharpening his gaze upon his own neighborhood, his reading distracts it, for he cannot find in these surroundings what his reading has taught him is the matter worth coming on. His surroundings begin to seem unvital. His education, instead of buttressing and refining his emotional nature, teaches him the rather to despise it, inasmuch as it teaches him not to see the surroundings out of which he is sprung, as they are in themselves, but as compared with alien surroundings: his education provides him with an alien medium through which he is henceforth to look at his native land! . . . What happens in the neighborhood of an Irish boy's home--the fair, the hurling match,
the land grabbing, the priesting, the mission, the Mass—he never comes on in literature, that is, in such literature as he is told to respect and learn (15).

Corkery maintains that the work of the Irish Literary Theatre (established by W. B. Yeats, Augusta Gregory, and Edward Martyn) from its beginning to 1922, whether good or bad in itself, was done for Ireland because it made an effort to express Ireland to its own people. J. M. Synge also stood apart from other Ascendancy writers because he lived with the people and because his writings interpreted their lives; nevertheless, his inability to understand their religious consciousness and his Anglo-Irish background separated him from the Irish people.

Corkery describes what he calls the "three great forces" which have made the Irish nation different from the English, set it apart spiritually and culturally: (1) the people's religious consciousness; (2) Irish nationalism; (3) the question of the land. Writers who wish to create a national literature, he contends, must understand that the land in Ireland will figure as prominently in any true Anglo-Irish literature as the freeing of the serfs lay behind Russian literature (22).

Ireland was for centuries a predominantly agricultural country, and its history has been shaped to a large extent by the struggle for the ownership of land. Corkery wrote that Ireland was indeed a "peasant-ridden" country, since
fifty-three percent of its population was engaged in farming or in work related to agriculture (21). By contrast, only six percent of the English population was so employed. Consequently, one significant theme of Irish literature is the peasants' struggle to possess the land they worked (16).

Many Irish writers and politicians envisioned an agricultural society which could be created in Ireland after independence from Great Britain was achieved. In his Saint Patrick's Day speech of 1943, Eamon de Valera, Prime Minister of the Irish Free State, described what he perceived to be the ideal Irish society:

The Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as the basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to things of the spirit—a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the joy of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths and the laughter of comely maidens, whose firesides would be the forums for serene old age. 8

And W. B. Yeats, in many ways de Valera's opposite, being a poet and Protestant, had earlier described his vision of the Irish landscape:

What is this nationality we are trying to preserve, this thing that we are fighting English influence to preserve? It is not merely our pride. It is certainly not any national vanity that stirs us on to activity. If you examine to the root a contest between two peoples, two nations, you will always find that it is really a war between two civilizations, two ideals of life. First of all, we Irish do not desire, like the English, to build up a nation where there shall be a very rich class and a very poor class. Ireland will always be in the main an agricultural country... Wherever men have
tried to imagine a perfect life, they have imagined a place where men plow and sow and reap, not a place where there are great wheels turning and great chimneys vomiting smoke. Ireland will always be a country where men plow and sow and reap... And then Ireland too, as we think, will be a country where not only will the wealth be well distributed but where there will be an imaginative culture and power to understand imaginative and spiritual things distributed among the people.

It has always been this way, Sean O'Faolain wrote in The Irish; looking backward at Irish history and culture rather than forward to some future Utopia, he claims that "The leitmotif of Gaelic society from time immemorial had been the lowing of cattle... Ireland's wealth was for centuries its soft rains, its vast pasturages, those wandering herds." Thus, to Yeats, de Valera, Corkery, and O'Faolain, the people who best represented Ireland's true culture were those who lived and worked on the land.

W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge, who wanted to find some consciousness they could identify as "Irish," and who were unable to accept entirely either the middle or upper classes, considered "real" Ireland to be synonymous with "peasant" Ireland. They wrote that the landscape--Yeats of Clare, Galway, and Sligo, Synge of Wicklow, Connemara, and the Aran Islands--was endowed with imaginative connections, such as customs, personalities, songs, stories, and expressions that gave the locality its character and through which they could express the people's spirit. Yeats described Howth through the lament of its aged crazy woman,
Moll Magee, and Sligo through the local song about the "Sally (willow) gardens" that he claimed an old woman of Ballisodare had sung to him. He thought the ballad was an excellent form to embody the material of this cultural "landscape," for he associated the primitive way of life and of speaking, preserved in ancient ballads, with the universal. Just as Yeats hoped to free himself from contemporary poetic diction by turning to traditional or primitive forms of the language, Synge also looked to the peasants to find a theme for his art. Both created what they believed to be characters who expressed the native people of Ireland to themselves and to the town-dwellers, who, they believed, lacked a sense of Irish cultural unity. Yeats thought that Dublin was inhabited by mercenary shopkeepers who had a habit of betraying their heroes. Synge believed that man was naturally a nomad and that travellers had finer intellectual acuity than town dwellers. Yeats rebelled against the myth of progress and wrote that all that was greatest in literature was based upon legends formed not by individuals but by nations over the centuries. He emphasized the peasants' knowledge of folklore and their embodiment of old ways of life, while Synge celebrated what he called their individuality. Yeats's peasant was a fisherman "wise and simple," dressed in "grey Connemara cloth," who went at dawn to cast his flies; Synge's was the lively, lusty peasant of Wicklow or the west who more closely resembled an aristocrat than a "labourer or
"citizen," as the wild horse more nearly resembles the thoroughbred than the hack or cart-horse (The Aran Islands I, CW II: 66). Both viewed the peasants as a link with the past, the traditional culture which would provide images for literature.

But to many native Irishmen, Yeats's and Synge's peasants more nearly resembled ideals than actualities. Neither the background nor history of the Irish peasant has been simple. One definition of an "Irishman" is that he is republican in politics, Catholic in religion, Gaelic in language and cultural tradition, and peasant in social origin. The term "peasantry" implies an agricultural way of life. The peasant is usually a small-scale producer who possesses simple technology and whose primary livelihood is cultivation of the soil, although fishing and craftsmanship may be included. Peasant communities are characterized by simple technology, subsistence production, low output, narrow range of output, and the importance of family labor. Yet this emphasis on occupation obscures a more important criterion—that is, the peasant society is necessarily defined in relation to a city and did not exist prior to the establishment of preindustrial cities, when settled agriculturalists lost their political and economic autonomy. They ceased to become peasants with the advent of industrialism.
The peasant class forms part of a larger society in that what it produces is subject to the demands and sanctions of power-holders outside its community, usually in an urban location (6). Many writers who analyze peasant societies emphasize structural relationships between village and city, yet the villages are not communities of autonomous small-scale producers but rather "represent the rural expression of large, class-structured, economically complex, pre-industrial civilizations, in which trade and commerce and craft specialization are well-developed, in which money is commonly used, and in which market disposition is the goal for a part of the producer's effort" (5).

Far from being independent villages remote from what may be perceived to be urban corruption, peasant communities rely on the urban culture as the principal source of innovation, motivation, and prestige (5). Peasants, fascinated by the opportunities the city offers, are emotionally dependent on it. Peasant culture requires continual communication with the larger society for religious, economic, and cultural viability. Ironically, it is also the city that is the source of the peasant's helplessness and humiliation: "... the peasant knows he can never really count on a city man" (10). The urban society usually drains the peasant society of its economic surplus (9). Peasants have little control over the conditions that govern their lives; their leadership is normally weak and peasant
revolutions rare (8). Nor is the peasant society artistically creative, although its inventiveness and vigor have been widely praised. On the contrary, the peasant's cultural forms are usually developed through imitation of urban customs. While it is true that artists often look to rural people for inspiration, the direction of influence is not evenly balanced (12).

The Irish peasantry was similarly powerless, dependent to a large extent on a landowning class, and while some writers of the Literary Revival praised what they believed to be the peasants' imaginative and spiritual way of life, the single most important concern of Irish peasants for centuries before independence was land tenure. The struggle for the land had cultural implications, for the landowners were often of one religion and thought to be of an alien nation, while the workers were of another religion and believed to be the native people. These "native" people were descended from Celtic tribes who migrated from central Europe westward and northward, finally into what are now the British Isles and Ireland, as early as the fifth century B.C. and developed a highly stratified, well-integrated tribal society. Their way of life was both pastoral and warlike; they remained a regionalist people up to the completion of the English conquest. This pastoral regionalism was in part responsible for their inability to unite to drive away foreign invaders. So pastoral was their nature, writes
Sean O'Faolain, they never founded a town; the closest they came to it was the establishment of monastic settlements (38). Every Irish town that exists was founded by the Danes, O'Faolain claims, who invaded in the ninth century to establish trading-posts, or the Normans who invaded under Earl Strongbow during the reign of Henry II in the twelfth century. Nor had the Irish any commercial sense or elaborate husbandry. While the Danish invasions had little effect on native life, the Danish and Norman colonists, as well as the Scottish colonists of the seventeenth century, left their character on the people to the present day. Moreover, the population of the Aran Islands was affected by its occupation for over a hundred years by English soldiers.

In 1885, historian John Beddoe wrote:

We might be disposed, trusting to Irish traditions respecting the islands, to accept these people as representatives of the Firbolg, had not Cromwell, that upsetter of all things Hibernian, left in Aranmore a small English garrison, who subsequently apostatised to Catholicism, intermarried with the natives, and so vitiated the Firbolgian pedigree. 14

The principal effect of the Norman invasions and settlements in Ireland was the introduction of a variation of the English feudal system in which landowning families let out to tenants the land they themselves did not use in return for payment or services.

There were few viable settlements, however, until the time of Elizabeth I. The organized, long-term plantation of Ulster by lowland Scots took place during the reign of
James I in the early seventeenth century. The occupation of the country was complete with Cromwell's land seizure in the mid-seventeenth century, although the settlement of land under Cromwell never approached the thoroughness of the earlier Ulster planters. The Cromwellian settlement was not so much a plantation as a transference of the sources of wealth and power—that is, the ownership of land—from Catholics to Protestants. Not a Protestant community, but a Protestant upper class, was created; the ownership of land changed, but the people who lived on it and worked it did not. To those who were farmers by profession, the usurpation of the land was more than an economic loss; it was dispossession. Therefore, one of the central questions of Irish history, and of the literature of Ireland, is the Land Question—who lives on it as opposed to who owns it. In the Jacobite War of 1690-91, when ancient Irish and Anglo-Norman Catholics, despite their previous feuds, combined against the new Cromwellian Protestant colonists, the Irishmen fought for James II because of a desire to get back the lands of which they had been deprived. Religion or personal loyalty to James had little to do with their fight.\(^5\)

Thus the struggle for land in Ireland was not only economic but also cultural, and the ownership of the land and the people's identification with locality has been a crucial element in economic, social, political, and cultural
change. The universal problem faced by members of the rural population—that of getting and keeping the land—became steadily more serious in the years after the Napoleonic Wars as a result of overpopulation and the deterioration of the Irish economy. But the nature of the struggle is complicated and does not take the form of simple dichotomy between Protestants and Catholics. Violence in the rural areas did not represent a collective assault by Irish "native" peasantry on the landowning class. Beginning in the 1700's, the number of middlemen increased who were not Protestant gentlemen but large farmers, many of whom were Catholic. Much agrarian violence resulted from the struggle by small farmers and laborers against large farmers, permeating the social classes and affecting not only relations between large Protestant landlords and their tenants but also those between small holders and graziers, farmers and laborers. There was a cleavage between owners and cultivators in prefamine Ireland, and among those within the farming class itself.

If relations between Protestant landowners and tenants were strained, those between Catholic farmers and Catholic laborers were also strained, farmers often being accused of unfair practices, such as withholding wages, seizing property, or refusing to maintain the land they let. There were differences in attitudes toward pasture-farming, because while grazing was preferred by large farmers as long as
market conditions encouraged grassland produce, greater rural population meant that additional land would be needed for tillage. Therefore, widespread hostility developed among the poor against grazing and consequently against farmers who specialized in grazing (38). Hostility against the system increased during the Famine and continued after it because graziers, both Catholic and Protestant, had benefited from the clearances and destruction of the peasant community. Even the nationalist movements were affected by conflicts among members of the rural population, their leaders not always siding with the poorer tenant farmers. Still, the Land Question was perceived by the urban population in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Ireland as a struggle largely between wealthy Protestant owners and poor Catholic peasants.

Anglo-Irish writers who wished to write about, even identify with, that other, "native" Ireland, had a very wide chasm to cross, a vast ravine of suspicion, mistrust, even hatred. The opposition to The Countess Cathleen and Synge's plays demonstrated that people felt that their institutions were being held up to ridicule; in addition, many natives did not like Ireland's representation as an overwhelmingly rural or peasant society, because new town-dwellers did not want to be reminded of rural poverty. The Anglo-Irish writers celebrated the wildness and savagery of the native Irish, so close to what the English chose as
the major denigrating feature in their image of the Irish. The Playboy celebrates the successful liberation by violence of an oppressed victim from domination of paternalistic tyranny, yet to Synge's Dublin audience, Christy Mahon was another depiction of the irresponsible, violent, irreverent Irish Catholic peasant.

The protest against The Playboy reflected religious and nationalistic sentiment in a period of national revival and stemmed from the memory of an alien Ascendancy's callous treatment:

The fault (for the riots) lies not in the native Ireland but in Ascendancy Ireland, which played the game of literature not for its own eyes, such as they have been and are, but for English eyes, not expressing Ireland to itself but exploiting it for others. Had Ascendancy Ireland treated native Ireland fairly in literature . . . The Playboy, instead of being greeted with outcry and passion, would have been taken for what it was worth . . . It may be that he [Synge] expected a Dublin audience to look at the spectacle of the play as a purely folk audience in the West, self-contained and not conscious that their neighbor in the next seat was English-eyed, might conceivably have done, for Synge was simple about many things, and was amorous of the honest insensibility of the folk consciousness (Corkery 183).

The Irish audience greeted his play with anger and indignation because they saw him as an Anglo-Irishman exploiting English stereotypes of Ireland.

Synge did not emphasize the Irish peasants' fierce fight in the struggle for land, but he did present the loneliness and tribulation in their personal lives. Denying the stereotype of the reckless, careless Irishman, he wrote that the
danger of the life on the islands made it impossible for the clumsy or foolhardy to survive there (The Aran Islands I, CW II: 94); and of the western "Congested Districts" he wrote, "... the talk sometimes heard of sloth and ignorance has not much foundation" (CW II: 340). He described the "throb of pain" that he felt when he saw the constabulary arrive on Inishmaan to evict tenants who had occupied the same land for thirty years. His glimpse of what he calls the newer types of humanity was not reassuring, "Yet these mechanical police, with the commonplace agents and sheriffs, and the rabble they had hired, represented aptly enough the civilisation for which the homes of the island were to be desecrated" (The Aran Islands I, CW II: 89). The evicted tenants were the victims of anonymous owners and police who looked like helmetted automatons.

Synge was aware of the discrepancies in land holdings and wealth among the rural population. Dan Burke, Michael Dara, and Patch Darcy of The Shadow of the Glen are small tenant farmers of the southeast, or perhaps small independent holders. The economic divisions between the self-supporting landholder and those poor who held no land are represented in the Tramp's referring to Nora as "lady of the house" and Nora's own confession that in order to provide for herself in her old age and not fall victim to the fate of homeless Peggy Cavanagh, she had felt the need to marry a man "with a bit of a farm, and cows on it, and sheep on the back hills"
(CW III: 49). Timmy the Smith and Molly Byrne of The Well of the Saints are rural tradespeople able to support themselves independently as long as the local farmers require their services; Martin and Mary Doul are the destitute, landless poor. The rift between Timmy and Martin is that between poor peasants struggling to survive in harsh times. Old Mahon in The Playboy of the Western World is a western peasant farmer eager to increase his holding by marrying his son Christy to a widow with a farm. Not their economic or political struggle but their desire for freedom, love, and beauty are Synge's concern.

Just as Synge drew his characters from people he knew in Wicklow and the Aran Islands, W. B. Yeats created peasant speakers from the peasants of Sligo and Galway. "The Meditation of the Old Fisherman" was founded (Yeats claimed) upon a conversation with a fisherman in Sligo Bay, and "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner," a protest against old age and passing time, was little more than a translation into verse of the words of an old Wicklow peasant (Poems 621). In "The Ballad of Father O'Hart" he describes a story about land-grabbing during the Penal Days (1695-1727) by an ambitious farmer, a "shoneen" or upstart imitator of the gentry from a race of "sleiveens" (rogues) who swindles a learned, holy man out of his lands (Poems 617-18).

Although Yeats idealizes the peasants' way of life in poems like "Shepherd and Goatherd," "The Song of the Happy
Shepherd," and "The Sad Shepherd," more often his peasant speakers complain of their hard way of life. Moll Magee, Crazy Jane, and Red Hanrahan suffer loneliness, ostracism, and misunderstanding. The "cursing rogue" of "An Hour Before Dawn," on the other hand, loves life even though he is reduced to sleeping outdoors, wearing rags, and stealing food. Between these two states of sadness and exultation are peasants like Robartes and Aherne who bring their mystical knowledge to the hard-working poet. Yeats knows that the ideal countryman is nonexistent: his mythical fly-fisherman, the most perfect audience for poetry, is "A man who does not exist,/ A man who is but a dream" (Poems 149).

Those who accused Synge of being anti-Irish did not understand that the countryside of his plays is a reflection of the larger world. The people are destroyed by greed, selfishness, disloyalty, impatience, and lust, and are inspired by love, hope, and joy. The world they live in is harsh: careless children ignore the advice of a wise older woman; a man sends his wife out onto the roads; blind people are destined to drown in the rivers of the south because they are driven from their own locality; tinkers camped beside the road must live by their wits; young men and women are forced by circumstances into unhappy marriage. They also triumph: Christy Mahon frees himself from a tyrannical father; Nora escapes her unloving husband; the Douls are able to pursue their vision of beauty; the
tinkers defeat a materialistic priest; Maurya is liberated from the destruction of the sea; Deirdre loses everything but escapes Conchubor, knowing her story will become a legend. Through their adversity Synge presents the nobility and the tribulations which they share with the rest of the world.
Chapter Two
The Peasant as Noble Savage

Michael Davitt's founding the Land League in 1879 was an important Irish attempt not only to return ownership of the land to the peasantry but also to mythologize the past. The League organized the peasants' political strength, provided an ideology, and prepared the way for the transformation of the peasant by the writers of the Literary Revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The political mythmakers created the idea that Celtic Ireland had been a nation of free landowners dispossessed by English settlers. However, as Sean O'Faolain points out, the first people to express concern over tenants' "rights" were in fact English; the ancient Celtic landowning families probably had few notions about equality:

At no time, however, do we form any intimate picture of the life of the lower grades, largely because both letters and society were graded upwards to a castle, and both "bards" and "chiefs" had the aristocratic outlook... Not until the sixteenth century does anybody much care what happens to them [the peasants] and then it is not the Irish chiefs but the English chiefs who speak of them, in some pity and consideration (42).

Nevertheless, Land League nationalists asserted not only an ancient claim to the land but also a special virtue on the part of the countrymen whose intimate relationship to the land tied them to Irish history and politics and made them
a symbol for the nation's struggle. Their fight to own the land they worked paralleled the nation's fight for independence. Moreover, their language and folklore united them with Ireland's Celtic history, and their way of life, both rural and traditional, could be described as simple and uncorrupted. Thus, the Land League's idealization of the peasants and its claim for them of an ancient heritage were both aesthetic and political.

Nationalists and Literary Revivalists, both Protestant and Catholic, desired that Ireland become a nation of peasant owners rather than one whose economy was founded on factory systems such as those in Great Britain. The writers of the Irish Literary Revival reacted to centralized industrialism and its attendant "progress," modernity, and commercialism, by idealizing the peasant. The values of tradition, archaism, peace, and communion with nature, which were inherent in--or imposed on--the Irish peasant were held in opposition to those of materialist England. Irish nationalists rejected the English view of the Irish peasant as poor, ignorant, and superstitious, claiming instead that he was unmaterialistic, naturally wise, and spiritual. They reversed the stereotype so that he was no longer the symbol of all that was wrong in ungovernable Ireland. He became instead the embodiment of virtue: he was spiritual rather than materialistic, he belonged to an
ancient race, and he lived in communion with nature. Ironically, the Irish writers who extolled the Irish peasantry in order to attack English bourgeois values acquired their ideas from English romanticism.

The Irish Literary Revival and the activities of the Land League were part of the Celtic Revival, which was an attempt to revive or restore Irish or Gaelic culture to Ireland and thereby to restore national pride and international prestige and which was in turn associated with the movement for independence. The Celtic Revival was nativist in that it constituted a conscious, organized attempt to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of the culture, in this case the Irish language, games, music, dance, and folklore. What usually happens in such movements is that certain elements of the culture are selected for emphasis and given symbolic value. Revived elements of the culture come to symbolize real or imagined freedom, unity, greatness, or happiness in older times, while elements of the culture which have survived become symbols of the culture's uniqueness. Irish nationalists sought to create unity of culture by developing a sense of Irish historical continuity.

Central to the Celtic Revival was a primitivist worldview which included the idealization of earlier Irish society and contemporary folk culture. Primitivist philosophy embraces the idea that civilization is destructive.
Central to the primitivistic position is the belief that civilization has dehumanized man and undermined his valued institutions; it has caused social bonds to disintegrate, fostered immorality, and created mental illness on a vast scale. Primitive and folk peoples, according to this view, represent man as he once was and could be or should be again were civilized society drastically reformed. 3

Chronological primitivism embraces the notion that civilization or human life itself reached or will reach its most sublime condition at a particular time—past, present, or future. 4 Cultural primitivism, on the other hand, finds its origin in discontent with civilization or society; it is the conviction of people in a complex society that life in a simpler society is far more desirable (7) and above all "natural":

The history of primitivism is in great part a phase of a larger historic tendency which is one of the strangest, most potent and most persistent factors in Western thought—the use of the term "nature" to express the standard of human values, the identification of the good with that which is "natural" or "according to nature." The primitive condition of mankind, or the life of "savage" peoples, has usually been extolled because it has been supposed to constitute "the state of nature" (11-12).

The cultural primitivist believes that the way of life he dreams of actually exists or has existed, and that he can identify examples of it (8).

The pastoral ideal stirred the imaginations of others besides Land League members and nationalists. George Moore, a cosmopolitan Irishman more at home in Paris than Dublin, who had severely criticized what he called the idiocy of Irish life, became enamored of the cultural primitivism of
the Literary Revival:

Those who believed that dreams, beauty, and divine ecstasy are essential must pray that all the empires may perish and the world be given back to the small peasant states, whose seas and forests and mountains shall create national aspirations and new gods. Otherwise the world will fall into gross materialism, with scientific barbarism more terrible than the torch and the sword of the Hun... The commercial platitude which has risen up in England, which is extending over the whole world, is horrible to contemplate. Its flag, which Mr. Rhodes has declared to be "the most valuable commercial asset in the world," is everywhere. England has imposed her idea upon all nations, and to girdle the world with Brixton seems to be her ultimate destiny. And we, sitting on the last verge, see into the universal suburb, in which a lean man with glasses on his nose and a black bag in his hand is always running after his bus.

Such righteous zeal also characterized the nationalists' attitudes. Padraic Pearse wrote that the destiny of the Gael was more glorious than that of Rome or of Britain. Ireland, he said, would become "the saviour of idealism in modern intellectual and social life, the regeneration and rejuvenator of the literature of the world, the instructor of nations, the preacher of the gospel of nature-worship, hero-worship, God-worship--such... is the destiny of the Gael" (98). Behind these convictions and the new cult of the peasant was the idealization of the primitive; ancient Gaelic heritage and the Land League ideal of peasant ownership formed the basis for a revival of interest in a national culture.

Yet those who emphasized this revival were in some ways at odds with the League's goal. Many Irish writers,
including W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge, valued the peasant for his supposed lack of materialism, his spiritualism, his ties to the land, his being uncorrupted by the bourgeois mind of the urban centers. The Land League's goal, on the other hand, was to create a nation of peasant owners—a rural bourgeoisie. In Padraic Colum's story "Land Hunger" (1925) Catholic farmers unite against a Protestant grazier, and, by means of cattle-driving, force him to give up his lease and the landowner to sell portions of his estate to the farmers. Colum's story suggests that the Celtic Revivalists' characterization of the peasants was inaccurate. They were potentially an eager bourgeoisie.

While the writers of the Revival were counting up the peasants' virtues, others were more critical. James Joyce described them as "a hard, crafty, matter-of-fact lot." While J. M. Synge's overall impression of the peasants was favorable, he also states that many were "far from admirable, either in body or mind." Acknowledging this to be an obvious fact, he explained that he writes this because it had become the fashion in Dublin "to exalt the Irish peasant into a type of almost absolute virtue, frugal, self-sacrificing, valiant, and I know not what." While there was some truth in this estimate, he continued, and while the peasant possessed many beautiful virtues, among them "a fine sense of humour and the greatest courtesy," his heart was not spotless, nor was he unacquainted with
the deadly sins, even west of the Shannon. The Irish peasant, according to Synge, was neither abject nor servile, in spite of relief-works, commissions, and patronizing philosophy ("The People of the Glens," CW II: 224, fn. 1), nor was he altogether generous or innocent.

The result of land reform, far from the ideal pastoral society of Yeats or of de Valera, was a rural bourgeoisie striving to attain ultimately materialistic goals. The small farmer's problem was to increase the size of his holding and to ensure that the land stayed in the possession of his family. As late as 1937, marriages of convenience were a common way of enlarging a family's holding. While familism and deference to age were crucial factors in shaping the countryman's way of life, late marriage and forced emigration threatened the family and nearly turned Ireland into an old person's country.

Furthermore, the glorification of the past and adherence to old ways reflects the glories of the older people and produces a rivalry between old and young which further threatened the security of the rural population. "The young people is no use," a man reported to J. M. Synge; "I am not as good a man as my father was, and my son is growing up worse than I am" ("In West Kerry," CW II: 250). Another described his disillusion with his changed home-land: "I have come back to live in a bit of a house with
my sister. The island is not the same at all to what it was. It is little good I can get from the people who are in it now, and anything I have to give them they don't care to have" (The Aran Islands I, CW II: 53).

The young seldom agreed with the old on the matter of their shortcomings, and thus the rivalry between father and son could be intimate and constant. Christy Mahon's rebellion, brought on by his tyrannical and ungenerous father in The Playboy of the Western World, characterizes the Irish countryman's dilemma--he depends upon his family and at the same time desires independence. Synge found his plot in a story told by an old man of Inishmaan about a young man who in a fit of passion killed his father with a blow from a spade and fled to the island where he was protected by the people until he could escape. The islanders protected criminals because legal justice was associated with English jurisdiction, but more importantly because of the conviction, universal in the west, that a man will not do wrong unless he is under the influence of a passion "as irresponsible as a storm on the sea" (The Aran Islands I, CW II: 95).

Their impulse may also have been due to understanding the young man's frustration caused by his dependence, well into adulthood, upon a parent.

Still, Synge's vivacious peasants and Yeats's mystical country people of "The Celtic Twilight" were very different from the peasants Arensberg and Colum described. The writers
of the Literary Revival chose to create a vision of Ireland in which those who live and work on the land are more closely in touch with national consciousness than urban dwellers. To Yeats the peasant represented Irish genius because he had not been corrupted by the materialism of modern, urban life. To Synge the peasant was spiritually, if not economically, free, and he should be left alone to live in the traditional way; above all, Synge praised his self-sufficiency. The cult of the Irish peasant as a repository of ancient wisdom and natural virtue found its origins in the English Romantic movement of the nineteenth century, an important aspect of romanticism being the return to nature—the desire to find the spiritual within the natural or to achieve a union of real and unreal, tangible and mysterious. A mood of romantic naturalism from the mid-eighteenth century included the cult of scenery, the child, the peasant, and the savage. The Noble Savage is a free and wild being who draws directly from nature virtues which raise doubts as to the value of civilization itself, because they are virtues which were previously thought to be held only by civilized persons.

The assumption that an idyllic society once existed and can be brought to life again grew out of the fundamental desire to believe that man can return to Eden if he will only abandon materialism and pride. The ideal is the recovery of lost virtue or innocence. The Golden Age, a
related notion, represents belief in a time in which a
culture or society achieved its greatness, perhaps in unity,
influence, or the arts. The relationship between the ideal
of a Golden Age and a Noble Savage stems from rejection of
the notion of "progress" and affirmation of belief in
archaic values. The Golden Age is to the ancient world
what the Noble Savage is to the modern; each represents
a protest against the evil incidental to human progress and
looks yearningly from what is believed to be contemporary
corruption to an imaginary primal innocence. 8

Pastoral literature, among the earliest forms of poetry,
involves the contrast between simple, rural life and some
more complex civilization. 9 Elizabethan England and
eighteenth-century Europe—as well as twentieth-century
America—desired greater simplicity because of dissatisfaction with "sophisticated" ways of life. Sir Philip Sidney
describes such an idyllic country (in The Countess of
Pembroke's Arcadia, 1590) populated by shepherds who live
in scattered houses among fields and who tended orchards
that produce "the most taste-pleasing fruits" and gardens
of "delicate green" with thickets, fair ponds, and beds of
flowers. They are happy people who want little because
they desire little, having in abundance good temper and
natural artistic ability and lacking ambition and materialism. These traits are fostered by a naturally beauti-
ful environment:
This country Arcadia, among all the provinces of Greece, hath ever been had in singular reputation, partly for the sweetness of the air and other natural benefits, but principally for the well-tempered minds of the people, who (finding that the shining title of glory so much affected by other nations doth indeed help little to the happiness of life) are the only people which, as by their justice and providence, give neither cause nor hope to their neighbors to annoy them; so are they not stirred with false praise to trouble others' quiet, thinking it a small reward for the wasting of their own lives in ravening that their posterity should long after say they had done so. Even the muses seem to approve their good determination by choosing this country for their chief repairing-place, and by bestowing their perfections so largely here that the very shepherds have their fancies lifted to so high conceits as the learned of other nations are content both to borrow their names and imitate their cunning. 10

Both the pastoral and the Golden Age are expressions of instincts and impulses which are deep-rooted in the nature of humanity, for human beings can imagine an ideal world and their fancy tells them to believe that the world of their creation actually existed.

The conception of a Golden Age of rustic simplicity, however, does not involve the whole of pastoral literature but rather that pastoral expression of the yearning of the tired soul to escape, even if only in imagination, to a life of simplicity and innocence from the unhappiness and anxiety of the "sophisticated" and ambitious urban world. The romantic sees in the peasant a picture of primitive virtue, which he or she prefers to the studied, cultivated ways of the educated man. But although the romantic may find in the peasant an image much closer to
the "natural man" of his imagination, he may detest the pastoral as ultimately urban and insincere. When Wordsworth subtitles *Michael* "a pastoral," for instance, his use of the term is ironic, for he does not present an idyllic rural life but the story of a real shepherd's struggle to keep his land and family together. The romantic rescues the peasant from his depiction as a happy, unself-conscious shepherd who spends leisurely days singing his own verses, heedless of the future, and transforms him into the Noble Savage who is not without his troubles, which are usually caused by encroaching "civilization."

The Noble Savage who possessed an innate sense of justice and a simple way of life predates romantic and even Elizabethan literature. Rejecting the sophistication and hierarchy of Rome, Tacitus praised the (supposed) self-sufficiency and egalitarianism of the Gauls in *Germania*:

> In every household the children, naked and filthy, grow up with those stout frames and limbs which we so much admire. Every mother suckles her own offspring, and never entrusts it to servants and nurses. The master is not distinguished from the slave by being brought up with greater delicacy. Both live amid the same flocks and lie on the same ground till the freeborn are distinguished by age and recognized by merit. Nor are the maidens hurried into marriage; the same age and a similar stature is required; well-matched and vigorous they wed, and the offspring reproduce the strength of the parents. 11

Furthermore, the innocent primitive was prey for the corrupted, "civilized" intruder. In "Of Coaches," Montaigne wrote that the Indian societies had been contaminated by
European explorers who were in no way superior to the tribes they adversely influenced, were in fact inferior to them as well as to their own ancestors:

I am very much afraid that we have very much precipitated to its declension and ruin by our contagion; and that we have sold it our opinions and our arts at a very dear rate. It was an infant world, and yet we have not whip'd, and subjected it to our discipline, by the advantage of our valour and natural forces; neither have we won it by our justice and goodness, nor subdu'd it by our magnanimity. Most of their answers, and the negotiations we have had with them, witness, that they were nothing behind us in pertinency and clearness of natural understanding . . . But as to what concerns devotion, observance of the laws, bounty, liberality, loyalty, and plain dealing, it was of use to us, that we had not so much as they; for they have lost, sold, and betray'd themselves by this advantage. As to boldness and courage, stability, constancy against pain, hunger and death, I should not fear to oppose the examples I find amongst them, to the most famous examples of elder times, that we find in our records on this side of the world. 12

The "primitive" tribes were more virtuous than Europeans because they were still governed by "natural" laws, Montaigne continues in "Of Cannibals," and laments that Europeans had not discovered them in older, "better" times when European men were more capable of valuing them and justly governing them than were the men of contemporary times (169).

The Noble Savage obtained his knowledge from experience, not from books. Similarly, he possessed a natural religion which he derived from contact with nature rather than from theological teaching. Anchorites who abandoned
civilization in order to worship God in the solitude of nature anticipated the romantic attitude. Nature provided the meeting-ground between man and God, or between man and the spiritual or supernatural, which he could never reach in civilized surroundings. In nature man transcended his preconceived notion about existence and found the spirit of the universe. The English Romantics associated nature with innocent wisdom. For Wordsworth, "One impulse from a vernal wood" carried greater moral impact than the instruction of teachers. In 1798 Coleridge expressed his desire that his child should "wander like a breeze" among lakes and mountains, to "see and hear/ The lonely shapes and sounds intelligible/ Of that eternal language, which thy God/ Utters, who from eternity doth teach/ Himself in all, and all things in himself" ("Frost at Midnight"). Coleridge's lifting the natural up to the supernatural, and Wordworth's finding significance in common things, both derive from the idea that innocence, intuitive wisdom, even the true spirit of poetry lie in primitive simplicity. Shelley wrote that the impulse to create art came from the interaction of mankind with nature, and that the savage ("for the savage is to the ages what the child is to years") expressed emotions produced by his surroundings. Poetry indeed was timeless and universal, being "connate with
the origin of man."^13 Much of Romantic poetry, including the Lyric Ballads, descends from the Noble Savage ideal.

While the Golden Age was based on belief in a glorious time long past, when men had been stronger, braver, and more just than those of contemporary times, the Noble Savage lived on, in remote areas of the known world. He might be tied to the land on which he was born, yet he was free of ambition, anxiety, and dependence on others. His traditional way of life kept him in touch with old values and with nature, and while he lacked amenities, his life was purer than that of the urban dweller, for he was not materialistic or acquisitive. Physical activity made him courageous, strong, naturally handsome. Innocent of the political intricacies that plagued "civilized man," he was unselfconscious, honest, and sincere, yet also accomplished, versatile, and self-sufficient. His spirituality, based on the mythic past, had nothing of pious sentiment. Sharing the sensibilities of the artist, he created natural poetry—songs and stories that told of pure emotion, joy and loss, triumph and tragedy. Yet his way of life was not idyllic, for it was threatened by corrupted "civilization."

Yeats believed that the Celtic ethos, which existed among the Irish peasants, was the enduring basis for unity of Irish culture. Irish Catholicism and folk belief of the west of Ireland held a mystic appeal for Yeats
and enabled him to link folk-belief with theosophy, because, he thought, true Celtic nature was in contact with the occult. The west of Ireland was a place of inarticulate power in which psychic memory was attached to certain areas remote from the "ordinary" (Anglo-Saxon) world. He wrote:

I learned from the people themselves, before I learned it from any book, that they cannot separate the idea of an art or a craft from the idea of a cult with ancient technicalities and mysteries. They can hardly separate mere learning from witchcraft, and are fond of words and verses that keep half their secret to themselves ("What is 'Popular Poetry'?" Essays 10).

They were in touch with the spiritual, mystical world of the ancient Celts because they lacked formal education which would have made them forget the old ways. The unwritten tradition, Yeats maintained, binds the unlettered to the beginning of time and the foundation of the world (6). He thus used folk-belief and mythology, not Catholicism, to create his myth of the spiritual, visionary peasantry.

The peasants' heritage united them with the history of Ireland and the history of the world. Folklore ("natural magic") expressed the world's ancient religion and the worship of nature. Therefore, the peasant's imagination, steeped in fairy lore and legend, offered the richest sources for understanding the past:

Folk-art is, indeed, the oldest of the aristocracies of thought, and because it refuses what is passing and trivial, the merely clever and pretty, as certainly as the vulgar and insincere, and because it has gathered into itself the simplest and most
unforgettable thoughts of the generations, it is the soil where all great art is rooted. Wherever it is spoken by the fireside, or sung by the roadside, or carved upon the lintel, appreciation of the arts that a single mind gives unity and design to, spreads quickly when its hour is come. 15

Like Synge, Yeats believed the peasants to be superior to the urban middle class and free like "unbroken horses, that are so much more beautiful than horses that have learned to run between shafts" (Explorations 10). He praised the "quick intelligence, the abundant imagination, the courtly manners of the Irish country people" (7). By virtue of their mythopoeic imagination, they constituted an ancient and a natural aristocracy. The old stories, if they could be perpetuated, would make Ireland once again a "Holy Land" of the imagination, as it had been before the coming of the Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian civilizations (12-13).

While Yeats created the myth of the Irish peasant possessed of natural virtue and ancient memory, Synge too saw them in a reverent, almost mythic way. He claimed to put aside idealism and to accept the country people as they were:

Adieu, sweet Angus, Maeve and Fand,
Ye plumed yet skinny Shee,
That poets played with hand in hand
To learn their ecstasy.

We'll search in Red Dan Sally's ditch,
And drink in Tubber fair,
Or poach with Red Dan Philly's bitch
Nevertheless, he believed that their traditions and fundamental differences from urban dwellers endowed them with special insight. He felt that they represented a link with past greatness, that their folklore endowed them with wisdom. Synge wrote that both the wildness and vices of the Irish peasants were due, like their good points, to the extraordinary richness of their nature. He recognized both the fragility and the harshness, brutality, and vitality of their way of life, for example in the account of the fight after a horse-race in West Kerry when four men fought on the shore until the tide came in ("In West Kerry," CW II: 275) and the "profuse Gaelic maledictions" of some fishermen to the crew of a steamer which passed too close to their nets (The Aran Islands IV, CW II: 151). Synge's vigorous, often brutal diction (in The Playboy, The Tinker's Wedding, and The Well of the Saints) reacts against both Yeats's ethereal peasant speech and what he considered to be the joylessness and pallor of the modern theatre.

Synge described the peasants as recklessly brave, unselfconscious, and intelligent. They rode their Connemara ponies at a desperate gallop with only a simple halter and stick, and with nothing to hold onto (The Aran Islands I, CW II: 79) and expressed their vitality in their vigorous dancing:
The lightness of the pampooties seems to make the dancing on this island lighter and swifter than anything I have seen on the mainland, and the simplicity of the men enables them to throw a naive extravagance into their steps that is impossible in places where the people are self-conscious (The Aran Islands IV, CW II: 153).

Their kindliness and merry-making were absent from the towns, and made him think of the life described in the ballads of Scotland ("In West Kerry," CW II: 256). Yet the peasants were also full of riot and severity and daring, and they bewildered him with their talk of wonderful events, always detailed, picturesque, and interesting. The islanders, he wrote, were pure and spiritual, and yet they had all the healthy animal blood of peasants and delighted in broad jests and deeds (The Aran Islands I, CW II: 102). At the same time the peasant was in his own way an accomplished, well-schooled man. He was naturally courteous and artistic, and his way of life made him courageous and versatile:

It is likely that much of the intelligence and charm of these people is due to the absence of any division of labour, and to the correspondingly wide development of each individual, whose varied knowledge and skill necessitates a considerable activity of mind. Each man can speak two languages. He is a skilled fisherman, and can manage a curagh with extraordinary nerve and dexterity. He can farm simply, burn kelp, cut out pampooties, mend nets, build and thatch a house, and make a cradle or a coffin. His work changes with the seasons in a way that keeps him free from the dulness that comes to people who have always the same occupation. The danger of his life on the sea gives him the alertness of a primitive hunter, and the long nights he spends fishing in his curagh bring him some of the emotions that are thought peculiar to men who have lived with the arts (The Aran Islands III, CW II: 132-3).
The islandmen reminded Synge of fresh-looking sea gulls while the women's red bodices and petticoats made them look like tropical sea-birds. He suggested a possible link between the wild mythology accepted on the islands and the strange beauty of the women, both of which were haunting and majestical. Some of the island women resembled those few women of London and Paris who had freed themselves by force of will from the bondage of "lady-like persons." But the island women were free because their society was "before convention"; they had never known this bondage and so did not need to liberate themselves from it. Nature affected the emotions of women as well as men:

Many women here are too sturdy and contented to have more than the decorative interest of wild deer, but I have found a couple that have been turned in on themselves by some circumstance of their lives and seem to sum up in the expressions of their blue grey eyes the whole external symphony of the sky and seas. They have wildness and humour and passion kept in continual subjection by the reverence for life and the sea that is inevitable in this place (The Aran Islands III, CW II: 143).

Like Yeats, Synge too saw in the Irish peasantry a Celtic aristocracy. He wrote of the tinkers, farmers, and fishermen: "These strange men with receding foreheads, high cheek-bones and ungovernable eyes seem to represent some old type found on these few acres at the extreme border of Europe, where it is only in wild jests and laughter that they can express their loneliness and desolation" (The Aran Islands III, CW II: 140). They lived like the
earliest sailors: "It gave me a moment of exquisite satisfaction to find myself moving away from civilisation in this rude canvas canoe of a model that has served primitive races since men first went on the sea" (*The Aran Islands* I, *CW* II: 57). He compared them with an aristocracy, not of blood but of ability, writing that "shrewd observation, and naive reasoning" were common to both learned men of the age of Geoffrey Keating and to peasants of modern times ("The Poems of Geoffrey Keating," *CW* II: 358).

Their primitive and beautiful poetry related the ancient stories, filled with mankind's earliest emotions (*The Aran Islands* II, *CW* II: 112). Their fulness of life grew from their contact with nature in the place of their origin: "All day in the sunshine in the glens where every leaf sparkles with peculiar lustre, and where air, foliage and water are filled with life, one has inevitable sympathy with vitality and with the people that unite in a rude way the old passions of the earth" (Notebook entries, *CW* II: 199).

Locality, which was central to traditional poetry, must inform contemporary writing, or so thought the writers of the Irish Literary Renaissance. Verses, Yeats wrote, should hold the color of one's own climate and scenery, for love of the land had enabled the Irish to create the most beautiful literature of a whole people. He went so far as to claim that Ireland possessed a history more
filled with imaginative events and legends than that of any other modern country, and that these legends surpassed all but the ancient Greeks' in wild beauty. In Ireland as in Greece there was no mountain not associated with some event or legend, while political events had made the Irish love their country ever more deeply. Writers should master the history and legends and "fix upon their memory the appearance of mountains and rivers and make it all visible again in their arts" ("Ireland and the Arts," Essays 205). Yeats's ambition for the Abbey Theatre was to bring upon the stage what he believed were the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland--loyalty, heroism, love of the land. It must be a folk theatre because literature had its roots in folklore and should be fashioned for artists who understood the necessity of recreating Ireland's heroic past, and for "a few simple people who understand from sheer simplicity what we understand from scholarship and thought" ("The Theatre," Essays 166). These "simple people" were the peasants as he imagined them to be--intuitively wise, endowed with a rich memory, and imbued with ancient folklore, without which poetical passages could not be understood, for high poetical style was not ostentatious, and stemmed from variations upon old cadences and customary words ("Certain Noble Plays of Japan," Essays 227-8).
A poet, Yeats wrote, must have access to symbols, types, and stories embedded in folk imagination: "No conscious invention can take the place of tradition, for he who would write a folk tale, and thereby bring a new life into literature, must have the fatigue of the spade in his hands and the stupor of the fields in his heart." "Folk" meant to Yeats the largely illiterate people of the countryside—peasants, tinkers, fishermen; Shakespeare's and Keats's knowledge of folklore had made them far greater than Shelley, who had only mythology. Irish authors should exploit native traditions and choose Irish subjects, as William Carleton had done. In "By the Roadside," the last prose piece in The Celtic Twilight (1893), Yeats expressed his appreciation of the popular imaginative tradition: "There is no song or story handed down among the cottages that has not words and thoughts to carry one as far, for though one can know but a little of their ascent, one knows that they ascend like medieval genealogies through unbroken dignities to the beginning of the world" (Mythologies 138-9).

In "The Fisherman" he creates his ideal Natural Man, the peasant imagination becoming a model for his own development. The fisherman is a peasant in grey Connemara clothes who rises at dawn to "cast his flies" (Poems 148) on a gray place on a hill, "where stone is dark under froth." He is an acceptable audience because he is not, like the middle class mob, craven or insolent, nor does
he desire attention from common people. His is no trivial occupation; he is concerned with one of the oldest activities of mankind. He goes to a mysterious place at dawn, the time in which miracles are most likely to happen, according to Celtic belief. Because the peasant represents a lost nobility, Yeats chooses him as his heir:

It is time that I wrote my will;  
I choose upstanding men  
That climb the streams until  
The fountain leap, and at dawn  
Drop their cast at the side  
Of dripping stone ("The Tower," Poems 198).

For Yeats, the peasants' folklore was more than a link with the Celtic past, important for political purposes. Poets must come into contact with images and symbols from myth and legend, for artists themselves did not create; they remembered images of past greatness (New Island 43), stored in a universal memory, the "fibrous darkness" from which all ideas emanated. The imaginative stories and songs which united people to their localities were expressions of universal themes: "The root-stories of the Greek poets are told to-day at the cabin fires of Donegal . . ." (UP I: 284). Thus the great myths of Ireland were not only expressions of the nation's history; they also belonged to the collective memory of the world, the "Spiritus Mundi" of Yeats's "The Second Coming." In his essay "Magic" (1901) he describes his theory of psychic processes and the collective memory:
(1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.
(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.
(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols (Essays 28).

The supremacy of imagination was derived from "the power of many minds to become one, over powering one another by spoken words and by unspoken thought till they have become a single, intense, unhesitating energy" (36). Barbaric and semi-barbaric people receive the invisible beings, spirits, and far-wandering influences more visibly and obviously, and more easily and fully than contemporaries could, for city life deafens the ear and kills the separated, self-moving mind that makes the soul less sensitive. The winds made contemporary man shiver uneasily and move near to the fire, but they had much greater power long ago (41).

For Yeats, primitive imagination was more powerful because of belief in magic and folklore. Music and poetry, which originated in the sounds enchanters made to help them to charm and bind with a spell themselves as well as others, should rediscover this power. While contemporary man praised the perfected individual life, primitive man praised the one mind which was the foundation of all perfection. Visions resulted from "buried memories,"
possessions of some supernatural artist. Symbols held the greatest of all power, Yeats believed, whether they are consciously or unconsciously used by the masters of magic, or half consciously used by the successors of magicians—poets, artists, and musicians. The Great Memory associates symbols with events, moods, and persons. Yeats wrote:

Whatever the passions of man have gathered about, becomes a symbol in the Great Memory, and in the hands of him who has the secret it is a worker of wonders, a caller-up of angels or of devils. The symbols are of all kinds, for everything in heaven or earth has its association, momentous or trivial, in the Great Memory . . . (50).

Imagination is always seeking to remake the world according to the impulses and the patterns in that Great Mind and Great Memory. What we call romance, poetry, intellectual beauty, is only the signal that the supreme Enchanter is speaking of what has been and shall be again. Each individual soul shared its history with that of the world and manifested some universal and historical truth. Tradition was a living thing with roots in every human consciousness and an analogue in an Other World. Yeats wrote: "To the greater poets everything they see has its relation to the universal and divine life: nothing is an isolated artistic moment; there is unity everywhere; everything fulfills a purpose that is not its own; the hailstone is a journeyman of God; the grass blade carries the universe upon its point . . . " (New Island 174). The folkloristic tradition of the remote countryside impressed J. M. Synge
who wrote that all art is a collaboration between the artist and the speech of the common people ("Preface" to The Playboy of the Western World, CW IV: 53). Images from tradition would affirm the unity of Irish culture and be part of a deeper culture underlying all societies: "The Irish peasant and most serene of Englishmen are at one. Tradition is always the same. The earliest poet of India and the Irish peasant in his hovel nod to each other across the ages, and are in perfect agreement" (New Island 204).

Yeats's ideas here are similar to those of Carl Gustav Jung, who called this universal memory the "collective unconscious." Jung proposed that there were two layers of the unconscious, a personal layer and an impersonal, or transpersonal, layer. The latter was not dependent upon personal experience and was entirely universal, its contents being found everywhere:

There are present in every individual, besides his personal memories, the great 'primordial' images . . . the inherited powers of human imagination as it was from time immemorial. The fact of this inheritance explains the truly amazing phenomenon that certain motifs from myths and legends repeat themselves the world over in identical forms. 17

The personal unconscious stands for the subjective psyche; the collective unconscious for the objective: "... the collective unconscious is anything but an encapsulated personal system; it is sheer objectivity, as wide as the world and open to all the world. There I am the object of
every subject, in complete reversal of my ordinary consciousness, where I am always the subject that has an object."

The primordial images of the collective unconscious comprise the most ancient and universal "thought forms" or patterns of thought. They resemble feelings as much as thoughts, and, although they cannot be truly personified, they lead their own independent lives. Jung called them "archetypes" or "dominants" of the unconscious, upon which the greatest thoughts of mankind shape themselves. Their origin is in the repeated experiences of humanity: "The archetype is a kind of readiness to produce over and over again the same or similar mythical ideas. Hence it seems exclusively the subjective fantasy-images aroused by the physical process. Therefore we may take it that archetypes are recurrent impressions made by subjective reactions" (68). The archetypes are mythological images from the legacy of ancestral life, ruling powers, gods, images of the dominant laws and principles, and regularly occurring events in the soul's cycle of experience. Insofar as these images are more or less faithful replicas of psychic events, their archetypes--general characteristics--also correspond to certain general concepts for physical phenomena.
Archetypal images may be regarded as the effect and deposit of experiences that have taken place, but they also appear as the factors causing such experiences. The concept is equivalent to the idea of soul, spirit, or God.

According to Jung, the universal parallelism between mythological motifs is evidence that the archetypes are mythological images from the legacy of ancestral life. Myths are psychic phenomena that reveal the nature of the soul: "Primitive man impresses us so strongly with his subjectivity that we should really have guessed long ago that myths refer to something psychic." The psyche contains all the images that have ever given rise to myths. Primitive man does not invent myths but rather experiences them as original revelations of the preconscious psyche, and involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings; they are not allegories of physical processes. The myths, Jung claims, are the psychic life of a tribe which decays when it loses its mythological heritage, like a man who has lost his soul.

The Irish peasant as Yeats and Synge created him embodied the collective memory of his nation and the timeless memory of the world; his imagination was necessary for the preservation of Irish culture. Free from materialism and ambition, he lived close to nature and in the old ways. Although he might be illiterate, his songs and stories told around the fireplace gave him knowledge which
was superior to that which he could learn from books. Although he might be tied to the land on which he was born, his self-sufficiency and individualism gave him freedom. He belonged to an ancient aristocracy both because he was descended from the Celts of Ireland's Heroic ("Golden") Age and because he possessed the ancient folklore. Only the peasant could provide the poet with images which affirmed the unity of Irish culture and described a deeper experience which underlay all culture.

Nevertheless, the soul of primitive man dies with his tradition, and both Yeats and Synge knew that the Irish peasant's way of life was being changed by relief-works and middle-class values, and they feared that the folklore, so important for Irish culture, would be lost. It was Ireland's misfortune, Synge wrote, that nearly all the characteristics which gave color and attractiveness to Irish life were bound up with a social condition near to penury ("In Connemara," CW II: 286). Synge associated "progress"—materialism and modernity—with death of the culture. He wrote that among the farmers and fishermen, nearly everyone—man or woman—was interesting and attractive, and his initial reaction was dread of reform that would in any way lessen their individuality while promising improvement in their well-being: "The thought that this island will gradually yield to the ruthlessness of
'progress' is as the certainty that decaying age is moving always nearer the cheeks it is your ecstasy to kiss" (The Aran Islands I, CW II, 103). "Progress" deprived the peasants of their language and the unwritten literature which was as full and distinguished as that of any European people (The Aran Islands II, CW II, 116). "Progress" destroyed the mystery of their lives: It is hard to believe that those hovels I can just see in the south are filled with people whose lives have the strange quality that is found in the oldest poetry and legend. Compared with them the falling off that has come with the increased prosperity of this island is full of discouragement. The charm which the people over there share with the birds and flowers has been replaced here [Inishmore] by the anxiety of men who are eager for gain (116). When the peasants came into contact with sophisticated life they became ashamed of their own. Synge wrote that his friend whom he calls "Michael" (Martin McDonagh) wanted to be photographed in his Sunday clothes from Galway instead of his native homespuns that were more becoming, because they connected him with the primitive life of the islands (The Aran Islands III, CW II, 134). Yeats distrusted progress in the form of land distribution to the peasants which transformed them into independent farmers. Integral to his vision was the reciprocal respect between aristocrat and peasant, derived from mutual "contact with the soil." Through this contact and self-conscious artifice, the aristocrat could recover the innocence and simplicity which were the peasants' natural
virtues. Thus the aristocrat must learn from the peasant. Three types of men had created all beautiful things: the aristocrat, a beautiful way of life; the countrymen, beautiful stories and beliefs; and the artists, all the rest ("Poetry and Tradition," *Essays* 251). All three were necessary for the creation of a unified culture. The poets themselves had first created the traditional life of the Irish countryside:

The life of the villages, with its songs, its dances and its pious greetings, its conversations full of vivid images shaped hardly more by life itself than by innumerable forgotten poets, all that life of good-nature and improvisation grows more noble as he meditates upon it, for it mingles with the Middle Ages until he no longer can see it as it is, but as it was when it ran, as it were, into a point of fire in the courtliness of kings' houses. He hardly knows whether what stirred him yesterday was that old fiddler, playing an almost-forgotten music on a fiddle mended with twine, or a sudden thought of some king that was of the blood of that old man, some O'Loughlin or O'Byrne, listening amid his soldiers, he and they at the one table, they too, lucky, bright-eyed, while the minstrel sang of angry Cuchulain, or of him men called 'Golden salmon of the sea, clean hawk of the air' (*Explorations* 205-6).

During Spenser's time the country people had lived the life that made Theocritus and Virgil think of shepherd and poet as one ("Edmund Spenser," *Essays* 373).

Yeats mythologized this life in "Shepherd and Goatherd," in which shepherd, aristocrat, and artist all become the hero. In this dramatic dialogue, the shepherd and goatherd meet when the former, lost in his poetic thoughts, allows his sheep to stray on the rocks of the goatherd's
desmense. Both praise a local man, a hero killed in a war: "He that was best in every sport/ And every country craft, and of us all/ Most courteous to slow age and hasty youth,/ Is dead" (Poems 142). He had been a shepherd who threw away his crook and abandoned the pipes he played among the hills, expressing their loneliness, "The exultation of their stone." This aristocrat-shepherd-artist was familiar with the old ways and left his ancient house as it had been in his father's lifetime. The old goatherd praises the young shepherd, also a poet: "You sing as always of the natural life,/ And I that made like music in my youth/ Hearing it now have sighed for that young man/ And certain lost companions of my own" (144). Experience has taught the goatherd the ways of the natural and the supernatural. The shepherd replies: "They say that on your barren mountain ridge/ You have measured out the roads that the soul treads/ When it has vanished from our natural eyes;/ That you have talked with apparitions." His thoughts have found supernatural pathways. The shepherd urges him to "Sing, for it may be that your thoughts have plucked/ Some medicable herb to make our grief/ Less bitter." They resolve to cut their rhymes into strips of "newtorn bark." Shepherd and goatherd represent youth and age, natural and supernatural, wisdom which transcends the temporal, and spiritual rebirth: "The outrageous war shall fade;/ At
some old winding whitethorn root/ He'll practice on
the shepherd's flute,/ . . . Knowledge he shall unwind/
Through victories of the mind." They are both artists and
countryman praising a national hero. Thus the countryman,
peasant, hero, and artist are joined by their consciousness
of their heritage.

Just as Yeats's myth of the Irish peasant is partly an
expression of feudal or archaic class sensibilities, but
also partly an expression of genuine idealism, similarly
his rebuke of the new Catholic middle class is more than a
manifestation of social prejudice. Yeats contrasted the
noble peasant with the modern middle class—to the detri-
ment of the latter—believing that cultural unity could be
strengthened only by infusing the peasants' spiritual
sensibility into the urban middle class. He defined "middle
class" as an "attitude of mind more than an accident of
birth" (UP II: 241) and described social position in
terms of opposition to the utilitarianism of the spirit
which he identified with England. He called the middle
class notion of "getting on in life" timid; "At Galway
Races" makes clear that brave men, horsemen, were spiritual
companions of the poet: "Aye, horsemen for companions,/Hearers and hearteners of the work" (Poems 97). All this
was true "Before the merchant and the clerk/ Breathed on
the world with timid breath." Yeats emphasized middle class
timidity, not social status.
Yeats associated lack of worldly success with improvement in moral character just as romanticism equated success with moral vulgarity. The "new ill-breeding" involved commitment to arduous utilitarianism and prudential morality. Middle-class weakness lay in rising above the tradition of the countrymen, without first learning that of the cultivated life, and in fear born of ignorance and superstitious piety. Immediate utility was everything to the middle class, and thus their real poverty was spiritual. The countryman, who made beautiful stories and songs, was in danger of being spiritually corrupted by middle class values.

The poet, peasant, and aristocrat were indissolubly and organically linked because they had nothing to do with the commercial-bourgeois world, and the aristocracy became the means of holding onto hope for unity of culture in the face of increasing mercantilism. In "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" (*Poems* 243) Yeats laments that a spiritual aristocracy which believed in tradition and ties to the land were the last of their breed. The symbols of aristocracy--the books, sculptures, pictures--are not material symbols of leisure or useless intellectual cultivation, but of dedication to a tradition. Thus, their lives were models for the rest of society to follow. The hero, like the aristocrat, commits himself to his people, expecting no reward. The Irish airman gives his lonely, extravagant
gesture of self-sacrifice for nothing except love of Kiltartan's poor. Yeats's aristocracy is a metaphor for a mental or cultural elite in which wealth and power are not valued for their own sake but for the nation's cultural unity. The aristocracy serves as an example, with the gifts that govern men and preserve tradition, and the hero serves through self-sacrifice, to save his people's lives and land.

An aristocracy indifferent to tradition and responsibility was to be condemned:

The poet must always prefer the community where the perfected minds express the people, to a community that is vainly seeking to copy the perfected minds. To have even perfectly the thoughts that can be weighed, the knowledge that can be got from books, the precision that can be learned at school, to belong to any aristocracy, is to be a little pool that will soon dry up. A people alone are a great river; and that is why I am persuaded that where a people has died, a nation is about to die ("The Galway Plains," Essays 214).

The peasants were thus more important than the aristocrats for Ireland's cultural unity. In order to show them what they should aspire to, Yeats compared the Irish aristocracy to another, greater aristocracy, that of the Italian Renaissance, in "To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery If It Were Proved the People Wanted Pictures" (Poems 107). In the first stanza the wealthy Dublin aristocrat is degraded because he shares the utilitarian and calculating values of the
middle class. The speaker contrasts him with Duke Ercole, Guidobaldo, Duke of Venice, whose great vision for his country was exemplified by his patronage of the arts, proof of the "exultant heart." The aristocrat should be free of self-serving motivations and does not need the voice of the middle class in order to act. The poem represents an attempt to purify life by offering higher, more ideal models for imitation. The Irish aristocracy can survive only by imitating those greater than itself.

In the same way, the great house in "Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation" (Poems 95) is a symbol of the spiritual aristocracy which serves to guide the nation toward its realization of cultural unity. Aspiring ideals should transcend the local historical situation such as the 1909 Land Act which forced large landholders to sell parts of their estates to peasants and to reduce rents. The peasants' houses were "mean roof-trees" which would become sturdier for the fall of the great houses, but the peasants could never hope to achieve the "gifts that govern men." While they were essential to the preservation of Irish culture, they had to be guided by the aristocrats, who would in turn be taught by the poets. Thus the peasants must simply be, in order that their way of life might survive; the aristocrats would lead them, and the poets would praise both of them. The Land Act created a class of peasant owners which Yeats feared would abandon the countryman's
ways without learning the cultivated ways and in so doing would hasten the destruction of the traditional ways of life, both those of countryman and aristocrat. Yeats's "aristocratic" poetry offered society powerful images which simultaneously criticize the meaner values of that society and provide it with noble goals to aspire to. It does not constitute a reversal of his earlier commitment to the importance of locality and peasant culture, but is rather an elaboration of one aspect of that poetic commitment.

The poet's task had little to do with accurately reflecting or criticizing sociological realities but created and recreated archetypal or ideal images which directed and shaped history and society. Poets who cared about Irish culture, Yeats wrote, knew that everything they did or said "must come from contact with the soil" where everything grew strong. The sole test was the "Dream of the noble and the beggarman" (Poems 321), not the images dreamt by noble and beggar, but the poet's ideal image, his myth.

Those who dream of the Noble Savage or Natural Man want to create a social ideal because they need to believe that somewhere (usually in some remote place) people live simply and naturally. Dissatisfied with their own culture and education, desiring communion with nature and a simple way of life, which they associate with wisdom and peace, they recreate themselves in terms of the dream. Yeats and
Synge created their myth of the Irish peasant in the romantic tradition that their readers might continue to believe in national culture and the imaginative power of the ideal.
Chapter Three
Natural and Supernatural

The pastoral ideal inspired the imaginations of writers long before the industrial age. The need to believe that a simpler age once existed in which people were less anxious and troubled by complexities of their world, and to believe that this lost innocence or tradition can be recovered, is deeply rooted in art and culture and has both religious and secular significance in the story of Eden and the dream of a future utopia. The countryside provides an artistic setting in which the author may work out ideas about human desire, identity and society, life and death. The seasons are metaphors for birth, growth, maturation, and decay. Sowing or planting time symbolizes hope and desire, while the harvest represents fulfillment or disappointment. Separation of individual from community takes on greater significance in the country, for isolation there is both mental and physical: individuals are divided not only by misunderstanding and alienation, as are the lonely people of the towns, but also by distance and weather. In Ireland, the very mist and mountains become a symbol for isolation. The natural forces which separate people are constant, if
sometimes unwelcome, companions. Loneliness in rural people comments ironically on primitivist philosophy and the values of pastoral romance.

In Celtic tradition, daily and annual patterns had meaning beyond the temporal one; the fourfold division of the day into morning, afternoon, evening, and night paralleled the annual seasonal divisions. Certain tasks were assigned for specific parts of the day, and different times possessed particular virtues or vices. Morning dew, for example, was virtuous, while midnight was a time of danger because supernatural powers dwelt near isolated places. The Celtic year was divided according to the round of agricultural life rather than to exact movements of the sun.\(^1\) At the same time, history and tradition endow the landscape with spiritual significance.

One attribute of romanticism which W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge embraced was the rejection of middle class and city and the endorsement of the peasant class and country. They hated what they believed modernity meant for Ireland—the dehumanizing machine age, the loss of spirituality, the destruction of tradition, the concentration of people into cities. Both criticized what they regarded as the materialism of the new middle class and its lack of respect for art. Yeats lamented the loss of the old order of peasant and aristocrat, while Synge resented the imposition of the culture of eastern Ireland on that of the west. Because
Ireland was a predominantly rural and agricultural country, its traditions were those of country people and were likely to be preserved by them, if the traditions were to be preserved at all. For Yeats, the virtue of the peasants lay in their instinctive wisdom, understanding of nature, and supposed ability to see and hear the supernatural beings around them, which made them superior to the "rational," materialistic, and calculating middle classes. His country people are isolated, symbolic figures like Red Hanrahan, the hedge schoolmaster, Crazy Jane the mad peasant woman, beggars, and fools. Synge rejected the importance of Irish faery lore so carefully studied by Yeats, Lady Gregory, and AE because he believed that the character of Ireland was to be found in the country people themselves and in their way of life, not in legends. He wrote that the new religion of the modern world was love of the beauty and mystery of nature, which Synge believed had arisen just as religion in the dogmatic sense had died (CW II: 351). He believed that the peasant's superiority lay in his dependence upon nature for his livelihood and his freedom from the artificialities of the civilization of eastern Ireland. For Yeats and Synge, the natural and supernatural worlds were entwined. The peasants provided them with a link to simple spirituality and to the natural world of colors and shadows, changing seasons and seclusion.
Folklore, the literature of the folk mind, was for Yeats and Synge imagination at its most unrestrained. Synge felt that folk imagination, which was free of the influence of European art, could transform common experience. Yeats wrote that Irish folklore would give the new century its most profound poetic symbols. Both held nationalist views and at the same time idealistic and traditional views about the peasants, seeing the country people of Ireland as a noble peasantry possessed of a primitive life-force and an ancient cultural heritage which were superior to the corrupted modern way of life. They sought to incorporate into their own work this heritage of vitality (Bradley 80), which they contrasted with the dehumanized, colorless context of urban life. In "The Lake Isle of Inisfree," for example, County Sligo becomes an idealized, rural place that beckons from the "deep heart's core" to the speaker who seeks to escape from the gray and uninteresting city. For Yeats, the west of Ireland was less an identifiable place than a country of the mind, a place where he could transcend the modern world. Synge recognized the threat that local conflict and the greed and corruption of the east posed for the peasant culture, but he could still find in the west of Ireland an innocence and lack of self-consciousness which he equated with spiritual vitality.
The writings of Yeats and Synge are a manifestation of a pastoral tradition of Irish lyric poets, whose constant motif was the open air, the hunt, changing seasons, love, animals, food, and drink (O'Faolain 20). The Celtic poets observed nature carefully and recorded its sounds and colors:

Tonight the grouse is not asleep
above the high, stormy, heathery hills,
clear and sweet the cry of her throat,
sleepless among the streams (22).

A little bird
Has let a piping from the tip
Of his shining yellow beak--
The blackbird from the yellow-leaved tree
Has flung his whistle over Loch Laigh (25).

The lyricists carefully described details of the landscape in order to convey the harshness of winter and the beauty of summer:

The eagle of brown Glen Rye gets affliction from
the bitter wind;
great is its misery and its suffering, the ice will get into its beak. 4

* * * *

All the sweetness of nature was buried in black winter's grave,
and the wind sings a sad lament with its cold plaintive cry;
but oh, the teeming summer will come, bringing life in its arms,
and will strew rosy flowers on the face of hill and dale (87).

In lovely harmony the wood has put on its green mantle,
and summer is on its throne, playing its string-music; (87).
Animals and places are individually named:

The grouse in Cruachan Cuinn,
The otter whistling in Druin da Loch,
The eagle crying in Gleann na bFuath,
The laughter of the cuckoo in Gnoc na Scoth;

(O'Faolain 20).

Specificity of location and love of the landscape, important themes in Celtic lyrics, necessitated such attention to detail. Stags roam in a particular wood in these poems; blackbirds, thrushes, and linnets sing and twitter; the mountain stream whispers a song in the rushes; and the wind moans in particular mountain valleys. Through these lyrics the poets describe a love of walking, the outdoors, woods, and hills, which persists in the Irish literature of every century (32).

Yeats's early poetry is filled with the mystery, beauty, and terror of the natural world. Born, he wrote, in a time when traditional memory still flourished in Ireland, he describes the emotional transcendence of the immediate, physical world and the relationship between nature and the supernatural. "The Unappeasable Host" (Poems 58) is filled with both terror and delight. The power of nature is clear here: the winds are "desolate" and cry over the sea and the west of Ireland. The winds have shaken the speaker's heart with desire which cannot be fulfilled, yet this desire, however vague, is more beautiful than religious devotion. The poems in the early section of The Wind Among the Reeds (1899) all concern
the desire for transcendence and human interaction with nature and with pagan spirits. The speaker of "Into the Twilight" urges his heart ("Outworn heart, in a time out-worn") to leave the troubles of the world ("Come clear of the nets of wrong and right") and to rejoice "in the grey twilight" and sing in "the dew of the morn" (59). He wants to go to the beautiful, mysterious land "where hill is heaped upon hill," for the "mystical brotherhood"--the sun, moon, hollows, wood, river, and stream--is victorious over despair and death, and the heart will find solace because the twilight and dew are kinder and dearer than love and hope. In "The Hosting of the Sidhe" (55) the faery call anyone who looks upon them away from his earthly pursuits ("the deed of his hand," "the hope of his heart") and entice him to follow them to the Other World. "The Moods" (56) reminds us of mankind's mortality and nature's cycle of birth and death, contrasted with the everlasting emotion and life of the Sidhe, whose "fire-born moods" never fade. In these poems, human beings are tempted by supernatural powers to abandon their earthly desires and mortal ambitions.

Yet to desire and pursue immortality, youth, and beauty is not to attain them. In "The Song of Wandering Aengus" (59-60) the speaker grows old wandering in search of a beautiful woman of the Sidhe. The speaker goes out
at dawn—the time, according to Celtic legend, when the veil between this world and the unseen world is very thin (Rees 92). He goes to the hazel wood (apple trees and hazel trees were rich in associations with the Otherworld [90-1]), because of some inexplicable longing ("because a fire was in my head") and wanders through "hollow lands and hilly lands" in search of unattainable beauty which he does not understand. As time passes, the light grows and shimmers: when he goes out, the "moth-like stars were flickering out"; the little silver trout he catches becomes a "glimmering" girl who fades through "brightening air." The speaker, named for the god of love, pursues her not as if by magic but of his own free will. Although he has now grown old with wandering, he refuses to give up his quest. He will find her, and will gather the fruit of magical nature, "The silver apples of the moon,/ The golden apples of the sun."

In other variants of the story the woman visits Aengus night after night and plays to him on a lute but eludes him when he reaches out to her. She takes the shape of a swan, not a fish. Aengus promises that if he can stay with her he too will take the form of a swan every other year and human form the remaining years (Jackson 93-7), and in some versions of the story is granted his request. In his 1899 note to this poem,
Yeats tells of a folk belief of Galway which attributed to the Sidhe the power to take the shape of fish and to swim in the sea. The poem itself was suggested to him by a Greek folk song and by an old man of Gort who told Yeats that he had seen a beautiful woman in Inchy Wood at about eight in the morning: "And I followed her and looked for her, but I could never see her again from that day to this, never again." Yeats will not allow his Aengus to achieve his desire, as did the Aengus of the folk tale, because he wants to show that desire for something beautiful and yet unattainable transcends reason and practicality. Aengus is old, but he prefers to wander and to gather spiritual treasures than to settle down.

Just as the Sidhe call mortals away from earthly matters, the voices of the natural world are audible everywhere, in the song of birds, in the wind, among hills, in shaking boughs, in the tides. They call to unsatisfied mankind who must live with the knowledge of their own mortality. The speaker of "The Everlasting Voices" (Poems 55) begs the voices to be quiet ("O sweet everlasting Voices, be still") for to look upon the world itself is to realize that one will grow old and die, while the longing for youth, beauty, and wisdom never fades: "Have you not heard that our hearts are old?" Although the voices belong to the natural world, they tell of the immortal one. Longing and desire were themes in Yeats's poetry all his
life, as was the romantic motif of wandering in search of beauty or wisdom. Nature, mystical powers, and the Sidhe are beautiful and majestic, but also dangerous, for they call people away from earthly comfort and such imperfect love as mortals are able to feel. While the natural and supernatural powers promise spiritual transformation, they also threaten disappointment, disillusion, and loss of individuality. In "The Madness of King Goll" (16-18), the powerful, influential, wealthy speaker rules a rich kingdom and commands fighting men. He is praised by "every ancient Ollave" (learned man) for his ability to restrain the "Northern cold"--the Fomorah, or powers of death and darkness, cold and evil, that come from the north (616). Like the speaker of "The Song of the Wandering Aengus," King Goll wanders in search of something he cannot explain. Goll abandons his kingdom to wander in fens and on the shore because within his "most secret spirit grew/ A whirling and a wandering fire." Now he wanders in the woods, companion to birds, deer, and wolves, and the leaves, both those in the trees and the dry ones at his feet, refuse to hush their old song. The supernatural never ceases to call to him through the natural world. Goll follows a sound that draws him, "a tramping of tremendous feet," possibly of faery, and sings of "some inhuman misery"--he does not say what he desires, for he does not know—and of Orchill,
a sorceress who "shakes out her long dark hair." While he sang his mournful, plaintive song, his desire (the "whirling and the wandering fire") was quenched, "with sound like falling dew." But now the stringed instrument is torn and still, and he is destined to continue wandering in the woods and hills in all seasons, still searching for whatever he wants.

King Goll wanders, singing, in the woods, driven mad because greatness--riches, power, or wisdom--cannot satisfy the desire for life and beauty. He is outcast from society, while "The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland" (43-5) is part of the world, yet both are consumed by the same frustrated desire to find the spiritual world. The man experiences no happiness in love, prosperity, fame, pride, or death because the creatures of the natural world--the fish, lug-worm, and knot-grass--sing to him of a country where Time cannot mar lovers' vows or turn the green leaf brown, where exultant faery dwell in magical surroundings, and where "old silence" bids the enchanted men and women who live there to rejoice. The man, who has achieved worldly success, is unable to find peace or comfort, for the songs of the supernatural reach him as he contemplates the natural world.

In "The Withering of the Boughs" (79-80), Yeats again employs a technique of the Irish lyricists. In this poem, the natural and supernatural worlds converge: the moon murmurs to the birds, and the man speaks to the moon. The speaker asks the moon for his "merry and tender and pitiful
words," for the road was unending and he cannot find a place to rest. When he does, he falls asleep upon "lonely Echtge of streams," which may be Slieve Aughty (Sliabh Echtge, the Mountain of Echtge, a faery goddess [631]). He dreams of the Country of the Young, where the moon drifts and the pale foam gleams, swans fly with golden chains, and a king and queen wander, transformed by a magical song. The boughs wither because he has told them his hopeless dream of immortality and beauty.

Yet the supernatural is as threatening as it is beautiful. "The Stolen Child" (18-19) tells of the attractiveness and also the danger of the powers that call to human beings. The faery sing to the human child of dancing on the strand and chasing the fish in the streams, creating a vision of beauty that is part of the natural world and at the same time promises release from anxieties and cares and from the cycles of birth and death which are part of the natural world. Yet the child must abandon the familiar world in order to become part of the faery world and to gain release from mortality. While they call to him to leave this world full of care, they fill the natural one itself with anxiety, for they lean from the ferns and whisper to the trout, giving them "unquiet dreams." The child must leave not only the sorrow and unhappiness of the world but also its peace and comfort. He will never again hear the lowing of the calves on the warm hillside nor the
singing kettle on the hearth, nor see the brown mice bob "round and round the oatmeal chest." The child must abandon earthly happiness in order to follow those who promise immortality.

In his essay "A General Introduction for My Work" (1937) Yeats establishes the significance of location in mythology and tradition, for natural and supernatural were knit together (Essays 518). The dead stayed where they had lived, sought no region of blessing or punishment, but retreated into the "hidden character" of the neighborhood. He writes that to the wise peasants the green hills and woods round about are filled with never-fading mystery, which science can never defeat. The peasants, who lived close to nature, thus became a poetic device for Yeats who wanted to write of a life apart from the soulless modern world. When an aged country woman told him the mountains made her think of the goodness of God, he concluded that God was nearer to her because the pagan powers were not far either, because the very country places the people visited were the settings of stories about the Sidhe and legendary figures. Northward in Ben Bulben, "famous for hawks," a white door is believed to swing open at sundown, allowing wild unchristian riders to rush forth upon the fields (Mythologies 90). Drumcliff was known to be a place of omens while both Drumcliff and Rosses were haunted. In a letter to Katharine Tynan, Yeats wrote
that going for a walk was a continual meeting with ghosts (Letters 54). A local Sligo family, called Kirwan or Hachett, was rumored in peasant stories to be descended from a man and a spirit and were notable for their beauty (Mythologies 74). Stories abounded of the Sidhe who carried off infants and then returned them to the living. "Kidnappers" tells of Sligo residents taken by the Sidhe; hardly a valley or a mountainside lacked a story of someone stolen by faery. For example, an old woman who lived near Hart Lake had been stolen in her youth. When after seven years she returned, she had no toes, for she had danced them off (76). Yeats proposed that Europeans might find something attractive in a Christ posed against a background not of Judaism but of Druidism, not shut off in dead history but "flowing, concrete, phenomenal" (Essays 518). He wrote: "I will not of a certainty believe that there is nothing in the sunset, where our forefathers imagined the dead following their shepherd the sun, or nothing but some vague presence as little moving as nothing" (Mythologies 63). Natural beauty was a "gateway" to the spiritual world (63).

Because of their closeness to the supernatural, the peasants could appreciate poetry as the materialistic urban classes could not. Yeats wrote that the peasants could still see enchanted fires ("William Blake and the Imagination," Essays 114), that they were not surprised by
miracles (Explorations 10). The arts, too, must become the garment of religion as in old times ("The Symbolism of Poetry," Essays 162-3). Poets must learn to exploit the mystical relationship with nature which they shared with the peasants. Traditional poets wrote more profound and lasting poetry because they knew the folk-beliefs.

Yeats defined inspiration as the ability to see the permanent and characteristic in all forms ("Blake's Illustrations to Dante," Essays 120). The Celtic source in English literature gives its sense of the mystery of nature, of passionate turbulence, reaction against the despotism of fact: "Once every people in the world believed that trees were divine, and could take a human or grotesque shape and dance among the shadows; and that deer, and ravens and foxes, and wolves and bears, and clouds and pools, almost all things under the sun and moon, and the sun and moon, were not less divine and changeable" ("The Celtic Element in Literature," 174). The poet of the Kalevala learned his songs from the music of many birds and many waters (175). The makers of the Sagas had less of the old way than the makers of the Kalevala, for they lived in a more crowded and complicated world; they were learning the abstract meditation which lures men from visible beauty, and were unlearning, it may be, the impassioned meditation which brings men beyond the edge of trance and makes trees, and beasts, and dead things
talk with human voices. The old Irish and old Welsh had less of tradition than the makers of the Kalevala, but more than the makers of the Sagas (175). The Irish "natural magic" is but the ancient religion of the world, the ancient worship of nature and the certainty of all beautiful places being haunted (176). The belief in a supernatural stemmed from contemplation of nature:

Men who lived in a world where anything might flow and change, and become any other thing, and among great gods whose passions were in the flaming sunset, and in the thunder and the thunder-shower, had not our thoughts of weight and measure. They worshipped nature and the abundance of nature, and had always, as it seems, for a supreme ritual, that tumultuous dance among the hills or in the depths of the woods, where unearthly ecstasy fell among the dancers, until they seemed the gods or the godlike beasts, and felt their souls overtopping the moon; and, as some think, imagined for the first time in the world the blessed country of the gods and of the happy dead. They had imaginative passions because they did not live within our own strait limits, and were nearer to ancient chaos, every man's desire, and had immortal models about them.(178).

Keats, Shakespeare, and Virgil looked at nature in the modern way, the way of people who are poetical, but are more interested in one another than in a nature which has faded to be friendly and pleasant, the way of people who have forgotten the ancient religion.

For Yeats, the peasants' experience is embodied in the conflict of natural and supernatural, 6 which could at any
moment create new myths ("The Celtic Element in Literature," 185). In The Secret Rose (1897), a series of stories about this conflict between the physical and spiritual worlds, he sought to create a mythology out of folklore. In "The Heart of Spring" an old man discovers through meditation and isolation the way to the spiritual realm. He has given up everything in his search for what he calls the Great Secret, longed for a life that would fill centuries, not "fourscore winters," to be like the ancient gods. His reverent and inquisitive servant boy fears the Sidhe who linger near the monastery at night. He begs his master not to fast or to beckon to the beings who dwell in the waters of Lough Gill or among the hazel trees and oaks, for he believes the old man to be weak and is concerned for his physical health. The boy himself hopes for a peaceful manhood, a cottage, and a family. But the old man hopes that the moment when he will hear the Song of the Immortal Powers is at hand, for a Faeryman has told him of it, and he desires to become like the immortal beings themselves. He instructs the boy to pile green boughs outside the door, fresh rushes on the floor, and roses and lilies on the table, for he is going to enter the kingdom of youth.

As the boy performs his tasks, the landscape takes on a magical appearance: the lighted lamp smells of flowers; the rocks seem to be carved of precious stones; Sleuth Wood appears to have been cut from beryl; the waters shine
of pale opal; roses glow like rubies; lilies have the dull lustre of pearl. Everything, in fact, takes the appearance of imperishability, except a single glow-worm whose faint flame burns on sturdily among shadows, moving aimlessly, the only thing that seemed perishable as hope (Mythologies 175). The boy arises an hour after dawn to prepare his master's boat, for he believes the journey will be a mortal one. Everything seemed to overflow with the music of birds: "It was the most beautiful and living moment of the year; one could listen to the spring's heart beating in it" (176). The boy finds the old man dead and thinks that he should have striven for the Christian heaven. But at once a thrush alights on one of the boughs and begins to sing. Perhaps it is the old man's soul, and natural and supernatural are one, as the old man believed.

The barrier between the physical and spiritual worlds vanishes in the Stories of Red Hanrahan (1897; rewritten in 1907). Hanrahan, a peasant "hedge schoolmaster" who is also a poet and mystic, travels between these worlds. Natural objects take on magical aspects. The introductory story draws on the folkloristic motif of the peasant card game on Samhain Eve with old men who possess otherworldly powers. Upon receiving the message that his sweetheart, Mary Lavelle, has promised to marry him following the death of her mother, Hanrahan tries to hurry out to go to her at once. But the old men try to stop him with invitations to
stay and celebrate with them; marriage will leave him little time for sport, they argue. Hanrahan rebuffs them, saying that if Mary does not find a husband, her lands will go to someone else, and hurries toward the door, where an old man who has been sitting and mumbling strangely to himself stops Hanrahan and compels him to play a game of cards. Hanrahan plays as if in a dream while the old man shuffles the cards, seeming to create rings of fire in the air with his hands. All that is visible in the room are his hands and the cards. Suddenly a hare jumps from the cards and then a pack of hounds, and they run around the room and then out the door. Hanrahan follows them in his dream-like state. He comes to a great shining house where grand women offer him the things the old man had mumbled about—pleasure, power, courage, knowledge. But he cannot accept what they offer, and he falls asleep, awakes alone, and stumbles back to the village one year later on Samhain Eve. Mary Lavelle has lost her land and emigrated, and he never sees her again.

In the stories that follow, Hanrahan is the seeker who searches for love, for the spirit of Ireland, for youth, and for Tír nanÓg. In "The Twisting of the Rope" he is tricked by magic out of a prospective marriage. In "Hanrahan and Cathleen" he learns that love of Ireland and anger at her oppressors can never be appeased. In "Hanrahan's Curse" his curse against age itself brings the old men of the village against him. In "Hanrahan's Vision" he sees a
procession of faery men and women come out of Ben Bulben's side through the white square door and ride through the valleys. The mist takes the appearance of waves of the sea washing the mountains. Hanrahan never ceases his wanderings and is welcomed as a poet wherever he goes. He knows that there are great secrets locked in the mountains and lakes but he cannot discover them for all his wandering. When Old Winny Byrne of the Cross-Roads, whose wits were stolen on Samhain Eve, passes him, singing of youth and beauty, he follows her. He dies, dreaming that she has become a beautiful Sidhe woman who has carried him off. From Irish folklore Yeats adopted the themes of transfiguration, wandering in search of wisdom or beauty, the love of solitude and the open air, and love itself. His wandering ballad poet is a spokesman for the people who still believed that certain places, inhabited by spirits, can exercise power over the minds of people (UP I: 74). Like King Goll and the man who dreamed of faeryland, Hanrahan understands the bitterness of frustrated desire; unlike them, he is able to glimpse the spiritual world he seeks, for he is a poet.

While Yeats created new mythologies from old folk motifs and legends, J. M. Synge wrote plays derived from his experiences on the Aran Islands. Like Yeats he was a traditionalist, but he was far more a primitivist, for he celebrates in his prose and drama the peasants' way of life, which he believed to be more virtuous and meaningful
than the civilization of the east. Yeats the mystic was interested in folk belief which could link the modern poet with timeless tradition; Synge the primitivist focused on the peasants' lives. Magic for him was the beauty of the landscape, the physical attractiveness of the hardy people, and a way of life close to nature. He had always been interested in natural history and experienced in the Wicklow mountains the hypnotic influence of mists and shadows that he believed were the origin of local superstitions and beliefs ("Autobiography," CW II: 10). But nature destroyed life as well as sustained it, and in this reality Synge, like the Celtic lyricists, found his theme: natural forces are both rejuvenators and destroyers. The peasants who looked daily upon the natural world looked also upon their own fate.

Synge's account of his stay on the islands forms an idealized, if detailed, picture of life there. He had the poet's ear for dialect, and wrote that he caught the real spirit of the island in some old fragments of melody or in the intonation of a few sentences when he listened to the men talking of tides, fish, and the price of kelp in Connemara (The Aran Islands I, CW II: 74). He also had an artist's eye for color and described tableau-like scenes that reinforce his conviction that the peasant's ancient way of life was superior to that of urban dwellers. An old man in one of the houses where he stayed told him
stories as they sat in the kitchen in the evening, while
the family drew round on their stools and the daughter of
the house in her "wonderful garments" spun on her wheel
(48). He visited the house where the most beautiful
children on the island lived and saw the eldest girl, about
fourteen years, sitting on a heap of straw near the doorway
where a ray of sunlight fell on her and the rye. Synge
wrote that her figure in her red dress and the straw formed
a curious relief against the nets and oilskins and created
a natural picture of exquisite harmony and color (130).

In Inishmaan, Synge wrote, one is forced to believe in
sympathy between man and nature, in the union of natural
and supernatural (75) and the inability of the people to
distinguish between the two (128):

Their minds have been coloured by endless
suggestions from the sea and sky, and seem
to form a unity in which all kinds of emotion
match one another like the leaves or petals
of a flower (102 fn.).

Miracles abound for the people: rye becomes oats, storms
rise up to keep away evictors, and cows isolated on lonely
rocks bring forth calves (128). Wonders, such as thunder-
storms and rainbows, are expected (129). At a funeral, the
thunder sounding a death peal of extraordinary grandeur
seemed in concord with the faces, stiff and drawn with
emotion. When the storm passed, the people's expression changed to one of friendly interest in each other. According to Synge, the supreme interest of the island lay in the strange concord that existed between the people and the impersonal, powerful impulses of the natural world (75 fn.). They depended on the sea and wind for their livelihood, and even their knowledge of the time depended on the direction of the wind, for they told time by the passing of light on the floor: nearly all cottages were built with two doors opposite one another, the more sheltered of which lay open all day to give light to the interior. When the wind was too strong, this door was closed, and so no light was admitted (66). Everything they did and, indeed, all that they felt were affected by the weather and the sea.

Synge felt himself transformed by the world around him:

. . . I was wandering out along the one good roadway of the island, looking over low walls on either side into small flat fields of naked rock. I have seen nothing so desolate. Grey floods of water were sweeping everywhere upon the limestone, making at times a wild torrent of the road, which twined continuously over low hills and cavities in the rock or passed between a few small fields of potatoes or grass hidden away in corners that had shelter (49).

A week of fogs that swept over the island left him with a profound sense of exile and desolation. When he walked he saw nothing but a mass of wet rock, surf, and tumultuous waves (72). On the other hand, the Atlantic storms were so
dramatic that he was shocked when he first saw one
arise and noted that the overwhelming power and beauty of
Atlantic storms affected him as beautiful music might affect
one whose appreciation of music was developed and yet who
had never heard any, or as the sight of a corpse might
affect one who knew nothing of death (97-8 fn.).

The immense suggestion from the world of inarticulate
power made him tremble long after the storm had passed.
The tremendous power of nature led him to morbid musing
that if he were to die there, no one outside the island
would know until after he was buried. He talked with no
one through days of rain and tempest, but gave himself over
to dreaming of his roving years in Europe. The raging
winds, he said, chanted a cadence to his "inner powers":

Have I not reason to join my wailing with the
winds, who have behind me the summer where I
lived and had no flowers and the autumn with
the red leaves of the forest and never gathered
any store for the winter that is freezing at
my feet? I have wandered only some few thousand
miles yet I am already beyond the dwelling place
of man (110).

The birds took up one plaintive note and passed it on to
one another along the cliff, "a sort of an inarticulate wail,
as if they remembered for an instant the horror of the
mist" (74). The birds exist between rational man and
inanimate nature, and voice the sinisterness that reflects
the islanders' relation with the sea. Their cry of horror
at the mist echoes the people's cry of horror at their
brutal treatment by the elements. The folk were less affected by the storm, but after a few days their voices sank in the kitchen, and their talk of pigs and cattle fell to a whisper, as if they were telling stories in a haunted house (72). Synge, however, felt the power of nature and the anguish of human helplessness before it. The "profound ecstasy of grief" he had heard expressed in the funeral keen contained not merely sorrow for the dead but also the whole passionate rage that every native of the island possessed:

In this cry of pain the inner consciousness of the people seems to lay itself bare for an instant, and to reveal the mood of beings who feel their isolation in the face of a universe that wars on them with winds and seas. They are usually silent, but in the presence of death all outward show of indifference or patience is forgotten, and they shriek with pitiable despair before the horror of the fate to which they are all doomed (75).

This is the cry of mankind who looks upon nature and is reminded of his own destruction. He went to the pier at nightfall in order to understand the influence of night on those who do their work after dark. "The sense of solitude was immense," he wrote. "I could not see or realise my own body, and I seemed to exist merely in my perception of the waves and of the crying birds, and of the smell of seaweed" (129-30). After a voyage to the south island he wrote:

The black curagh working slowly through this world of grey, and the soft hissing of the rain gave me one of the moods in which we realise
with immense distress the short moment we have left us to experience all the wonder and beauty of the world (139).

Individuality and mankind itself seemed to dissolve in the mist and sea.

And yet the climate of the islands produced some spectacular beauty as well as mist, fog, and rain. He wrote of the dreamy tone that comes with the rocking of the waves (94), of lying on the rocks for hours, companion to cormorants and crows, of the "intense insular clearness" of Ireland which allowed him to observe every ripple in the sea and sky, the crevices in the hills beyond the bay (53). Even when the sea was shrouded in gray and rain was threatening, the thin clouds threw a silvery light on the sea and an unusual depth of blue on the Connemara mountains (68). When the gray cleared, the sun shone with luminous warmth that made the whole island glisten with the splendor of a gem, and filled sea and sky with a radiance of blue light (73). His descriptions resemble those of the Celtic lyricists:

Bars of purple cloud stretched across the sound where immense waves were rolling from the west, wreathed with snowy phantasies of spray. Then there was the bay full of green delirium, and the Twelve Pins touched with mauve and scarlet in the east (110).

Yet these days, so different from the storms and mists, did not invite him to think of rejuvenation, as the storms and gray, overcast days taught him to dwell on mortality.
In this lonely world where men were so dependent on nature, articles possessed extreme significance:

Every article on these islands has an almost personal character, which gives this simple life, where all art is unknown, something of the artistic beauty of mediaeval life. The curaghs and spinning-wheels, the tiny wooden barrels that are still much used in the place of earthenware, the home-made cradles, churns, and baskets, are all full of individuality, and being made from materials that are common here, yet to some extent peculiar to the island, they seem to exist as a natural link between the people and the world that is about them (58-9).

In Riders to the Sea the natural and supernatural are interrelated, and even very mundane activities are endowed with significance—replenishing turf, stitching, making a rope halter or bread, or changing an old shirt for a new one. Objects are interconnected with life and seem to prophesy disaster. The white boards from Connemara intended for Michael's coffin are used for Bartley's. The new rope which hangs on a nail by the white boards also comes from Connemara and is being reserved for Michael's funeral. The only details Maurya forgets are nails themselves. Cathleen saves the rope from being eaten by the pig with the black feet, which Bartley tells her to sell to the pig-jobber. The rope then becomes a halter for Bartley's fateful ride. Familiar articles of peasant life become symbolic of disaster. A knife bought from the man who tells the family about the seven-day walk to Donegal from the Connemara coastline is used to open Michael's clothes.
Nora's stitching becomes evidence of possession and also of Michael's impending disaster; she altered the stitches so that in the event of his death his identity could be established. In a way, her sewing foreordained his fate. The stick which Michael brought from Connemara is given to Maurya, one of the objects the young leave behind for the old. She used it to go to the well where she sees the apparition which leaves her unable to bless her son. Flannel from Galway is used to determine whether the shirt in the bundle is made of the same material. Maurya poked the coals away from the cake and then failed to give Bartley his bread (product of the fire). The cake (bread) then becomes food for the builders of Bartley's coffin.

The primitive, organic culture of the island is based on the small world, the hearth surrounded by the kitchen, the cottage, the island. The kitchen as center of both work and communication is the center of the "cognitive map," the center of the islanders' territory. The symbol of the hearth, the fire, is never entirely extinguished. It is the area for both men's objects (nets, oilskins) and women's (spinning-wheel, turf loft) and the objects from the outside (rope, knife, and boards). The threshold line between the family and cottage and the outside is dangerous and exposed, the big world having both physical and psychological ramifications for the islanders. Kilronan is the center of primitive culture; Galway and Dublin call
enticingly and dangerously, representing a sickness for Aran culture called emigration. Leaving the island to work constitutes exile. The east threatens the islanders; the people from the big world enter as bailiffs and police. Thus the mercantile world threatens, invades, and desecrates the island. Economic conflict further divides the two worlds, as agents controlled market prices (76).

The doorway of the cottage is a psycho-graphic boundary between the small and larger worlds of Riders to the Sea. Objects mark the distance from the doorway: the spring-well, site of Maurya's vision, is a boundary-line which Bartley crosses. Beyond that lie the pier, the shore, the green head, the white rocks. The next layer of the cognitive map is the wind and sea which the women hear from inside the cottage, the center of their world. Next come Connemara and Galway, place of origin of the white boards, the new rope, the stick, the knife, the flannel, the young priest who is ignorant of the sea, the pig-jobber who will likely cheat Nora, the hooker which is tacking in from the east and will presumably bear the island men away, the black hags (birds) which are the only keeners for Michael. They are the location for the fair which lures Bartley away. Still beyond is Donegal, and "the black cliffs of the far north," the distance to which is measured in time: seven days are required to walk there from "the rocks beyond," the Connemara coastline.
In the second part of the play the balance between shelter and nature is broken: the human being dissolves in the sea, the human body becoming an object. The women listen from inside the cottage to the roaring of the sea in the west, to Bartley passing the big stones, to someone crying out near the shore. But they cannot battle the sea nor protect themselves against the grief that is their inheritance.

Nora and Cathleen continuously use symbols of the dark night in their speech: the cliffs of the north, the hags of the sea, the night, the feet of the pig, are all black, the color of evil and death (Messenger, *Inis Beag*, 106). The pig with the black feet is a symbol linking all references to death, for in Irish mythology the pig was an eater of corpses. The pig has been eating the new coffin rope and will be sold for slaughter: both references link him with death. Maurya rakes the fire aimlessly until it is almost extinguished. In Irish folklore the fire, symbolic of life, must not be allowed to die down (166). The wind blows open the door, the outside world invading the small.

The young in *Riders to the Sea* are foolish and careless of life, in contrast to Maurya's depth of understanding. Grief has taught her wisdom; she knows that human beings, and especially an only son, are more important than horses. She gives a vital clue to her spiritual condition and a premonition of the disaster which will soon
overtake her household when she prophesies that by nightfall she will have no son left her in the world. She knows the young priest is ignorant of the sea; indeed, throughout the play, he is always referred to as "young," and hence inexperienced. She knows he is wrong not to stop Bartley and to trust that God would not leave her without a son. Her remark that in the big world the old bequeath things to the young, while on the island the young leave things behind for the old, expresses her understanding more poignantly: while the islanders are dependent upon the mercy of the elements, more of them might survive if they heeded the wisdom of age, if the young would abandon their foolish security and pride. Maurya's only concern is for Bartley, not for the physical welfare of the family, and she is so grief-stricken that she forgets the blessing of leave-taking. Cathleen roughly admonishes her for refusing her blessing, chides her for allowing him to go with "a hard word in his ear" (CW III: 11), and sends her with the bread down to the well to see him. Maurya warns him not to go, telling him that the wind was raising the sea and there was a star up against the moon. He ignores her pleading, hurrying with his work, eager to go to the boat and the fair, which he has heard will be a good one for horses. His concern is that the family will be hard pressed with only one man working and orders Cathleen to
do the work normally undertaken by men—including striking a hard bargain for the pig. He is sure he will not be needed to dig a grave for Michael, for his mother's nine-day vigil resulted in nothing, and so he eagerly grasps at the opportunity the fair offers. Cathleen sides with him, insisting that the life of a young man is to be going out on the sea and that no one wants to listen to an old woman who repeats herself.

Bartley is an ambitious, proud young man who has learned nothing from the deaths of his brothers. Nora and Cathleen are naive and unable to understand what is happening to them. Even at the end, Cathleen tells the man who brings in Bartley's body that her mother is getting old and broken, and remarks to Nora that an old woman will soon be tired from anything she will do. Nora merely attributes her mother's courage in watching for Michael nine days and her passivity at Bartley's tragedy to favoritism for Michael (25). Nora cannot accept Michael's death with the courage Maurya displays after Bartley's; she remarks that it is a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher but a bit of an old shirt and a stocking (17). But Maurya, although she is old, is both remarkable and strong; after Bartley's death she makes her final, eloquent affirmation of life and individuality.
The young are careless not only of life but of precautionary rules which protect the natural world from the supernatural. It is clear that the play's action falls about November 11, for Maurya looks ahead, after Bartley's death, to the long nights after Samhain. The feast customs are transgressed at the beginning, for Cathleen kneads cake and spins in violation of festival rules. Bartley carelessly puts on the flannel shirt formerly owned by the drowned Michael. A common belief that the departed still own whatever property they possessed in life and may be jealous of it (Kiberd, Synge, 166) dictates that no one else should use such property. Thus, Cathleen's giving Maurya Michael's walking stick for her journey to the well demonstrates the girl's indiscretion. Similarly, it is unlucky for a traveller to return for something forgotten, as Bartley returns for the rope (163). Not returning a blessing was even more dangerous, for even compliments were harmful unless returned with the precautionary words "God bless you" (Messenger, Inis Beag, 102). Bartley, who presumably knows something of the sea, ignores the warnings of wind and tide: the southwest wind and eastern tide create two surf masses that collide loudly and produce dangerous weather conditions.

The story was inspired by Synge's experiences on the Aran Islands. A man had been washed ashore in Donegal with
one pampooy on him, and a striped shirt with a purse in one of the pockets, and a box for tobacco. These are the articles Bartley picks up before he heads off to the sea; he puts on Michael's shirt and takes up his purse and tobacco. For three days the people of the island tried to fix the identity of the man found in Donegal. The drowned man's mother stood on the shore as Maurya stares out to sea after Michael, looking out and weeping. The dead man's identity was determined by his sister who pieced together all she could remember about his clothes, purse, his tobacco box, and stockings. In the end there seemed little doubt it was her brother, whose name was Michael. She said, "please God they'll give him a decent burial," then began to keen slowly to herself. To Synge, she represented a type of the women's lives upon the islands (The Aran Islands III, CW II: 136), where the loss of a single man was a slight catastrophe to all except the immediate relatives, because (Synge believed) very often all the working men of a household died together at sea (137).

The theme of the coffin-boards used to bury someone for whom they were not intended comes also from The Aran Islands. A woman died of typhus, and as no boards could be found to make a coffin, a man gave up the boards he had kept for two years to bury his mother, who was ill but
still alive (158). Synge collected a story of a young woman who had been taken by the faeries who returned to tell the people that four or five hundred of the faeries rode on horses, and she herself rode a gray horse behind one of them (159). After the funeral of a young man, Synge wrote that he realized that he was talking to men who were under a judgement of death: "I knew that every one of them would be drowned in the sea in a few years and battered naked on the rocks, or would die in his own cottage and be buried with another fearful scene in the graveyard I had come from" (162). Grief for the death of a person under forty is deep and prolonged on the islands (Messenger, Inis Beag, 94); a common folk remark is that "It's not often the old are taken." The idea for Maurya's apparition might have come from a story a woman told in which, when horses were being herded toward a boat, a woman saw her son, who had been drowned some time before, riding on one of them (The Aran Islands IV, CW II: 164).

The crucial lines of Maurya's speech at the end of Riders to the Sea may come from a letter written in Irish by Martin McDonogh, a friend of Synge's from Inishmaan, on February 1, 1902: "That is a sad story to tell, but if it is itself, we must be satisfied because nobody can be living forever." Riders to the Sea was written later that
year. In his letter Martin also says that Sean his
brother "must be satisfied." Rage against shortened life
and tragic death was ineffectual. Martin displays the
same philosophical acceptance, not resignation, that
Maurya does.

Nora Burke, in The Shadow of the Glen, will not be
satisfied with philosophical acceptance. She demands from
life what Maurya knows can never be hers—love, and
emotional comfort. Maurya is a tragic figure who opens
her heart to the world and blesses her sons, giving them
individuality and achieving it herself while accepting
the limitations which life has imposed. Nora possesses
an impetuous, energetic personality, but in the end chooses
to immerse herself in the natural world which in Riders to
the Sea and The Shadow of the Glen is destructive of life,
and to relinquish individuality. In doing so she escapes
both fear and loneliness and gains a measure of freedom.

In The Shadow of the Glen, the shelter protects human
individuality, yet it is also the sterile denial of life
while the outside is vital, amoral, and instinctual.
Michael Dara and Dan Burke remain powerful and safe inside
the shelter but are the least sympathetic, heroic, or
imaginative characters. The mist is the entity into which
man dissolves, like the sea (Flood 77-8). Human
disintegration is associated with the coughing and choking sheep who live in the rain and fog: Patch Darcy dies raving in the white formlessness. Just as the sea transforms Michael, the great rower and fisher, into a memory, leaving nothing but a plain shirt and stocking, the mist transforms Darcy, once a great shepherd who could walk through five hundred sheep and not miss one of them, into a madman. Synge describes the effect of the mountain mists in his essay "In Wicklow":

The daylight still lingered but the heavy rain and a thick white cloud that had come down made everything unreal and dismal to an extraordinary degree. I went up on a road where on one side I could see the trunks of beech trees reaching up wet and motionless—with odd sighs and movements when a gust caught the valley—into a greyness overhead, where nothing could be distinguished. Between them there were masses of shadow, and masses of half-luminous fog with black branches across them. On the other side of the road flocks of sheep I could not see coughed and choked with sad gutteral noises in the shelter of the hedge, or rushed away through a gap when they felt the dog was near them. Above everything my ears were haunted by the dead heavy swish of the rain (CW II: 192).

This is the world which has engulfed Darcy and will engulf Nora and the Tramp.

Loneliness plagues the characters of this play as well as those of Riders to the Sea. Nora Burke laments to the Tramp her sense of loss at Patch Darcy's death: "... and it's very lonesome I was after him a long while ... and then I got happy again—if it's ever happy we are, stranger—for I got used to being lonesome" (CW III: 39).
In doing so she echoes the words written to Synge by his friend from Inishmaan, John McDonogh, the father of Martin: "It is lonely we were the time you left, for a long while, but now we are getting out of it, when we are used to being lonely" (Kiberd, "J. M. Synge," 62). Throughout this play, Nora and the Tramp talk of loneliness. Old Dan Burke was always cold to her, day and night, and so Nora surmises that coldness in him might not be a sign of death after all. The Tramp muses on her living alone, that not two living souls would ever see her candle in the window. The cottage is so far back in the hills that only a small path leads up to it and an ass and cart would be drowned in the rain water. Nora and the Tramp are alike in that she lives virtually alone in the back hills while he wanders alone. Nora remarks, when she leaves to call Dara, that even a corpse is better company for the Tramp than nothing and no one. She later foretells a lonely old age for Michael and for Dan.

Nora yearns for emotional satisfaction. Although she was hard to please as a child, a girl, and a woman, she settles for Dan Burke because he owns property which she believes will shield her against poverty in her old age (CW III: 47). She now regrets her marriage; although she has not met the fate of Peggy Cavanagh, who is forced to tramp the roads, neither does she have a family like
Mary Brien, who is younger than herself (51). Fear of poverty and old age made her choose Dan, and now she is dissatisfied:

I do be thinking in the long nights it was a big fool I was that time, Michael Dara, for what good is a bit of a farm with cows on it, and sheep on the back hills, when you do be sitting, looking out from a door the like of that door, and seeing nothing but the mists rolling down the bog, and the mists again, and they rolling up the bog, and hearing nothing but the wind crying out in the bits of broken trees were left from the great storm, and the streams roaring with the rain? (49).

She thinks of passing time, the winter and summer, the fine spring, the young growing behind her and the old passing, and realizes that she has spent a long time on the back hills meditating on the meaning of life. Rebell ing against her unhappy match, she resembles the wilful mountain ewes that Dara cannot control. Clearly, he is no match for her; as she muses on past loneliness and romantic longings, he imperviously counts out the money he thinks Dan has left to her. Darcy, a great shepherd like those reared in Glen Malure and Glen Imaal (47), could have been a suitable match for her. That she was married might have been one of the reasons he went mad; loneliness and the impersonal mist drove his wits away.

Fear also plagues the characters in The Shadow of the Glen. The Tramp is afraid to touch Dan's corpse because of the curse he laid on Nora. Michael Dara is unashamed
to admit his fear of the dead (45) and grows uneasy at the mere mention of mad Darcy. The Tramp was so afraid of Darcy's raving that he feared for his own sanity, and, instead of seeing whether he could help the man, he ran to the town to get drunk, believing that the voice he had heard was supernatural, a voice "you wouldn't believe at all, and you out of your dreams" (39). His courage did not return until he learned that the voice he'd heard was Darcy's, yet he tells Nora that he is not easily afraid, as a tramp must not be. He then asks her for a needle to protect him from spirits, saying as he moves uneasily, "there's great safety in a needle, lady of the house" (41). Nora, on the other hand, demonstrates her fearlessness in admitting him to the house and later in going out into the woods to live.

In this play Synge affects a dramatic presentation of a wake, during which it was customary to discuss topics of current interest, as Nora and the Tramp discuss Darcy's death (Kiberd, Synge, 168-70). A common feature of wakes was playing courtship games, such as "marrying," in which a man asks a girl to marry him, but she rejects him for another. The plot of The Shadow of the Glen is a variant of this game, for Nora and Dara arrange their own match, yet she rejects him for the Tramp. In fact, marriages were often arranged at wakes. Financial considerations being paramount in rural Irish matches (172), Dara discusses
Dan's legacy to Nora. Her acceptance of the Tramp is within the convention of "marrying" in which the girl chooses the first man to come into the house from outside. The play is a mock-wake, for not only is Dan still alive, but his faults rather than his virtues are recalled. We are entirely on Nora's side, for Dan reveals himself to be the kind of man she says he is. Her planning a marriage on what she supposes is the day of his death is overhasty and irreverent, yet we forgive her because she has always had to turn to others for companionship. While others praise Darcy, Dan reveals his callousness by cursing him (CW III: 43). Darcy is spoken of more often and more respectfully than Dan, although Darcy has been dead a year. The Tramp praises Darcy's prowess as a shepherd to Dara, who cannot deny the truth. Nora regards the Tramp with greater respect after he speaks well of Darcy (47). Nora and the Tramp distinguish themselves with their love of talk and, presumably, communication: he remarks that she is "a grand woman to talk" (43), and she agrees to go with him because of his "fine bit of talk" (57). Dan is a poor talker and a worse listener: he chides the Tramp for his "blathering about the rain" (43) and repeats in mockery the words that passed with such vitality between Nora and the Tramp (Kiberd, Synge, 173).
Arthur Griffith accused Synge of borrowing his plot from a Greek tale, the "Widow of Ephesus," but Synge collected the tale from Pat Dirane on Inishmaan (CW II: 70-2). In this tale a tramp goes to a lonely country house in which a woman waits alone after her husband—as she thinks—has died. She offers the tramp tea, spirits, and a pipe, as Nora does in the play, and then she goes to tell the neighbors of her husband's death. As in the play, the husband reveals himself and his plot to the stranger, who keeps his secret. The woman returns to the cottage with a young man who goes, he says, to the bedroom to sleep. The woman follows him, and the husband and tramp find them in bed together. In the play, Nora and Dara try to entice the Tramp to sleep in the bedroom so that they can make plans for their marriage. Dara is surer of Nora's assent than he has reason to be. In the story the husband beats the young man with a club; in the play Dan Burke invites Michael Dara to stay with him. The Tramp in Dirane's story is an onlooker who narrates the tale; in the play he becomes a major figure, verifying Darcy's virtues, and convincing Nora to leave the shelter and go to live in the glen.

Furthermore, many of the motifs Synge uses in the play are recorded in his notes and essays about his walks in the Wicklow glens. Among the people who live in the scattered
cottages of Wicklow, Synge found many whose personalities demonstrated the influence of their particular locality. They lived for the most part beside old roads and pathways where scarcely one person passed in a day, and looked out "all the year on unbroken barriers of heath." Heavy rains caused the thatch to drip, and terrible storms bowed the larches which were twisted towards the point where the sun rises in June. Winds howled through the narrow glens with the roar of a torrent, breaking at times into silence that increased mental tension. "At such times," Synge wrote, "the people crouch all night over a few sods of turf and the dogs howl in the lanes" (CW II: 209). He described his walking in a Wicklow glen when heavy rain and a thick white mist made everything seem unreal and dismal: trunks of beech trees reached wet and motionless into the grayness overhead, and between were masses of shadow and half-luminous fog with black branches across them. He wrote:

On the other side of the road flocks of sheep I could not see coughed and choked with sad gutteral noises in the shelter of the hedge, or rushed away through a gap when they felt the dog was near them. Above everything my ears were haunted by the dead heavy swish of the rain (CW II: 192).

But at sunrise the almost supernatural radiance brings everyone out into the air with the joy of people who have recovered from a fever. This climate, Synge concluded,
acting on a dwindling and lonely population, caused or increased a tendency to nervous depression, and made common "every degree of sadness" from mournfulness to insanity (209).

Patch Darcy's fate may have been suggested to Synge by a tale he collected from an old man in Wicklow in which a young lad who was reaping in the glens had gone mad and lost his way. In the morning the people found footprints, but nothing was known until they found his body on the mountain half-eaten by crows. The informant assured Synge that when he was a lad the young had been robust, but now the country people were "lonesome and bewildered" and no one knew the cause of their ailment (209-10).

Nora's romanticism and her shepherd-hero also come from folklore which Synge collected in the glens. He overheard a tinker rebuke a shepherd for boasting of his prowess, for the herd had been after sheep from his boyhood but had never attained the skill of shepherds reared in the mountains:

Those men are a wonder, for I'm told they can tell a lamb from their own ewes before it is marked, and that when they have five hundred sheep on the hills--five hundred is a big number--they don't need to count them or reckon them at all, but they just walk here and there where they are, and if one is gone away they'll miss it from the rest (228).
Synge borrowed the tinker's words for Nora's respectful description of Patch Darcy.

The Irish countryside in the work of Yeats and Synge thus became a setting for the working out of ideas about literature and society. Their landscapes do not resemble those of pastoral idylls, for while their landscapes are spectacularly beautiful and magical, they are also remote, dangerous, and haunted. Closeness to nature enabled the Irish rural people to communicate with the spiritual world, but their lives are far from contented, peaceful, or happy. Natural cycles remind them of mortality, and sinister supernatural forces threaten. Yeats and Synge both celebrate the rural way of life, but they also present the loneliness, confusion, and fear that are part of it. The relationship between the people and nature is complex and dynamic and extends deep into the mysterious, and sometimes dangerous, spiritual realm.
Chapter Four
The Peasant and Love

If the countryside provided a setting for the working out of ideas about self and society, it also provided a setting for love and romance, a necessary part of the pastoral ideal. The fundamental conventions of courtly love poetry are the ennobling power of love, the elevation of the beloved above the lover, and the conception of love as unsatisfied desire, always increasing. In pastoral romance, the woods or countryside represented safety for the lovers and freedom to create their own world. Modern writers drew images and motifs from traditional Irish love poetry, which was both pastoral and romantic, but which contained tragedy and pathos as well, principally because of separation from the loved one and because of the fear of old age.

Love in Irish poetry means desire—-for youth, beauty, and passion—and requires that the lover be as young and beautiful as the loved one. While the woods represent safety and solace, they also remind the lovers of their own mortality. The speakers in Irish love poems praise the beauty of the natural world but also lament the passing of seasons which will bring them closer to old age. Thus
the pastoral setting creates an ironic contrast, for while it represents safety and freedom from the "civilized" world, it also represents mortality. Birth and blossom, death and decay become metaphors in love poetry.

Nora Burke laments in *The Shadow of the Glen*: "Isn't it a long while I am sitting here in the winter, and the summer, and the fine spring, with the young growing behind me and the old passing" (CW III: 49). As her life goes by, passion seems lost to her. This is the consequence of marriage for economic reasons: she felt she had to marry Dan Burke in order to have a home and security in her old age, and found herself married to an old man who could not love, "wheezing the like of a sick sheep close to your ear" (CW III: 57). Christy Mahon and Pegeen Mike imagine their life together, but neither they nor any of Synge's or Yeats's peasant speakers experience lasting married love. The speakers in Irish love poems seldom, in fact, praise the virtues of married love, and only an old man and woman (Martin and Mary Doul in *The Well of the Saints*) who cannot see each other remain together. The horrible reality of growing old, rather than romantic idealism--the theme of much Irish love poetry--becomes a major concern in Yeats's and Synge's writing.

Love itself is insufficient: inevitably society or the outside world interferes with the lovers in their
creation of an ideal world, as the bishop does when he comes between Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman in *Words for Music Perhaps* and as Conchubor does by deceiving Naisi and Deirdre. Sometimes the lovers themselves lack the virtue or courage that love demands: duty and bravery are also necessary, as Deirdre and Naisi, Nora Burke, Christy Mahon, and Crazy Jane discover. Romantic love is threatened by a harsh world of human treachery, pride, ambition, adversity, greed, and especially old age and fading beauty. Both mortality and the "civilized" world threaten love.

Yeats and Synge develop the theme of the lover's lamenting the loss of the loved one and of youth which makes love possible. Douglas Hyde's translations of the songs and poems ascribed to the Irish poet Anthony Raftery (1784?-1835) and of the love songs from Connacht, which he published in 1893, were major sources for both Yeats's and Synge's work. A frequent motif in the songs Hyde translated is the jealousy of those in heaven—the saints, prophets, and bishops, even God himself—of the lovers who openly express their pleasure in being with one another. In the song entitled "Una Bhan" ("Fair Una"), the lover contrasts his beloved, to her advantage, with life in heaven:
O Una, O maiden, O friend, and O golden tooth, 
O little mouth of honey that never uttered injustice, 
I had rather be beside her on a couch, ever kissing her, 
Than be sitting in heaven in the chair of the Trinity. 1

The lover in Irish folk songs repeatedly vows: "I had rather be beside you than in the glory of Paradise" (Kiberd, Synge, 126). The song "Nancy Walsh," translated by Hyde, also declares that the lover prefers life with the woman to life in heaven:

A girl beyond compare, a pretty girl lives THERE, 
By Geata-mor the FAIR one is dwelling; 
Such cheeks, like roses RARE, the dead would rise to STARE, 
I'd rather be with HER than in heaven. 2

J. M. Synge's poem "Dread" (1906-8) incorporates this notion of the deprived deity:

Now by this window, where there's none can see, 
The Lord God's jealous of yourself and me (CW I: 40).

The sentiment is fused within Christy's speech to Pegeen in which he says that the Lord God is lonely in his splendor:

It's little you'll think if my love's a poacher's or an earl's itself when you'll feel my two hands stretched around you, and I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips till I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in his golden chair (CW IV: 147).

In Synge's poem "Is it a Month?" (1907-9, CW I: 52) and in The Playboy of the Western World, heaven becomes a veritable prison which houses lonely souls:
If the mitred bishops seen you that time, they'd be the like of the holy prophets, I'm thinking, do be straining the bars of Paradise to lay eyes on the Lady Helen of Troy, and she abroad pacing back and forward with a nosegay in her golden shawl (CW IV: 149).

Such images are irreligious; what they reveal, however, is affirmation of life and confirmation that the living woman is superior to promises of heaven.

Another frequent motif from Irish love songs which Synge used was the praise of the beloved who is called a "knowledge-star" or "star of knowledge." These celestial motifs evoke images of the sky and dawn, brightness or light, as metaphors for love's inspiration. In "Father Leeam" the image refers to religious understanding or devotion: "And is it not happy for the flock who are under his shield/ If they believe the Star of Knowledge" (Hyde, Raftery, 83). The speaker in the poem "Oh, Youth Whom I Have Kissed," longing for a tryst with her lover, employs the image of the star with the promise of a meeting:

Oh, youth whom I have kissed, like a star through the mist,
I have given thee this heart altogether,
And you promised me to be at the greenwood for me
Until we took counsel together (Hyde, Love Songs, 103). The image is used in its commoner context as a symbol of the beloved, together with images from nature which describe her beauty, in the poem "Breedyeen Vesey":

120
If you were to see the Star of Knowledge
And she coming in the mouth of the road,
You would say that she was a jewel at a distance
   Who would lift mist and enchantment.
Her countenance red, like the roses,
And her eyes like the dew of harvest,
And her thin little mouth, very pretty,
   And her neck like the colour of the lime
(Hyde, Raftery, 227).

In The Playboy of the Western World, after Christy has
become the hero of the village and the gallant lover
Pegeen desires, his speeches echo the celestial image from
Irish love poetry ("star of knowledge") and words of
devotion ("holy Brigid" and the "infant saints");

   Amn't I after seeing the love-light of the star
   of knowledge shining from her brow, and hearing
words would put you thinking on the holy Brigid
speaking to the infant saints . . . (CW IV: 125-7).

Pegeen learns to speak eloquently to Christy, although
before his arrival she shows little inclination or talent
for what the Widow Quinn calls "poetry talk." However, she
possessed a vivid imagination before she met Christy, if
what she describes to him of her dreams is true:

   And myself a girl was tempted often to go sailing
the seas till I'd marry a Jewman with ten kegs
of gold, and I not knowing at all there was the
like of you drawing nearer like the stars of God
(CW IV: 151).

Christy's imagination is also inspired by his love:

   Isn't there the light of seven heavens in your
heart alone, the way you'll be an angel's lamp
to me from this out, and I abroad in the darkness
spearing salmons in the Owen or the Carrowmore
(CW IV: 149).
The significance of Hyde's translations of the love songs he collected in Connacht and the *Songs Ascribed to Raftery* lies in the fact that they became the source of a new dialect for Irish drama. In a book review of October, 1893, Yeats praised the translations, saying they were better than either Walsh's or Mangan's poetry (*UP I*: 295). Hyde, Yeats wrote, had made available to the public "that beautiful English of the country people who remember too much Irish to talk like a newspaper." Yeats also praised the commentary on the poems, describing it as "almost as much a fragment of life as the poems themselves" (292). Of the poem "If I Were to Go West," Yeats wrote, "The whole thing is one of those 'thrusts of power' which Flaubert has declared to go beyond the reach of conscious art" (294). He lamented that the time when these songs were commonly sung among the people had passed away:

As for me, I close the book with much sadness. These poor peasants lived in a beautiful but somewhat inhospitable world, where little has changed since Adam delved and Eve span. Everything was so old that it was steeped in the heart, and every powerful emotion found at once noble types and symbols for its expression. But we live in a world of whirling change where nothing becomes old and sacred, and our powerful emotions unless we be highly trained artists express themselves in vulgar types and symbols . . . Yes, perhaps, this very stubborn uncomeliness of life, divorced from hill and field, has made us feel the beauty of these songs in a way the people who made them did not, despite their proverbs:
'A tune is more lasting than the song of the birds,
A word is more lasting than the riches of the world.'
We stand outside the wall of Eden and hear the trees talking together within and their talk is sweet in our ears (295).

Yeats saw that Hyde's book signified the advent of a new power into literature:

I find myself now, as I found myself then, grudging to propaganda, to scholarship, to oratory, however necessary, a genius which might in modern Irish or in that idiom of the English-speaking country-people discover a new region for the mind to wander in. In Ireland, where we have so much to prove and to disprove, we are ready to forget that the creation of an emotion of beauty is the only kind of literature that justifies itself (Explorations 93).

The English spoken by native Irish speakers in the west, Yeats argued, was the only good English spoken by any large number of Irish living at that time. Therefore, the new literary idiom should come from them, for literature must be founded on the speech of the common people (94).

Love in these songs of Connacht involved not only joy at the sight of the beloved and celebration of youth and beauty but also dissatisfaction, sorrow because of separation, and unfulfilled desire. These songs are characterized by light-heartedness and mirth, even extravagant celebration, but also melancholy. The singers celebrate not only the local beauty and the individual, secret love, but, soliloquizing alone in the woods, they also pine for the
lost lover who has emigrated. So profound is the grief of the lover that all contemplation of peace with God, all hope of happiness in the power of love to ennoble the lover, all comfort in the family or home, are forgotten. The poems tell more of grief, melancholy, and contrition of heart than of gaiety or mirth. The poem "If I Were to Go West" laments simply and gently the loss of love and takes images from nature to describe the lover's sorrow:

If I were to go west, it is from the west I would not come,
On the hill that was highest, 'tis on it I would stand,
It is the fragrant branch I would soonest pluck, And it is my own love I would quickest follow.

My heart is as black as a sloe,
Or as a black coal that would be burnt in a forge,
As the sole of a shoe upon white halls,
And there is great melancholy over my laugh.

My heart is bruised, broken,
Like ice upon the top of water,
As it were a cluster of nuts after their breaking, Or a young maiden after her marrying
(Hyde, Love Songs, 5).

The melancholy lover goes on to compare his love with the color of blackberries (a common image in Irish poems), and to declare that he will leave his town, which no longer holds any joy for him, only blame and spite, and to denounce love itself and to prophesy unhappiness for his beloved who has given herself to a man who does not
understand her (Hyde, *Love Songs*, 7). The sorrow of love is the theme of "Long Am I Going," which has two speakers, a man and a woman:

'Tis a pity without me to be married
   With the bright treasure of my heart,
On the brink by the great river
   Or at the nearer ditch by its side.
Company of young women,
   It is they who would raise my heart,
And I would be a year younger
   If I were married to my desire


On the halls of this great house
Resides and does be my white love,
Altogether (?) (he is) my knowledge-star;
   What I am sure of is that he is not to be got;
I would think his kiss sweeter
   Than the b'yore 5 and the sugar white;
And, unless I get you to marry,
   What I think certain is that my heart will
not be whole (27).

The woman laments that the garden is a wilderness and all fruit spoiled for her because she desires a man she cannot have. Perhaps the saddest of the love songs, and one which clearly reveals the extent to which thoughts of passion and physical desire were a part of the Catholic peasants' thoughts of love, is spoken by a woman whose lover has crossed the sea:

My grief on the sea,
   How the waves of it roll!
For they heave between me
   And the love of my soul!

Abandoned, forsaken,
   To grief and to care,
Will the sea ever waken
   Relief from despair?
On a green bed of rushes
   All last night I lay,
And I flung it abroad
   With the heat of the day.

And my love came behind me--
   He came from the South;
His breast to my bosom,
   His mouth to my mouth ("My Grief on the Sea,"
   Hyde, Love Songs, 29-31). 6

Another convention of Irish love poems was the 
comparison of the beloved with legendary queens (Deirdre 
or Helen), with the declaration that the beloved was more 
beautiful. Raftery tells of Mary Staunton, who lived on 
a quay in Galway and was considered extremely beautiful. 
In the song she is called "a lovely POSY lives by the 
ROADWAY," a "sky-woman" who kindles light from her bosom 
when she walks, "the Star of Monday," who is more beautiful 
than Deirdre or Helen. Her cheeks are like roses growing 
among lillies, her mouth melodious with songs, her waist 
narrow and chalk-white, her countenance like roses, her 
hair shining like the dew, "her two breasts equal-round 
over against her heart." She appears like harvest dew 
and is compared with apple-blossom (Hyde, Raftery, 321-5).

Raftery sang even more gloriously of the Posy Bright 
of Ballylee, a peasant woman who was the most beautiful 
in the west of Ireland for a hundred years. She too is 
a "sky-woman," and those who see her find that words are 
insufficient to praise her beauty and her manners (325).
She lived in Ballylee near Gort Inse-Guaire. "I never saw a woman as handsome as she, and I never shall til I die," said an old man to Lady Gregory. An old fiddler who remembered her well remarked, "Mary Hynes was the finest thing that was ever shaped. There usedn't to be a hurling match in the county that she wouldn't be at it, and a white dress on her always. Eleven men asked her in marriage in one single day, but she would not marry any one of them. There were a number of young men sitting up drinking one night, and they fell to talking about Mary Hynes, and a man of them stole away to go to Ballylee to see her, and when he came to the Bog of Cloone he fell into the water and was drowned" (327). Another old man said, "The strongest man that we ever had, and that Shawn O'--, he got his death on the head of her, going across the river in the night hoping to see her." An old woman declared that the sun and moon were not so fine as she, and that all praised her courtesy highly (329). She was a "jewel-woman," the fairest in the world, fairer than Deirdre, Venus, or Helen, a "star of light, O Sun of Harvest" (333). Hyde tells us that she welcomed blind Raftery with a hundred welcomes and declared "The cellar is strong in Ballylee." The "cellar" alludes to a deep pool in the river, near a house.
Yeats describes this pool in the river in "Coole and Ballylee, 1931": "Then darkening through 'dark' Raftery's 'cellar' drop" (*Poems* 234). Raftery followed Mary Hynes to her house and although he, being blind, could not see her beauty, he could write a song about her. Yeats also collected the story of Mary Hynes, who was believed to be the most beautiful woman the west of Ireland had ever produced. She lived in Ballylee, and her story was told for sixty and more years after her death. He collected the story of the men drinking in Kilbecanty and the one who died in Cloone Bog as he attempted to learn the truth of the tale. Another man, the strongest in the countryside, named John Madden, died while trying to cross the river at night to get to Ballylee to see her. Yeats wrote that because of their generous spirits and their love of beauty, "These poor countrymen and countrywomen in their beliefs, and in their emotions, are many years nearer to that old Greek world, that set beauty beside the fountain of things, than are our men of learning" (*Mythologies* 28).

In "The Tower" Yeats incorporated this theme of the power of the legend to inspire the poet's song about beauty he cannot see. In this poem the speaker summons images from history and the surrounding countryside, one of which is that of Mary Hynes, whom legend has termed
the most beautiful woman in the west of Ireland. Yeats's treatment of her, however, is much different from Raftery's, for in Yeats's version the song itself--art--confers the glory on the woman rather than her providing inspiration for the song ("So great a glory did the song confer"). Not her face but the song (poetry and music) drove the men mad who sat drinking and toasting her, and caused one man to drown "in the great bog of Cloone" (Poems 195).

Yeats is less respectful of Mary Hynes than Raftery is, for he does not celebrate her manners, kindness, or beauty, but rather the song that drove men mad and the legend that created the song. He wants to question the poet, "beauty's blind rambling celebrant," and the drowned man whose wits were driven astray by the song ("The man drowned in a bog's mire,/ When mocking muses chose the country wench" Poems 197), for they know secrets the speaker wishes to know about love, the heart, the legendary history of the country-side. Mary Hynes in Yeats's poem is "A peasant girl commended by a song,/ Who'd lived somewhere upon that rocky place" (Poems 195). The few who remembered her had "greater joy in praising her" not because of her fine manners but because of the power of the song to influence men:
Remembering that, if walked she there,
Farmers jostled at the fair
So great a glory did the song confer (195).

Those who praised her were maddened by the poet's rhymes,
or else were driven mad by their own words of praise
("And certain men, being maddened by those rhymes,/ Or else by toasting her a score of times,"), and declared
that they must "test their fancy by their sight"—measure
the dream against the reality. Theirs is a disastrous
decision, for the reality is transformed by the dream and
can never be measured. Furthermore, they cannot test their
dream because they have lost their senses and are unable
to perceive the tangible world:

But they mistook the moon
For the prosaic light of day—
Music had driven their wits astray— (195).

They do not know that, once inspired by the music and the
legend, they can never look upon the physical world in the
same realistic ("prosaic") way, for poetry has inspired
them ("Music had driven their wits astray—") and their
efforts to "test their fancy" end in disaster: "And one
was drowned in the great bog of Cloone" (195). The man
is destroyed in the pursuit of a dream.

The dream vision of beauty or a life full of happiness
or inspiration informed the Irish poetry of love, and it was
this that Yeats and Synge incorporated into their writing.
Yeats praised Synge's delight in language, which made him
resemble the great writers, and his preoccupation with individual life and with what was lasting and noble, that came to him from listening to old stories in the cottages, not from books. It was Synge who demonstrated that the dialect in Hyde's translations could become a powerful new literary idiom. Yeats wrote that the only literature the Irish country people possessed were their songs, full of extravagant love, and their stories of kings and of kings' children (Essays 303). Every writer who was part of a great tradition has had his dream of an impossibly noble life, and the greater he is, the more does it plunge him into some beautiful or bitter reverie:

Mr. Synge, indeed, sets before us ugly, deformed or sinful people, but his people, moved by no practical ambition, are driven by a dream of that impossible life. That we may feel how intensely his Woman of the Glen dreams of days that shall be entirely alive, she that is 'a hard woman to please' must spend her days between a sourfaced old husband, a man who goes mad upon the hills, a craven lad and a drunken tramp; and those two blind people of The Well of the Saints are so transformed by the dream that they choose blindness rather than reality. He tells us of realities, but he knows that art has never taken more than its symbols from anything that eye can see or the hand measure (Essays 304).

Synge's characters, wrote Yeats, are preoccupied with the dream of this impossible life, and of greatness of love. Their emotional subtlety stems from this dream that they might transcend their surroundings to find their own desire. The attainable is not part of his plays; moreover, the
characters themselves—like everyone caught up in great events—do not know why they act as they do:

She (Nora Burke) feels an emotion that she does not understand. She is driven by desires that need for their expression, not 'I admire this man,' or 'I must go, whether I will or no,' but words full of suggestion, rhythms of voice, movements that escape analysis. In addition to all this, she has something that she shares with none but the children of one man's imagination. She is intoxicated by a dream which is hardly understood by herself, but possesses her like something half remembered on a sudden wakening . . . For though the people of the play use no phrase they could not use in daily life, we know that we are seeking to express what no eye has ever seen (Essay 305).

Nora Burke's longing for a life of greater richness and excitement suggests pathos and melancholy. She faces a situation extremely harsh and severe—her husband is setting her out on the road, without food, shelter, or protection. The motif is common in Irish poetry: in the aristocratic songs, the protagonist was a noblewoman, wife of a chief or prince; but in the peasants' love songs, she might be any woman unhappily wed. The husband is hard and cold; he fails to satisfy her; she strikes out against the marriage, which was usually arranged by the parents. She wishes for her husband's death so that she can escape with her lover. One common feature of the songs is the argument between the aged husband and the restless wife, in which he invariably loses patience and vows to cast her out on the roads without food or clothes
(Kiberd, Synge, 127). In The Shadow of the Glen Synge presents dramatically the condition of the Irish country people, many of whom were caught in loveless, arranged marriages.

The women of Ireland, Synge wrote, could look forward to a life much different from that which was described in their love poetry. He wrote that among the men of Aran, the greatest merit they could see in a woman was that she should bring them many children:

The direct sexual instincts are not weak on the island, but they are so subordinated to the instincts of the family that they rarely lead to irregularity. The life here is still at an almost patriarchal stage, and the people are nearly as far from the romantic moods of love as they are from the impulsive life of the savage (CW II: 144).

These are not the sentiments of romance heard so clearly in the songs ascribed to Raftery or in those collected by Hyde. The women Synge met on the islands also lived lives far removed from that described in the love poetry:

The maternal feeling is so powerful on these islands that it gives a life of torment to the women. Their sons grow up to be banished as soon as they are of age, or to live here in continual danger on the sea; their daughters go away also, or are worn out in their youth with bearing children that grow up to harass them in their own turn a little later (The Aran Islands II, CW II: 108).

Nevertheless, Synge wrote, the passion for children was powerful there (252). Nor was the unmarried man valued for himself, but rather as a potential husband. An island-man told Synge:
Listen to what I'm telling you: a man who is not married is no better than an old jackass. He goes into his sister's house, and into his brother's house; he eats a bit in this place and a bit in another place, but he has no home for himself; like an old jackass straying on the rocks (121).

This sentiment is repeated in The Playboy by Michael James, father of Pegeen, when he hears that she is determined to marry Christy and not Shawn:

What's a single man, I ask you, eating a bit in one house and drinking a sup in another, and he with no place of his own, like an old braying jackass strayed upon the rocks? (CW IV: 157).

Practical rather than romantic concerns seemed always to prevail.

The loveless rural marriage of The Shadow of the Glen was contracted because of necessity. Pat Dirane's tale of the unfaithful wife emphasized the husband's ruthless cunning, while Synge emphasizes the loveless sterility of life (Watson 78). Nora's only hope of escape is little better than her marriage: Michael Dara is cowardly and greedy and darkens the tone of the play by emphasizing this sterility and Nora's predicament. One suspects that he too is little capable of satisfying her. Dara's greed and Dan Burke's bitterness contrast with Nora's humility, loneliness, and sense of mortality. The hopeless reality is contrasted with her dreams of love and fulfillment.

Nora Burke leaves the "civilized" world that promises her nothing. Yeats's Crazy Jane is a peasant woman who
also faces a loveless old age, but her way of dealing with her loneliness is to curse the world and to refuse to respect social convention. Many of Yeats's poetic speakers, both in the early poems and the later ones, are beggars and old men and women (Moll Magee, the Old Mother, the Old Pensioner, Father O'Hart, Father Gilligan) whose age has reduced them into a state of poverty and rags, and of spiritual or emotional deprivation. Yeats transformed the Crazy Jane of legend into an old hag for whom sexual love and desire have become the meaning of life. Like the woman of popular tradition, Jane gives her virginity to a lover who is gone but whose memory she cherishes. The poems resemble ballads in their simple diction and unequivocal facing of tragic emotion. The difference between Crazy Jane and the jilted woman of nineteenth-century tradition, however, is that Jane is not destroyed by her love but lives on, full of vigor, love, and hate. Although the tone of "Crazy Jane and the Bishop" may resemble that of "The Ballad of Moll Magee," who laments her lost child, husband, and youth, the theme is quite different. Moll asks the children to pity her and to desist from throwing stones, while Jane feels no remorse for anything, only anger that her love was banished, and she asks for no pity.
The Crazy Jane cycle of literature, about a poor maniac girl who becomes mad as a result of her lover's leaving her, extends about one hundred fifty years, beginning with Matthew Gregory Lewis's "The Ballad of Crazy Jane" (written between 1793 and 1801). "Crazy Jane" appeared on broadsides and in popular song chapbooks for half a century. A chapbook published in 1813 by Sarah Wilkinson describes Jane as seventeen, beautiful, and very poor. Jane falls in love with her brother-in-law, Henry, surrenders her virginity to him, and says farewell to peace for her lifetime. Henry goes to London and the West Indies, while Jane, alone, discovers she is pregnant and aborts her child. She goes mad and lives two years a maniac, wandering in places where she had met Henry. After her death he returns, repentent, and commits suicide on her grave, and is buried beside her under a yew tree. Various theatrical versions of the story remained in popular tradition for a century, until it died away toward the close of the nineteenth century. Wilkinson's epitaph for Jane reads:

Traveler, stop, whoe'er thou art,  
Shed a tear ere thou depart;  
For here, releas'd from care and pain,  
Lies Love's sad victim, Crazy Jane (Hoffman 67).

In a play by Charles Somerset, Jane's father calls down curses on the head of her lover, as Jane calls down curses
on the Bishop in "Crazy Jane and the Bishop." The first line of the poem, "Bring me to the blasted oak," may have been suggested by a woodcut of Jane before a tree (68).

Yeats's play *The Pot of Broth* (1904) contains a song with a reference to Jack the Journeyman and a note pertaining to her name:

> The words and the air of 'There's Broth in the Pot' were taken from an old woman known as Cracked Mary, who wanders about the plain of Aighne, and who sometimes sees unearthly riders on white horses coming through stoney fields to her hovel door in the night time. 9

Jack the Journeyman may have come from Lady Gregory's play *A Losing Game* in which she uses the common motif in Irish folklore of the jealous old husband and the young wife (Hoffman 72). But Cracked Mary was not a spokeswoman for sexual love, nor was the Crazy Jane of the ballads. She was a heartbroken, jilted lover.

Gaelic love songs reveal a delight in melancholy recklessness and wildness of speech. Their speakers' intensity of passion allows them outside the pale of normalcy; their imaginations are distracted. Distracted feelings are not "normal," and we find the speaker saying that others advise him or her to have nothing to do with this craziness. The mood of setting aside ordinary things is common in European love poetry, but in Gaelic songs it has immediacy, outrageousness, a mood of liberation, and frenzy. 10 The lunatic, such as King Goll, can represent
the spontaneity of the subjective animal world. Yeats, in the Crazy Jane poems, recovers a strong affinity with the Gaelic love songs, because these songs established a world of erotic anguish in which places and things are charged with immeasurable significance. In his version of "Love Song: From the Gaelic" the lovers express their faith that they will be safe in the woods:

My love, we will go, we will go, I and you,
And away in the woods we will scatter the dew;
And the salmon behold, and the ousel too,
My love, we will hear, I and you, we will hear,
The calling afar of the doe and the deer.
And the bird in the branches will cry for us clear,
And the cuckoo unseen in his festival mood;
And death, oh my fair one, will never come near
In the bosom afar of the fragrant wood (Variorum Poems 767).

Like Sweeney in Buili Shuibhne (Mad Sweeney), the peasant lovers become extremely sensitive to the details of the natural world around them.

Just as the speaker in "My Grief on the Sea" utters the pain of loss and unfulfilled desire, "Crazy Jane on the Day of Judgment" reveals erotic longing and the desire to be absorbed into the being of the other:

'Love is all
Unsatisfied
That cannot take the whole
Body and soul';
And that is what Jane said (Poems 257).

The speakers in both poems lie in the grass and dream that their lovers come to them. Longing and secrecy lead to madness:
'Naked I lay
The grass my bed;
Naked and hidden away,
That black day';
And that is what Jane said.

In the Irish Gaelic poem, the lover hallucinates as she dreams that her beloved, who is on his way to America, returns to her:

On a green bed of rushes
All last night I lay,
And I flung it abroad
With the heat of the day.

And my love came behind me--
He came from the South;
His breath to my bosom,
His mouth to my mouth (Hyde, Love Songs, 31).

The two mysterious singers delight in irrationality and strangeness, in abandoning conventional mores, caution, and rationality. Jane becomes mad in order to find out what true love is, which cannot be shown until time is gone:

'What can be shown?
What true love be?
All could be known or shown
If Time were but gone.'
'That's certainly the case,' said he.

A tryst between a mad woman and the ghost of a dead lover, a common theme in Irish love poetry, frames the action of "Crazy Jane and the Bishop" (Poems 255-6), in which Jane's strength of feeling prevails over the religious strictures of the bishop. Crazy Jane cries out to be led to the "blasted" oak, like Lear upon the
heath who cries out against betrayal. She wants to "call down curses" on the head of the bishop who banished her lover, Jack the Journeyman. He wasn't even a bishop when he accused them of living "like beast and beast," not even parish priest, yet he was fierce ("an old book in his fist"). His piousness and righteousness are powerful enough to prevent them from being together, but powerless to prevent the ugliness of old age--she states triumphantly that his skin is "wrinkled like the foot of a goose"--nor can his habit conceal his physical deformity, "The heron's hunch upon his back." Jack, who had been straight and tall ("But a birch-tree stood my Jack"), calls her to the oak tree, which is solid and stately (not the yew-tree of legend), to meet his ghost.

The second refrain in each stanza compares the two men. Jane has chosen the "solid man" who stands tall. The bishop is a "coxcomb" because he is ludicrous, waving his old book and ordering her about, and because he degrades love; furthermore, as a hunchback, belonging to Phase 26, he is not an admirable character.11

The last line before the refrain echoes "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner" (Poems 46) in which the speaker declares, "I spit into the face of Time/ That has transfigured me." Jane declares that "should that other come, I spit." The "other" is the bishop, who apparently still
tyrannizes her. The first refrain adds a level of
difficulty to an otherwise straightforward poem. The
bishop is not likely to declare that "All find safety
in the tomb," for he believes in sin and punishment. Clearly Jack has not found safety, for his ghost walks at night, although this refrain may be his calling to her. Jane will not be safe in the tomb, for she is unrepentent.
Nor is she, with her blasphemous and anticlerical sentiments, the type to desire safety. Perhaps Jane as speaker of the refrains wishes to live and to avoid "safety" that she knows she will eventually find in death.

In "Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman," Jane foretells the time she will be in the tomb and will no longer be able to satisfy the lovers who came to her at night. She does not care that they leave her, for physical love is sufficient for her:

I know, although when looks meet
I tremble to the bone,
The more I leave the door unlatched
The sooner love is gone,
For love is but a skein unwound
Between the dark and dawn (258).

The ghost which finally leaves the cycles of reincarnation and returns to God is lonely, as were the saints and angels in the Irish poems who were jealous of the living lovers. Jane does not desire union with God but reunion with the other world from which she can enter into life again:
I--love's skein upon the ground,
My body in the tomb--
Shall leap into the light lost
In my mother's womb.

She wants to continue to engage in free love. Had she remained faithful to Jack, her life would have been unfulfilled, and her unhappy spirit would walk the roads after her death, searching for what she had missed:

But were I left to lie alone
In an empty bed,
The skein so bound us ghost to ghost
When he turned his head
Passing on the road that night,
Mine would walk being dead.

Having rejected both religion and fidelity, Crazy Jane expresses her faith in permanence, which to her is continuity, in "Crazy Jane on God" (258-9). "All things remain in God" she sings at the end of each stanza, equating all experience--personal (love), public (war), or cosmic (the cycles of history). Her unnamed lover leaves her after a night of love; armies meet "In the narrow pass" for battle; a house which represents generations burns to the ground; Jane herself who was "wild" Jack's lover becomes "like a road/ That men pass over." She regrets nothing and asks for no pity. Her body (not her soul) rejoices ("sings on"), for although individuals and nations experience upheaval, permanence is found in moments of great emotion--love or passion.
Crazy Jane reaches her greatest exuberance and irre­ligiousness in "Crazy Jane Talks With the Bishop" (259-60). She uses orthodox Christian symbols to refute the bishop's puritanical (and "sensible") argument. Jane personifies Love, as Christ was equated with Love. Her use of "mansion" echoes not only the Bishop's words ("Live in a heavenly mansion,/ Not in some foul sty"), but Christ's: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2). Neither death nor love (grave nor bed) denies that the desirable (beauty) and undesirable (excrement)--fair and foul--are part of the same thing, just as Christ was simultaneously divine (fair) and human (foul). Fair and foul are "near of kin" and must exist together as love and death exist together with the "heart's pride." In the last stanza "Love" takes on a new meaning. When a woman is intent upon winning her love, she may be "proud and stiff." Love here is spiritual. But "Love," both spiritual and physical, "has pitched his man­sion in/ The place of excrement." The spiritual and physical are one now, inseparable. Mansions are seldom "pitched," as tents are, yet perhaps all things are pos­sible for Love, or for a God who takes a human form, dies, and lives again.

Jane's depth of feeling prevails over the Bishop's stern advice, for she knows what he does not--that the spirit is not simple and pure, that it is part of the living body.
She demonstrates the truth of her convictions not only through her argument but through her choice of words, not only "Love" and "mansion" (which she borrows from the Bishop) but "pitch," which means both "set up" and "throw"; "rent," another Biblical term ("And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst" [Luke 23:45]); and "sole" and "whole." She affirms that whatever is to be "sole" (one) or "whole" (unified) must be rent asunder, as the veil of the tabernacle was upon the death of Christ who would make the scul one with God; "sole" and "whole" pun on "soul"—that with which the Bishop is concerned—and "hole"—Jane's concern, although she too understands the importance of the spirit and love. To Jane, a "heavenly mansion" is lifeless and empty, as was the heaven in the Irish love poems, while an earthly mansion is filled with love.

Jane laments her lost lover and defends the life she has lived. The Irish folk-songs and folk-stories emphasize the imminence of time and age, sorrow and separation. The natural world mirrors the human in that all things are dependent on time. Nora Burke expresses this sentiment when she laments that she spends her whole life observing the seasons passing, with no children herself (CW III: 50-1). Nora herself does not know what she desires, only that she is difficult to please, desirous of love. And Conchubor
in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, a peasant play because of Synge's use of the dialect which animates his other works, measures passing time in terms of seasonal changes and images from the natural world:

How would I be happy seeing age come on me each year when the dry leaves are blowing back and forward at the gate of Emain, and yet this last while I'm saying out when I'd see the furze breaking and the daws sitting two and two on ash-trees by the Duns of Emain, 'Deirdre's a year nearer her full age when she'll be my mate and comrade,' and then I'm glad surely (CW IV: 193).

Deirdre wants to remain in the woods she is used to and begs to be left there, while Conchubor, the bitter old man greedy for the young woman he has raised to be his mate, does not want to wait for her. She begs to be allowed to stay where she is well used to the "tracks and pathways and the people of the glens," this being the life for which she believes she was born (193). Also, she has been used to having her freedom on the edges of the hills: "I'm too long watching the days getting a great speed passing me by, I'm too long taking my will and it's that way I'll be living always" (195). Conchubor accuses her of wanting to remain a child always, instead of emulating Emer and Maeve, who grappled with their destinies (195), and to live like a common person: "You'd wish to be dressing in your duns and grey, and you herding your geese or driving your calves to their shed . . . like the common lot"
scattered in the glens?" (191). Certainly she sounds like a child when she begs him to allow her to stay. He answers that he is a "ripe man" (195) and lonely; although he is king he is not happy.

But she does not wish to remain a child, except insofar as her desire to live in the woods reflects an innocent idealism. She wishes for a young man with raven hair, snow-white skin, and blood-red lips (191). Lavarcham, the wise old woman, sees the inevitable: "Birds go mating in the spring of the year, and ewes at the leaves falling, but a young girl must have her lover in the courses of the sun and moon" (213). Fearful of Conchubor's anger but determined to live freely, to embrace her destiny rather than accede to it, Deirdre remarks, "And maybe from this day I will turn the men of Ireland like a wind blowing on the heath" (199). Deirdre is aware of the stories of doom which have been foretold, but her desire for romance makes her reckless. To Naisi she says:

I was in the woods at the full moon and I heard a voice singing. Then I gathered up my skirts, and I ran on a little path I have to the verge of a rock, and I saw you pass by underneath, in your crimson cloak, singing a song, and you standing out beyond your brothers are called the flower of Ireland (CW IV: 209).

Deirdre is a creature of nature, and she desires a man who is young and brave over an elderly (and cowardly) king.
Tedium and brevity threaten love. Naisi tells Deirdre that each one has a short space only to be triumphant and brave (CW IV: 209), and Deirdre remarks to Owen, when he asks her whether she is well pleased with the same man next to her snoring every morning at the dawn of day (223), that the wise know that they will have the same things only for a short space, that she is not weary of Naisi (223). She tells him that she is well pleased with her seven years "seeing the same sun throwing light across the branches at the dawn of day" (223). Yet to Lavarcham she articulates her troubles: "I've dread going or staying, Lavarcham. It's lonesome this place having happiness like ours till I'm asking each day, will this day match yesterday, and will tomorrow take a good place beside the same day that's gone, and wondering at times is it a game worth playing, living on until you're dried and old, and our joy is gone forever?" (219). Deirdre and Naisi are both troubled by doubts about the strength of their passion and depth of their love.

Fergus wants the sons of Usna to return to Ireland. A warrior, he believes in duty rather than prophecy, since Conchubor has given his word that he will deal with Naisi in good faith. He appeals to Naisi's pride:

... it would be a poor thing if a timid woman... could turn away the Sons of Usna from the life of kings. Let you be thinking on the years...
to come, Deirdre, and the way you'll have a
right to see Naisi a high and white-haired
Justice beside some king of Emain. Wouldn't
it be a poor story if a queen the like of
you should have no thought but to be scraping
up her hours dallying in the sunshine with
the sons of kings? (227).

Fergus interprets greatness as "white-haired Justice" and
believes Naisi's rightful position is as a king's minister.
Duty to the country is foremost with him, and he reminds
Naisi of his experience, saying he's been in the woods
long enough to realize the truth of what Fergus is saying
(227). When Naisi finally refuses to go with him, Fergus
rebukes him, saying he was not mistaken that the sons of
Usna were hunters only (229), insulting their manhood
when he sees he has failed to persuade them.

Not Fergus's appeal to their pride nor acceptance of
destiny and the prophecy makes Deirdre and Naisi leave
the woods, but fear of the loss of love and loss of
youth. Naisi confides to Fergus his ultimate fear:

I'll not tell you a lie. There have been days
a while past when I've been throwing a line for
salmon, or watching for the run of hares, that
I've had a dread upon me a day'd come I'd weary
of her voice [very slowly] . . . and Deirdre'd
see I'd wearied (227).

But he soon recovers his faith in Deirdre and in himself,
and assures Fergus that Deirdre has not seen his concern,
that she has no thought of growing old or tired; it is that
which puts wonder in her ways, "she with spirits would
keep laughter in a town with plague" (229). He refuses
to go, saying that his fears of losing his delight in Deirdre were delusions only, that Conchubor's seal and all Fergus's talk of Emain and the fools of Meath were nothing beside one evening in Glen Masain (229).

Clearly Naisi does not know Deirdre as well as he thinks he does, for her thoughts dwell on age, mortality, and weariness of love. At one point she despairs of their being able to stop the coming of the prophecy (217). Deirdre has overheard Naisi confiding to Fergus that he may grow tired of her; the intimation that this may happen is enough to convince her that their love is insufficient, that noblemen's sons cannot remain hunters only: "The dawn and evening are a little while, the winter and the summer pass quickly, and what way would you and I, Naisi, have joy forever?" (231). Naisi tries to persuade her to go away to the woods of the east, with his brothers, "for it's right to be away from all people when two lovers have their love only" (231), as he has previously said that the thrushes bear a grudge against the heavens for the sweetness of her voice (207). So the man who had previously suspected that he would lose his interest in Deirdre now affirms that he needs only his love. Not those in heaven but those on earth, teeming with life, envy the lovers in this story.
She replies that there is no safety, that love can never be truly safe, that she has envisioned their enemies digging their graves in the quiet woods, seen the clay lying on the leaves that are bright and withered (231). She will not give in to the forces of nature, will not have Naisi growing old in Alban and she an old woman beside him (237). Further, she adds that it is a lonesome thing to be away from Ireland always (237). Later, as Deirdre mourns for Naisi, Conchubor remarks bitterly that it would be better if he were in his grave, that Deirdre were crying for his death, and Naisi were old and alive beside her (259). Conchubor believes that Naisi is fortunate because he will never grow old, that old age, not untimely death, should be pitied. "There's one sorrow has no end surely," says Conchubor, "and that's being old and lonesome" (259).

The state cannot survive Conchubor's treachery. Lavarcham foretells the end of Emain that will revert to nature, the place where kings held state grown up with nettles, thistles, and docks growing and animals grazing (247). Fergus, innocent of Naisi's blood, burns Conchubor's capital in vengeance for his deceit (267). Lavarcham, the wise old woman, had tried to dissuade Conchubor from trying to seize Deidre against her will, but he rebuked her, saying "It's too much talk you have" (243), as Dan
Burke has said to Nora and the Tramp in *The Shadow of the Glen* as he casts them out. Thus the "civilized" world of *Deirdre* falls apart because of the lovers' deaths. But talk, or words, are the victors here: a story will survive, "a thing will be a joy and triumph to the ends of life and time" (269).

*Deirdre*, as she keens wildly for Naisi, celebrates physical love and their life in the woods: "But who'll pity *Deirdre* has lost the lips of Naisi from her neck, and from her cheek forever; who'll pity *Deirdre* has lost the twilight in the woods with Naisi, when beech-trees were silver and copper, and ash-trees were fine gold?" (257-9). The fate of the young in this play (*Deirdre*, Naisi, Ainnle, Ardan, and Owen) is to die, while the old (Conchubor, Fergus, Lavarcham, the Old Woman) survive. *Deirdre* at her bravest and most tragic moment declares: "I have put away sorrow like a shoe that is worn out and muddy, for it is I have had a life that will be envied by great companies . . . It is not a small thing to be rid of grey hairs and the loosening of the teeth . . . It was the choice of lives we had in the clear woods, and in the grave we're safe surely . . . " (267-9). Only death can prevent her from growing old and enable her to escape Conchubor. She and Naisi have quarrelled only once during their life together--and that before their newly-dug grave--yet their quarrel is resolved with her suicide. *Deirdre*
does not simply accept her destiny; decision lies behind her actions. In this play, human beings determine the outcome of love and consciously turn the events of their lives into legend.

Although some readers may object that the peasant idiom is too rough for the speech of nobility, Synge in fact returned to an older tradition which describes Deirdre as a woman of nature, not the refined queen that Douglas Hyde and AE made of her. Synge went to the true source of the oral and manuscript versions of the tale in Irish, the twelfth-century Book of Leinster, in which he found a barbaric tale told in a robust idiom. He preserved its stark and primitive tone for his harsh drama about people who actively bring about their own destruction (Kiberd, Synge, 178-87). These are the ancestors of the Irish peasants, he seems to say; this tale was told by generations of storytellers to the people in their huts. Deirdre of the Sorrows may signal the change in Synge’s interest from plays based entirely on peasant sources, but it shows that he was still interested in peasant dialect and the themes of desire, envy, and fate which animated Irish love poetry.

The Gaelic poetry emphasizes the desire to escape from ordinary existence and live with passion and daring; love inspires the speakers in these poems to dream of an impossible life. Reality in the form of passing time
or separation from the beloved threatens to annihilate this dream, and usually succeeds. The use of peasant speakers in love poetry and drama enables Yeats and Synge to be irreligious, outrageous, and earthy. Their speakers do not inhabit a pastoral environment in which conflict is finally resolved in favor of the lovers; rather, civilization and necessity (old age, separation, poverty) keep the lovers apart. The only resolution is in the poetic expression of despair, loneliness, and depth of feeling which allows the lovers to share in the common bond of human experience.
Chapter Five

The Peasant as Wanderer, Hermit, Seer, Prophet

In all of J. M. Synge's plays except Riders to the Sea the heroes reject the "respectable" life offered them by society or a community. In W. B. Yeats's peasant poems the speakers wander in search of something and usually abandon conventional society. The peasant in these works is a wanderer or hermit, a seer or prophet who voices the unfulfilled desires of an individual or a nation. He protests against the oppression of his country by another country, the blindness of his own people, the necessity of old age and poverty, the restrictions of law and religion. The peasant can be eloquent or outrageous, for he has no need to live up to social expectations. Yeats and Synge both describe the peasants as resembling aristocrats more closely than members of the middle class, just as the wild horse more nearly resembles the thoroughbred than the hack or cart horse. The simile suggests that they viewed the vagrant or peasant as freer and nobler than those of the middle class. Physical deprivation gives him insight into the nature of life. Unencumbered by material possessions or desire for gain, the beggar or
hermit is free to meditate on questions of ultimate truth or spiritual mystery. Although society frequently attempts to stifle the creativity of the wanderer, he remains spiritually free and superior to those who live within civilized society.

J. M. Synge adopted the view that the tramp represented the imaginative life because he had been liberated from the gnawing frustration of life on the land. In his essays on Wicklow and West Kerry, Synge suggests that the vitality and distinctive temperament of laborers beget tramps. Vagrants constituted the natural aristocracy of Wicklow: the laborer possessed a temperament of distinction, and the gifted progeny of peasants and laborers became tramps just as among the middle classes the gifted children were least likely to be economically successful:

In the middle classes the gifted son of a family is always the poorest--usually a writer or artist with no sense for speculation--and in a family of peasants, where the average comfort is just over penury, the gifted son sinks also, and is soon a tramp on the roadside ("The Vagrants of Wicklow," CW II: 202).

The existence of tramps was not to be regretted, for their appearance in great numbers was evidence of this giftedness among the peasantry. In places where the laborers and peasants had preserved their vitality, a certain number of vagrants were to be expected. The tramp and Nora Burke of The Shadow of the Glen, Mary Byrne in The Tinker's
Wedding, and Martin Doul in *The Well of the Saints*, born into higher circles would have been writers or artists. The wandering life nurtured individual vitality and imagination just as society stifled it:

Man is naturally a nomad . . . and all wanderers have finer intellectual and physical perceptions than men who are condemned to local habitations. The cycle, automobile and conducted tours are half-conscious efforts to replace the charm of the stage coach and of pilgrimages like Chaucer's. But the vagrant, I think, along with perhaps the sailor, has preserved the dignity of motion with its whole sensation of strange colours in the clouds and of strange passages with voices that whisper in the dark and still stranger inns and lodgings, affections and lonely songs that rest for a whole lifetime with the perfume of spring evenings or the first autumnal smolder of the leaves (*CW II: 195-6*).

The healthiness of the outdoor life allowed the tramps to live to great age, although many stories of longevity were exaggerated. The tramps' privilege was in being little troubled by laws or other restrictions. A few people inherited their status as wanderers, but often they were merely ordinary people who drifted from village life and did not differ from the classes from which they came (202).

Among the old vagrants Synge found wise people whose lives he believed resembled works of art. Their talk was humorous and their ideas distinctive; they lived more fully than most people whose lives were more conventional. Their revenge on strangers who do not accord them their due respect was to call down curses from heaven (195). The
vagrants of Ireland bore no resemblance to the mendicants of Italy, for mobility was a condition of the existence of tramp life in Ireland, and the greater number he saw were vigorous women and men of fine physique. Unlike the poor of the Continent, they made no pretense of infirmity. When treated with tact they were courteous; when rudely answered they avenged themselves with a word of satire. They rarely committed crimes or were drunk or unseemly. The freshness of their wit, equally sure in the women and the men, never lost a point which could be turned to profit or revenge and further distinguished the Irish tramps from the beggars of Europe (196-7).

Synge's plays revolve around small communities and fugitives or wanderers of one sort or another. There is always a big world that threatens or negatively influences the smaller world. The Tinker's Wedding involves a camp and a church near a settlement at which there is a fair. The dichotomy is established between the camp and church--the profane and the sacred--and the camp and the community--the free and the restricted, the savage and the civilized. The Well of the Saints is set at a crossroads with a church near a settlement where the middle-class people work. The Shadow of the Glen takes place in a farmhouse secluded on a hill with a village below. In Riders to the Sea the cottage and island are threatened by the larger world and
the sea. In Deirdre of the Sorrows, Deirdre's country home and the camp in Alban are outside of Emain Macha, but not outside its sinister influence. The Playboy of the Western World takes place entirely in a shebeen near a settlement on the shore of the west coast of Mayo near Sligo, where "harvest hundreds" pass through for the boats which take them to England. The shebeen represents a place of safety from the villagers and the people of the outside world, the peelers and Old Mahon. What is being presented is the battle between the community's mores, expectations, and customs, and the individual's imagination, freedom, and creativity. The wanderer's rebellion against social restrictions and conventional morality represents the artists' demand for freedom to create as well as Ireland's struggle for independence.

The tinkers in The Tinker's Wedding and Christy Mahon in The Playboy reject religious and parental authority and conformism. They are irreverent and blasphemous. Sarah Casey does wrong to look to the religion of the civilized world at all, for she is better when restored to her unorthodox but natural life. The Tinker's Wedding presents another aspect of the romantic picture presented in The Shadow of the Glen. Rather than leaving the civilized world to enter the sublime natural world, as Nora Burke and the Tramp do, the tinkers Sarah Casey and Michael and Mary
Byrne do not enter the civilized world but rather request its sanction—in this case, the marriage rite. The tinkers loudly express their independence from the community; they steal from it and beg from it, but they feel no desire to enter it.

The tinkers prevail in the battle of wits. Mary Byrne's speech reveals her fine imagination as well as her stern grasp of reality. Her songs are full of heathen unbelief:

And when we asked him what way he'd die,  
And he hanging unrepented,  
'Begob,' says Larry, 'that's all in my eye,  
By the clergy first invented' (CW IV: 17).

She appreciates beauty and independence. Although she terms her son a fool for wanting to marry Sarah Casey, she calls Sarah a "grand handsome woman, the glory of tinkers, the pride of Wicklow, the Beauty of Ballinacree," who should not be lying down lonesome to sleep at night "in a dark ditch when the spring is coming in the trees" (23). She wants to tell Sarah the finest story she would hear in the east of Ireland ("from Dundalk to Ballinacree"), a story of queens in fine silks making matches for themselves. She praises Sarah's strength as well as her looks: "I've a grand story of the great queens of Ireland with white necks on them the like of Sarah Casey, and fine
arms would hit you a slap the way Sarah Casey would hit you" (25).

But her talk is also filled with longing and fear of loneliness:

What good am I this night, God help me? What good are the grand stories I have when it's few would listen to an old woman, few but a girl maybe would be in great fear the time her hour was come, or a little child wouldn't be sleeping with the hunger on a cold night? . . . Maybe the two of them have a good right to be walking out the little short while they'd be young; but if they have itself, they'll not keep Mary Byrne from her full pint when the night's fine, and there's a dry moon in the sky (27).

She begs them not to leave her alone, but they walk off, ostensibly to steal hens from Tim Flaherty, but in reality to make love. Mary knows what they are about; she knows the happiness of youth, beauty that is temporal, and the loneliness of old age.

She also knows how to deal with the priest, how to get him to talk for her entertainment and how to take her revenge on him when he insults her. She matter-of-factly invites him to share a drink, remarking sardonically that the night is "cruel dry" and letting him know that she believes he is no better than the tinkers: "Aren't we all sinners, God help us!" (17). She commiserates with him not because she really feels sympathy but because she loves to talk: "It's destroyed you must be hearing the sins of the rural people on a fine spring" (19). She tells him it would
break her heart to hear him talking and sighing, and she coaxes him into accepting a drink. But when he refuses to hear her song, and rebukes her, saying she will soon die and that she should be on her knees praying (21), she gets her revenge by remarking casually that in all her travels the one thing she has never heard is "a real priest saying a prayer" (21); in other words, she has never felt the need for religion, nor does she fear death. She further scandalizes him by remarking that it would be "great game to hear a scholar," the like of him, "speaking Latin to the saints above" (21). When he says that he never met her like for hard abominations, she feigns innocence, asking "Is that the truth?" and accuses Sarah and him of making "whisper-talk" before "the face of the Almighty God" (21).

Sarah too is a conjurer. She encourages Michael to stir up the fire so the priest can see her face, since she knows he can be persuaded by beauty; she has seen him looking out his window and "blinking at the girls" (45). She tells the priest he is a "kind man with the poor" (13)—something he clearly is not—who would surely wed them for nothing. He refuses rudely, but she persuades him, by coaxing and flirting, to marry them for a crown and ten shillings, plus the gallon can that Michael is making (15). Before he leaves she extracts his promise, just as all
three tinkers will extract his promise not to turn them over to the law for tying him up. Sarah reveals the hypocrisy behind established values. She remarks to Michael that he should look busy when the priest walks by, "for it's great love the like of him have to talk of work" (13). Further, she knows that the priest himself does not work hard, that he indulges in the vices he abhors in others: "It's often his reverence does be in there playing cards, or drinking a sup, or singing songs until the dawn of day" (13), and they are more likely to make a bargain after he has been drinking. She is hypocritical as well, for after flirting with him she pronounces him "the fearfulest old fellow you'd see any place walking the world" (23).

Still, the audience is on the tinkers' side, for they are right to poke fun at a man who is openly contemptuous of them and clearly possesses little virtue. The play rejects the stereotype of the ignorant itinerant, for the tinkers' language reveals that they are much smarter and more imaginative than the priest. He is greedy and desires an easy life:

If it's starving you are itself, I'm thinking it's well for the like of you that do be drinking when there's a drouth on you, and lying down to sleep when your legs are stiff. [He sighs gloomily.]

What would you do if it was the like of myself you were, saying Mass with your mouth dry, and
running east and west for a sick call maybe, and hearing the rural people again and they saying their sins? . . . It's a hard life I'm telling you, a hard life, Mary Byrne; and there's the bishop coming in the morning, and he an old man, would have you destroyed if he seen a thing at all (19).

Mary loves to sing and talk, to drink with her friends at a fair, and to sleep in the ditch when she is tired, but she does not, like the priest, pretend to be more virtuous than she is. He reveals his own lack of virtue and the selfishness inherent in the desire to be religious without being generous.

The tinkers' constant arguing and unkindness does not reveal bad nature but rather liveliness, wit, and desire for entertainment. Mary calls Michael a fool for wanting to marry Sarah and implies that marriage will not stop a woman who has made up her mind to leave (35); the sanctity of the marriage-rite is not as strong as the desire for freedom. Sarah teases him, saying she will go off with Jaunting Jim or the rich tinkers of Tibradden if he does not marry her (9). He insults Sarah by questioning her fidelity: "... it's new thoughts you'll be thinking at the dawn of day" (7). He retorts that her nickname, "the Beauty of Ballinacree," is what they call horses in Arklow (11), and he groans at her words and his own confession to his mother that he plans to marry
Sarah (35). Yet he loves her, for he looks at her in horror when she describes the thoughts of freedom that the springtime inspires in her: "The like of that, Michael Byrne, when there is a bit of sun in it, and a kind air, and a great smell from the thorn trees is above your head" (9).

Even as they enjoy their freedom from the restrictions of religion and society, they are not free from necessity or passing time. Mary verbalizes what will come of Sarah's longing to be married:

> It's as good a right you have surely, Sarah Casey, [to be married] but what good will it do? Is it putting that ring on your finger will keep you from getting an aged woman and losing the fine face you have, or be easing your pains, when it's the grand ladies do be married in silk dresses, with rings of gold, that do pass any woman with their share of torment in the hour of birth, and do be paying the doctors in the city of Dublin a great price at that time, the like of what you'd pay for a good ass and a cart? (37).

Thus, for all their irreverence and satirical humor, the tinkers will face the same end as the priest and the great queens of their stories. They laugh at the rest of the world: "... it's little need we ever had of the like of you to get us our bit to eat, and our bit to drink, and our time of love when we were young men and women, and were fine to look at," Mary tells the priest (49). But they still run from him in the end, because he has the power to utter maledictions in Latin and to scare them into flight.
The story is drawn from a folktale Synge heard in Wicklow about a pair of tinkers who convinced a priest to marry them for half a sovereign and a tin can. They returned after three weeks to ask the priest again if he would wed them. When he asked for the can, they told him they had finished it but that the ass had kicked it and damaged it so that it wasn't fit for him. "Go on now," the priest retorted. "It's a pair of rogues and schemers you are, and I won't wed you at all" ("At a Wicklow Fair," *CW II*: 228-9).

One of the most famous Irish indictments of clerical avarice is a song collected by Douglas Hyde for a volume called *Religious Songs of Connacht*, chapter two of the *Songs of Connacht*, from which Synge may have drawn part of the plot for *The Tinker's Wedding*:

Sure if you were dead tomorrow morning  
And I were to bring you to a priest tied up in a bag  
He would not read a mass for you without hand-money  
(Quoted in Watson 143).

Synge reverses Hyde here, where the priest himself is tied up in a sack as punishment for his selfishness. The occasion is not a death but a wedding, and the priest is tied up not before but after the refusal (144). Another story which may have served as a part of the plot of *The Tinker's Wedding* was one which he heard on a mountain
to the east of Aughavanna, in Wicklow. The informant told him that tinkers came from every part of Ireland and were "gallous lads for walking round through the world." One time he saw fifty of them on the road to Rathdangan, match-making and marrying themselves for the year that was to come:

One man would take such a woman, and say he was going such roads and places, stopping at this fair and another fair, till he'd meet them again at such a place, when the spring was coming on. Another, maybe, would swap the woman he had with one from another man, with as much talk as if you'd be selling a cow ("The Vagrants of Wicklow," CW II: 204).

Synge reverses this story as well, for it is the woman Sarah Casey who decides she will wed Michael and who is driven by her passions in the springtime of the year.

Synge wrote that peasants were precious possessions for any country and blamed the middle class for supporting the status quo that was so abhorrent in the Congested Districts. He felt that in Mayo the natural, wild, intuitive life of the peasant had been demoralized and degraded by religion and materialism; he distrusted religious dogma and detested modern capitalism. The tinkers of Wicklow, however, possessed greater freedom than the peasants of the west. An old wanderer whom Synge met in Wicklow had lived more fully than most other people in the world:
As he sleeps by Lough Bray and the nightjar burrs and snipe drum over his head and the grouse crow, and heather whispers round him, he hears in their voices the chant of singers in dark chambers of Japan and the clamour of tambourines and the flying limbs of dancers he knew in Algeria, and the rustle of golden fabrics of the east. As the trout splash in the dark water at his feet he forgets the purple moorland that is round him and hears waves that lap round a boat in some southern sea. He is not to be pitied... His life has been a pageant not less grand than Loti's or George Borrow's and like all men of culture he has found a strong concept of the interest of his own personal aspect. He is no leech-gatherer such as Wordsworth met upon the moors but is still full of scorn and humour and impatience... There is something grandiose in a man who has forced all kingdoms of the earth to yield the tribute of his bread and who, at a hundred, begs on the wayside with the pride of an emperor. The slave and beggar are wiser than the man who works for recompense, for all our moments are divine and above all price though their sacrifice is paid with a measure of fine gold. Every industrious worker has sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, perhaps served him in chalices of gold... (CW II: 196).

This is Synge at his most romantic: the wanderer is freer than the property owner because he can go where he likes, untroubled by laws, politics, or material possessions; the beggar can be proud because he makes his own decisions and is, moreover, able to force the kingdoms of the earth to provide for him; the provincial is more cultured than the city-dweller, for culture has nothing to do with education, company, or manners, but with vigourousness of mind and depth of emotion. The countryman or wanderer is more likely to contemplate spiritual matters because he is
not materialistic nor interested in achieving status. His life close to nature is superior to life in the crowded cities, because it allows him to get closer to God and Eden, the condition of innocent happiness. This romantic view of the country life represented as well the aspirations of a nation long subjugated by another which was considered to be more sophisticated and was certainly more urbanized.

Yeats, however, is even more romantic in his use of the wanderer as a poetic speaker. His beggars and hermits clearly suffer physical privation which merely enables them to focus their thoughts on matters of the spirit or of art. In "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" Yeats wrote that "All that we did, all that we said or sang/ Must come from contact with the soil." Heroic Ireland could put thought and art to "that sole test," the "Dream of the noble and the beggar-man." Through this unlikely juxtaposition Yeats shows that culture is unified and all the people of a nation share in its traditions. The great and sorrowful persons of literature had come from legend and were but images of the primitive imagination ("The Celtic Element in Literature," Essays 182). These images, expressed in the speech of the common people, could be used to inform modern literature and bring the culture of Ireland to the world's attention. Yeats
attempted to improve upon the tradition of the "popular" poets by imitating their speech but rejecting their sentimentality. Among his most successful ballad-like poems are those inspired by his contact with country people -- "the Ballad of Father Gilligan," "The Ballad of Father O'Hart," "The Ballad of Moll Magee," "The Ballad of the Foxhunter," "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner," and "The Meditation of the Old Fisherman."³

Yeats's ballads achieved their epic form in "Beggar to Beggar Cried" and "Running to Paradise" (Hoffman 41). By adopting the voice of the beggar he uses the simple and direct speech of the folk to make his feelings universal, something the words of aristocrats cannot do. The aristocratic speaker talks of the loneliness of leadership, and stands for everyone. The few who are heroes walk "proud, open-eyed, and laughing to the tomb." The common man expresses pleasure in sunrise or sunset, an Easter wind from the south. The beggarman in Yeats's later poems becomes one of his favorite poetic voices--one of his masks--because, free from the material world, the beggar, like the Shakespearian fool, can reveal ultimate truths and spiritual mysteries (43). The personalities of Crazy Jane, Tom the Lunatic, the Wild Old Wicked Man, and even the speaker in "The Statesman's Holiday" permit him the manipulation of
emotion in dramatic speech, which ballad-like form enhances (48). Edwin Muir writes that Yeats's most consummate triumphs are his "simple riddling songs, filled with the realistic yet credulous imagination of the peasantry. This is the kind of song the peasantry might make if they still made songs, with its shrewd evaluation of worldly goods, and its belief in another world" (Quoted in Hoffman 44).

The tale of "The Three Beggars" (Poems 111-13) is framed by the musing of the old crane of Gort who concludes that nonchalance is the posture that will bring him his reward. Desire is the subject of this poem. Old King Guaire asks the beggars if they can answer a riddle: "Do men who least desire get most,/ Or get the most who most desire?" He asks whether desire increases itself or whether indifference brings the greatest reward. The question precedes the legendary one which the speaker of "The Tower" is to ask: "Does the imagination dwell the most/ Upon a woman won or woman lost?" (Poems 197). One of the beggars answers that desire makes the individual strong ("And what could make their muscles taut/ Unless desire had made them so?"), that he who possesses strength of will shall have the most. The king promises that the one who falls asleep first (that is, who can be indifferent to his desire) will have a thousand pounds and departs
"merry as a bird/ With his old thoughts." All the beggars accomplish is to lose three nights' sleep. The first beggar thinks of sexual desire: although he is old he will persuade a pretty girl to share his bed. The second values respectability and dignity; first he says he will learn a trade, then he says he will become a farmer. The third believes that status is important. He would imitate his betters ("the other gentlemen") by laying his thousand pounds on a horse, thereby making himself a gentleman. Their idleness had taught them to dream:

One to another sighed and cried:
The exorbitant dreams of beggary,
That idleness had borne to pride,
Sang through their teeth from noon to noon (112).

But none wins because none is able to put aside desire and adopt an attitude of indifference. The old crane (heron) concludes that he must be indifferent, although by the end of the poem he has not yet attained what he wanted.

"The Three Hermits" (113-114) live in a windy, stoney place beside "a cold and desolate sea." Their lack of material possessions enables them to contemplate questions of reincarnation and blessedness. Although fearful of impending death and the possibility of returning to earth in "some most fearful shape," the first one cannot stay awake long enough to pray. The second one, though plagued
with fleas, manages to keep his belief in just rewards, that men receive what they deserve in the afterlife, and that, should they be God-fearing yet weak of will, they shall have a finer life next time, as a poet, king, or "witty lovely lady." Unlike his counterparts, the third has achieved the gaiety and understanding of spiritual transcendence that will be described so vividly in "Lapis Lazuli." That he sings like a bird in spite of ragged clothes and fleas associates him with King Guaire of the previous poem, and with poets and visionaries, even saints. He is unnoticed by those who are still concerned with the body (practicality) and the soul (religion). He is an artist, for he sings, and yet he makes no mark in the world.

A single speaker in "Beggar to Beggar Cried" (114-15) decides to change his life, to leave the world and find bodily and spiritual health, to "make" his "soul" (prepare for death) before he becomes bald. To do this he will live a middle-class life and acquire a wife and house so that he can have physical comfort ("To rid me of the devil in my shoes") and sexual satisfaction ("And the worse devil between my thighs"). His wife should not be either too wealthy or too beautiful, for wealth and beauty would
prohibit his living comfortably: the rich are "driven" by their wealth as beggars are by the "itch" (and thus the wealthy and poor are equated), the comely plagued by their beauty. Yet as he grows respected at his ease, he will lose the "humorous happy speech" which the poem itself celebrates. He still desires to wander, still is inspired by the "wind-blown clamour of the barnacle-geese."

And although he declares that he will settle for the ordinary existence, his decision leaves him "frenzy-struck."

The beggars who value the wandering life, as well as those who sing even as they sit on their windy, stoney places, are blessed. They are "running to paradise," as is the speaker in the following poem. This poem reinforces the theme of the previous one, that those who give themselves over to middle-class pursuits such as making money will become dull old men. The beggar here has a fine life, for as he runs toward Paradise, people along the way see to his needs. His brother, having decided to spend his life as a gentleman, has worn himself out in the pursuit of respectability: he beats his "big brawling lout," keeps a gun, dog, and servants, but is bound down by his possessions. The rich and poor exchange places, the poor achieving wealth and the rich losing it, yet the process results in the loss of imagination, the "humorous happy speech" of the previous poem which is the hallmark
of the "darling wit" in this one. He who was content
to be bare-heeled at school abandoned the wandering life
in order to stuff "an old sock full" of money and has
consequently lost his wit and imagination. The speaker
will make no such mistake. He cares nothing for material
gain nor human company; the wind takes his fancy, for
no one can "buy or bind" it. The discordant, unsingable
refrain creates a dialectic between itself and the stanza.
The king and beggar are one in Paradise, yet the unitalicized
is creates a mystery. Rather than implying that in Paradise
all are equal, the speaker indicates that in consciousness
they are one.

Yeats's beggarman poems are unified by imagery of sight,
sound, and touch. The series begins with three wrong-
headed, silly beggars who are foolish enough to desire
a different way of life and ends with one of Yeats's
eloquent affirmations of life. The wind that no one can
contain in "Running to Paradise" carries the clamour
of the geese in "Beggar to Beggar Cried." The sea air
which will bring health to the beggar chills the three
hermits. All are ragged and live outdoors exposed to
the elements in desolate, stony places. The hermits and
beggars of the first two poems are plagued by lice and
fleas. For all this, there is merriment, movement, noisy
but vigorous cursing and argument ("brawling"), melodious
singing. For all their poverty, these characters are very much alive.

All these images are brought together in the final poem of this series, "The Hour Before Dawn" (116-19), in which a beggar wanders in a "windy place." The beggar, "a bundle of rags upon a crutch," anticipates the aged man of "Sailing to Byzantium," who is merely a "tattered coat upon a stick." This beggar is at first a "cursing rogue," profane, not in pursuit of heaven or given to thinking about spiritual matters. He, like King Guaire, is "merry." He finds himself on Cruachan (Roscommon) at the magical hour before dawn. Things look good at first, for he spies the possibility of a meal--he counts a pair of lapwings and a sheep with no house nearby--and the possibility of constructing a shelter out of stones. This is a magical mountain, for Maeve's nine Maines (children of Ailill) were nursed here, and "an ancient history" declared that "Hell Mouth lay open near that place." As he fumbles with the stones he uncovers a deep hollow in the mountain and prepares to flee until his fears are dissipated by the sight of a "great lad with a beery face," who snores away, "no phantom by his look." He awakens the lad who mistakes him for one of Maeve's brawling sons who, sick of his grave, is walking. In his first affirmation of life, the rogue angrily demands that
he not be called a ghost. Nor will he be quiet, he says; he will talk as he helps himself to the beer. But the sleeper will not allow the beggar to drink his magical potion, the beer "from Goban's mountain-top" that enables him to sleep as long as he desires. The rogue would sleep away the winter, yet the lad remarks that he too began with such a simple idea, but gradually lost interest in life until he desired only to sleep to his death. His sleep is now nine centuries long. The rogue cannot bear this insult to life. He cries out in a rage:

'It's plain that you are no right man
To mock at everything I love
As if it were not worth the doing.
I'd have a merry life enough
If a good Easter wind were blowing,
And though the winter wind is bad
I should not be too down in the mouth
For anything you did or said
If but this wind were in the south.'

The sleeper argues that "all life longs for the Last Day," that human activity comes to nothing at all. Souls will be but "sighs," flesh and bone will disappear, leaving behind nothing, not even a "smoking wick." The sleeper, being blessed (he says), keeps to his cleft like a rabbit and waits for God in a drunken sleep, for nothing matters but heaven. The rogue cannot stand this idea. With "great pummelling" he vents his rage on the sleeper—who is entirely impervious to physical abuse, unable to feel anything--then buries him in his mountain hollow as if he
were something evil, heaping up stone on stone and then heaping up more stones, so eager is he to keep this denial of life from being known in the world. The rogue embodies the contraries of rage and merriment (anger and joy). The opposite of the sleeper, he feels physical pain and the discomfort of living out of doors, and he combines the sacred and the profane--he prays and curses together, for he loves life with all its privations. He affirms both life and faith when he flees "From Maeve and all that juggling plain," then gives thanks as the dawn breaks.

The peasant who abandons the life of the community and strikes out on his own expresses his individuality as the artist does. Freedom from social mores and restrictions leads to individuality rather than to conformity. The tinkers of Synge's play create a life for themselves which is far more vivid than that of the priest's. Yeats's beggars and hermits voice the desire to wander unfettered, to live essentially, unmotivated by social aspirations. The hundred-year-old singing hermit and the "cursing rogue" are pure life; they celebrate life unencumbered by useless things and repressive rules. They are poets who praise the world merely because they live in the world, because dawn follows night, and because, being poor, they have nothing to lose, and so do not have anything to fear. The desire to romanticize the wanderer because he is alone
and free to go where he pleases, independent of obligation, springs from a deeply felt conviction that all human beings could be intellectually and spiritually free if they could only abandon materialism and fear of the unknown.
Poetic speech was regarded as a high form of discourse in Gaelic Ireland. One who possessed it was thought to be wise and held the status of those with magical powers. Poets of the people were regarded with reverence (Mythologies 29). For this reason, Yeats and Synge chose to exploit the stories of the old Irish wandering ballad singers in order to create a lasting Anglo-Irish literature. Synge was more interested in folk-tales and stories of the seanchas, upon which he could base his plays, knowing that art was rooted in peasant life. Yeats believed that all literature was but the perfection of an art that had once been practiced by everyone. Synge expressed this same idea when he wrote that the unlettered literature of lonely places was the real source of the art of words (Kiberd, Synge, 159). He did not want to create a folk literature for a peasant audience, but he did want to incorporate the methods and themes of folklore into his poems and plays. Synge believed that Tolstoy was wrong when he wrote that art should be intelligible to the peasant but right in claiming a certain criterion for art: "I think this is to be found in testing art by its compatibility with the
outside world and the peasants or people who live near it. A book, I mean, that one feels ashamed to read in a cottage of Dingle Bay one may fairly call a book that is not healthy--or universal" (CW II: 351).

Synge valued the folk stories themselves, not the tales of faery and heroes, as the best sources for modern literature. He wrote that poets should turn to ballads not for purposes of imitation but of finding new methods of expressing their own poetic ideas and believed that one of the greatest advantages enjoyed by the folk was their being indifferent to social mores and artistic conventions which inhibited their direct expression of emotion. Synge admired Yeats's poems which displayed the brevity of folklore. Poets, he wrote, should not copy the peasant songs but adopt or use by instinct the peasant's inner mode of creating (Kiberd, Synge, 160). The universality of art was found in its relationship to ordinary life:

In all the circumstances of tramp life there is a certain wildness that gives it romance and a peculiar value for those who look at life in Ireland with an eye that is aware of the arts also. In all the healthy movements of art, variations from the ordinary types of manhood are made interesting for the ordinary man, and in this way only the higher arts are universal ("The Vagrants of Wicklow," CW II: 208).
Synge wrote in an unpublished essay, "On Literature and Popular Poetry" (1897-8), that folklore possessed artistic potential: with the growth of folk studies, people began to realize that the songs and stories of primitive men offered artistic suggestions, that the arts were losing their meaning in technical experimentation while peasant music and poetry were full of exquisitely delicate emotion. Ibsen and Zola, who attempted realism, were not beautiful but joyless and pallid. On the other hand, Synge found both beauty and realism in folk idiom (Kiberd, Synge, 160).

Yeats reserved his highest praise for writers who were part of this Irish tradition:

Mr. Synge alone has written of the peasant as he is to all the ages; of the folk-imagination as it has been shaped by centuries of life among fields or on fishing-grounds. His people talk a highly coloured musical language, and one never hears from them a thought that is of to-day and not of yesterday (Explorations 183).

Yeats envied the spontaneous inspiration of the anonymous songsters of Connacht, for the very difficulty in writing as a modern man made him more acutely aware of the beauty of folk poetry than the folk who had created it (UP I: 70). He considered a poem to be "an elaboration of the rhythms of common speech and their association with profound feeling" ("Modern Poetry," Essays 508). A poet
should not be the "bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast" but one who has been reborn "as an idea, something intended, complete" ("A General Introduction for My Work," 509). For Yeats, the peasant fisherman was but another mask which he used to convey wisdom, simplicity, and loneliness, together with deliberate solitude and the skill of hand and eye which he found in Renaissance tradition. He is the poet reborn as an idea--"A man who does not exist" (Poems 149), except in the imagination. Yeats and Synge were both interested in the theme of the artist's creation of self and the alienation the artist experiences in order to pursue his vision.

Characters which move people speak to everyone of the universal emotions, Yeats wrote. The artist sorrowfully contemplates the great irremediable things, but remakes all that he experiences in a state of joy. The poet thus writes of everyone's desire, for if he is truly an artist he speaks for everyone. The "shaping joy" keeps the sorrow pure, as it keeps pure the love and hate felt by everyone, for nobleness of the arts is the mingling of contraries—sorrow and joy, perfection of and surrender of personality, energy and stillness, mortality and immortality, time and eternity ("Poetry and Tradition," Essays 255). Yeats found a "whimsical grace, a curious extravagance" in the
western tales, told by people who live in wild and beautiful scenery, under a sky ever changing with clouds. Those who told the tales were often poor but serious-minded fishing people who found in the doings of ghosts and spirits the fascination that gives vitality to their lives. The freedom of self-delight comes from the arrangement of events into words, no longer in the circling necessity of life.

"The Happy Townland" (Poems 85-6) seems to have been written to be spoken aloud or sung, as were many of Yeats's songlike poems and ballads. Yeats may have borrowed the theme from a Munster song, "An Maídhrín Rua"--"The Little Red Fox" (O'Faolain 98). The poem unites aristocrats and peasants in a townland which has become a mystical place of bounty and celebration:

> Boughs have their fruit and blossom  
> At all times of the year;  
> Rivers are running over  
> With red beer and brown beer.  
> An old man plays the bagpipes  
> In a golden and silver wood;  
> Queens, their eyes blue like the ice,  
> Are dancing in a crowd.

The heart of a "strong farmer" would break in two out of desire to be part of this courageous, happy world where men express high emotion through battle, where the souls of heroes reside: "But all that are killed in battle/
Awaken to life again." The term "strong farmer" comes from one of Yeats's stories in Mythologies called "A Knight of the Sheep"; it refers to a proud Sligo man who lived north of Ben Bulben and was descended from a fighting clan (31). The poem celebrates heroic courage and the abandonment of common life for the Other World:

It is lucky that their story
Is not known among men,
For 0, the strong farmers
That would let the spade lie,
Their hearts would be like a cup
That somebody had drunk dry.

The peasants have achieved nobility through their hard work, preservation of tradition, and the desire to find the Land of the Ever Living. To pursue immortality and heroism is noble, yet to leave the fields and the homeland is bitter:

The little fox he murmured,
'O what of the world's bane?'
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at his rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
'O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane.'

The poem presents the joy of action and life in the Other World with the sorrow felt by those who contemplate mortality. Human beings want to enter the Other World, yet to find it is to surrender personality, home, and
tradition. The tale is folkloristic, drawn from the old theme of the conflict between desire for immortality and desire to remain in the world.

Yeats's most famous peasant poet was Red Hanrahan, who might have been suggested by the Irish poet Owen O'Sullivan the Red or by the stories of the hedge schoolmasters of nineteenth-century Ireland. Yeats's intention was to create a new myth by using traditional elements. In "The Tower" the speaker calls up images from the surrounding countryside because of his fundamental question, his need to learn from tradition whether the imagination dwells the most upon a woman won or a woman lost—whether it dwells on that which is desired or that which has been attained. He summons several local characters, including Mrs. French (from Sir Jonah Barrington's Personal Sketches of his Own Time, 1827) and Mary Hynes (made famous by Anthony Raftery), in order to enquire of them his question. But only Hanrahan possesses the special knowledge he seeks—his "mighty memories," derived from the stories which were first published in 1882, then republished in 1897 as The Secret Rose. They were revised with Lady Gregory's significant help and republished in 1905 (348).

The stories of this wandering peasant poet and hedge schoolmaster involve the themes that dominated Yeats's poetry—alienation from community, acceptance of his own
and Ireland's past, loss of love, old age. In the initial story, Hanrahan learns about his own alienation from Ireland's past. He refuses to question the meaning of the symbols he is confronted with—Pleasure, Power, Courage, and Knowledge, or the Cauldron of the Dagda, the Stone of Destiny, the Spear of Lug, the Sword of Nuada—Ireland's four great treasures. In the final story the treasures take the shape of the pot, knife, baking stone, and blackthorn stick—common articles of western cottages, which he finds in the cottage of Winny Byrne. Hanrahan, like the young Michael Gillane in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, learns that he must abandon worldly ambition and accept his fate and his role in Ireland's history, to identify his own with Ireland's destiny. He loses his loved one in the first story, to be reunited in the final one with his faery bride. The stories reveal a pattern of sin, suffering, repentence, and redemption (352-4).

Yeats's Hanrahan stories fulfilled two of his artistic aspirations, to create myths and to project contrary aspects of the self. Hanrahan is a ballad poet, a wanderer and visionary, both alienated from and one of the people. Yeats was taken with the idea of the educated folk poet who knew Homer and Virgil, as Hanrahan does, as well as the Irish epics (Hoffman 67), just as
Yeats himself desired both to be a member of an elite and also to communicate with the common people (32). The story of "Kidnappers" (Mythologies 70-6), which Yeats claimed he had collected from an old woman, can be identified with an early ballad, "The Host of the Air," except that the young man in the story is a poet. This poem represents the first appearance of the supernatural card game found in "The Tower" and the story "Red Hanrahan."

It is a mythic motif, a test of human beings by the creatures of the Other World in which a girl's life is at stake. By winning the card game, O'Driscoll could have won his wife from the dead, like Orpheus (Hoffman 71). The pack of hounds, like the flight of the barnacle-geese in "Beggar to Beggar Cried," represents a common motif of the Wild Hunt--the flight of unshriven souls after the enchanted card game, following a witch in the shape of a hare (76).

Thus Yeats has taken a traditional motif and added the figure of the wandering ballad poet. The stories are concerned with two of Yeats's important poetic themes--the rightful place of the poet in society and the terror of old age (Finneran 357).

In the first story, "Red Hanrahan," the poet is set out on the road to wander because he lacks the courage and strength to seek the truth. Tricked out of his true love
and her inheritance by a magician with a supernatural pack of cards, Hanrahan encounters the four legendary women who demand of him the fundamental question. He cannot question them because he cannot find the right words to do so (Mythologies 221). Because of Hanrahan's weakness, Echtge, Daughter of the Silver Hand, will not be awakened from her eternal sleep.

The second story, "The Twisting of the Rope," is also drawn from a folktale and begins with Red Hanrahan's meeting Oona, a daughter of a house, in Kinvara. She is attracted to Hanrahan because he sings a song he had heard or created during his lonely wanderings on Slieve Echtge, a song about the heroic, happy Other World:

O Death's old boney finger
Will never find us there
In the high hollow townland
Where love's to give and to spare;
Where boughs have fruit and blossom
At all times of the year;
Where rivers are running over
With red beer and brown beer,
An old man plays the bagpipes
In a golden and silver wood;
Queens, their eyes blue like the ice,
Are dancing in a crowd (229).

But Oona's mother and father do not like Hanrahan because he has "no good name now among the priests, or with women that mind themselves" (225). They cannot refuse him entrance to their house nor force him to leave once he is there, for it is bad luck to expel a poet of the Gael and a singer from one's house. So the girls' parents
trick Hanrahan as the old magician had done: they get him to twist a rope with his own hands out of hay. As he does so the rope lengthens, so that he steps out the door, which they immediately bolt shut. Hanrahn sits by the shore, his hands working in a twisting motion as if he were twisting the rope, "but it seemed to him as he twisted that it had all the sorrows of the world in it."

The women of the Sidhe call to him, but he refuses them and writes a song called "The Twisting of the Rope."
The Sidhe women mock him, saying he is weak and will never find comfort among the women of the earth.

"Hanrahan and Cathleen, the Daughter of Houlihan," associates the peasant poet with natural sorrows, ideals, the soil itself. He thinks about Ireland's weight of grief and sings the song known as "Red Hanrahan's Song About Ireland." "Hanrahan's Vision," the fifth tale, relates him to all the great women of Irish love legend--Blanaid, Deirdre, Grania--but the only one who speaks to him is Dervorgilla, the unhappiest of all tragic women, for her sin brought Ireland into submission (251). In this story Hanrahan sings the entire song of "The Happy Townland" which came to him in one of his dreams; the song celebrates heroic life and laments its passing.
Hanrahan denies the proper attitude toward love in the fourth tale, "Red Hanrahan's Curse." He had coaxed the hearts from five girls whom he then abandoned, for he had wandering in his heart. He assists a young girl, Nora, in her desire not to be married to old Paddy Doe, a farmer with a hundred acres. He puts her sorrow, along with his curse against old age, into a song which is sung in the village. He succeeds in winning the enmity of the old men of the village who drive him away again. Only before his death in the final story does he learn to put his poetic skill to use in the service of love; he questions the old women about the Cauldron, the Stone, the Sword, and the Spear. Yeats's heroes never triumph. Only the soul triumphs, through transfiguration. Even Paradise is a dream of the soul. Hanrahan is reunited with a faery bride, but he has never known perfection in earthly love. The artist's soul is renewed and imagination restored by the "mighty memories" of the peasant poet (Hoffman 81).

Yeats does not write many poems in which the speaker is obviously both a poet and peasant. He concludes that art is a dream vision of both noble and beggarman, the two parts of Irish society in which he found vigor and imagination (Poems 321). In "Under Ben Bulben" he
instructs new poets to "Sing the peasantry, and then/
Hard-riding country gentlemen" (327), to laud these
two extremes of society but not the mercenary middle class,
who were "Base-born products of base beds" (327). Owen
Aherne and Michael Robartes, peasants dressed in Connemara
cloth, sing the changes of the moon which instruct the
listening poet (163-7). In "Two Songs Rewritten for the
Tune's Sake" (281-2) the speaker is a wandering peasant
poet who desires to become a beggar because his love is
lost; yet his tone is neither sorrowful nor tragic. "Three
Songs to the One Burden" (328-30) is a ballad sung in part
by a "Roaring Tinker," but we do not get a sense that he
is a true peasant poet, only that he is a wandering ruffian.
Descended from Manannan, he distinguishes himself from
the common country people:

The common breeds the common,
A lout begets a lout,
So when I take on half a score,
I knock their heads about.

All Mannions come from Manannan,
Though rich on every shore
He never lay behind four walls
He had such character,
Nor ever made an iron red
Nor soldered pot or pan;
His roaring and his ranting
Best please a wandering man.

Yeats discovers his ideal peasant artist and audience--
his mask or antiseif--in the poem "The Fisherman" (Poems
148-9). This man goes "To a grey place on a hill/
In grey Connemara clothes" at dawn, the magical hour for the Celts. The poet, who wishes to embrace one of his many masks--that of the simple, natural man--dreams of writing him one "Poem maybe as cold/ And passionate as the dawn." Although the poet can visualize the fisherman who is his ideal, who goes "At dawn to cast his flies," nevertheless, it has been a long time since he has called to this image of his own opposite. But the key word is "dream"; this man so utterly unlike himself, being wise and simple, lives only in his imagination. The poet has taken the image in his mind--created by his desire to embrace a more natural world--and associated it with the image in the environment, that of the fisherman he saw as a youth:

It's long since I began
To call up to the eyes
This wise and simple man.

The fisherman has become for him a symbol of his hope that he would write for his "own race," since he sees around him only the images of an unworthy civilization:

The witty man and his joke
Aimed at the commonest ear,
The clever man who cries
The catch-cries of the clown,
The beating down of the wise
And great Art beaten down.

Scorning this trivial modern audience, he imagines his ideal of the man in "grey Connemara cloth" who climbs
to a place "where stone is dark under froth," who is wise in his simple, natural way, and who needs no clever words to express himself. The poet now has an image with which to summon his opposite, who does not exist, in the empirical world, for he is an image ("A man who does not exist,/ A man who is but a dream") which enables the poet to write for him one "Poem maybe as cold/ And passionate as the dawn." His ideal man is drawn from the romantic pastoral image of the noble countryman who embodies virtue, whose life under the changing skies of western Ireland is itself a work of art, so well integrated is he with his surroundings. Against the background of the west—the grey dawn, the stone dampened by froth—the fisherman is one with the landscape and its history. Yet the image is contrasted with the modern reality, the urban world full of shallow people who prefer popular comedy to great art, who enjoy tasteless jokes. The man of the western country-side stands out like a hero, engaged in timeless activity. The modern, urban people do what is fashionable at the moment, beating down what is traditional and universal. The fisherman is an individual; the modern people are a mob who flock to hear the comedian because they would rather be amused than be inspired. They are the modern reality the poet finds when he had hoped to write for his
own people. He resolves that he will write for his romantic ideal, but his resolution is clouded by the irony that this man does not exist in the contemporary world apart from the poet's mind.

Yeats's noble peasant fisherman led a life which approached the unity of art. For Synge the artistic peasant was not an image but a reality, and his way of life was to be celebrated. His peasant characters are not bucolic and rustic but vibrant, athletic, savage, and spirited, and they embody the Irish character which he believed was imaginative and daemonic. While Yeats sought an image, Synge wanted a hero for the modern world, and so he looked to primitive men to find one.

Christy Mahon achieves heroic stature because in his frustration with his father he strikes a blow he believes to have been fatal, and the people of Mayo laud him for it. Not his act or his illusion created his new identity but rather the adoration of people who desire a hero. By the time they turn against him, he has mastered his own life. Christy becomes an artist in that he recreates himself from a cowardly farm boy into a courageous athlete, lover, and leader of the people. He controls his own emotions and his will. He courts Pegeen with his own inspired "poetry talk." The play is about the liberation of a victim of paternalistic tyranny, of provincialism, of loneliness, but
it may also speak of the desire for national independence, and individual freedom from social repression. Christy's discovery of his own will enables him first to strike at his father, then to defeat the Mayo athletes and his chief rival for Pegeen's hand, and finally to set himself completely free to "go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day" (CW IV: 173).

Synge collected the story which was to form the plot of The Playboy in the Aran Islands. A Connaught man killed his father with the blow of a spade when he was in a passion, and fled to the island where he threw himself at the mercy of the people. They hid him in a hole which Synge's informant, the oldest man on Inishmaan, showed him, and kept him safe for weeks. "This impulse to protect the criminal is universal in the west," Synge wrote (The Aran Islands, CW II: 95), due partly to the association between legal justice and English law, but more directly to the people's conviction that a human being would not do wrong unless under the influence of a passion as "irresponsible as a storm on the sea." They did not believe that such passion could be controlled. A person who committed such a crime would be quiet for the rest of his life, they said, for no one would do such a thing if he could help it (95). Michael Flaherty echoes this sentiment in The Playboy when
he remarks that Christy should have had good reason for doing what he did (CW IV: 73). A prototype for Christy may have been Hyde's description of Raftery, who was said to have been a "spare, thin man" (Hyde, Raftery, 25), the best in Ireland at wrestling and leaping bogholes (Hyde uses the term "lepping" [27]). He was an adroit conversationalist who captivated listeners. Synge may have adapted Christy's athletic feats from the horse races on the sands which Synge observed in Connaught ("In West Kerry," CW II: 272) and the island riders who rode their Connemara ponies at full gallop with nothing to hold onto (The Aran Islands I: 79).

Christy begins to be aware of his own power when he realizes the men in the shebeen are interested in him (CW IV: 75). He boasts that he is the son of a "strong farmer . . . could have bought up the whole of your old house a while since from the butt of his tail-pocket and not have missed the weight of it gone" (69). Later he tells Pegeen, "We were great surely, with wide and windy acres of rich Munster land" (79), but he forgets this story entirely when he says that he committed his crime in a "cold, stoney, divil's patch of a field" (101). He becomes a hero because the people of Mayo are starved for someone to believe in, much as Synge believes the modern world is. He possesses the ability, but he needs the
approval of the townspeople in order to learn to believe in himself. He wins Pegeen with his courage, his daring, his fine talk; he grows and improves, gathering the courage to slay his father a second time, boasting that he will take some of the others before he goes (171). Finally he gives his triumphant speech, after defeating the athletes, his rival, the townspeople, and his father.

The people's starved imaginations desire violence because they lack stimulation. The Widow Quinn tells Christy he is a "fine, gamey, treacherous lad" (101). Pegeen also equates violence with courage: "... and you a fine lad with the great savagery to destroy your da" (111), and says she will not marry a man the like of Shaneen who had "no savagery or fine words in him at all" (153); "I wouldn't give a thraneen for a lad hadn't a mighty spirit in him and a gamey heart" (113). The characters delight in vivid personality and in violence for its own sake.

Jimmy Farrell flatters Pegeen with her ability to "knock the head of any two men in the place" (63). Pegeen, chiding the reticent newcomer Christy, challenges him with "You did nothing at all. A soft lad the like of you wouldn't slit the windpipe of a screeching sow" (71). Susan remarks that Sara Tansey drove the ass cart ten miles to see "the man bit the yellow lady's nostril on the northern shore" (97). Sara answers, fitting on Christy's
boots: "There's a pair do fit me well, and I'll be keeping them for walking to the priest, when you'd be ashamed this place, going up winter and summer with nothing worthwhile to confess at all" (97). Sins and crimes are to be lauded, while virtue equals boredom. The most cowardly of the men is the least respected. The Widow Quinn remarks to Shawn, "It's true all girls are fond of courage and do hate the like of you" (117). When Shawn voices his opinion that Mayo is as good a place and now as good a time as any other, Pegeen makes clear the relationship between violence and romance:

As good, is it? Where now will you meet the like of Daneen Sullivan knocked the eye from a peeler, or Marcus Quin, God rest him, got six months for maiming ewes, and he a great warrant to tell stories of holy Ireland till he'd have the old women shedding down tears about their feet. Where will you find the like of them, I'm saying? (59).

The heroes are both violent men and story tellers with vivid personalities. Christy rebels against unbearable restraint, against church and state: he is Messiah as well as hero. The girls' bringing him presents parodies the Epiphany. His triumphs in the sports parody the Palm Sunday adulation; Synge may also have had in mind triumphal exploits at Greek games. When Christy's pretensions are unmasked, he is vilified, ridiculed, tortured, and offered up for
sacrifice. Yet the religious imagery is undermined by the blasphemous epithets and irreligious behavior of the characters. The allusions to mercenary marriage and the Widow Quinn's mercenary matchmaking lead to sexual degradation. Pegeen is likened to a beast whom it were better to breed to a sturdy stud like Christy. The villagers applaud Christy for his act of emancipation, for it is an embodiment of their own desires. But when it becomes reality, they have only the courage of their dreams. Christy's story is like Parnell's, a "gallows story" when told, but when publicly seen, it becomes a "dirty deed." The townspeople are hypocritical because they act only out of self-interest; Christy's actions are the result of desire for liberty and anger at the appalling treatment he receives from his father.

Christy's artistic gifts, like Raftery's, spur those he meets into creating art, however dismal their stories seem when compared to his. Synge recorded this trait in the islanders: "The people have so few images for description that they seize on anything that is remarkable in their visitors and use it afterwards in their talk" (The Aran Islands III, CW II: 129). Pegeen eagerly relates the story of the Widow, who reared a black ram at her own breast, and who killed her own husband by hitting him with a rusty pick, so that he died from blood
poisoning. "That was a sneaky kind of murder did win small glory with the boys itself," says Pegeen (CW IV: 89), who does not remark on the sneakiness in Christy's deed—he has hit his father on the back of the head. Jimmy Farrell tells of the skulls in the city of Dublin, "ranged out like blue jugs in a cabin of Connaught" (133-5). He declares the truth of it because a lad saw them as he returned in the Liverpool boat from harvesting: "'They have them there,' says he, 'making a show of the great people there was one time walking the world. White skulls and black skulls and yellow skulls, and some with full teeth and some haven't only but one'" (133-5). He also tells of a man who killed horses after he was k'ked in the head, ate the insides of a cock and died afterwards (137). Philly also tells a story of death, of the graveyard beyond the house where he was a lad and the exposed skeleton of a man who had thighs "as long as your arm." He imagines the people of the old days to have been greater than those of the present: "He was a horrid man, I'm telling you, and there was many a fine Sunday I'd put him together for fun, and he with shiny bones you wouldn't meet the like of these days in the cities of the world" (135). Michael Flaherty's story of Kate Cassidy's wake is derived from the stories of
tremendous drunkenness at funerals that Synge heard on the islands (The Aran Islands I, CW II: 76). The funeral served merely as an occasion for drunkenness: "... you'd never see the match of it for flows of drink, the way when we sunk her bones at noonday in her narrow grave, there were five men, aye, and six men, stretched out retching speechless on the holy stones" (CW IV: 151).

Old Mahon's storytelling is as vigorous, although not as artistic, as Christy's. He displays proudly his wounded head and declares triumphantly that his own son did it, that he walked hundreds of miles winning his bed and board for the telling of his tale (135). He too waxes gregarious when he believes he is being praised. When the Widow says that he must have vexed his son fearfully to make him strike such a blow (she assumes, like the islanders of Synge's acquaintance and like Michael Flaherty, that the fault lies with the victim and not with the criminal), Old Mahon echoes Christy's "Is it me?" (121). He delights in imagining brutality, telling the Widow, "There was one time I seen ten scarlet divils letting on they'd cork my spirit in a gallon can; and one time I seen rats as big as badgers sucking the life blood from the butt of my lug" (143). He affirms Christy's description of his violent temper, of his being locked in an asylum for battering peelers and assaulting men,
when he declares the welcome he shall have at the Union, for he is "a terrible and fearful case, the way that there I was one time screeching in a straitened waistcoat with seven doctors writing out my sayings in a printed book" (143-5).

Pegeen too becomes an artist and changes her tone when she makes love to Christy after he has won the sports. She, too, echoes Christy's incredulous, "Is it me?": "And to think it's me is talking sweetly, Christy Mahon, and I the fright of seven townlands for my biting tongue. Well the heart's a wonder, and I'm thinking there won't be our like in Mayo for gallant lovers from this hour to-day" (151).

Christy becomes an artist and hero in his own right because the people of Mayo encourage and flatter him. Pegeen declares that only his tiredness keeps him from talking the way Owen Roe O'Sullivan did or the poets of Dingle Bay: "... I've heard all times it's the poets are your like, fine hairy fellows with great rages when their temper's roused" (81). She tells him he must have had great people in his family and he should have lived like a king of Norway or the east (183). Christy finds his real courage when the villagers turn against him and accuse him of being a fraud. He does not revert to his former, cowardly self but fearlessly orders them:
"Shut your yelling, for if you're after making a mighty man of me this day by the power of a lie, you're setting me now to think if it's a poor thing to be lonesome, it's worse to go mixing with the fools of the earth" (165). He asserts his position in their society: "... I'm after hearing my voice this day saying words would raise the topknot on a poet in a merchant's town" (165). Finally, full of confidence in himself as athlete, hero, poet, and lover, he blesses them for what they have enabled him to find in himself: "Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day" (173).

The people of Mayo, however, cannot rise to the hero they have made. They desire security and peace over artistry and courage. Michael Flaherty declares what they all feel (except Pegeen), that "By the will of God, we'll have peace now for our drinks" (173). For the villagers, eloquence is not enough; they reject poetry for mundane life. Like Nora Burke, Pegeen is left without her vision of a happier life, but unlike Nora she can choose only between two lonely conditions--spinsters or lonely marriage. Nora at least has the promise of some beauty in her life. The audience may feel that Pegeen deserves what she gets for turning against
Christy, yet we feel sympathy for her. Society has no room for Christy the artist, the wandering minstral, for the artist is irredeemably alien and fugitive (Maxwell 51). Christy will carve a new society for himself, while Pegeen, who might have become his partner in the creation of a new society, has neither the imagination nor the will to leave the sterile way of life she knows.

Apart from Riders to the Sea, all of Synge's art praises the daemonic in man, the irresponsible spirit of the natural man, and he chooses the people of the west where he saw that this spirit had liberty to make itself felt. Synge wrote that the humor of the middle island (Inishmaan) was quaint and wild, but on the south island (Inishere) he met a humor that was close to ecstasy: "Perhaps a man must have a sense of intimate misery, not known there [Inishmaan], before he can set himself to jeer and mock at the world" (The Aran Islands III, CW II: 140). The passionate spirit of all the islanders expressed itself in "magnificent words and gestures" (92). The temperament of the people of Connaught itself was "half savage" (122): "The man who feels most exquisitely the joy of contact with what is perfect in art and nature is the man who from the width and power of his thought hides the greatest number of Satanic or barbarous sympathies" ("Autobiography," 6).
Christy Mahon creates a new personality for himself, while the Douls in The Well of the Saints create a vision of a new world, an Eden which can be created only by a free imagination: the world is either beautiful or ugly according to the sensibilities of the perceiver. The images of sound and smell are as important as those of sight. The Douls experience a world through their senses that the other people ignore: "Isn't it finer sights ourselves had a while since and we sitting dark smelling the sweet beautiful smells do be rising in the warm nights and hearing the swift flying things racing in the air, . . . till we'd be looking up in our own minds into a grand sky, and seeing lakes, and broadening rivers, and hills are waiting for the spade and plough" (CW III: 141). They are creatures of the senses, peculiarly aware of their state of being, making whatever they can of sensuous perception. The Saint's abstract religious truth is to them defeating and deluding. Heaven and hell are within the sensuous world, the endurable and unendurable, the warm sun and stoney path. Martin's resolution is not an escape from reality but an acceptance of its dualities, fair and foul, and of the wholeness to which they may be brought (Maxwell 53).
Synge described his visit to the old ruined church of the Ceathair Aluinn, "The Four Beautiful Persons," on Inishmaan, and a holy well near it that was famous for curing blindness and epilepsy. A woman of Sligo long ago had seen it in a dream and took her blind son to it where the water restored his sight (The Aran Islands I, CW II: 56-7). The basic theme of the play--newly sighted people wishing to be blind again--comes from a folk tale about a blind man, who, having been cured, asks to be made blind again in order that he may not commit sin (Ó Súilleabháin 21). Yeats wrote that in primitive times blind men became poets, as in his own time they became fiddlers in the villages, and were content to praise life. Poets who suffered impediments plain to all sang of life with the ancient simplicity ("Discoveries," Essays 277-8). The family quarrels in The Well of the Saints are fought over simple things. Mary and Martin provide drama for themselves, to break the tedium of familiarity; there is little real malice.

The custom of Mary and Martin had been to sit by the wayside, inspiring sympathy in passers-by--whom they despised--and indulging in vain dreaming. They exchange this aloof and independent existence for one of drudgery. Now they must work with their hands and are not only poor but also miserable, whereas earlier, when
blind, they had been poor but free. Their outcry against injustice is the undoing of the countryside. Like Christy Mahon, they disturb the peace of the local people who want to punish them for it.

Their is a world of dreams. While newly sighted people would probably not wish to be blind again but would find each other, however wrinkled and old, to be beautiful, the Douls' wish tells us more about the world they live in. Their blindness is a metaphor; while the others are sighted, they see very little and feel very little but desire for gain. Timmy the Smith is self-satisfied and abusive. Molly Byrne is foul-tempered, malicious, and vain. The Saint's language is full of liturgical dullness and exhortation to duty. He is a well-meaning but foolish reformer who is blind to Molly's nature and to the Doul's spiritual vision. The Douls prefer blindness and fantasy to labor and reality which destroys their belief in themselves. Their descriptions of the world they cannot see are poetic; the world they can see, however, is devoid of beauty.

Mary and Martin Doul love nature. Martin knows the lay of the land as well as any sighted man: Mary calls him "a grand man the world knows at finding your way if there was deep snow itself lying on the earth" (CW III: 133). Mary loves the outdoor life, as does the Tramp in The Shadow of the Glen: "Well, the sun's coming warm this day if it's late autumn itself" (71). However, like Adam and
Eve they wonder about the visible world, the knowledge that has been denied to them. Martin states his lack of faith: "I do be thinking odd times we don't know rightly what way you have your splendour . . . " (71). He is unsatisfied and says plaintively that if they could see themselves for one hour only they'd know for certain what they looked like and would never have to heed the lies of the rabble (73). He also laments that he is unable to see the young girls walking the road.

The play emphasizes the discrepancy between belief and reality, the poetic and the prosaic, the imaginative and the mundane. The Saint believes that young girls are "the cleanest holy people you'd see walking the world," and so he entrusts his holy water, cloak, and bell to Bride and Molly Byrne (83). Timmy the Smith and Mary Doul remark sarcastically on his naiveté. Molly Byrne fits the Saint's cloak on Martin and tells Mary that if she could see Martin she'd be as proud as Satan (85). Martin believes the cloak will become him. Martin talks of Mary's "yellow hair, and her white skin, and her big eyes" (87) and declares that being a saint is not as good as being wedded "with the beautiful dark woman of Ballinatone" (87). Molly remarks scornfully to Martin, "... it's little you know of her at all" (87). Timmy
says they will see a "great wonder" this day and pities them, saying it was "bad work" that the people let on that Mary was fine-looking, when in reality she was a "wizened hag" (93).

Martin at first refuses to believe the Saint when he says that the Douls are wrinkled and poor (89). Mat Simon speaks the truth, that it's more joy blind Martin felt from the lies told him about his wife being fine-looking than Molly's husband will ever get from her (93). He feels simple pity for the Douls and believes that they will not be vexed by the lies, for they have been given great joy and pride when they were blind.

Molly's selfishness and materialism are inferior to the Douls' vision: "It'd be a fine thing if some one in this place could pray the like of him, for I'm thinking the water from our own blessed well would do rightly if a man knew the way to be saying prayers, and then there'd be no call to be bringing water from that wild place, where, I'm told, there are no decent houses or fine-looking people at all" (91). Although she is about to be married, she has little faith in marital love: "If it's vexed he is itself, he'll have other things now to think on as well as his wife, and what does any man care for a wife, when it's two weeks or three, he is looking on her face?" (93).
The play is unsatisfying in that newly sighted people, blind from their seventh year, would presumably find everything in the world beautiful, even the bleeding feet of the Saint and the wrinkled face of an aged spouse. Martin's cruel comments to Mary reveal greater familiarity with the visible world than he could have had: "I'm telling you there isn't a wisp on any grey mare on the ridge of the world isn't finer than the dirty twist on your head. There isn't two eyes in any starving sow, isn't finer than the eyes you were calling blue like the sea" (97). Furthermore, it is difficult to believe that a newly-sighted person would wish to be blind again. Yet the Douls come to understand more than the sighted people in this play. Martin states that only those who have been blind truly see anything (117). The materialistic people of the village mistake drudgery for virtue. The Douls, having created their own beautiful world, find the visible one dissatisfying. When the community tries to force these wandering artists to conform to their customs and values, the Douls rebel against the constraints. In the process they force the people to examine their own way of life. Timmy the Smith complains that Martin and Mary have made everyone uneasy: "But it's a queer thing the way yourself and Mary Doul are after setting every person in this place,
and up beyond to Rathvanna, talking of nothing, and thinking of nothing, but the way they do be looking in the face" (111). Deprived of their own dream, the Douls force everyone else to question their own complacencies.

Martin's language is so poetic that he captivates Molly Byrne against her will. She tells him he sounds like a man who is losing his mind, but she is nevertheless intrigued by his words (117). He insists that he can see her as no one has ever been able to see her because he has been blind, and that together they can find a more beautiful world: "Let you come on now, I'm saying, to the lands of Iveragh and the Reeks of Cork, where you won't set down the width of your two feet and not be crushing fine flowers, and making sweet smells in the air . . . " (117). His most poetic speech reveals his despair at his disillusion:

Grand day, is it? . . . Or a bad black day when I was roused up and found I was the like of the little children do be listening to the stories of an old woman, and do be dreaming after in the dark night that it's in grand houses of gold they are, with speckled horses to ride, and do be waking again, in a short while, and they destroyed with the cold, and the thatch dripping maybe, and the starved ass braying in the yard? (113)

But after they again lose their sight, the Douls return to each other to find new dreams and create a new world. Mary believes that she is becoming a beautiful
old woman with white hair, and Martin creates a new image of himself as an old man with a long, silken beard. They return to their lost Eden through their senses: Mary hears the sound of birds that herald the springtime and says that there will be fine warmth in the sun and sweetness in the air, that they will sit in the quiet and smell the new flowers growing. Martin hears the lambs of Grianan and the full river rushing in the glen. After they have refused the Saint's offer to cure them again, Martin describes the new world they have found and the world they are leaving:

We're going surely, for if it's a right some of you have to be working and sweating the like of Timmy the Smith, and a right some of you have to be fasting and praying and talking holy talk the like of yourself, I'm thinking it's a good right ourselves have to be sitting blind, hearing a soft wind turning round the little leaves of the spring and feeling the sun, and we not tormenting our souls with the sight of the grey days, and the holy men, and the dirty feet is tramping the world (149).

After the Douls have gone, Timmy the Smith remarks that in the south, where they are going, lie many rivers in which they may be drowned (151). They have regained their paradise, but reality proves to be stronger than their dream in the end. Still, the Douls triumph over their tormentors and embrace a destiny of their own choosing.

One by one the artists are outcast from societies which fail to appreciate them. Nora Burke and the Tramp,
Christy Mahon, and Mary and Martin Doul, are all forced to leave their communities or homes. Red Hanrahan too is outcast, although his story ends with the hope that he has entered the Other World. The artist, which should be a respected leader, is rebuked by his own people who are too blind to understand him. The fate which Yeats and Synge see in store for the artist is that he will lose his people but will yet possess his imaginative vision.
CONCLUSION

Motivated by their desire to create a new sense of nationality (as opposed to nationalism) in Ireland, Yeats and Synge did romanticize and idealize the way of life of Irish peasants. They were not merely Gaelicists who found in the Irish peasant an image of Celtic superiority in spiritual and moral matters, but they did ignore the fact that Ireland is unique among European countries in its lack of a "country cult" which caters to an urban population's dream of a rural ideal. Too many of Ireland's city dwellers, lately come from the country, knew first hand the harshness of life there.

The primitivism of Yeats and Synge stemmed from their values, derived from romanticism and the belief that modernity--industrialism and technology--meant decay of beauty. Yeats wrote that literature decayed when it no longer made language more beautiful or vivid; Synge wrote that the proper criterion for art is found by comparing it with the life of the people. Unable to accept the values of the urban middle class, they looked to the countryside and the peasants for artistic inspiration. Yeats wanted to create new myths for Ireland from old ones and new images.
from tradition. Synge wanted to express the language he heard in the rural places of Ireland, to portray the vitality he believed the peasants possessed, and to help preserve their way of life. Both found in nature a mysterious power which was to be respected, yet while Synge believed that nature provided the impulse for superstitious belief, Yeats believed that the spiritual forces were to be found within the natural world itself.

When he first began to write, Yeats records in his *Autobiography*, he had hoped to find his audience in Sligo (10). He never abandoned his belief in the traditional hierarchy of aristocrats and peasants, for he believed that an independent Ireland should be founded on old values. The aristocrat, who was worldly and sophisticated, must act as a leader, maintain his dignity, and represent higher values; the significance of his actions was political and influential in nature. The peasant, on the other hand, could voice the cry of the heart against necessity--old age, loss of love, dispossession. The peasant could be more vital and less cautious; his language could be extravagantly outrageous. His actions--farming and fishing--preserved a timeless way of life. Synge, however, could have dispensed with the aristocrat altogether, for in the peasants and wanderers of Wicklow and the west he thought he saw a greater nobility.

Jack B. Yeats wrote in a letter that while Synge was well-travelled, the Irish countryside and its people were what he loved:
Synge must have read a great deal at one time, but he was not a man you would see often with a book in his hand; he would sooner talk--or rather listen to talk--almost anyone's talk.

... I think the Irish peasant had all his heart. He loved them in the east as well as he loved them in the west, but the western men on the Aran Islands and in the Blaskets fitted in with his humour more than any--the wild things they did and said were a joy to him (CW II: 402).

Still, Yeats and Synge created a peculiarly Irish and modern form of the pastoral. Their characters stand out against a harsh and beautiful--and unmistakably Irish--landscape, which itself becomes symbolic of human relationships, and, in Yeats's case, aspects of the poet's memory. If Yeats and Synge ignored localized social norms and exaggerated the peasants' artistic sensibilities, they nevertheless also presented the very dark side of their lives. The world of Synge's plays is not the rediscovered Eden that we find in some of his journal entries, nor, for all his writing about the artistic traditions of the Irish peasants, is Yeats able to find his ideal audience. If the urban world suffered from the degradation of modern times, so too did the countryside: bitterness, anger, jealousy, avarice, lust, uncertainty, and cruelty plague the rural life as Yeats and Synge present it. Dreams of beauty, love, and an impossibly noble life remain dreams, which are usually denied to the people.
Even though they were the key figures in the Irish Literary Revival, Yeats and Synge were outsiders, being Protestant, middle-class, and essentially urban in outlook. Their writing about the peasants was derived not from personal experience but from ideas, and each one, according to his own personal bent, found confirmation of his ideas about them. While not indulging in sentimental pastoral, both were romantic, both transformed the peasants into ideal figures, whether they were tragic or comic, heroic or ignoble. What was important about the peasants to Yeats and Synge was not what would interest an anthropologist, historian, or sociologist; they were interested in whatever gave them images for art; thus, the peasant became a wanderer, a mystic, a man of nature. Such artistic recreation characterizes the Irish Renaissance as a whole—Irish culture and history are idealized in order to create a traditional inheritance. Such idealization is necessary for writers who create a literary culture outside their personal experience and who try to forge a national culture from ideals and from art.
NOTES

Chapter One: Irish Peasants and Anglo-Irish Writers


7 Quoted in Daniel Corkery, Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study (Cork: Cork Univ. Press, 1931), vi. Hereinafter referred to as "Corkery."


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Chapter Two: The Peasant as Noble Savage


5Quoted in G. J. Watson, Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce, and O'Casey (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 50. Hereinafter referred to as "Watson."


Chapter Three: Natural and Supernatural


3. Synge described his theory about the origin of superstition and the interrelationship between the natural and supernatural in writings that were published after his death under the title "Autobiography":

One evening when I was collecting on the brow of a long valley in County Wicklow wreaths of white mist began to rise from the narrow bogs beside
the river. Before it was quite dark I looked round the edge of the field and saw two immense luminous eyes looking at me from the base of the valley. I dropped my net and caught hold of a gate in front of me. Behind the eyes there rose a black sinister forehead. I was fascinated. For a moment the eyes seemed to consume my personality, then the whole valley became filled with a pageant of movement and colour, and the opposite hillside covered itself with ancient doorways and spires and high turrets. I did not know where or when I was existing. At last someone spoke in the lane behind me—it was a man going home—and I came back to myself. The night had become quite dark and the eyes were no longer visible, yet I recognized in a moment what had caused the apparition—two clearings in a wood lined with white mist divided again by a few trees which formed the eye-balls. For many days afterwards I could not look on these fields even in daylight without terror. It would not be easy to find a better instance of the origin of local superstitions, which have their origin not in some trivial accident of colour but in the fearful and genuine hypnotic influence such things possess upon the prepared personality. (CW II: 10).


12. In a passage omitted from an article published on May 9, 1907, in the *Manchester Guardian*, Synge praises the peasant shepherds' virtues which he says increase the beauty of the landscape itself:

The herds who spend half their time walking through the mountains in dense clouds or mist are one of the most remarkable classes left in Ireland. To know these people in their own glens, to talk with them when it is raining and in the cold dawns and the twilights is a pleasure and a privilege like few others. There are men who have a simplicity and sincerity that would cure any cynicism, and a fineness of form— in at least some of the men and women—with an expression of curious whimsical humour or despondency that never loses its interest. Beautiful as these Wicklow glens are in all seasons, when one has learned to know the people one does not love them as Wordsworth did for the sake of their home, but one feels a new glory given to the sunsets by the rugged figures they give light to (CW II: 228 fn.).

13. This detail comes from a folk belief Synge collected on Inishmaan. Pat Dirane advised Synge to keep a sharp needle under the collar of his coat in order to ward off the faeries. Synge attributes this belief to the sanctity of the instrument of toil, a folk belief common in Brittany, and to the fact that iron was a common talisman among primitive people (*The Aran Islands* I, CW II: 80).
Chapter Four: The Peasant and Love


3 Yeats would not again praise Hyde so exuberantly until 1929. Yeats believed that the scholar in Hyde would overcome the poet, and he did not like Hyde's being drawn into politics by the Gaelic League. Lady Gregory replaced him as Yeats's most important guide in his study of Irish folklore (UP 1: 292). But in "Coole Park, 1929," Yeats praised Hyde as a member of the company of artists who had created the Irish Literary Renaissance:

There Hyde before he had beaten into prose
That noble blade the Muses buckled on,

...  

Found pride established with humility,
A scene well set and excellent company (Poems 243).

4 That is: " 'Tis a pity that I am not married."

5 Beer.

6 The fourth and fifth stanzas of this poems are as follows:

My grief and my trouble!
Would he and I were
In the province of Leinster,
Or county of Clare.

Were I and my darling--
Oh, heart-bitter wound:--
On board of the ship
For America bound.
The literal translation follows:

My grief on the sea. It is it that is big. It is it that is going between me And my thousand treasures. I was left at home Making grief, Without any hope of (going) over sea with me, For ever or aye. My grief that I am not, And my white moorneen, In the province of Leinster or County of Clare. My sorrow I am not; And my thousand loves On board of a ship Voyaging to America. A bed of rushes Was under me last night And I threw it out With the heat of the day. My love came To my side, Shoulder to shoulder And mouth on mouth (Hyde, Love Songs, 29).


Chapter Five: The Peasant as Wanderer, Hermit, Seer, Prophet

Chapter Six: The Peasant as Artist


BIBLIOGRAPHY


