NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

Faculty of Design : Department of Visual Communications

Jack B. Yeats's Portrayal of the west of Ireland;

through line and composition.

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Introduction

In my search through the works of visual art, I found the paintings of Jack B. Yeats to be the most exciting. On researching Yeats's work, I was still more captivated when I realised that a lot of it was inspired by my own native place - the west of Ireland. With further exploration I discovered that this inspiration from the west is more clearly evident in his early works.

Being unfamiliar with Yeats's earlier work, I decided this would be the focus of my thesis. I was to discover that much of the work was executed as line illustrations, which were completely different to his paintings. It was intriguing to find that Yeats's late paintings, whose colour so excited me, developed from black and white linear illustration.

Hence I have chosen Jack B. Yeats's early illustrations - inspired by the west of Ireland, and its people; works that have been left in the background, smothered by his late paintings - as my focus. It was with great anticipation then that I set about the arduous task of discovering and selecting much of the heretofore "unknown and undiscussed" illustrations of Jack B. Yeats which I am about to examine.

The body of my research was compiled when Hilary Pyle's book The Different Worlds of Jack B. Yeats was published. This book deals with Yeats's black and white cartoons and illustrations. Had it been published earlier I may have shaped my thesis differently.

I chose specific works for discussion because of my absolute captivation by and fascination with them on discovering them as illustrations in their original context. The works include:

_ Three illustrations done for A Broadsheet;

_ Five drawings done as pictorial journalism for The Manchester Guardian, reporting on the congested districts in the west;

_ Illustrations with J.M. Synge's writings in The Aran Islands;

_ Illustrations for Yeats's own book - Life in the West of Ireland; and

_ Three carefully chosen watercolours which I consider vital to the development of my thesis.

I selected these works because each was illustrated between the years 1900 and 1912, a period when Yeats visited the west of Ireland regularly. I have also included Yeats's illustrations in Patricia Lynch's book The Turfcutter's Donkey, which were done in his later years. In the midst of his oil painting it was nice to find that his line illustrations were still developing and expanding in his portrayal of western rural Ireland.

In all of these works I intend to look at Yeats's portrayal of the west, examining it in the context of Nationalism, the Industrial Revolution and illustration of the period.

John Butler Yeats once made a comment on his son's early drawings: His "drawings are never of one object, one person, or one animal, but of groups engaged in some kind of drama" (Pyle, 1989, p.13). The works I am about to discuss are a typical example of one of these "groups engaged in drama" that managed to intrigue and captivate Yeats throughout his life. The works are not figurative or landscape studies. They are studies of a life, a place, a group of people. They serve as social records of this race, but more important and intriguing, they tell a true story in incorporating Jack B. Yeats' own unique vision, direct observation, social commentary, imagination, technical and artistic

skill and human understanding. These will be my viewpoints, then, as I discuss Yeats's subject matter, use of line and composition.

I have excluded Yeats's use of colour because it appears as a separate entity in his works - as if it was applied after the drawing had been completed.

Chapter One

Jack B. Yeats and Irish Nationalism

It is very important that Jack B. Yeats's portrayal of the west be considered in the context of his wider vision of Ireland as a whole, which in turn needs to be considered in the context of the period he lived in.

Jack B. Yeats was Irish to the core. Although born in England, Ireland was in his blood. His bond for the west developed when he was a child growing up in Sligo. This bond developed into a love for his native country during the period when Yeats left Ireland to live in England for some years. Through visits home, attending political meetings and hearing patriots speak, this love was strengthened and Yeats's vision for his country grew from the political atmosphere in Ireland at the time. He became a strong nationalist and his work was to echo this. And understandably so, because it was the turn of the century and Ireland was struggling for Home Rule. The country desperately wanted to distinguish itself as a nation separate from England and one of the best ways of doing this was visually.

The nation set about establishing a national identity in the hope that it would transcend its troubled politics and economics. One way it did this was through the use of national symbols, e.g. the national flag and harp were seen on stamps and coinage. The second way was a plea on behalf of the State for Irish artists to use Irish subject matter, a call that the Young Irelanders had made a generation before in 1830. But it was now the time of Douglas Hyde, the Gaelic League, the GAA and the Celtic Revival; there was a huge upsurge in "Irishness" and this lit a spark in the people, especially the artists. This had a

RELIEF WORKS

Plate 1

AN ISLAND HORSEMAN

Plate 2

great influence on Yeats's subject matter. Ireland was his subject matter but the west was his focus.

At that time there was a new idea that the west was the best representative of "Irish Ireland uncontaminated by its colonial past" (Kennedy, 1994, p.145). For this reason, the west became associated with Ireland's visual identity. Yeats did more, however, than merely promote the west as a visual identity, which was what a lot of artists on the continent were doing at the time, such as in Germany (Fowler, 1982, p.7). He went further. He gave the people of the west an identity of their own, not just one for the entire country. He distinguished the lives of the people and gave them pride in their existence by representing reality. The drawings for The Manchester Guardian report on the hardship in the region. The illustrations for The Aran Islands give a rounded view of life there, as do the watercolours and drawings for A Broadsheet. Those for Life in the West of Ireland focus on certain events and the work for The Turfcutter's Donkey convey the "idea" of the west.

It is notable that none of these works depict any great nationalist events or heroes of the struggle. Yeats did not portray any kind of violence. Rather, he focused on the ordinary people and their lives. In 1901 Jack told a friend and art collector, John Quinn, that he didn't think much of a "great lot" of Sinn Feiners; but he believed in the Sinn Fein idea: "I think it is a good thing for it is full of living ginger" (Booth, 1990, p.81). This "living ginger" permeates through Yeats's drawings, making them works of liberty and freedom. They radiate a real sense of liberty for Ireland. This alone justifies the many ongoing protests against past and present constraints and tyrannies within the country.

"The Relief Works" (Plate 1) is a direct protest against the oppression of the people; people who must serve as slaves for their "superior" to earn a meagre shilling a day. All the other works make the same protest, albeit indirectly, through their projection of the freedom and "living ginger" of life in the west. Yeats employs certain symbols that reappear throughout his works, for example,

Plate 3

'TAKE THE POT! WE 'LL KEEP THE DONKEY!'

Plate 4

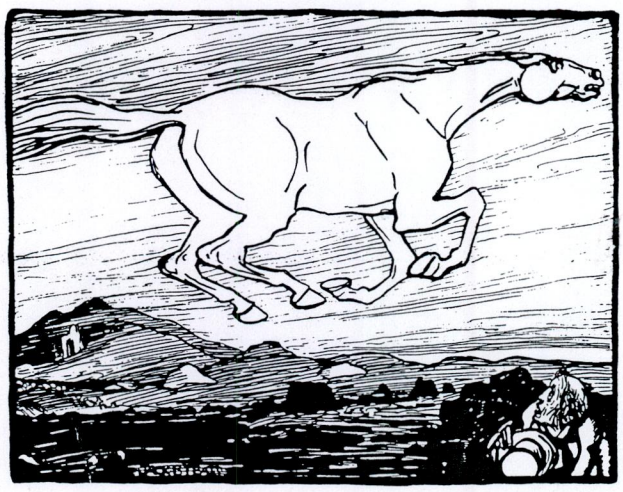


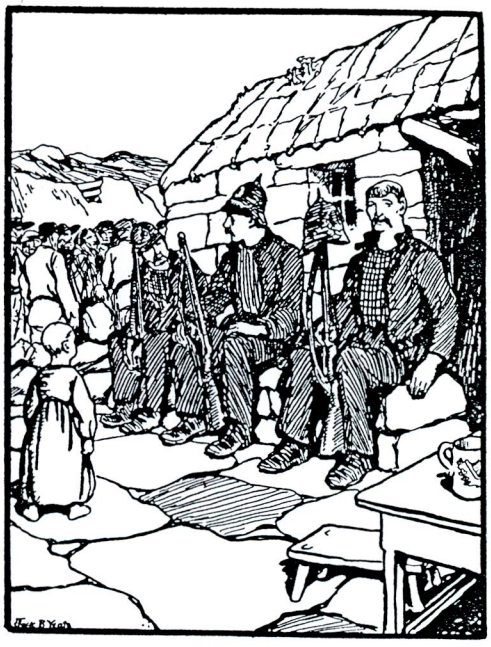
Plate 5

either the horse or the donkey appear in each of the three books. The animal is native to Connemara, having been born and bred there, and is a significant part of the west. It is the second main figure in "An Islandhorseman" (Plate 2), "Gathering Seaweed" (Plate 3) and "Take the Pot..." (Plate 4). The manner in which Yeats depicts the horse/donkey, even in Plate 4, when it is someone else's subject matter, releases an air of freedom. In Plates 4 and 2, the horse/donkey gallops through the air. They represent the power and wildness of the west that cannot be repressed under any rule. In "The Pooka, The Pooka" (Plate 5), the horse becomes larger than life, reigning supreme over his land.

Yeats' use of a young person in Plates 2, 4, 6 and 7 also contributes to the new hope for freedom in the air for Ireland. The repeated use of the pirate and pilot images serve as strong and evocative symbols. They broke with conventional law and projected their code of freedom. They represent the main figures in "The Pilot" (Plate 8) and "The County of Mayo" (Plate 9). While in "Boatbuilding at Carna" (Plate 10) and (Plate 11), the westerners are allowed to wear pilot caps. In "The Evictions" (Plate 7) Yeats chooses an innocent child as the symbol of freedom. The child is not involved in the eviction, either way, but he witnesses the result of colonial exploitation and will grow up a determined nationalist.

Yeats's subject matter and use of symbolism signify the sense of liberty and hope for the people. So, too, does his portrayal of the figure.

Plate 6



THE EVICTIONS

Plate 7

Plate 9

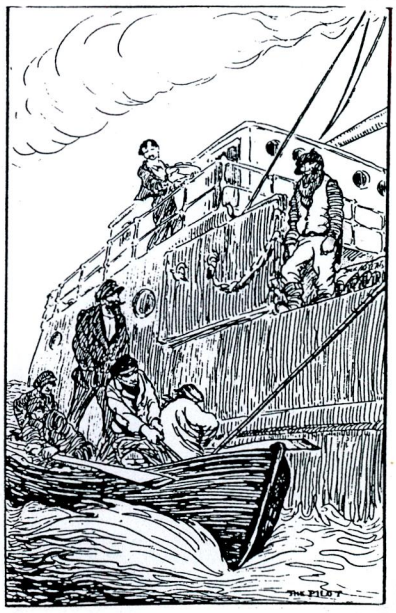
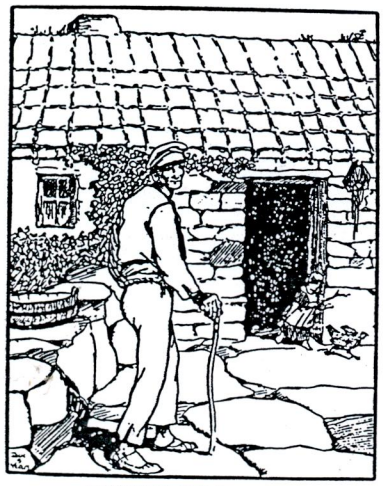


Plate 8



THE MAN WHO TOLD THE STORIES

Plate 11

BOAT-BUILDING AT CARNA

Plate 10

Chapter Two

Yeats's Portrayal of the Figure

In this chapter I will discuss Yeats's use of the figure to communicate an idea. He uses the figure to communicate his portrayal of the people of western Ireland. The figure of the west is given a prominent place in this work. Yeats was more interested in the actual people of the west and their relationship to the environment than he was in their traditions and customs. The works are not studies of human form or figure drawings, but are studies of a group of people and their lives. Through visiting the west, Yeats got to know the people well; he began to understand their world. He had a psychological understanding of the people and this is what he expresses in his figures, their mental state; their spirit. He makes the figure a forthright expression of their feeling and character. They are what Duranty once asked for, to

forget the human body treated like a vase -

> in his own dress in the midst of his social habits,
> at home or on the streets (Pickvance, 1982, p16).
> what we need is a distinctive note of modern man,

Yeats achieved these forms, "alive and bold: forms that logically developed from within" (Pickvance, 1982, p16).

In this chapter I have selected pieces that are typical of Yeats's character studies in the work in general. "The Man from Arranmore" (Plate 12), "Porter" (Plate 13), "Carrying Seaweed for Kelp" (Plate 14), "The County of Mayo" (Plate 9) and "Boatbuilding at Carna" (Plate 10) are all strong portrayals that tell about the people and their life. It is notable that in all of them "an outstanding character" has marched "out of a normal event to take on a starring role"

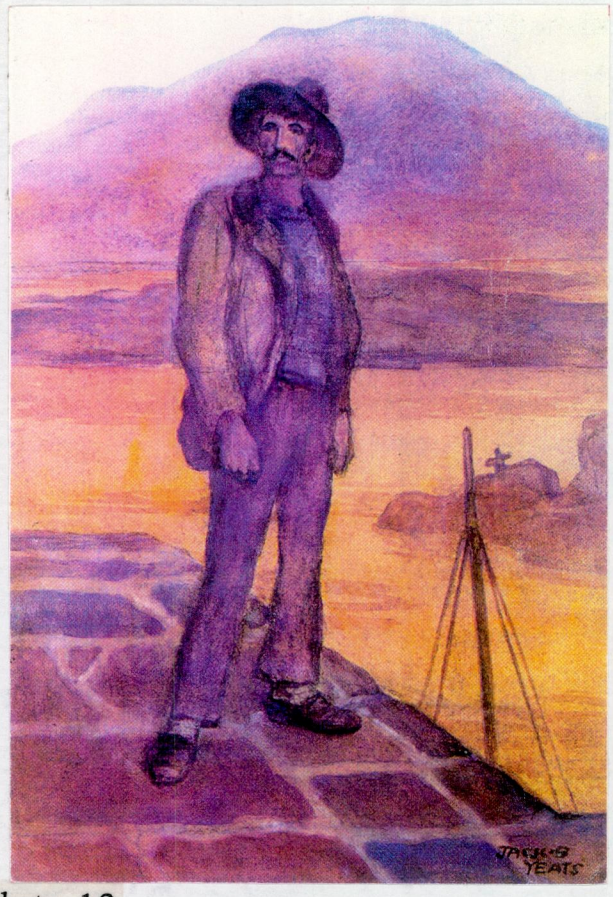
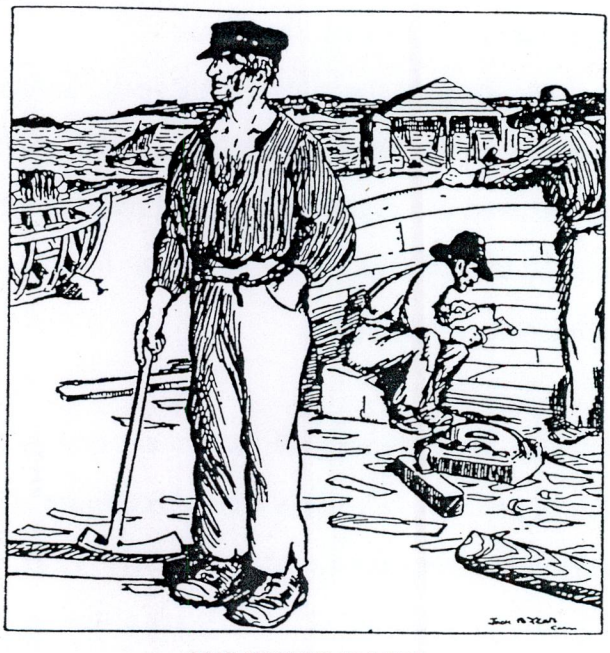


Plate 12



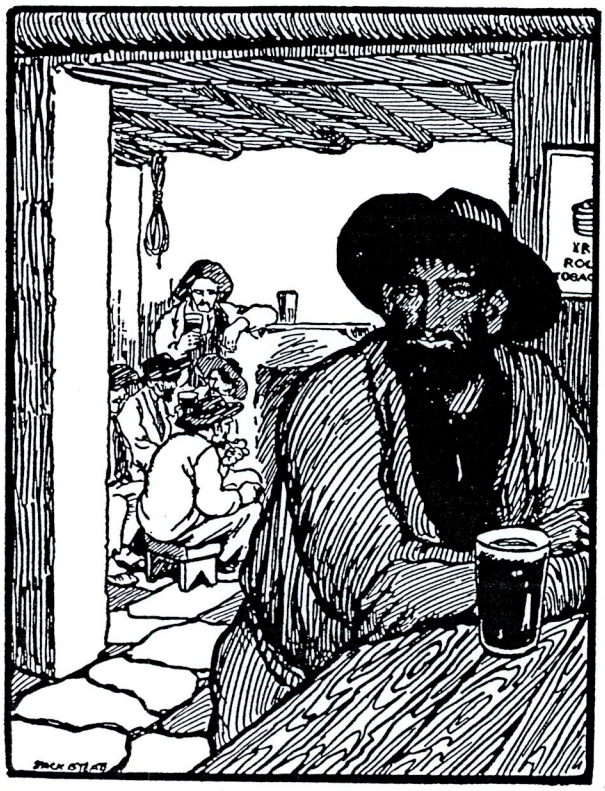
BOAT-BUILDING AT CARNA

Plate 10

(O'Driscoll, Robert, Reynolds (eds.), 1972, p.16). The "starring role" is the characterised type, immediately recognisable: "The Boatman" (Plate 12), "The Country Man" (Plate 13), The Woman of the West" (Plate 14), "The Emigrant" (Plate 9) and "The Boat Carpenter" (Plate 10). These types are not just representations, they are statements.

Plate 12 depicts a proud figure of a western man sanding tall, on a pier, gazing towards us. The figure in his stance epitomises the stoicism and dignity of the people, a people who have been repressed for years but still managed to hold on to their dignity through it all. They have stood the test of hardship and have come out strong. Yeats always displays respect for the dignity inherent in the individual. There is no great deal of attention given to the face, but the man's eyes express all. So, too, to his shoulders held high, his fists clenched, one leg stretched out in front of the other. He is a confident, self-contained, proud individual. The head, as in Plates 10 and 13 has suddenly turned sideways and upwards, suggesting the humility and reverence of the people, a noble reticence of a simple people. The strength of his character is suggested by his strong sense of vertical presence in contrast to the horizontal landscape and diagonal direction of the pier. The hooker's mast rising above the pier endorses the man's pride and stoicism which, in turn, is echoed by the cross that stands on the rock behind the mast. All in turn are echoed by the "rising" mountain.

Yeats's portrayal of the boat carpenter in Plate 10 is quite similar to the previous. He is in the "starring role", larger than life, stepped out of the activity in the background. He has completed his task, and has an air of satisfaction and pride about him as he stands firm, although slightly more relaxed than the previous boatman. With one hand in his pocket, the other holding a tool, he appears happy with his work and his life.



PORTER

Plate 13

In both portrayals Yeats achieves in each of the figures, through the head, eyes, hands and posture, a subtle balance between the depiction of withdrawal into inner thought and the portrayal of a lively presence, which creates an expression of freedom and vitality in the individual.

These works completely defy the past portrayal of the Irish peasant, where the people of the west were sneered upon, represented in cartoons for newspapers as retarded, savage creatures who hovered between apes and Englishmen, drowning their sorrows in drink or a Paddy in an amusing situation. It wasn't until the 19th century that things changed, thanks to artists such as Daniel Maclise, who got caught up in the Irish cause and started to depict reality.
Between 1877 and 1890 there was a huge change in the way the Irish peasant was portrayed. He was now being glorified as the man who was "truly" Irish, who had the key to the remains of the country's native culture. And part of this culture was, of course, the pub. In "Porter" (Plate 13) Yeats depicts the moment of relaxation for the Irish peasant. He is again in the foreground, he has stepped out from the background scene. Here there is still an air of pride in the air, suggested by the man's self-assured posture as he leans on the bar counter. The stumpy black outline that Yeats employs to depict this rural character suggests the strength of mind of the man, as well as his strength of character. The limbs are well built, muscular and strong, limbs of a man not oppressed by the famine. He is here to stake his place. The men of the island don't pretend to be gentle, meek people. They are strong and tough, toughened by their years of hardship.

Yeats's woodcut technique is very appropriate to his subject matter. The stark, rugged, exaggerated, intense line suggests aptly the struggle these people had in overcoming many hardships - living in barren, uncompromising land under harsh weather conditions. The bold, crude, earthy line powerfully suggests the toughness of this race. As in other works, the man's eyes are gleaming, looking out at us; he is a real person, sharp, aware, and certainly not stupid. This real sense of presence is also highlighted by the dramatic close-up presentation of the figure.

CARRYING SEAWEED FOR KELP

Plate 14

Jack's brother, W.B., has been quoted as describing the people of the west as "ethereal remains of a lost era," but Jack saw them as people "with muscle, energy and personality" (Sunday Times, 31.3.1991). He always brings out the character of the person: "the man who will stand his round in the pub, who is more than just his occupation," "earthy rumbustious, a skilled raconteur, articulate and fluent as no man in an English bar ever is". The man's hands are tough, bulky, worked hands. Most of his pictures commemorate someone "who has lived by his hand in a rough world" (Dublin Mag., 1923, p.7).

Even his portrayal of the women of the west is no exception. Plate 14 illustrates a simple but extremely difficult task of the women of the islands, a picture that says so much about the women of the west and their hardship. This poor woman must struggle against the elements, carrying a huge basket of seaweed over her shoulder, climbing the rocks in her tattered pampooties. The massive weight of the seaweed on their backs and shoulders suggests both the physical and mental weights they must bear. They suffered the mental pain of having to watch their children leave one by one, go off to America, or marry somewhere or live in the continual danger of the sea. This illustration depicts the torment of these mothers. This woman's hair, hanging down on her face, is almost a continuation of the seaweed above her head, a very unglamorous portrayal but a real one. Her hands are cold and wretched looking as they anchor the load. But her strength of character is again reinforced by the thick rugged black outline that is used to depict her. The intensity and strength of this outline, equal to that of the border around the picture, heightens the tragic intensity of the woman and her lot. The rain and the wind are described in somewhat lighter line, because she is mentally strong enough to withstand her hardship. The woman's eyes are looking at us; she is aware of what is happening.

It is very interesting to compare these western figures to that of Yeats's typical "returned emigrant" in "Memory Harbour" (Plate 15). Yes, the figure again is in the foreground, but he is portrayed as a much weaker, meeker, almost "scrawny"

Plate 15

Plate 9

RELIEF WORKS

Plate 1

Plate 16

figure. The life appears to have gone out of him. His depressed, wearied face contrasts sharply to the fresh faces of the natives. The figure is also in contrast to the "life" in the background of the picture; Sligo is full of action. The "returned emigrant" avoids the viewer's eyes. The natives, who are portrayed much stronger, alive yet more innocent, gaze directly at the viewer. The man's face here is shaded with emotion "as he turns his back on the scenes of his past childhood" (Ryle, 1993, p.85). The man is smoking a cigar because he feels uncomfortable and out of place. It is even more interesting to contrast this figure of the "returned emigrant" in Plate 15 with Yeats's portrayal of the "about-to-be-emigrant" in "The County of Mayo" (Plate 9), where the figure is described as a bold, muscular, well-built pirate who must leave his native land. But "Memory Harbour" (Plate 15) is evidence of what will happen him when he has left.

Yeats often uses such contrast of characters actually within the same composition. In "Relief Works" (Plate 11), the degraded natives appear like slaves, their heads hung low in humility and weakness, while their ganger peers on them with a stern face of power and arrogance in a firm upright posture. The contrast in characters accentuates the injustice of the government solution to poverty.

The same occurs in "The Country Shop" (Plate 16) when Yeats contrasts the fragile woman with her stern shopkeeper. The peasant woman is bent over. We only get a glimpse of her face, but that glimpse expresses a world of worry as she clutches to her small bag of coins. She is obviously impoverished. This is further accentuated by her ragged clothing. The shopkeeper, on the other hand, appears quite middle-class, with her neat buttoned blouse, and brooch fastened under her throat. Sitting upright and firm, we get to see all of her face with "its small hard speckled eyes," her "tight mouth encased in flabby joints" devoid of expression (Pyle, 1986, p.28). She doesn't appear to have any sympathy for her fellow being. Yeats uses contrast of characters here to accentuate the tyranny and greed within the community and the unequal distribution of wealth.

THE EVICTIONS

Plate 7

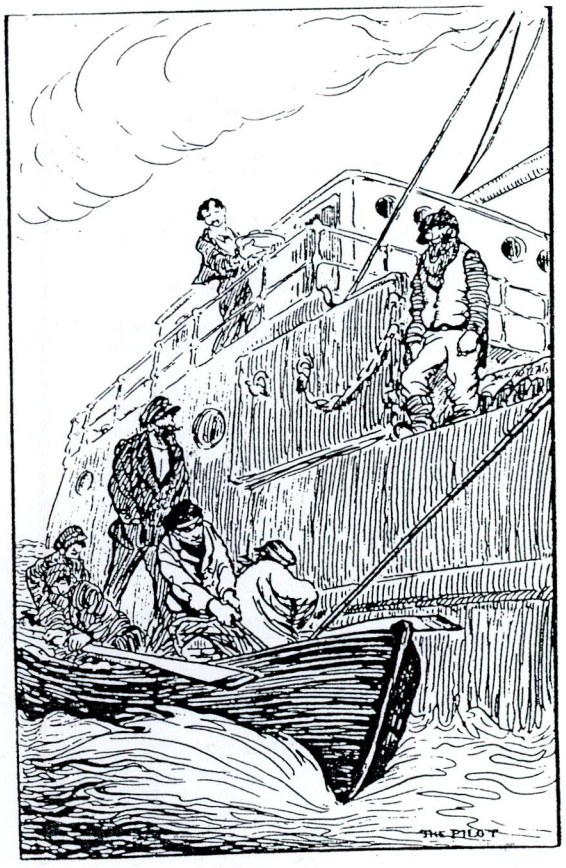


Plate 8

AN ISLAND HORSEMAN

Plate 2

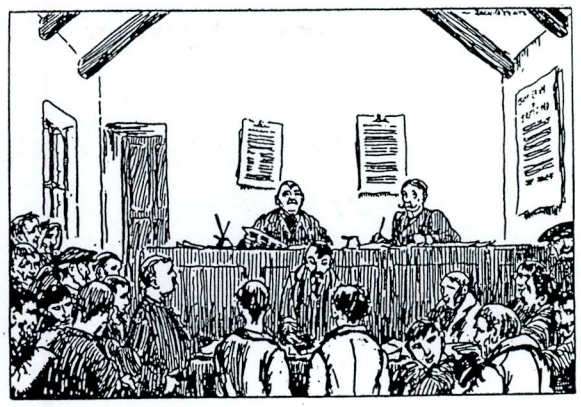


Plate 17

In "The Evictions" (Plate 7), the hugeness and crudeness in the description of the policeman contrasts starkly and horribly with the small innocent child before them. They also contrast with the weariness and wretchedness in the face of the poor woman who has just been evicted. This serves to emphasise the cruelty of the event.

Yeats creates quite an amusing contrast in "The Pilot" (Plate 8) between the waiter in his dress suit, white collared shirt and lovely dicky-bow holding the fragile tray of drinks, as he dares peer down below deck to the muscular-looking pilot in his hat and seafaring clothes directly below the waiter, trying desperately with all his strength to pull on the rope that has just come down from the ship.

In "An Island Horseman" (Plate 2), the energy and wildness of the young men sitting unconventionally on his horse as he gallops down the road, confidently waving to the world, is in contrast to the conservative pose of the two women walking calmly and appearing quite shocked, behind the stone wall in the left centre middleground. Their contrast in size is also very notable.

In "The Poteen Makers" (Plate 17) the confident impassive characters behind the official desk are contrasted with some of the very worried and wearied-looking creatures in the crowd. Yeats even goes so far as to contrast the two magistrates. One is a fat, bubbly-looking character, while his partner seems the more "reserved", conservative and thin-looking type.

Yeats employs contrasts in characters, usually to make clear whose side he is on. In his depiction of a solitary figure he makes this statement through their posture, head, limbs and eyes. Yeats is essentially an artist of the people; even when he depicts the landscape it is usually in context with its lifeblood - the inhabitants.

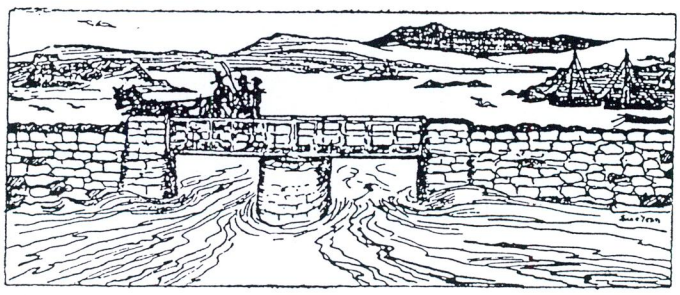


Plate 18

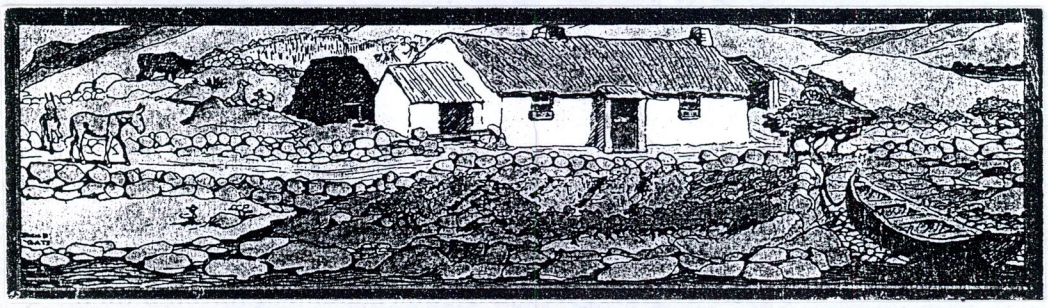


Plate 19

Chapter Three

Yeats's Portrayal of the Landscape

His integration of the figure into the environment

I have dealt with Yeats's portrayal of the figure as an entity in itself. A lot of the work, however, involves the integration of the figure into the landscape. But before I delve into this, I will take a quick look at Yeats's portrayal of the land as a non-figurative entity.

The land itself was part of Yeats's devotion and attachment to the west, and in the years between 1900 and 1912 he made many non-figurative studies of the landscape in which he portrayed the "beauty and reality" he found in this unspoilt, desolate region. In my research I found that very few of these landscapes were executed in line, apart from one done for The Manchester Guardian ("The Causeway", Plate 18), and another I discovered for the Cuala Press (Plate 19). Neither are extremely captivating. They are straightforward representations. Plate 18 shows a horse and cart carrying some people over a bridge. It is a side view and the horizontal direction of the bridge contrasts nicely with the diagonal flow of the water underneath it. Plate 19 depicts a typical Irish rural scene of an average white-washed cottage, with a pile of turf to the left, a wheelbarrow to the right and a currach across the road in front of it, while two funny-looking donkeys march towards the house. Both scenes are done in a relatively light, thin and rather quiet, peaceful line, and are of horizontal format. They are purely visual representations rather than studies of the landscape.

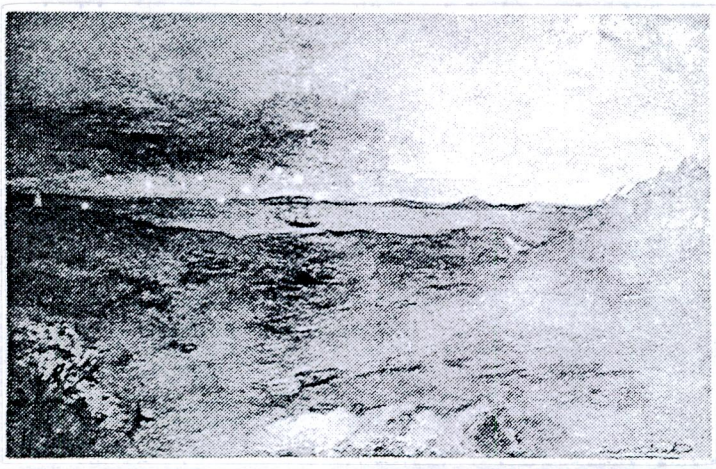


Plate 20

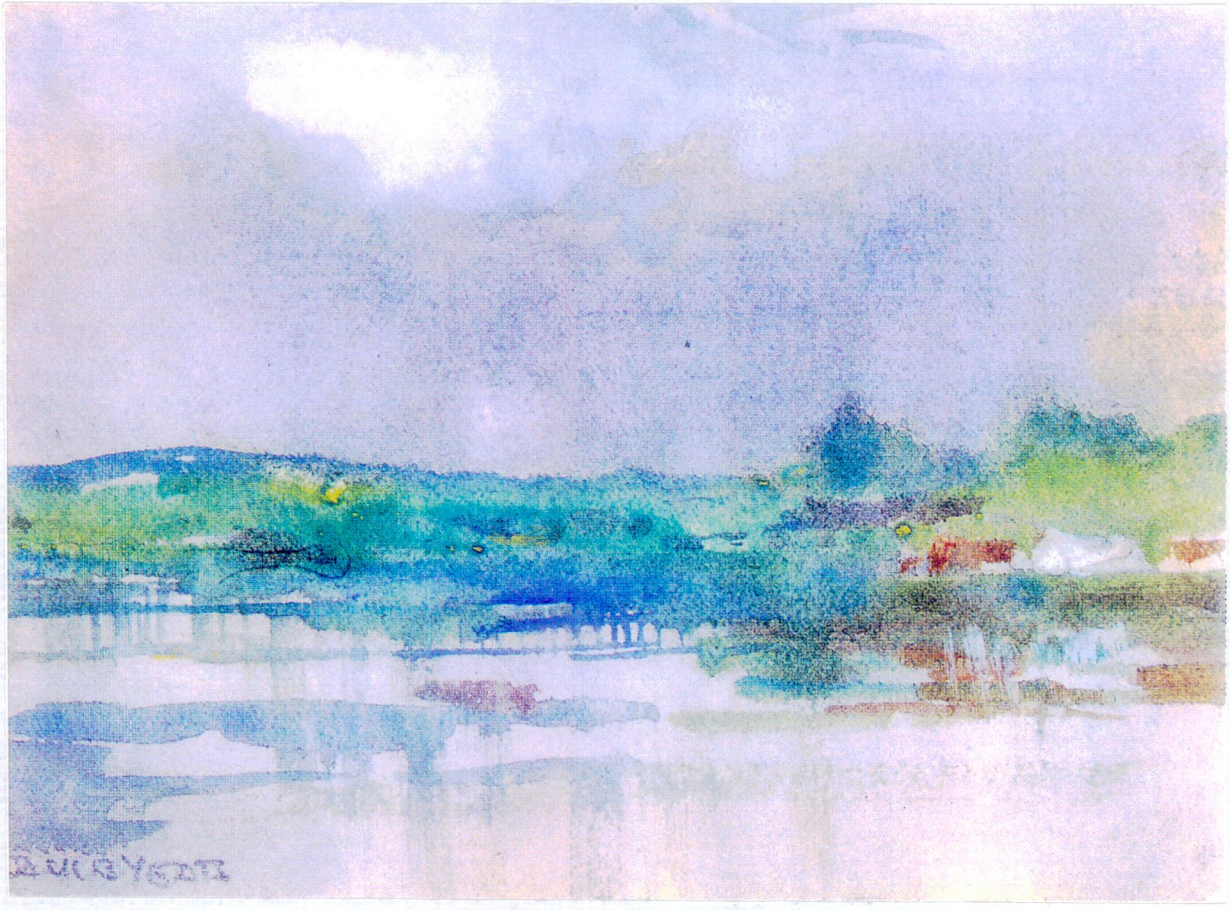
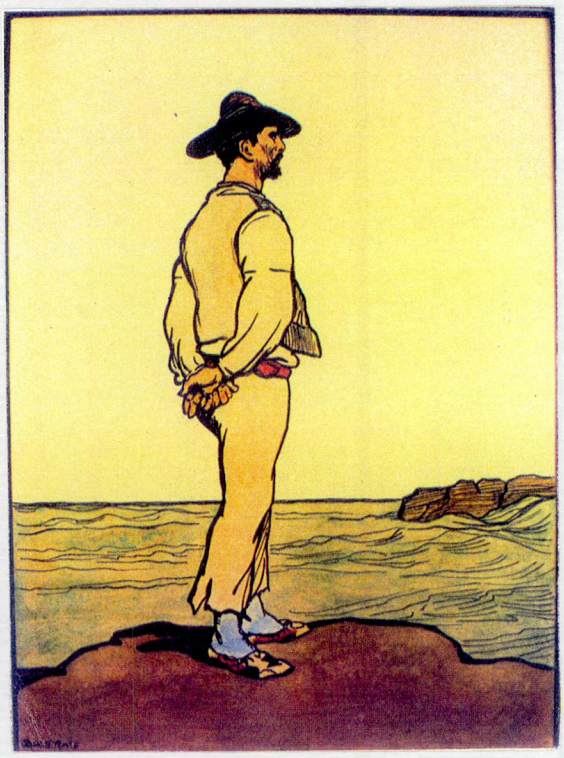


Plate 21

What I did find, however, in my research, apart from the former, was landscape studies of the west done in watercolour, a medium Yeats was experimenting in during these years. I have chosen to look briefly at two such paintings, typical of those done in the first few years of the 1900s: "Rosses Point" (Plate 20) and "The Lake" (Plate 21). Yeats once said that Rosses Point was the landscape that meant most to him in the world, for it was here he was reared. In this work, there is a ship to be seen in the centre distance and a lighthouse to the left. But these are only minute features in such a fantastic, wide expanse of sandy beach and deep blue water. In this watercolour, Yeats expresses the huge sense of freedom that is to be found at Rosses Point.

"The Lake" (Plate 21) is a study of Coole Lake, County Galway, where his friend Lady Gregory lived. But again it is more than an exact visual representation of the lake. Rather, it is a study of the atmosphere of the west. The brushwork here is delicate and fluid, capturing aptly the dampness of the Atlantic air, as if it were a magic haze, unique to the west. The threatening rain is always lurking, but there is peacefulness in the air, achieved by the subdued colours, and unity of tone. Yeats captures the solitude of the west in his huge expanses of open sky above land and water. There is an impressionistic feel to the painting as the colours are let run freely into each other. The low tones, dreamlike colour and light flowing brushwork together reflect the introspective and brooding mood of the period (Pyle, 1993, p.24).

Even though these paintings are realistic in portraying the landscape in all its dampness and desolation, there is present the "passionate identification" with the landscape itself. David Brett includes this quality of identification as one of the four main painterly relationships with the land (the other being purely spectator relationships, that of ownership where the land is owned and the relationship of work, where the land is worked by the peasants). Yeats manages to find the "romantic delight" in the beauty of reality. Furthermore, he finds "passionate identification" with a land that is worked and owned, a feat that David Brett argues is not possible. But this is part of the uniqueness of Yeats's portrayal.



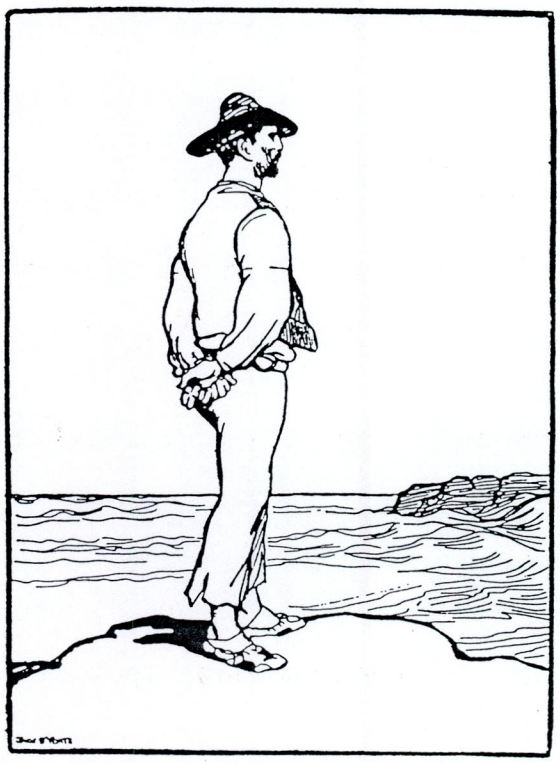


Plate 22

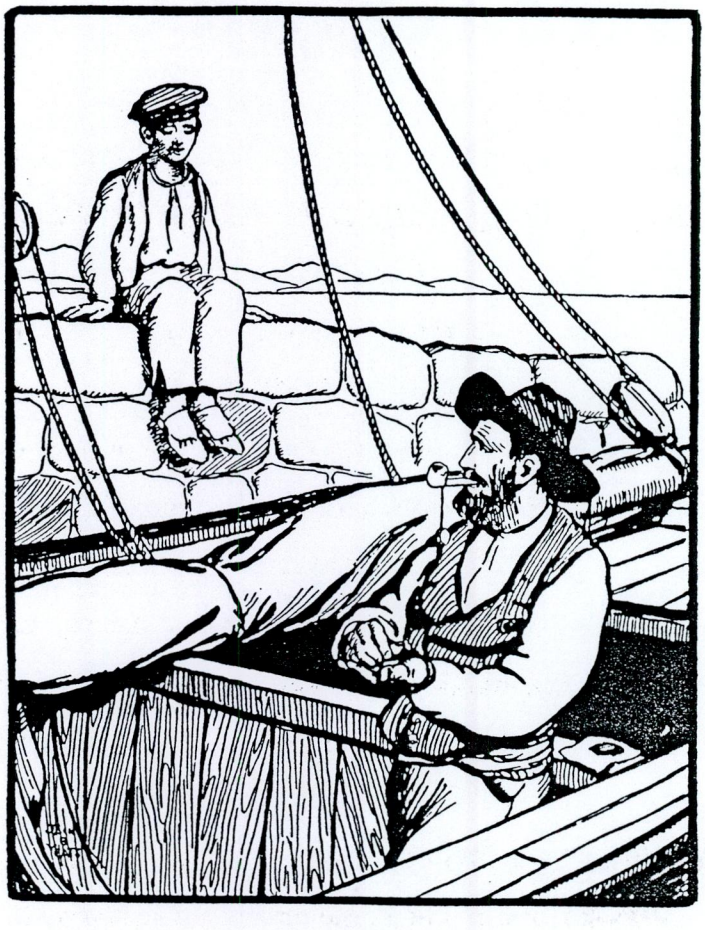
He finds romance in a land that is worked and owned by the peasant. He integrates the peasant into the land so they become part of each other.

Much of Yeats's illustrations are taken up with this relationship which he saw as part of the "essential nature" of the west, and this is where his interesting use of line to describe the landscape appears.

I will now look at this relationship and how it is expressed in his work.
Yeats achieves an equal balance between the figure and the landscape by his use of line and composition. In "An Island Man" (Plate 22), a proud island man stands firm on a rock jutting out to sea, gazing towards the Atlantic. Both figure and environment are held in tension by the use of equal strength of outline describing both man and land. The dark borderline that controls the picture is continued into the composition as the outline of the rock and figure. The man is a continuation of the land, which in turn is a continuation of the surrounding environment. They are part of each other, part of the one. This equality and oneness is further emphasised by the abundant use of wide empty space, in the rock, in the figure and in the background. The line used to describe the sea is a somewhat lighter line and successfully indicates distance.

The overall composition is very simple and extremely effective. The man and his rock beneath him are both foreground and anchor the picture, to give the composition a very peaceful sense of weight and balance. Land is man's anchor, his base. Without the land, the figure is lost in space. "Without land, a man is nothing" (the recent film "Far and Away"). The dramatic close-up treatment of both figure and rock unite them both even more, in our eyes. (The rock in the low centre right serves to break the flatness of the picture). Behind them lies the vast Atlantic Ocean and wide open sky. Yeats presents us with an extremely simplified representation of the background so as not to distract our attention from the idea of oneness. In fact, the sky is total, wide empty space, symbolic of the huge world outside the island. The man is facing towards this "invincible deity". However, the movement of the water emphasises the stillness and

Plate 12



THE HOOKER'S OWNER

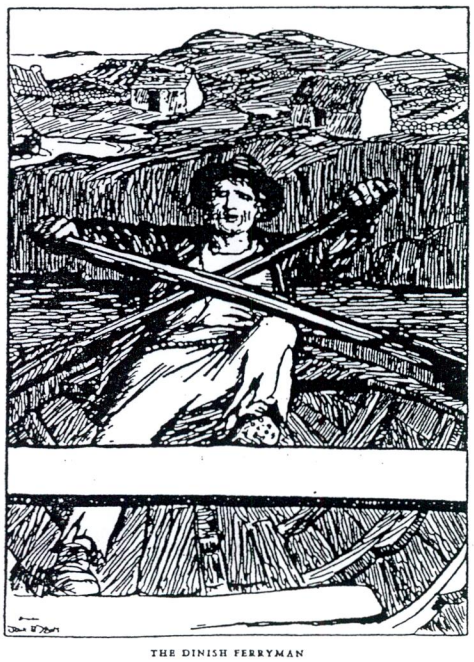
Plate 13

firmness of the man and his rock. The vast empty space that permeates the whole picture accentuates the feeling of open air and timelessness: all that matter are the basics, man and his environment. Man is at one with nature.

Similar to this illustration is the watercolour "The Man from Arranmore" (Plate 12). Instead of using empty space, however, Yeats's use of warm mauves in both the land, pier and the figure suggests the oneness of essence. "The land is a man's soul" ("Far and Away"). The only thing to distinguish the figure from the land is the use of his characteristic outline around the figure, of course the man's features and the warm gold colour of the water. The darkened mauves in the man's hat stand out slightly from the lighter colour of the mountain behind him and serve to anchor the figure securely to the pier beneath him. He stands firm on his land, protected by his hat from the savages of the ocean.

Yeats's use of line in "A Hooker's Owner" (Plate 6) is similar to its use in "An Island Man" (Plate 22), where both figure and environment are combined by equal strength of line describing them both.

Here a boatman is pictured in his hooker, about to light his pipe, while a young boy sits on the pier, peering on and maybe conversing. This is a depiction of man and boy in harmony with their surroundings. Because we get to see their contented facial expressions we are completely convinced. The sea was as much a part of the people's lives as was the land, and here Yeats achieves a balance between the sea, the land and their people. The strong sense of presence of the man and boy is heightened by the diagonal direction of the wall and boat. They form a triangle backwards into the right middleground of the scene and eventually disappear. This triangular movement of the wall and boat is very effective in suggesting the vastness of the world outside the island. The man and the boy both anchor this movement. Yeats achieves a charming balance in the picture between the gentle swaying movement of the big man in the boat with the firmness of the small boy sitting on the wall. The sea is suggested by the movement of the rope and boat, the land is suggested by the stillness of the



THE DINISH FERRYMAN

Plate 23

GATHERING SEAWEED FOR KELP

Plate 24

boy on his stone wall. Yeats uses equal strength of line to depict both. The wide empty space again contributes to the sense of timelessness. These people had all the time in the world. It also accentuates the peacefulness in the air which contrasts starkly to the scene in "The Dinish Ferryman" (Plate 33).

"The Dinish Ferryman" (Plate 23) - here Yeats employs an abundance of parallel hatching lines to describe the dramatic scene of a ferryman rowing madly in his currach. He blends the figures into his surroundings by the use of closely hatched line, achieving a dark shade, depicting the background and blending this shade into the figure, so that the use of white mass in the man's clothes and the boat's cross-bar serve only for perspective and dramatic purposes.

An example of where Yeats integrates people, as opposed to a singular figure, into their environment, is his illustration "Gathering Seaweed for Kelp" (Plate 24). One of the main activities on the islands was kelpmaking, for which the seaweed was needed. Here the women are busy collecting the seaweed and the men are out in currachs, presumably fishing. It is an example of interdependence between the people and their environment. Again, Yeats depicts this through line and composition. There is no main item of focus in the picture, apart perhaps from the woman closest to us. A rock at the left foreground serves to anchor the composition. He gives the people and environment equal importance. There is no extra strength of line used to depict the people. They are shaded in parts, for tonal purposes, as are parts of the surroundings, such as the rock, the seaweed and the currach.

In this work Yeats employs a more carefree line than the busy strong lines in the previous illustration (Plate 23). It is not nearly as intense a moment. The scarcity of line and detail give us a glimpse of life where the people and the environment are in perfect, peaceful harmony.

The same harmonious relationship is exemplified in the illustration for The Turfcutter's Donkey. Yeats again achieves this by composition and line; the

SHE WAS SEATED ON THE BACK OF A HUGE SALMON

Plate 25

'TAKE THE POT! WE 'LL KEEP THE DONKEY!'

Plate 4

results are absolutely charming. The composition is an empty page on which he makes some sketchy, fleeting lines to indicate presence. The same quality of sketchy line is used to describe figure and environment, so that form becomes the only distinguishing feature.

For example, in Plate 25 ("She was seated on the back of a huge salmon"), the "downward-dragged" line used to depict the girl sitting on the salmon's back is echoed everywhere in her surroundings, so that her hair, her clothes, her legs appear almost indistinguishable from the grass, salmon and water. She is camouflaged by her surroundings. The downward pull on her ragged hair and jacket echo the grass/weeds directly behind her. The white of her face, hands and dress relate to the empty space in the water and the top left of the picture. The densely shaded areas of her jacket flow rhythmically along the outline of the salmon's back, to be continued into the rush of water that stretches horizontally along the bottom of the picture and becomes part of the rock. This rhythm is then picked up and echoed by the waves behind the salmon. The figure and environment are integrated here more than ever.

Line is used more sparsely in Plate 26, where only a few lines are sketched on this wide open space, and these are to suggest movement. The few sweeps of line in the sky, the few in the land echo the sweeping movement of the donkey and the now "flying" teapot. The donkey is described in the same hairy-grassy quality of line as the land below him. The children are sketched with the same quality of line that describes the vegetation in the bottom left and right corner of the picture, plus the teapot. They boy's hair could very easily qualify as a continuation of the lines in the sky. Even the borderline echoes the whole scene.

In Plate 27 Yeats focuses all the attention on the bottom right corner, with the sketched detail of land and children, as if the children were coming out from the land, emerging and going towards almost, entering the open world, represented by the wide empty space that occupies the rest of the scene.

'LOOK! DOWN BY THE RED ROCK, SITTING UP IN THE DONKEY CART!'

Plate 27

Illustrating someone else's story, Patricia Lynch's The Turfcutter's Donkey, he still couldn't resist depicting this attachment between the people and the land. It was obviously a part of the west that continually fascinated him. This romantic attachment is very real and is still a significant part of the west today. It is something that has stemmed from history. Agriculture was one of the main livelihoods in Ireland through the ages. More than half the population lived on the land at Yeats's time, and most of these were in the west. Over the years, however, under English rule, the Irish peasants were thrown off the land and often left homeless. They lived under the constant fear of eviction. The land was all they had. They had worked it; it was their life and soul. To take this away from someone is clearly wrong and unjust, and naturally increases the intensity of the relationship. The "love of the land" became even stronger in the hearts of the people, particularly in the west, because it was here that most of the evictions took place. It is this "love of the land" that creates the romanticism in the Irish character, and has served as a theme for many a good book, film, song and in this case artwork.

Yeats's work has been described as "attempting to depict the return of the non-Ascendant Irish to their formerly dispossessed landscape". He is giving back to these people their rightful relationship, representing the "underdog" who has been repressed for so long (Cruikshank, 1978, p.15). At last these people's basic rights were being acknowledged and the reality of their lives being represented.

Chapter Four

Yeats's Representation of Reality from Observation - *Both Negatively & Positively*

The work, in general, is a real change from the Turner/Constable-like landscapes of the "Pale" that had represented Ireland for so long. It was only now in the 19th century, at last, that reality was actually being taken into account. Part of the uniqueness of this portrayal is the sheer honesty of observation that it involves, in both subject matter and style. Yeats's portrayal of the west in these works is one of honesty, of reality, of observation, which he made while growing up in the west, and visiting there regularly between 1900 and 1912. The works, therefore, serve as important social records of a people and a part of our history that should not be hidden away or forgotten.

Between 1845 and 1851, Ireland lost two million of its population due to famine (by death and emigration). Most of this happened in the west. But there are extremely few numbers of illustrations recording the famine or its effects, and the few that do "play a minor role in these books, merely embellishing the text, serving as chapter divides or frontispieces" (Kennedy, 1994, p.76). This is part of the reason why people have no concept of the "harrowing reality" of this awful event that has shaped the spirit of our land. As John Waters points out "people are ignorant and refuse to remember what Ireland has, or never known, about English colonial exploitation" (Waters, 1994, p.26).

Yeats's illustrations record Ireland only a mere generation after this terrible event, and serve as records of the effects of the famine, the recovery of the people and the land from the devastation; the west's economic, human and

Plate 1

agricultural condition still notably under colonial rule. One cannot stress enough the importance of visual records in our history. After all, today we have the television to impress images of the Third World on our consciousness.

There were others, like Howard Helmick, who illustrated Irish life factually, and Lady Butler, who depicted the rugged landscape of the people who loved and lost their land. But Yeats's works go deeper. They focus on the actual people and their lives. He entered the souls of the people and viewed them from their own standpoint by depicting reality the way the people experienced it. In this way he gives them a voice.

In "The Relief Works" (Plate 1), for example, Jack B. Yeats has put on paper the human degradation that people suffered. Four men, of scrawny limbs, carrying heavy loads of earth on primitive stretchers. Two others, bent over by the burdensome weight of the bags on their shoulders. A further two trying to break stone, while four women struggle uphill with loads to carry that are larger than themselves. They are all being "supervised" by the ganger, who stands idle. It is a record of innocent men and women slaving to a "superior" at a roadside, like a band of convicts, all for a shilling a day. Yeats's use of line expresses it all. It is one that contrasts sharply with the bold, energetic line of the illustration for "The Aran Islands". It is a slower, dispirited, dejected line, radiating a sense of tiredness and gloom. The work is full of social comment.

The ganger, well-dressed, neckscarf and all, stands firm; he is in charge of the "lesser mortals" who are contrasted figures, bent over from hardship and humiliation. The ganger's hands are gripping his jacket collar and appear to have never done a hard day's work in their existence. Again, Yeats expresses the peasant's state of mind through their eyes, which in this case are cast down towards the ground and in some cases, completely closed. It is degrading for them as human beings. And these relief works were designed to help the people. There is obviously something wrong somewhere. The peasants are being overworked and underpaid, while the ganger, who appears quite wealthy, is

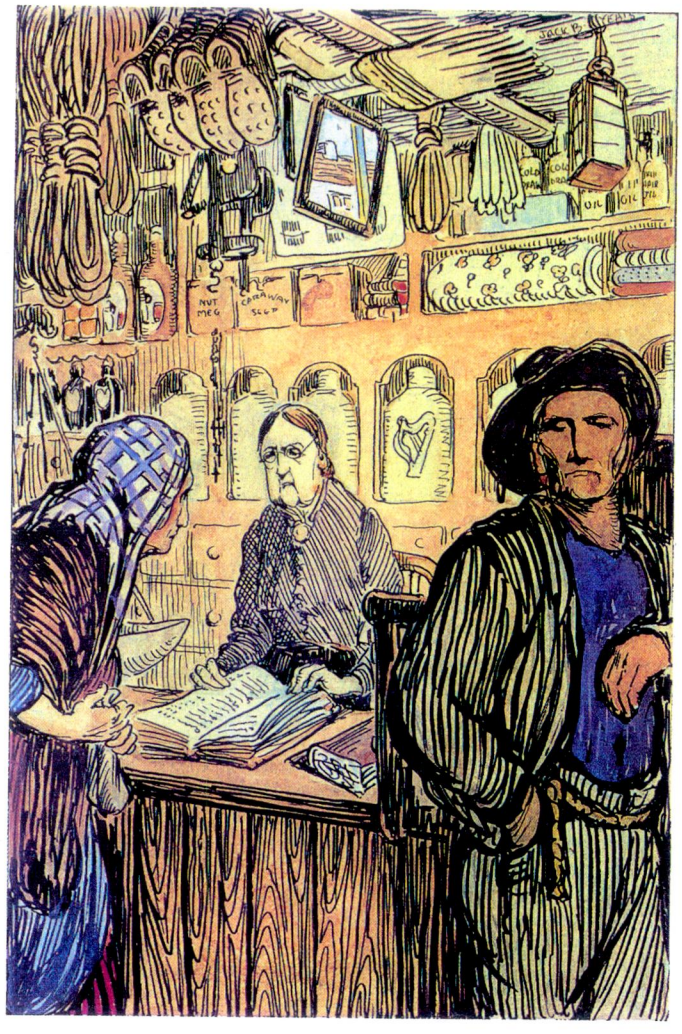


Plate 16

doing nothing. Here Yeats is suggesting the reason for the poverty of the area, i.e. the system. The work is rather apt in the context of nationalism. These people are prisoners who need their freedom. Home Rule is for them.

"The Country Shop" (Plate 16) is another report on the tyranny of the past. This time, however, it exists within the community. The location is a country shop occupied by three people - the shopkeeper, the peasant woman and the countryman. The peasant woman is paying her bill, while the countryman listens in on the dealings. Yeats contrasts the appearance of the peasant woman to that of the middle-class shopkeeper (as I have discussed in Chapter 2), and in so doing makes it obvious that his sympathies are with the peasant woman. He describes the shopkeeper as the stronger character, whether she is annoyed by putting more on credit for her customer, or refusing her any further credit because she owes enough already. However, the shopkeeper can control what the peasant woman can buy. The country man in the right foreground appears the muscular, strong type (typical of Yeats's western characters), described by the strength of bold line, heavily executed. His ears are open, his eyes downcast in disgust. Again, the work is full of social comment.

The shopkeeper can control what the peasant buys, because of the lack of availability of goods in the area. The shopkeeper takes advantage of this and ends up swindling the customers. The people spent most of their time in debt to the local shop (Booth, 1990, p.62). This tyranny maddened Yeats as he now understood the reason for much of the poverty. Yeats would have witnessed the greed of capitalism that resulted from the Industrial Revolution in England, where there was an increase in very rich men and very poor peasants. To see this in his native home would have repulsed him even more. So he employs an abundance of detail in the picture to suggest the materialism of the shopkeeper. The amount of line suggests the stuffiness of the shop, and lack of open air in the place, where business is all that matters. The glimpse of the outside world in the mirror hanging from the ceiling is in stark contrast. The claustrophobic composition contributes to Yeats's comment. It is interesting to note the Rosary

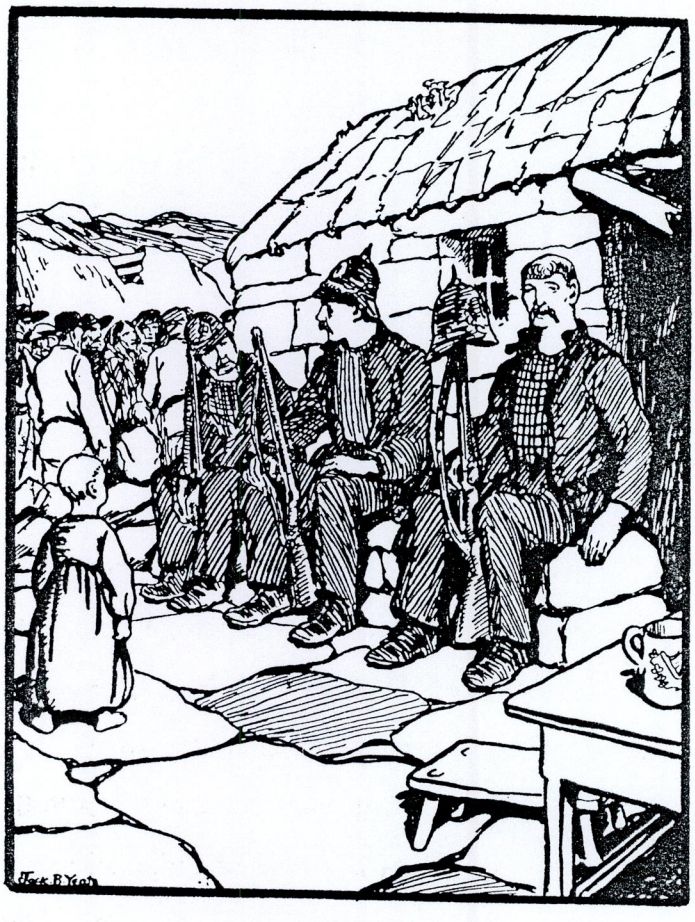
Plate 17

Plate 28

beads which separate the women. The shopkeeper's head is between the Rosary beads and an Irish harp. She is the "Catholic" "Nationalist" who runs the system.

"The Poteen Makers" (Plate 17) contains more of Yeats's satire. Even poteen is denied to the people. An illicit drink made in country areas, it was one of the only comforts these people had, and one of the very few ways of making a few shillings. This is what the law spends its time and money on. Instead of helping the people and solving injustices, they bring the peasants to court for indulging in a "good trade for poor people" (Synge). The peasants have Yeats's full sympathy, expressed by his contrast in characters (as previously discussed). Shown in profile and some from behind, there is an overall air of apprehension among the crowd. These people have no power; they are victims of the law. The two leading figures behind the huge official desk are fully in charge, looking down impassively at the crowd as if it were animals before them. They sit in a confident manner, eyes cast upwards and across, avoiding eye contact with the peasants. Their elevation against the uncluttered walls accentuates their power and force. They are ready to punish. Yeats, using extremely straightforward parallel hatching to describe the scene, captures a human situation brilliantly.

"The Man of Carraroe" (Plate 28) is one of his usual figure portrayals which expresses so much about reality. The figure in the foreground, his face, tired and worn from work, weather and poverty. His clothes are ragged and torn. There is a huge patch on a leg of his trousers. His hands are clenched tight with anger. His eyes stare directly at us, to stir our emotion. He is real. This is happening. His eyes, his mouth, the sideward tilt of his head, his face, express an unwilling resignation to his fate. He is sitting on some rocks. Described in the same "stuttering", "crinkly" quality of line as his surroundings, the man is part of the stones, the land. But Yeats brings him to the fore so much, in an effort to draw our attention to him, otherwise he is forgotten by the system.



THE EVICTIONS

Plate 7

Yeats brings to the fore the reality of individuals who must not be swept away in a general dismissal of social types.

Evictions were a common event which really have so little visual recording in history. Yeats's illustration, "The Evictions" (Plate 7), records the reality of the brutal event so common in the west at the time. Three policemen sit outside the house that has just been taken over, each holding a gun upwards and looking very undisturbed by what they have just done - thrown a family out of their home, while an innocent child looks on.

The composition is very effective. Yeats views the event from an interesting angle. The child in the left foreground is closest to us. The three policemen in the middleground are projected out to the foreground, accentuating their power and force. And in the left background corner stand the peasants, comforting the evicted mother. We are only given a glimpse of this woman, but hers is the face which one finds oneself focusing on. This is due to Yeats's skill in expressing a person's mental state in the fewest strokes of a pen. Her eyes are just staring into space as she shakes with fury and clings to her shawl. The work is laced with social comment. The policemen are contrasted to both the child and the peasants (as described in Chapter 2). An air of satisfaction pervades as the man in front rests his hat on his gun - another job done! The saddest and most effective depictions in that of the child gazing directly at the policeman, who himself avoids all eye contact. The child is almost camouflaged into the stone. He/she is the last figure one tends to see but - does it stir the emotions. Yeats wrote afterward in a letter of a politician who explained why he became a nationalist:

> I was .... but a child .... on going to school
> and I saw the agent. He took the unfortunate man
> and throwing him on the road and I saw the man's
> wife come out crying ... I was but a child.
> I swore I'd be a Nationalist (Pyle, 1989, p.89).

This was most likely the child in "The Evictions". These were the events which turned Yeats himself so strongly towards Nationalism. The works make it clear

AN ISLAND HORSEMAN

Plate 2

that it wasn't so much the revolutionists or the politicians that inspired him, but the ordinary people and their lives.

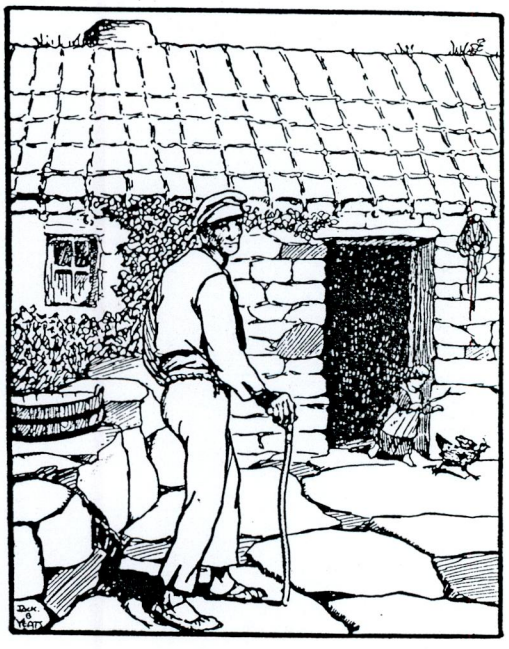
Events like these needed to be recorded, both visually and literally, in order to make people aware. For those people brought up amid the luxuries of England, The Manchester Guardian would now open their eyes.

Yeats's Portrayal of the Positive Side of Life in the West

In the portrayal overall, Yeats creates a positive feel about the reality of the west. In this paragraph I will examine his depiction of the positive side of life, that which he observed in the west.

His portrayal of the people, for example, is one of respect and admiration for their stoicism and dignity, their strength of character in the face of hardship and oppression. Yeats describes how these people rose above their situation. They held onto their culture, to their way of life. In his illustrations for The Aran Islands, he creates the effect of a charmed world by his use of woodcut line that suggests the primitiveness of the way of life, but a charming primitiveness, reminiscent of that "other existence" we see in Gaugin's work where there is a "fresh and exciting aesthetic".

Such a world permeates through the illustration "An Island Horseman" (Plate 2). Here a young islandman rides on the back of his galloping horse, down the road, waving his hat to the world, where there are no cars, no fumes, no timetables to trouble him. Freedom is in the air, as the boy sits unconventionally sideways on his horse. His eyes are wide open; he has no constraints. There is a real sense of "native" wealth present in this work. The baskets on the horse are handcrafted on the island; the man's waistcoat looks homespun; the pampooties are in good shape. The horse appears fit as a fiddle, and we are given a glimpse of two great pillars behind the horse. Yeats's line is alive and successfully conveys the movement in the scene.



THE MAN WHO TOLD THE STORIES

Plate 11

THE PIER

Plate 29

THATCHING

Plate 30

In the illustration "The Man who Told the Stories" (Plate 11) he uses the same device of line to express the charm of the world, where there is a respect for old people and character. This scene describes the seanchaidhe walking with his stick towards the cottage. He is in harmony with his surroundings, part of the west, the storyteller whom everyone knew. He was also a pilot in his younger days (according to Synge in his writings for the book) and now he is allowed to wear his pilot cap as a symbol. There is a real respect for individuality and character in western Ireland, and this picture shows Yeats's admiration for this. There is also warmth of atmosphere present, suggested by the chunkiness of the line and the clarity of the empty space. The seanchaidhe will sit beside the fire and all the people gather round him as he tells his stories. Yeats manages to convey so much in the simple depiction of a moment.

In "The Pier" (Plate 29) he pictures the people gathered together to watch a ship come safely home. Part of the hardships of the people was living in the constant danger of the sea. But here Yeats highlights the positiveness in the unity of the people, their coming together in times of trouble. The same unity is evident in "Thatching" (Plate 30), where four islanders come together to mend a thatched roof. There is a real positive air to the activity, people helping each other. The sense of unity is emphasised by Yeats's arrangement of the figures; he has them all coming from different directions so that they all face the centre figure who is happily at work. The job done means the inhabitants' living conditions will be improved. Yeats is suggesting here that the people are capable and know what is best for them. The scene contrasts sharply to that of "The Relief Works" (Plate 1), a Government solution which has obviously failed. He is viewing the situation from the people's point of view, and so he further promotes native industry in kelpmaking (Plate 31). Here a man is depicted contentedly engrossed in his work.

Yeats's fabulous use of space in this composition conveys the worker in harmony with his surroundings. There is a charming sense of movement and action created, despite a permeation of wide empty space. Yeats creates this

KELP-MAKING

Plate 30

BOAT-BUILDING AT CARNA

Plate 31

movement with the use of contrasting line directions. The diagonal angle of the man and spade, back towards the top right hand side of the composition, is contrasted with the diagonal sweeping of smoke out towards the top left hand side of the picture. The movement in both directions comes from one centre point in the picture of the not yet burnt seaweed. This, combined with the thick chunky line of stone in the bottom foreground, anchors the composition and contrasts beautifully to the pure empty white in the sky. The background is only broken by indication of some land, animals and faraway hills for perspective purposes.

Yeats sees something unique even in the native process of manufacture. There are no machines, no division of labour to destroy the personal or the individual. He portrays the man's pride in his work through his posture and eyes which are fixed on his job.

The same pride and satisfaction the people have in their work is evident in "Boatbuilding at Carna" (Plate 10), where the carpenter stands proud, looking to the world for appreciation of his craft.

It was these simple pleasures of the people that intrigued Yeats - their simplicity of attitude. He realised that these people's lives were not in need of change, rather some help and support. Theirs was a good way of life and certainly worthy of assistance. Yeats was obviously sceptical of the Government's idea of "improvement", as it would lessen the individuality of the people and their unique way of life. He represents reality from the people's standpoint and tears apart with powerful hands the hypocrisy that covers bad conditions and social rifts.

The strong sense of reality in the work, whether it is positive or negative, comes from Yeats's genuine interest in these people and their lives. It is with this objective reality that he manages to combine his own wonderful imagination and this will be my exploration in the next chapter.

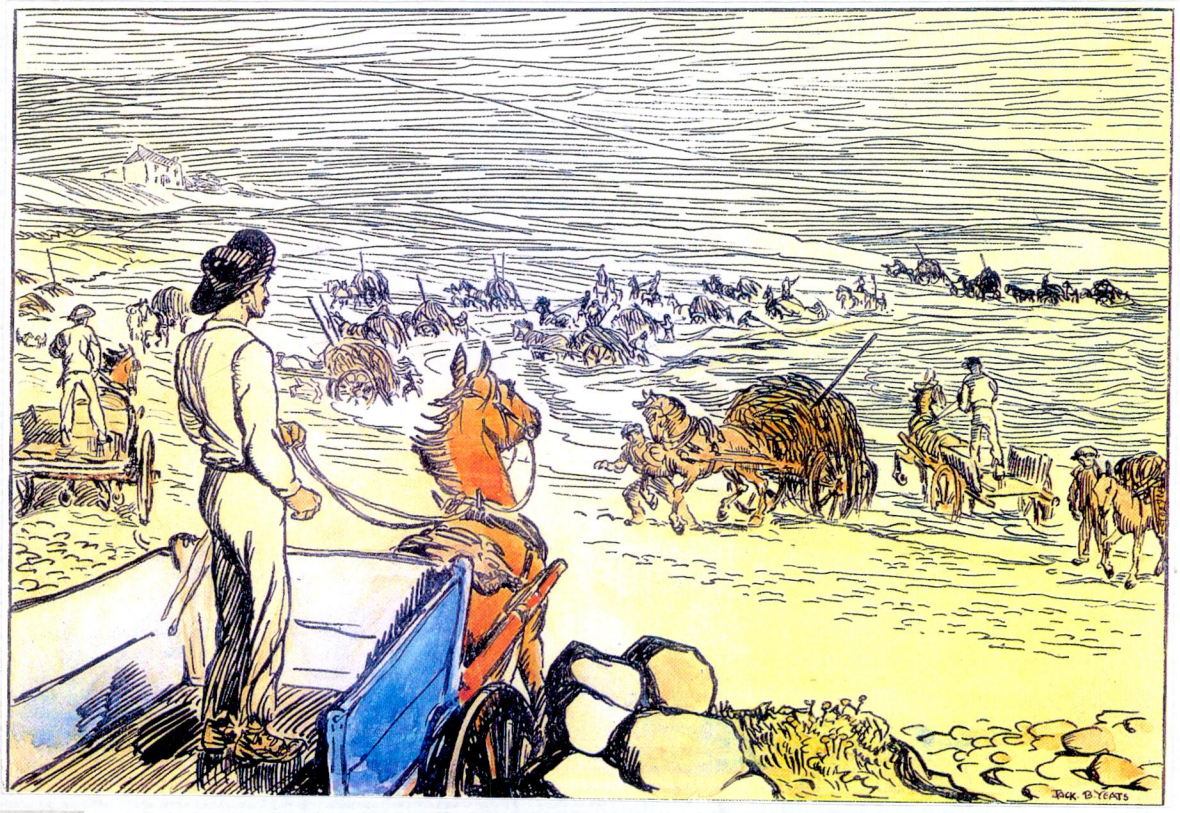


Plate 3

Chapter 5

The Combination of Imagination and Reality

It is Yeats's fusion of his own imagination with objective reality that transforms the work into something far more important than social records.

The imagination in these illustrations comes from a vision of the west that has been cultivated in Yeats since he was a boy growing up in Sligo, an imagination that has stemmed directly from observation of reality and folklore in the west and on which he was bred. What makes the work so individual, original and personal is the presence of that underlying vision of a romantic and mythical world of his own native home.

In this chapter I will look at this vision, which involves the combination of imagination and reality in some selected works, and also includes its origin, namely Yeats's family and his childhood.

In "Gathering Seaweed" (Plate 3) we are presented with a common everyday scene in the west, the natives gathering seaweed for kelp. Yet in this activity Yeats saw something fantastic, unique to the west. He instills the feeling of the heroic into the event of spearing and collecting floating seaweed. The whole scene takes on a majestic grandeur. The typical westerner, surveying the scene from his cart in the foreground, appears like a charioteer hero of ancient times. His horse is also rendered as a personality in its majestic stance. This heroic stance of both horse and man is reminiscent of the days of the Roman Empire, while the carts and their load depict the Irish rural scene of the time, its misty, stormy atmosphere hovering over the hills and strand. Yeats's use of

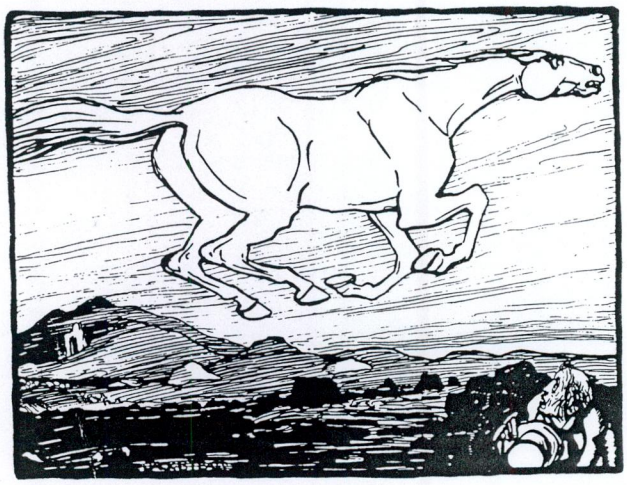
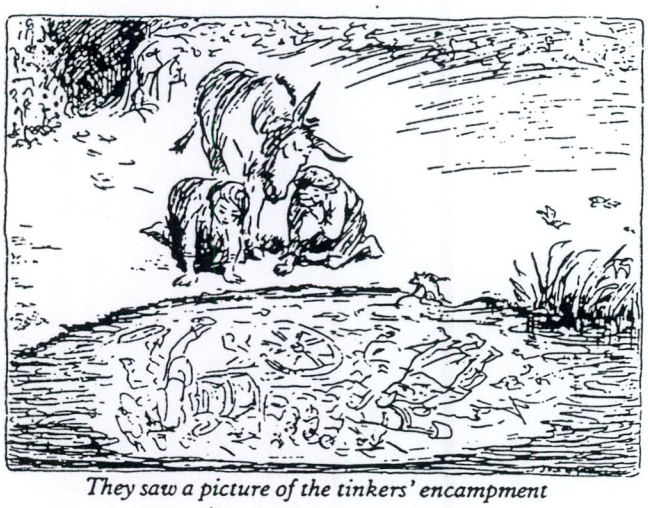


Plate 5



They saw a picture of the tinkers' encampment

Plate 34

'How did You Get here?' He asked

Plate 26

imagination in their stance strongly accentuates the pride these people took in their work and their awareness of the distinction of their way of life.

In "The Pooka, The Pooka" (Plate 5), the horse takes on an even more powerful presence than in the previous illustration. Here he is the symbol of freedom and the symbol for the west. Yeats exaggerates his size so that the horse becomes larger than life, his madness giving him wings and magical power. One could go so far as to say that Yeats is delving into Irish mythology. This horse could easily be from T¡r na nOg.

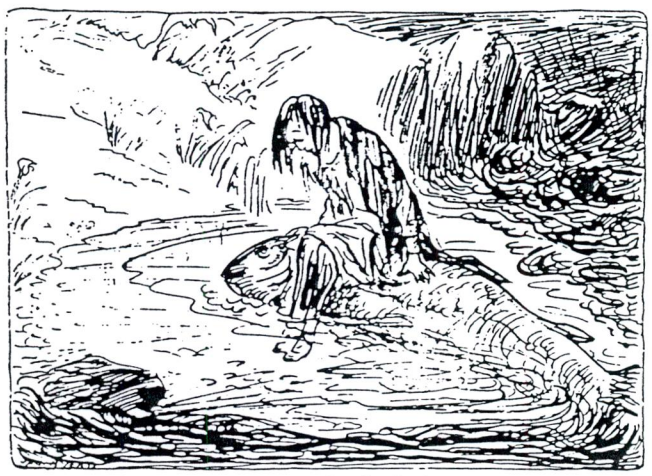
The magic of Yeats's vision is best exemplified in his interpretation of Patricia Lynch's writing in The Turfcutter's Donkey. Her subject matter is highly imaginative and imbues the west with a mythical feel. The west becomes a place where anything can happen. Yeats is the ideal artist to translate such works visually because they coincide with his own vision and knowledge of western life.

In these illustrations he combines a fantastic realm of fantasy with an amusing matter of fact air, typical of the west. His semi-cartoon, semi-realistic style of depiction is very appropriate in describing the amalgamation of fantasy with the reality of life, so that both become blurred, part of the same. Yeats doesn't go to any special or different lengths to highlight the fantastic element in the scene. Rather both fantasy and reality appear as one.

In Plate 34 the children peer innocently into the lake only to see a reflection of the "Tinkers' Encampment" in the water. But nothing different happens to Yeats's description. The line remains extremely simple, as if all lakes in the west had magic reflections. The only one that seems in the least surprised is the little girl in the picture, who brings her hand to her mouth in wonder. Yeats certainly doesn't seem surprised. In Plate 26 he describes the huge bird standing in an everyday stance, conversing realistically with a young boy, in such a relaxed, cool, self-assured manner, with such a human expression on his face as

Eileen, Seamus, and the ballad-singer rose lightly in the air

Plate 32



She was seated on the back of a huge salmon

Plate 25

The elephant carried his passengers safely to the other side

Plate 33

he looks at the boy as if he were his fellow being, while all the time some country folk walk by on the opposite side of the road. Yeats injects such an imaginative element into such a realistic scene, so convincingly that on first glimpse the scene appears quite normal, everyday. It is only on looking further that the fantasy present becomes apparent. He achieves this through his very relaxed, sober, casual description of the events, as if it were commonplace for people to fly at a country fair (Plate 32), life-size salmon to become friends with humans (Plate 25), children to ride on an elephant's back across water (Plate 33), life-size birds to take part in conversation. Yeats depicts these scenes of wondrous happenings in the same style as the very realistic scenes of children running across a bog. In Plate 4, two children are riding a donkey, then in Plate 33 Yeats casually has them riding on an elephant's back across the lake, while a giant-sized salmon decides to join them. But nothing different appears in the technique of description. In Plate 32 he fills the left diagonal of the page with average country folk at a fair, and in the other (diagonal) there are some children flying with a raggedly-dressed long figure of a man.

The directness and vividness in all the scenes is heightened by Yeats's use of his own, very matter of fact captions, to describe the scene. He employs real sober, very commonplace lines, taken from everyday conversation, to describe such bizarre and unusual happenings.

For example, Plate 32, "Eileen, Seamus and the ballad singer rose lightly in the air" describes the magical sight of these people in flight. "She was seated on the back of a huge salmon" describes Plate 25, as if it was the most normal place in the world for the girl to sit.
"Seamus saw a strange man coming across the bog" in Plate 35 hardly prepares us for the sight of a Cuchalainn-type figure. But these captions add to the directness of the work and are strongly suggestive of the people's acceptance of myth in western Ireland, something which fascinated Yeats.

'TAKE THE POT! WE 'LL KEEP THE DONKEY!'

Plate 4

SEAMUS SAW A STRANGE MAN COMING ACROSS THE BOG

Plate 35

AN ISLAND HORSEMAN

Plate 2

It is his use of line and composition describing the scenes that serve to create the real magical feel in the work. The sketchy manner of drawing in these illustrations, and in Plate 3 contributes to the mythical atmosphere. No non-essential details are included.

In "Gathering Seaweed" (Plate 3), for example, Yeats uses simple, wide-parallel hatching in the background to describe the atmosphere over the hills and strand, while also avoiding much background detail. This, along with the abundance of empty space, imbues the scenes with a feeling of timelessness. None of the works are anchored in time by any particular background. In Plate 3, the event could be taking place during the Roman Empire, while the illustrations for The Turfcutter's Donkey qualify for somewhere such as T¡r na nOg. Yeats employs next to no decorative charm in these drawings, yet they are charming. He achieves a lovely enchantment and what Thomas MacGreevy described in Yeats's Studies as a "magically tender charm" (MacGreevy, 1945, p.7). The looseness of the lines also suggest the mood and anticipation of his youth. It was from his youth that such a vision grew, a vision born out of love for his native home, implanted in him by life around him, and also by his parents. His father, for instance, "To be with him was to be caught up in a web of visionary hopefulness" (Booth, 1990, p.35), were Yeats's own words. At night he would tell Jack stories of adventure of his youth in the west "where he ... had not a care". These stories worked their way into Yeats's illustrations to create a carefree world, in drawings such as Plate 3 and Plates 32-35.

His father also instilled in him a deep vision of the people of the west. He said "the peasants of the west can enjoy themselves in solitude, poeticised by their religion, by their folklore, and by their natural history and by living under a changeable sky" (Booth, 1990, p.35). The west had its own magical distinct way of life, and this is the world we see in Plate 3, and Plates 32-35, a world separate and distinct from that of the Pale or England. This world is also evident in "An Island Horseman" (Plate 2), where we are given a glimpse of a charmed world full of adventure. The stones are represented by jewel-like shapes, reminiscent

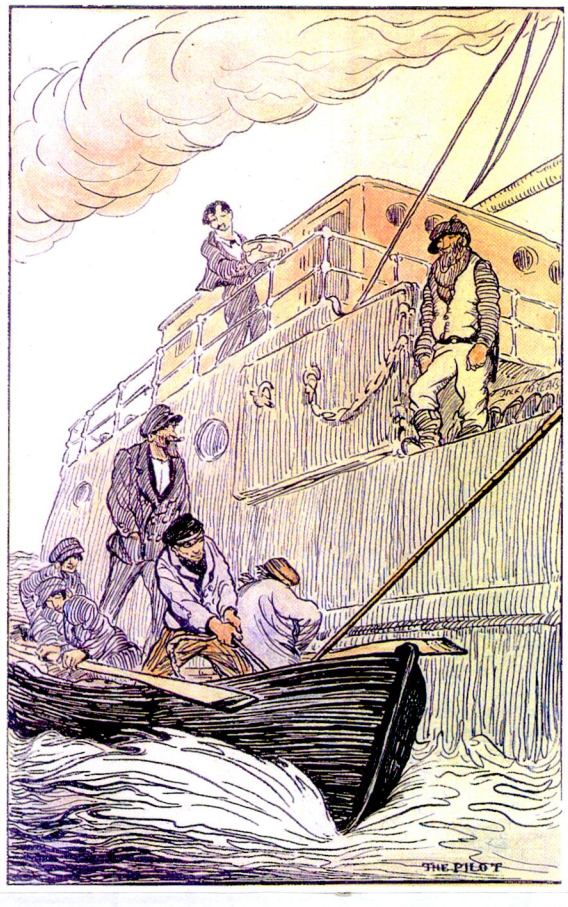


Plate 8

of Harry Clarke's "fantastic" world. The horse, too, takes on a magnificent presence, and all is brought down to reality by the appearance of the two native women, dressed in their traditional clothing, in the left middleground. The "changeable sky" that his father talked about is also represented here, as is their "religion", symbolised by the convent gates in the right middleground of the picture.

Yeats saw romance in it all, and the life at sea was no exception. In "The Pilot" (Plate 8) he records another ordinary, everyday event that happens off the islands of the west. When the ship docks in the bay, because the water is too shallow or too rough for it to come right into the pier, the currach serves as its link to the island. In this scene the currach is arriving at the ship's side and the pilot grabs the rope that has just been thrown down to him from the vessel. Two boys, enjoying the trip, hold on to one oar while a man on the alternative side of the currach grips the second. An everyday scene, but Yeats depicts it with such a romantic view of sea life that it could have easily taken place in the time of pirates. He describes the captain of the ship as a traditional pirate in his traditional dress, standing fierce and proud on his vessel with one leg pushed out in front to lean on the ship's edge, the other remaining firm in place, and his fists clenched tightly as he glares down with guarded hostility on the currach. The captain in the currach balances himself with his hands in his pocket and cigar in mouth, to glare right back up. All that is missing from in between them is the skull and bones of the "Jolly Roger". Reality in the scene is represented by the typical western currach and its pilot. The two boys in the currach are also a fraction more realistic than the waiter, swaying on the ship with the tray of drinks, he is about to serve.

The same romance of sea life is portrayed in "The County of Mayo" (Plate 9), where Yeats describes a native who must leave his land. The emigrant is depicted as facing downwards, his face plunged into his hands, his elbows into his knees, very gloomy-looking in general. But even in the face of harsh reality, Yeats employs imagination. He depicts the emigrant as a legendary figure of the

Plate 9

west, the pirate in his traditional dress, with the opening of his shirt laced, the sleeves of his coat slashed and fastened with buttons. Behind him rises the ship's sail, with a figure climbing the rigging. We are also given a glimpse of the sea in the left middleground, while in the right corner appears a stern, traditional-looking captain of the vessel, ready for voyage.

Yeats's imagination was full of pirates, villains, the sea-afaring world. His mother spent hours telling stories of pilots and fishing people of Rosses Point, and of her childhood in Sligo with them. She was another main figure to instil in Yeats his deep love of Sligo. Her family had been settled there for generations "and it was always assumed between her and us that Sligo was more beautiful than other places" (Booth, 1990, p.23). Yeats combined his romance of the sea and Sligo with the reality of life and the anger he felt that people were forced to leave both and emigrate to foreign shores. The tragic face of the figure suggests the tragic state of affairs in the west - emigration.

Yeats's fusion of imagination to reality also comes in his method of depiction - his dense, crude, heavy, exaggerated, angular line. Some people are actually disturbed by the barbarity of the depiction (Pyle, 1993, p.27). But Yeats wanted to disturb the viewer; he wanted his pictures to be powerful and convincing in order to emphasise the problem, in this case of emigration. This semi-cartoon, semi-realistic style he employs allows him to omit the argument and state the conclusion - the end of a race. One contemporary commentator wrote: "It is as if he had determined to make visible for himself and us the wastage and wreckage and human debris of a great race passing on near passed" (Pyle, 1993, p.27). Yeats's harsh, unsophisticated style surely achieves this. He highlights the problem by his extra thick marker line around the emigrant figure. The figures are symbols and probably bear little physical likeness to the people they stand for. Yeats is portraying emotions through personality, rather than physical likeness. His semi-cartoon, semi-realistic style allows him to focus on an idea expressed through the portrayal of personality. In this plate he brings the figure to the fore, so much so it occupies most of the space within the composition,

while the stern captain appears so small and cropped a figure. He is someone who fails to realise the problem, positioned in the bottom right hand corner of the picture.

This semi-cartoon, semi-realistic style allows Yeats to express comment alongside fact and reality, which works parallel to his combination of the romantic (works in subject matter) and the barbaric (in style of depiction). Both are expressed by the marriage of imagination to reality.

Above all, however, Yeats's imaginative style allows him to create a fairytale world of very ordinary events which never received attention before. It allows him to deal with matters in a not so heavy-handed manner. His use of imagination in the works is not an escapist one. Ireland is a place where there exists "a popular imagination that is fiery, and magnificent and tender" (Synge, 1990, p.12). It is an imagination rooted in reality, in real life and owes much to the folk imagination of the western people. The illustrations prove that Yeats believed whole-heartedly in the imagination. He recognised that it was being threatened by the results of the Industrial Revolution and this worried him. He believed in the blend of fact and fancy, which Charles Dickens advocates so strongly in his novel Hard Times, as a necessary combination for human existence and expressed this opinion through his subject matter and technique.

Yeats's imagination allowed him to see the fantastic and dramatic in very ordinary, everyday events, and in the next chapter I will examine his use of drama in the illustrations.

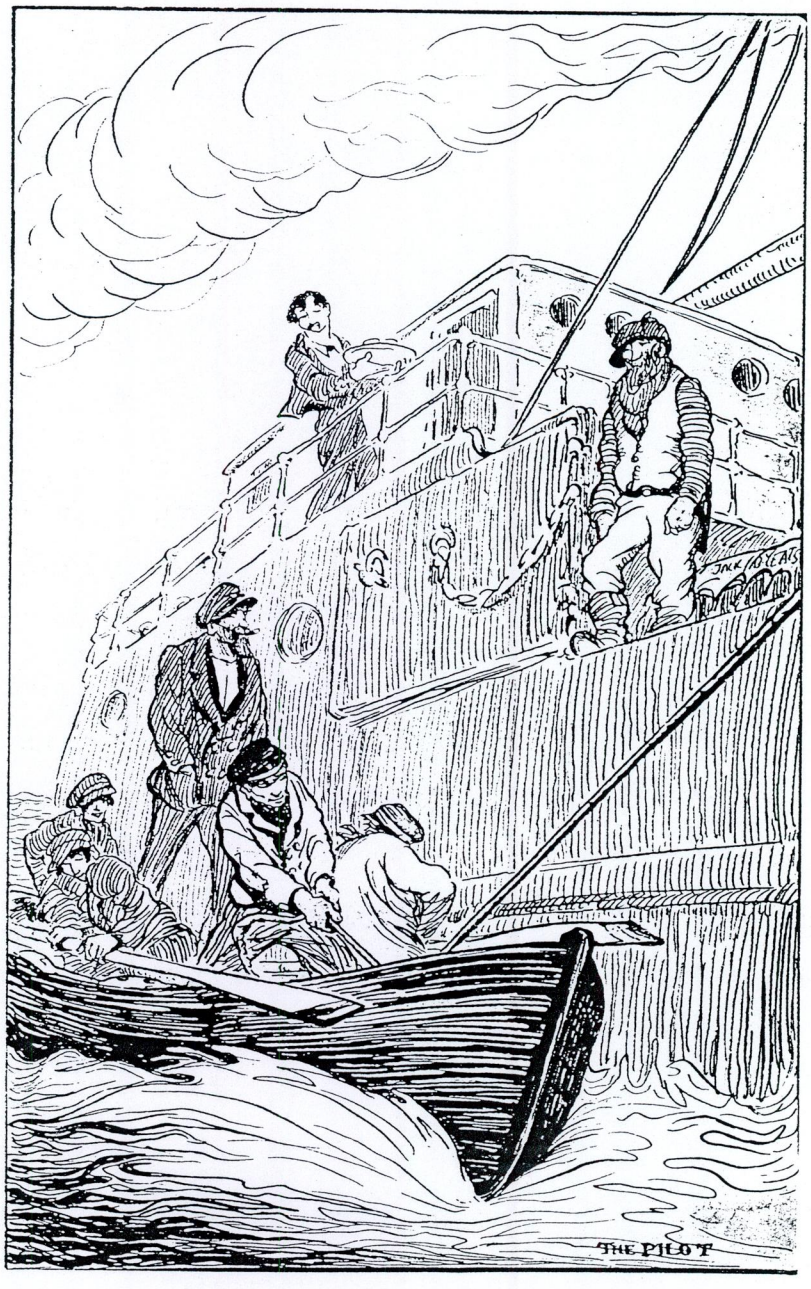


Plate 8

Chapter Six

Drama in theWork

Yeats injects a sense of drama into his blend of imagination and reality and this is essentially what makes it so memorable as a work of art.

I will now look at the dramatic quality of his illustrations, the origins of such drama and how successful it works in the portrayal of the west of Ireland.

"Yeats's illustrations are all about melodramatic impulse and feeling for the moment" (Pyle, 1989, p.60). He was a man intrigued by the simplicity in these people's lives and could see something extremely exciting and adventurous in their everyday events. As he does, by his use of imagination, Yeats brings attention to these events by highlighting the drama in them. He captures a moment and frames it, then imbues the moment with all the excitement and vigour of the event. He does this by using certain devices.

For example, in "The Pilot" (Plate 8), Yeats employs contrast in the direction of his lines to express the drama of the everyday occurrence off the west coast. The picture is alive with linear movement. The swirling lines of the splashing waves contrast to the vertical, parallel hatching of the tall, stable ship. The wide, empty space in the waves contrasts forcibly to the thick, dense hatching in the currach, so that we can sense the conflict of the water and currach echoed by the conflict of linear movement. The rough movement of the currach is contrasted to the fragile shake that the drinks on the waiter's tray may suffer on the huge steam ship. The strength and tautness of the rope connecting the currach to the ship contrasts sharply to the swirling movement of water. Yeats's

Plate 3

taut composition is also very effective. The concentration of action described by the dense, black shading and line in the bottom of the picture gradually decreases with sober, wide, parallel hatching in the middleground, which is contrasted by the wide expanse of empty space in the sky at the top of the picture. This is only to be interrupted by a line of smoke which serves to anchor the whole composition. Our eyes focus on the bottom of the scene and are gradually pulled upwards. The cropping of the scene with a narrow vertical frame serves to heighten the drama of the moment. The dramatic job of the pilot in the currach, pulling the rope, is highlighted by the strong "marker" stroke, used to depict him. Yeats's dramatic depiction of the whole event is quite justified (as I have experienced it on several occasions, going to his Inis Oirr, the smallest of the islands). He captures the atmosphere of the moment, which for someone who is not used to it, is extremely dramatic. His use of contrast in line direction in an outdoor scene such as this contrasts starkly to the boring concentration of vertical parallel lines that describe his indoor scenes in Plates 16 and 17 ("The Country Shop" and "The Poteen Makers").

A device Yeats frequently uses to dramatise his pictures is that of the dramatic close-up. For example, in "Gathering Seaweed" (Plate 3), the dramatic close-up of the one figure and his horse and cart surveying the whole scene serves to intensify and dramatise the moment. It is interesting and effective that the figure is facing the scene from a different angle than the viewer. It moves our attention to the importance of the activity on the strand. The man and his horse and cart coming diagonally from the boithrin at the left hand corner of the picture, into our view, forms a triangular shape with the stones and vegetation coming from the right hand bottom corner. Both meet to form a triangle in the foreground of the picture, with the horse's head serving as the tip of the triangle. This climax of intensity is then contrasted and relieved by the wide horizontal expanse of the scene, and the looseness of the widely-hatched horizontal lines in the background. Here, again, the concentration of action takes place near the bottom left of the picture and decreases as one moves into the scene.

Plate 9

PORTER

Plate 13

AN ISLAND MAN

Plate 12

Yeats exploits the use of the dramatic close-up in "The County of Mayo" (Plate 9) and "Porter" (Plate 13), where the characters are almost cut out from the background. They possess a kind of stage personality, as does the women in Plate 14. This stylistic feature probably comes from his regular stencilling of figures for the miniature theatres he made in his youth. Yeats would sketch some scenes from his plays and cut out the figures, simplifying them to firm outline. He would then replace these figures so that they stood out from the background (Houfe, 1992, p.114). This device has definitely influenced his use of outline in these illustrations, notably in "An Island man" (Plate 22). The intensity and exaggeration of the outline contributes to the melodrama of the scenes; the figures are the focus of our thoughts. Yeats's use of borderline will also have likely come from the stage miniatures. By framing the picture, they are becoming staged scenes. In Plate 31, "Kelpmaking", a form of industry becomes a work of art in Yeats's illustration, as happens to all the events he frames.

It must be remembered that these works were inspired as much by stage as by words. Yeats spent much of his time making miniature theatres, and its influence has suited well his portrayal of the west. As his father once told him as a boy: "The peasant of the west can enjoy themselves ... by living under a changeable sky which ... is a perpetual decoration like the scenery in some vast theatre" (Booth, 1990, p.35). Yeats acted out this life in his illustrations and, as Sheleton worded it, "discovered that the presentation of any event as if it were theatre creates theatre: the frame of a stage is almost all that is needed to give symbolic power to the inconsequent, the casual, the insignificant" (Booth, 1990, p.35). And this was exactly Yeats's purpose.

In Plate 14, the woman's tragic figure takes centre stage. The melodrama of the scene is heightened by the rain and wind that blow against her. One can imagine vividly the stage scene and hear the crying of the wind and rain. Nature cries in empathy with the humans. The very low horizon in the picture, serves to accentuate the figure.

KELP-MAKING

Plate 31

CARRYING SEAWEED FOR KELP

Plate 14

THE DINISH FERRYMAN

Plate 23

In Plate 9, the cropping of the figure to half length heightens the intensity of the moment, because it is not the scene we are focusing on, rather the captured moment of sadness.

"The Dinish Ferryman" (Plate 23) is a powerful recording of dramatic action. A ferryman rows his boat furiously towards the island. It is another exemplification of Yeats's depiction of drama through composition. The ferryman is placed in the foreground so that he and his boat take up three-quarters of the height of the composition to form one of Yeats's triangles of intensity and drama. Facing us, his eyes stare directly at the viewer to capture our attention. But he is moving away from us into the picture, almost pushing himself back in by pulling the oars of the boat and pushing his foot against the crossbar. The perspective contributes to the dramatic element. The foreground is described by the use of white empty space in the man and the boat's crossbar. The man is moving back towards the land which, with its small cottages, disappears into another triangle above the horizon and echoes the foreground one, suggesting continual movement backwards.

Even in his scenes for The Turfcutter's Donkey, although a lot more lightly sketched, they are full of drama. Yeats's quick-witted reduction of line serves the purpose of this dramatic quality. In Plates 32 and 27, he contrasts a crowded area of the picture with one of almost empty space, in an effort to heighten the drama and suspense. There is also present a real melodramatic directness of the people's folk tales, suggesting their sober acceptance of myth.

In Plate 32 Yeats's composition is intriguing; the lengths he goes to in order to heighten the drama and suspense of the scene. He fills the lower diagonal of the page with the people and their environment, then recklessly and courageously leaves the upper diagonal complete open space, only to be interrupted by the flying humans. The result is absolutely charming. Our attention follows down the diagonal outline of the crowd in the centre of the page, only to be diverted

EILEEN, SEAMUS, AND THE BALLAD-SINGER ROSE LIGHTLY IN THE AIR

Plate 32

'LOOK! DOWN BY THE RED ROCK, SITTING UP IN THE DONKEY CART!'

Plate 27

upwards by some flying figures, our eyes cast upwards all of a sudden. (Yeats must really have loved playing with direction, both in composition and line). The figures are taking flight from amongst the row of people. Their delicateness of sketch is echoed by the floating birds and trees down below in the right bottom corner of the scene. The few scribbles for the sky in the top ground serve to relieve the empty space and suggest sky. This empty space is like an "air" of magic. Yeats's compositional devices really beautify the dramatic quality of the scene.

In Plate 35, here again Yeats plays with a reckless amount of empty space jutting into the scene from the top left hand corner, with the speed of a flash, to occupy the whole centre of the composition, only to be interrupted then by the "Cuchalainn" figure running through. It is almost like the stage light circling down on the performer. Whatever, it serves to "climax" the drama in the scene, as the little boy manages not to fall off the gate. In fact his calmness further heightens the drama of the moment.

The use of drama in these works is similar to Yeats's use of imagination: not only to heighten our involvement in the scene, but to capture and focus our attention on the events in these people's lives which distinguish them from the rest of the world. His technique includes, namely, linear movement, intensity and exaggeration of line, quick-witted reduction of line and use of borderline to frame the scene. And in his composition: the dramatic close-up of the figure, formation of a triangle of intensity in the foreground, contrasting areas of empty space to a concentration of action and use of a low horizon, typical of the west of Ireland.

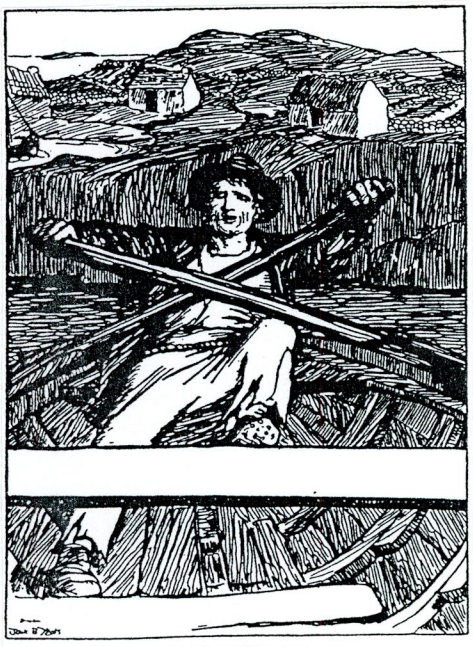
Yeats's technique always serves him well, in his injection of drama and imagination into his work, in his portrayal of the people and their attachment to the land, in his projection of liberty, and also in his depiction of reality and social comment. But the argument of many critics surrounds Yeats's techniques.

SEAMUS SAW A STRANGE MAN COMING ACROSS THE BOG

Plate 35

In the following chapter, I will discuss the technique used in the illustrations.

RELIEF WORKS



THE DINISH FERRYMAN

GATHERING SEAWEED FOR KELP

BOAT-BUILDING AT CARNA

The Manchester Guardian

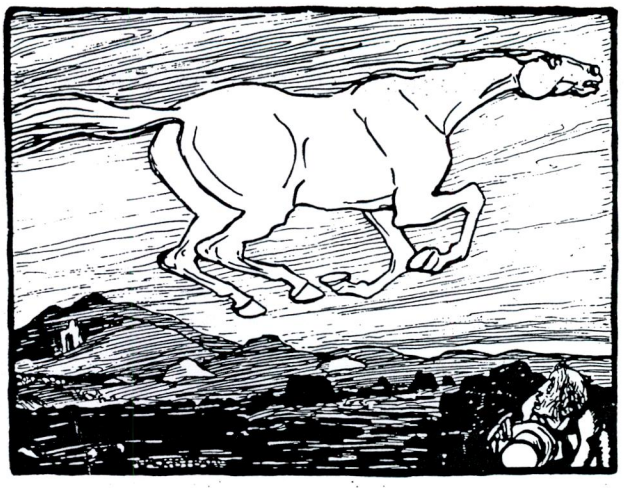
Chapter Seven

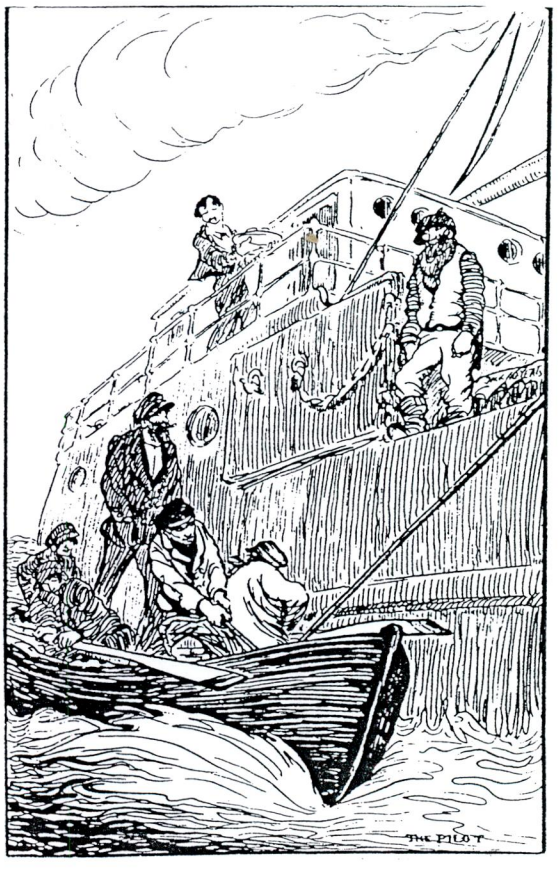
Yeats's Technique

"Did he [Yeats] have a technique?" His friend John Quinn "was of the opinion that Jack undervalued technique" (Pyle, 1993[b], p.110). Yeats did not undervalue technique. He simply considered his subject matter more important. He was not drawing by any rules of a technique, or adhering to any particular movement. Rather the work was of "spontaneous inspiration" which came from the lives of the Irish peasants, the people of the west.

Art in the past was not very popular with the common people, because is was always associated with the aristocracy and therefore mistrusted by the common nationalist, who believed that the true Irish, the native inhabitants, were not wealthy enough for a visual art. Yeats now wanted to create a truly Irish art, an art for the ordinary people of Ireland, and what better way to do this than to take inspiration from the actual people and their lives. He believed the best thing about Impressionism was that it "will knock the handcuffs off all painters". Yeats wanted his technique to develop freely from his subject matter and situation. And so it did, but it also shows signs of being influenced by the art world around him.

Jack did not admit to being greatly influenced by the work of other artists. However, in his illustrations there are some, maybe unconscious, influences from the outside art world. For example, the cropping of the figure and composition, dramatic close-upness and the brave use of empty space is reminiscent of the work of Degas. The informalities of execution, positive vigour, and the fact that the figures are capable of filling a space with their





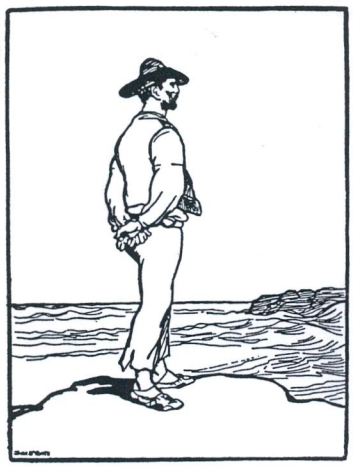
A Broadsheet

psychological important, remind us of Daumier's drawings. The illustrations (Plates 32-36) recall the fantasy of Richard Doyle. While Yeats's focus on an alternative world to that of industrialisation, by use of line and composition, bear a resemblance to the work of Harry Clarke and Arthur Rackham, the illustrations could also be compared to Goya drawings, in that both artists believed their work was for the liberty of the ordinary people.

These are all considerable influences, but as Yeats said himself: "the drawings must not be made as memories of the drawings of others, they must be memories of the people who make them" (Booth, 1990, p.98).

In justifying Yeats's technique, however, one must consider its development in the context of illustration of the period. His technique is that of a man who has learned his craft in Victorian England. The drawings for The Manchester Guardian are part of his cartoon style as a pictorial journalist for the English magazines of the period. There was a proliferation of magazines in England at the time, which meant an increase in pictorial illustration and a decrease in time between commission and publication. This resulted in rapidly drawn pen line replacing laborious effects (Houfe, 1992, pp13-15). The technique in the drawings for The Manchester Guardian is rooted in this period of straightforward illustration. It was during the execution of these works that a more personal style was developing, as Yeats became more attached to his subject matter and broke out of his journalistic cartoon style.

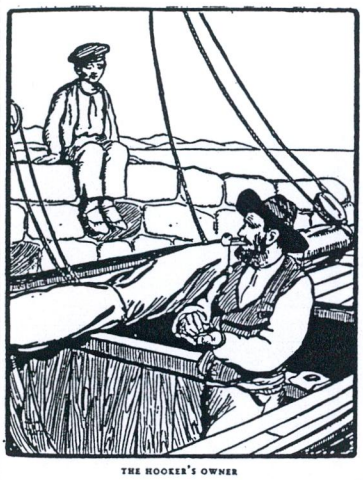
This development of style is seen in the illustrations for A Broadsheet and The Aran Islands. The technique is much bolder and cruder, with an expressive quality. This technique was influenced by the Broadsheet style that was revived during the '80s and '90s (Houfe, 1992, p.113). Yeats collected traditional balladsheets for years. The woodcut illustrations in these balladsheets were to have a huge influence on the development of his technique. (Their popularity was related to the revival of the 15th and 16th century woodcuts, a revival that stemmed from a tiredness and boredom with the Victorian illustrator that



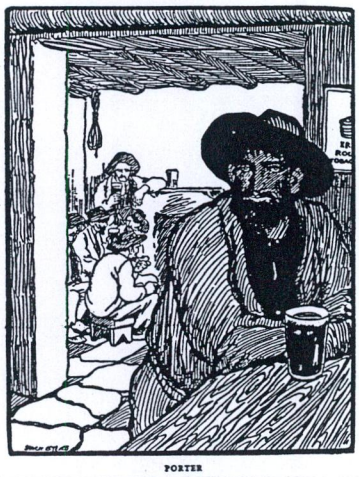
AN ISLAND MAN

AN ISLAND HORSEMAN

CARRYING SEAWEED FOR KELP



THE HOOKER'S OWNER



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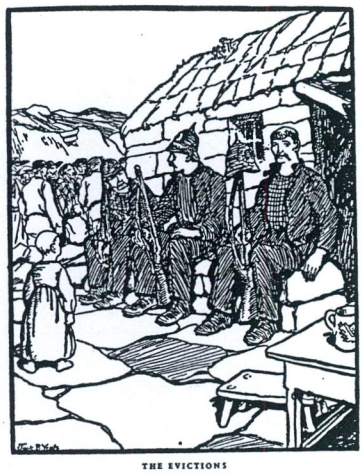
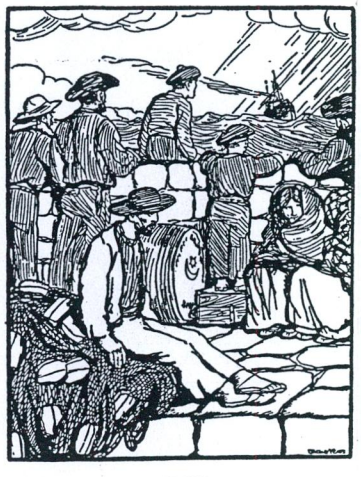


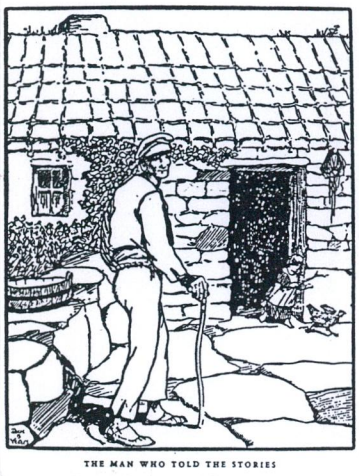
THE EVICTIONS

KELP-MAKING

THATCHING



THE PIER



THE MAN WHO TOLD THE STORIES

The Aran Islands

dominated the first half of the century [Hocknett, 1988, p.188]. It also resulted as a reaction against the "machine effects" of the Industrial Revolution which had led to a "sameness" of mass production and loss of individuality). The freedom and spontaneity of the woodcut-style broke from the stiffness of the Victorian prints and the "machine effect". It was advocated by the Arts and Crafts Movement, that existed in Ireland at the time. By returning to these old methods, and keeping a modern expression, they hoped to restore the "personal" to the book.

Yeats's technique in A Broadsheet and The Aran Islands corresponds to this. He was obviously influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement. His line follows in the tradition of Morris, and other artists from the movement, such as Walter Crane. It was "simple, bold and in harmony with the subject matter" (Houfe, 1992, p.4). His stark, rugged, exaggerated, intense line was inspired by the struggle of the people to overcome their hardship; their stoicism; their pride and sense of freedom and individuality. It was also inspired by the primitiveness and charm of the life there, and the line in The Aran Islands is quite reminiscent of the "stained glass" style, which played such an important part in the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Celtic Revival in Ireland.

So Yeats's technique, although dictated by his subject matter was quite in tune with the period. It also followed the trend at the time of no longer representing every possible detail of something, or being pleasing to the eye. Instead, character in isolation was the ruling motive, with just enough actuality in the background to convey time (Houfe, 1992, p.15). In his illustrations for The Aran Islands, the use of wide empty space and lack of detail successfully translate the atmosphere of the scene. This was precisely Yeats's aim because it was the essence of the west that inspired him most.

The illustrations for Life in the West of Ireland are done in a similar, bold, exaggerated, spirited line of the period, but are somewhat less sophisticated, less subtle than those in The Aran Islands. Here Yeats employs contrasted areas of

Life in the West of Ireland

black and white, augmented by rich parallel hatching and demonstrates a loosening of style as he becomes more acquainted with his subject matter. The drawings here are more specified, focus on events - courtroom, gathering seaweed, the country shop - and are excellent examples of Yeats's skill in capturing a situation, idea and an emotion in an array of simple sketching strokes of pen.

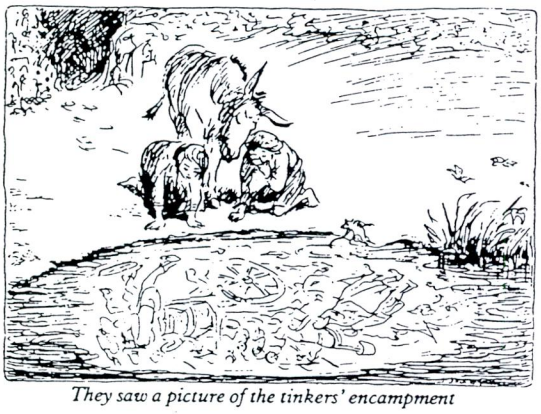
The final group of illustrations done for The Turfcutter's Donkey, at the late period of Yeats's life, are done from memory, observation and imagination. Here Yeats has developed a unique, carefree technique. He has taken what he needs from the outside world and now we have the pleasure of discovering what has stood out most in his memory about the west; what has inspired his imagery most memorably - open expanses of fresh air and a sense of timelessness expressed by an abundance of wide empty space; a sense of myth and romance between the people and the land expressed in his still vigorous, even more economised, fleeting strokes of line, describing the figure and environment as one. There is an air of simplicity and naturalness of the people, expressed here in the spontaneity and lightness of the sketches. Yeats still employs line as his instrument of expression, but in a much freer, looser manner, inspired by the freedom of the west.

In all the previous illustrations, he has captured the essence of life in the west from direct observation. Here Yeats really captures the "idea" of the west which is now in his memory and imagination after studying and getting to know the place in his earlier works. Pictorial journalism of his early days has taught him how to make rapid reports in extremely loose, simplified line to express the "nature", the essence of the west. In these drawings (Plates 32-25) this lesson in technique has been put to beautiful use. The illustrations capture in the most simplified, swirling lines, a world of people he loves.

People who ask "Did he have a technique?", or criticise in general, obviously do not understand what the work is about. There are obvious influences, but

'TAKE THE POT! WE'LL KEEP THE DONKEY!'

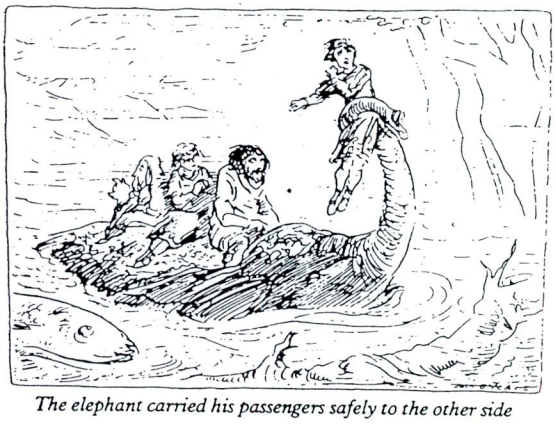
Eileen, Seamus, and the ballad-singer rose lightly in the air



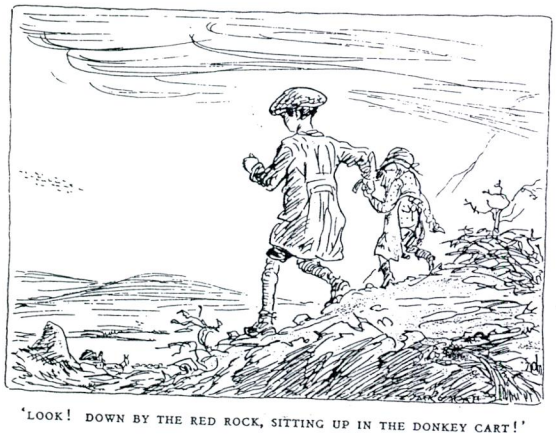
They saw a picture of the tinkers' encampment

'How did You Get here?' He asked

She was seated on the back of a huge salmon



The elephant carried his passengers safely to the other side



'LOOK! DOWN BY THE RED ROCK, SITTING UP IN THE DONKEY CART!'

SEAMUS SAW A STRANGE MAN COMING ACROSS THE BOG

primarily, the subject dictates his technique. Here, life in the west of Ireland inspires a truly Irish art. To understand this work, therefore, one needs an insight into the subject matter. Commenting on Yeats's exhibition in New York, the New York Times (5 April 1904) describes the work as "often queer, in some instances childish ... rough notes for illustrations rather than well-considered pictures". This is an American point of view from someone who has no insight into the subject matter - the essence of the west. To appreciate the work, one needs to know Ireland, to know the west and then recognise the artist's understanding and passion for his subject matter. In describing "the essence of being Irish", Brendan Kennelly points out that "Ireland is a place where character and personality are cherished far ahead of theory and abstraction". Yeats's illustrations are not meant to be well-considered pictures. Rather, they were to capture the essence of a way of life, of its character and personality in all its "childishness and queerness".

Jack's audience were the Irish, not the Americans. He told John Quinn, after performing a miniature theatre for children in London: "I would like to be giving entertainments to Irish children, they would be such a much brighter, quicker audience" (Pyle, 1993[b], p.108). These works are for the Irish people. They were an Irish art which answered the call of Douglas Hyde and his companions. Their technique is dictated by their subject matter and their subject matter is executed with affection. And to draw with affection for one's subject matter is the most valuable technique there is.

Yeats wanted his work to be rememberd for its meaning, which rises above technique. In the next chapter I will look at the sybolic meaning within the illustrations.

THE PIER

Plate 29

THATCHING

Plate 30

Plate 17

Chapter Eight

The Transformation of the Local into the Universal

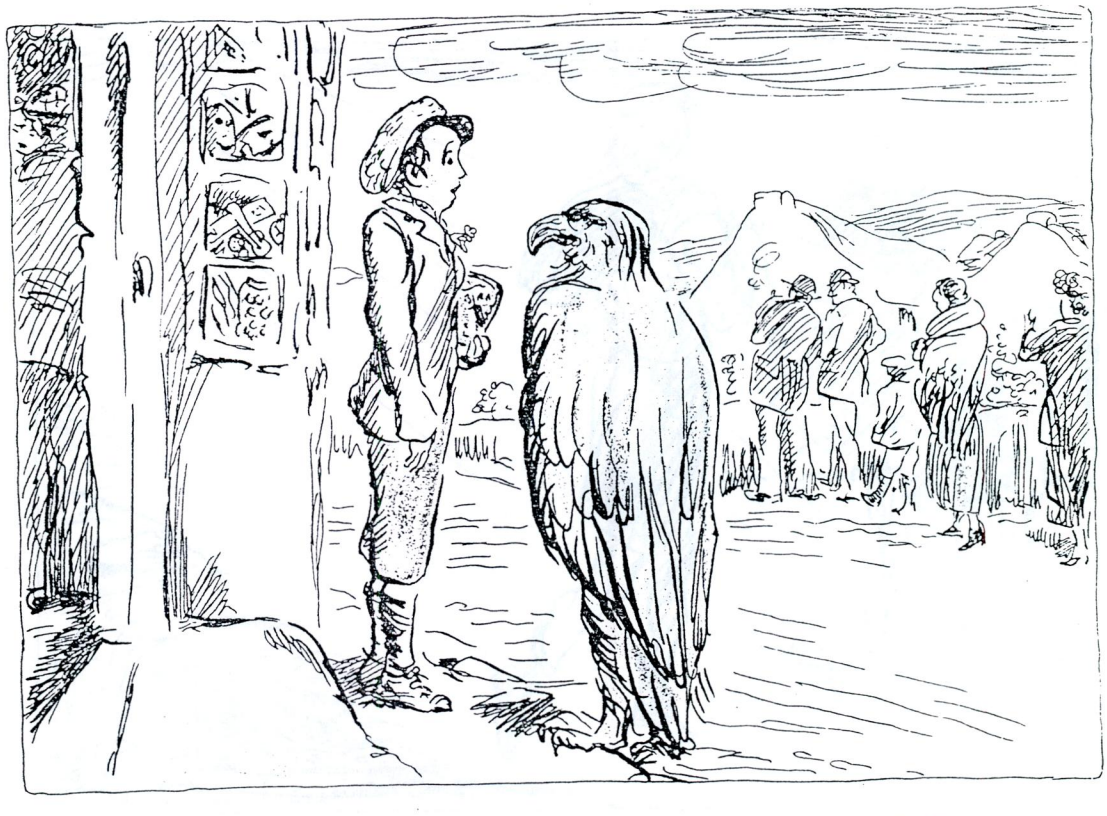
Yeats gives a symbolic value to his subject matter. One of the features of his work as a whole is that of the humanity and simplicity of life, and the work I have discussed here is no exception. Yeats's own reflection of life shines through this portrayal, so that it becomes a celebration of invaluable qualities, not just in Ireland or the west, but in humanity in general. In this chapter I will look at how Yeats transforms the local into the universal, so that the portrayal becomes one of the "bare elemental substance of basic humanity ignorant of the world-made man and of the man-made world alike." (Dalsimer, 1993, p.208).

In "The Pier" (Plate 29), for example, we see Yeats's fascination for human relations, where he observes the unity of the people coming together in times of trouble. The same unity is evident in Plate 7, where the peasants gather round to comfort the victim. It is also highlighted in Plate 30, where the islanders contentedly gather together for the job of thatching.

Plate 29 also captures the artist's intrigue for human reactions, as he notes the young boy on the wall, full of excitement as he watches the ship battle its way through the waves, while the women huddle together in anguish. The same variety of human reaction is described in Plate 17. There are expressions of "malicious glee" alongside worry and concern on the faces of the men and women to the left of the picture; menacing eyes in the centre face of the group in the left bottom corner, and pride and dignity in the right side, all contrasted to the impassible faces of the magistrates behind the official desk. This drawing is

EILEEN, SEAMUS, AND THE BALLAD-SINGER ROSE LIGHTLY IN THE AIR

Plate 32

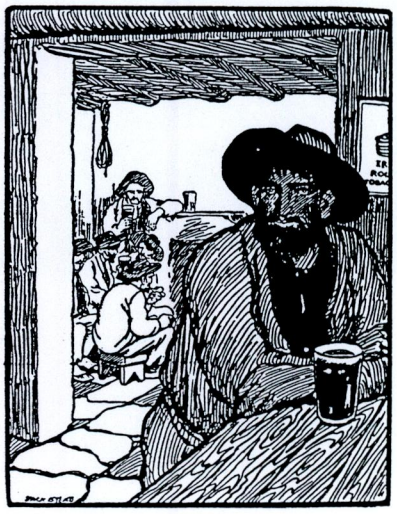


'HOW DID YOU GET HERE?' HE ASKED IN AMAZEMENT

Plate 26

SEAMUS SAW A STRANGE MAN COMING ACROSS THE BOG

Plate 35



PORTER

Plate 13

AN ISLAND HORSEMAN

Plate 2

an example of Yeats's skill in the simplification of crowds while retaining individuality within the crowd.

His obsession with human reactions is epitomised in the work for The Turfcutter's Donkey, where he described in a few simple strokes the people's reactions to magic happenings. For example, in Plate 26, when the boy finds himself conversing with a giant-sized bird, his eyes expand and prepare to pop out. His mouth, his head, his whole posture displays a sense of amusement and innocence. The various reactions in the crowd to the "flying people", in Plate 32, is another example of Yeats retaining individuality while rendering simplified crowds. One man has an expression of "wow" on his face, displaying wonder and fantasy, while the woman behind stares upwards in sheer bewilderment, straining to focus. The gentleman in the hat beside her glances only fleetingly at such wondrous sights. A boy in the bottom left corner of the picture has fallen flat on his behind in complete shock, while the young lad in front of him sums up the basic wonder of humanity in a beautiful reduction of line, by Yeats. Even when the "Cuchalainn" figure appears in Plate 35, Yeats can't resist focusing attention on the reactions of the boy, perched in quite sober surprise on the gate. All these illustrations convey human reactions.

Another aspect of humanity that captivated Yeats was the idiosyncratic nature of a person, as these works show. For example, in Plate 13, the islander is removed from the background scene, deep in his own thoughts. Yeats often employs this device of "character isolation" to depict human idiosyncrasies, as in Plate 2, where the young man gallops off down the road on his horse, waving his hat to the world, totally unbothered and unconcerned by what anyone thinks. Yeats removes almost all background information from "An Islandman" (Plate 22), so that the figure becomes a peasant in timeless space there, as in many of the illustrations, e.g. in the proud figure in Plate 3, the boat carpenter in Plate 10 and the boatman in Plate 12, the figure becomes a human ideal existing outside of history. Within these figures, Yeats portrays the pride, dignity and inner freedom inherent in the individual, the soul that cannot be repressed. In Plate

AN ISLAND MAN

Plate 22

CARRYING SEAWEED FOR KELP

Plate 14

BOAT-BUILDING AT CARNA

Plate 10

Plate 16

16, the countryman is Yeats's ideal man, who disdains the greed involved in business affairs, as he listens in disgust to the dealings between the shopkeeper and the customer.

Yeats's strong sense of humanity caused him to have a great empathy for the ordinary people, especially those who suffered under the hands of others. He recognised the greed in humanity and includes this in his work. He felt strongly about lust for power and wealth, and satirises this in Plate 16. In this illustration Yeats takes a huge leap from the specific to the general. "The Country Shop" (as I have discussed in Chapter 4) makes a profound statement against the capitalism that was spreading like a disease since the Industrial Revolution. The shopkeeper displays no sympathy in expression for her fellow povertised human being. Business dictates human relationships. This was a feature of modern society that was emerging at the turn of the century, due to the Industrial Revolution. The main aim of modern economy was maximum efficiency. One must work at increasing profit.

The same theory was applied to production and manufacturing. With the many advances in science, work was removed from the home, the workshops and the open air, into factories. An introduction of a high division of labour meant that work became depersonalised. The alienation of the self from one's work deprived the worker of enjoying work as a play on his own mental and physical powers.

Yeats's illustrations (Plates 31 and 30) are a direct protest against such changes. They promote human individuality in manufacturing and work. As an empathiser with the Arts and Crafts Movement, he fought for workmanship and craft over the advantages of technology and factories. In Plates 31 and 30 we are presented with a society free from machinery or factories. Instead, we are shown the handiwork of the individual in the open air, where the people are engrossed in their labour - kelpmaking, gathering seaweed. In Plate 10 we witness the satisfaction and pride these people derive from their labour. Synge

THATCHING

Plate 30

KELP-MAKING

Plate 31

said in his writings, in The Aran Islands, that this form of work was partly responsible for the charm, intelligence, pride, character and individuality of the western people.

The illustrations on the whole could be described as "a mourning for the past", similar to the poem of Wordsworth:

> Plainliving and highthinking are no more
> The homely beauty of the good old cause
> Is gone, our peace, our fearful innocence
> And pure religion breaking household laws.
> (Martin, 1969, p.111)

In The Aran Islands, Yeats is offering us an "ideal society" similar to the one Wordsworth mourns in his poem, and Blake describes in his words: "where there is a universal grace of spirit, a sense of dignity and a flow of respect between person and person".

In all the illustrations Yeats focuses on simple, everyday events as if they were magic (Plates 8, 3, 2, 23, 11). The illustrations project simplicity of attitude, the intrinsic importance of everyday life and events which should be cherished in a society. The portrayal overall is suggestive of an ideal existence and an ideal society; a suggested alternative to that which was resulting from the Industrial Revolution. This was a universal topic at the turn of the century, both for art and for literature. And so Yeats can't resist making the journey from the specific to the general. It is obvious from his lack of detail that he was not concerned with time or place, but far more serious about the simplicity and humanity of basic life "ignorant of the world-made man and of the man-made world alike" (Dalsimer, 1993, p.208), that existed in the West.

For me, the most important aspect of the universality of the work is its appeal to the human imagination. In a world where fact and logic are being swallowed in bulk, only to be regurgitated to a timetable, isn't it fantastic to indulge in such

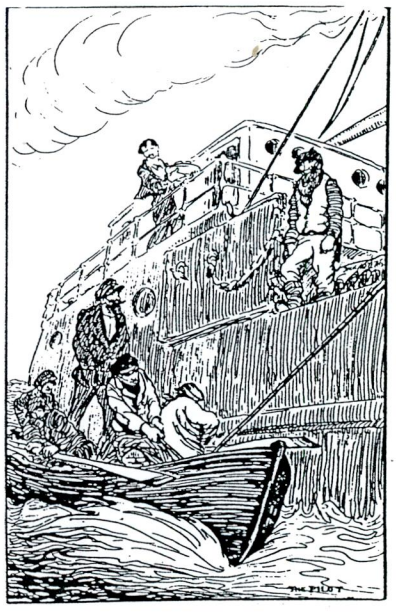


Plate 8

Plate 3

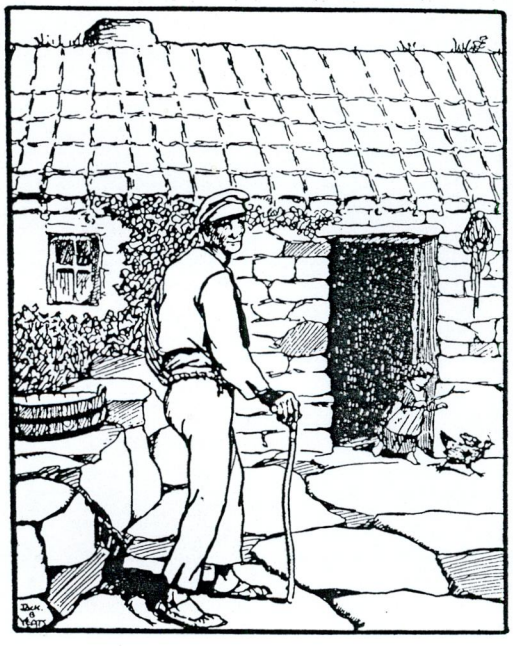
AN ISLAND HORSEMAN

Plate 2

illustrations as The Turfcutter's Donkey, the romance in The Aran Islands, A Broadsheet and Life in the West of Ireland, which was part of our country less than a century ago.

THE DINISH FERRYMAN

Plate 23



THE MAN WHO TOLD THE STORIES

Plate 11

Conclusion

In his early illustrations, Jack B. Yeats uses many devices to portray the west of Ireland and its people. Through his representation of the figure - posture, limbs and eyes - he communicates the mental and physical state of the people as a whole. His integration of the land and the figure by line and composition aptly portray the people's attachment to and dependence on the land. These portrayals show us his instinctive powers of observation and his representation of reality gives a voice to the people and makes some important social comment.

The drawings which were examined defy all past misconceptions and suggestions about the "hellishness" of Connacht. The works come together as a powerful portrayal of a part of Ireland that is often neglected, forgotten and sneered upon.

The subject matter and technique combine reality with imagination. The influence of folklore on the experiences of his youth serve to raise his works from the mundane to the romantic. With his line and composition, Yeats injects a sense of drama and suspense into the scenes. An obsession with humanity rather than time and place transform the works from the local into the universal.

Yeats's technique, in all its ruggedness and informality, was dictated by his subject matter, the west of Ireland and its people. For Jack B. Yeats's art was for the Irish and serves to represent nationalism, or "liberty", for the ordinary people of his country. He displayed the personalities, hardships and pleasures of the people while capturing the essence of the place which actually transpires the

details. There is no pretension in his work, rather Yeats's love for his native home and people.

Jack B. Yeats did these illustrations, directly as pieces of life, without thinking or caring whether or not they would receive acclaim in the artworld. The work tells a true story and its meaning is to be savoured and cherished in the west of Ireland.

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