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Announcements and Comments

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Announcements and Comments

DURING a moment of domestic annoyance, Mrs. Yeats once told her husband, “AE was the nearest to a saint you or I will ever meet. You are a better poet but no saint. I suppose one has to choose” (*Letters*, p. 838). It is a distinction Yeats seems to have endorsed in a short poem written in 1931:

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

Critics, especially formalist critics, have taken the lines as a mandate to ignore the life while interpreting the text, or at least as a justification for making their own choice. As these essays demonstrate, that is certainly a mistake. Yeats rarely makes clean choices, presents us instead with a career of vacillations, or attempts—always willful and often heroic—to have it both ways. If he does make a choice (or if we must choose in order to decide how we are to understand him), he selects perfection of the life. Perfection means energy, intensity, and multiplicity, and in a few rare moments what he describes as ecstasy or beatitude. No less than Keats he thought that the poet leads a life of allegory and that his works are the comments on it. Before comment, and as part of the process of perfection, comes transformation. “A poet,” he said in one of his last and most comprehensive essays

writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness; he never speaks directly as to someone at the breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria. Dante and Milton had mythologies, Shakespeare the characters of English history or of traditional romance; even when the poet seems most himself, when he is Raleigh and gives potentates the lie, or Shelley ‘a nerve o’re which do creep the else unfelt oppressions of this earth,’ or Byron when ‘the soul outwears the breast’ as ‘the sword outwears its sheath,’ he is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete. (*Essays and Introductions*, p. 509)

The essays in this issue of *CLQ* attend to that rebirth, to the process by which accident and incoherence become complete, by which life, passing through phantasmagoria, becomes meaning, and personal history becomes myth. Phillip Marcus surveys the relationships between

literature and politics, and the tensions of literary politics, that inform Yeats's career. George Mills Harper and George Bornstein chart and assess his encounters with two strong enchanters, Dante and Nietzsche. Elizabeth W. Bergmann discusses the influence of John Butler Yeats and the importance of portraiture in his son's poetry. In Michael J. Sidnell's essay, the allegory in *The Wanderings of Oisín* is referred to Yeats's literary combats as well as to his theories of symbolism and his occult researches.

It has been a pleasure to read the essays submitted for this issue, difficult to return those that did not quite fit, and to postpone others because there was not space. More articles about Yeats will appear in forthcoming issues. The Healy Collection of Modern Irish Literature forms one of the special strengths of Colby's library, and hence one of the particular interests of the *Quarterly*. The illustrations reproduced in this issue are from some of the original sketches by John Butler Yeats which decorate and partly define the Healy Room. The picture on the front cover is of William Butler Yeats, and the picture on the back cover is of John Butler Yeats. Other illustrations are identified by their captions. A guide to the Healy Collection is available from J. Fraser Cocks III, Special Collections Librarian. Thanks to all those who submitted essays, and to John Sutherland for his editorial wisdom and assistance.

DOUGLAS N. ARCHIBALD
Guest Editor

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

DOUGLAS N. ARCHIBALD, the guest editor of this issue, is Professor of English and Chairman of the Department of English at Colby College. He is a graduate of Dartmouth, with a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. He is the author of *John Butler Yeats* (Bucknell University Press, 1974). He has published essays on literary influence and literary history, and is at work on a critical study of W. B. Yeats.

PHILLIP L. MARCUS is Professor of English at Cornell University. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1968. He is the author of *Yeats and the Beginning of the Irish Renaissance* (Cornell University Press) and *Standish O'Grady* (Bucknell University Press). He is the editor of forthcoming editions of Yeats's *The Secret Rose* and the manuscripts of *The Death of Cuchulain*.

GEORGE BORNSTEIN is Professor of English at the University of Michigan. He is the author of many books and articles on 19th and 20th century poetry, including *Yeats and Shelley* (University of Chicago Press, 1970) and *Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens* (University of Chicago Press, 1976). His article on the newly

discovered "Yeats's Copy of Shelley at the Pforzheimer Library" will be appearing shortly in *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities*. He has received various honors, including an ACLS Fellowship.

GEORGE MILLS HARPER is Professor of English at Florida State University. He is the author of *The Neoplatonism of William Blake*, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, *W. B. Yeats and W. T. Horton*, three monographs in the Dolmen Press's Yeats Papers, and many articles in learned journals. He is the editor of *Yeats and the Occult*, co-editor (with Richard J. Finneran and William M. Murphy) of *Letters to W. B. Yeats*, co-editor (with Walter K. Hood) of *A Critical Edition of Yeats's "A Vision" (1925)*, co-editor (with Kathleen Raine) of *Thomas Taylor the Platonist: Selected Writings*, and a contributing editor of *A Concordance to the Writings of William Blake*. A former President of the College English Association, he has lectured widely on Yeats in Europe and America.

ELIZABETH W. BERGMANN is a graduate student at the University of Michigan. She has a B.A. from Mount Holyoke and an M.A. from the University of Michigan. She is presently completing a Ph.D. dissertation on W. B. Yeats and the visual arts.

MICHAEL J. SIDNELL is Professor of English at Trinity College, University of Toronto, and Director of the Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama. He holds a Ph.D. from London University. He has published a good many articles on Yeats, drama, and other subjects, including "Mr. Yeats, Michael Robartes and their Circle" in *Yeats and the Occult* (1976), and "Yeats in the Light of Day: the Text and Editions" in *Editing Twentieth Century Texts* (1977); he is co-editor (with D. R. Clark and G. P. Mayhew) of *Druid Craft* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1971). He is presently at work with P. Manus and W. Gould on an edition of Yeats's *The Secret Rose*; he is also writing a history of the London Group Theatre. He will be a Visiting Scholar at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, in 1979-1980.

JHS

THE MAJOR summer exhibition at the Museum of Art will be *Chinese Painting: Sung-Ch'ing Dynasties*. It will trace the development of Chinese painting from the Sung Dynasty (960-1279), when it was at its height, through the Ch'ing Dynasty (1912). The exhibition will consist of seventy album leaves, one of the most important and most characteristic forms of Chinese painting. Small and intimate in scale, the album format first appeared in the Sung Dynasty. All the major subjects associated with this type of painting will be represented—landscapes, birds, flowers, bamboo, figures and themes related to history and poetry. In connection with the exhibition, Chinese pottery and porcelain from the Bernat Collection of Oriental Ceramics, given to the College in 1953 and

1954 by Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Bernat, will be on view in the lobby of the Museum.

The album leaves are being lent to the Museum by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the guest curator for the exhibition is Germaine Fuller, a Sinologist and art historian who is teaching Chinese and Japanese art at the College.

HUGH J. GOURLEY III
Museum Director