

**T. J. Kiernan**

## **LADY GREGORY AND W. B. YEATS**

I begin with Coole House, Galway, because so much of the story centres there. This was a typical Irish demesne residence, thick-set and blocky and sure of itself, with dense woods flanking its rear and, at the end of the fan-shaped woods, a wide expanse of lake and a beauty of swans. It was the ancestral home of the Gregorys, of the Anglo-Irish landlord class, who had carried the white man's burden, and amassed considerable fortune, in the directing of the East India Company. One of these Gregorys, Sir William, a distinguished Governor of Ceylon, married for a second time, at sixty-three, Augusta Persse of Galway, who was twenty-eight; at forty she was widowed. Five years later, the Lady Gregory of literary fame began her apprenticeship as a writer.

After her husband's death, she had edited papers of William Gregory, her husband's grandfather who was Under-Secretary for Ireland, 1812-31. Much documentation she suppressed through tenderness for the feelings of living descendants from that troubled post-Union period in Irish history. She had edited her husband's biography. Her literary life began, however, when she met W. B. Yeats in 1896. She was then forty-four; Yeats was thirty-one. Five years earlier, he had proposed to, and been refused by, Miss Maud Gonne, and he was still very much in love with her.

Lady Gregory took him to Coole in the summer after their first meeting. Coole was quiet; life there restrained but did not restrict. It had an air of history, even in the ancient copper beech beside the house which fulfilled the functions of a visitor's book, with the autograph-cut initials of distinguished visitors—George Bernard Shaw, Augustus John, George Moore, Sean O'Casey. It had an air of contemporary history, as one ascended the staircase, the walls of which were hung with framed letters from men of letters and men of statecraft. I stopped on my first going up that stairway to read Mark Twain to Lady Gregory. And the staircase led to the library, the pride and the calm of Coole, walled, it seemed, in vellum and mellowed leather.

There, Lady Gregory made precise the poet's life, made orderly his routine of work and reading. She made herself necessary to him; healed

him from the hurt to his vanity of that unrequited love; guarded him from fresh adventure of that kind; gave him, when he needed it, and all through his life, a cloister. In his autobiographies, he has told how he looked to her, at that turning-point in his creative work, to send him to his writing at eleven each day, and at some other fixed time to answer correspondence; and how, thanks to her firmness, he recovered his will to write.

Yeats' description, in *Dramatis Personae*, carries through her life: "Lady Gregory, as I first knew her, was a plainly dressed woman of forty-five, without obvious good looks, except the charm that comes from strength, intelligence and kindness." She was a woman of great goodness, simplicity, and guile. From a background of British Imperialism (her father, Dudley Perse, was a four-thousand acre landowner in Galway; her husband was governor of Ceylon), she became a realistic rebel, as free from sentimentality in her cause as only a woman, and especially an Irish woman, can be; with all the hard sense of her sex and the single-mindedness. She broke Yeats away from the chores of magazine-writing, helped finance him from it, telling him in the early years of their friendship that the only wrong act that matters is not doing one's best work.

The impact of Lady Gregory on Yeats' life was a smoothing, healing influence. The impact of Yeats on her life was to create a new woman. She began, under the influence of Yeats, to learn the Irish language. She started Irish language classes in Coole and in Gort, the nearby village; and she translated in the National Library of Ireland some of the old Irish sagas. The woman with a background of imperialism became Irish—and sturdily, and when needed militantly, proud of it. This brought about a radical transformation in her mind, giving to what looked as if it were being shaped for a dull prosaic life of middle age and old age a new and unwearied fervour. It was analogous to a religious conversion. It made her angry with the false picture of Ireland given by propaganda to the world, what the historian, Alice Stopford Green, called "a picture gloomy and savage, circulated by adventurers and planters," which "through sheer repetition . . . has passed as it were into the common creed of Englishmen. The growth of this political myth, its planting and watering through seven centuries, has been a stupendous fact in Irish history."

To help break that myth was a principal purpose of the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre movement. From Coole Park, the joint Gregory-Yeats statement, the founders' charter of the Abbey Theatre, issued in 1898. The purpose, it said, was to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. "We will show," ran the manifesto, "that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism."

The Gaelic Revival, the Literary Revival, and the Irish Literary Theatre form a unity, and the threads of the three cannot be disentangled or dissociated from the political revival known as Sinn Fein. The phrase in the letter from Coole: "We are confident of the support of all Irish people who are weary of misrepresentation" has its counterpart, on the action side, in the self-reliance and stand-on-your-own-legs meaning of Sinn Fein.

Lady Gregory's own account of what led to the formal foundation of the Irish Literary Theatre is dramatic in its simplicity. It was a day of rain in Coole. She, her new friend Yeats, and an old neighbour, Edward Martyn, had just had lunch:

It was a wet day and we could not go out. We sat through that wet afternoon, and though I had never been at all interested in theatres, our talk turned on plays. Mr. Martyn had written two, *The Heather Field* and *Macve*. They had been offered to London managers and now he thought of trying to have them produced in Germany, where there seemed to be more room for new drama than in England. I said it was a pity we had no Irish theatre where such plays could be given. Mr. Yeats said that had always been a dream of his but he had of late thought it an impossible one, for it could not at first pay its way, and there was no money to be found for such a thing in Ireland. We went on talking about it and things seemed to grow possible as we talked, and before the end of the afternoon, we had made our plans. We said we would collect money, or rather ask to have a certain sum of money guaranteed. We would then take a Dublin theatre and give a performance of Mr. Martyn's 'Heather Field' and one of Mr. Yeats' own plays, 'The Countess Cathleen.' I offered the first guarantee of £25.

That first guarantee set the movement going, but it was a case of four authors—Synge, Yeats, Moore, and Martyn—in search of players and a playhouse. I should say five authors, for the full house was complete when Lady Gregory, who "had never been at all interested in theatres," wrote her first play, *Twenty-Five*. With this comedy and three plays of Yeats, the Irish National Dramatic Company made its bow in London at the Queen's Gate Hall. Walkley, dramatic critic of the *London Times*, impressed with the calm delight, the artless impulsiveness of the acting, described the performance as "a sight for sore eyes, eyes made sore by the perpetual movement and glitter of the ordinary stage." More important, perhaps, was it that an English woman, Miss Annie Elizabeth Fredericka Horniman, admired the plays sufficiently to give financial support, some £800 a year, to the new theatre in Dublin.

A biographer of Yeats, A. N. Jeffares, who was given information both by the widow of the poet and by Mrs. Maud Gonne MacBride, quotes Maud Gonne's opinion "that both Lady Gregory and Miss Horniman were in love with Yeats, and certainly in Miss Horniman's letters

there is the suppressed sentimentality which would indicate this. Lady Gregory carried more weight in all Yeats' plans." Miss Horniman contributed in all about £10,000 to the theatre, and withdrew her support in 1910, ostensibly because the Abbey Theatre was not closed when King Edward VII died in that year. Lady Gregory had brought Yeats on a tour of Italy, to divert his mind from the rumpus in the Abbey Theatre over the showing of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*.

Women feared Lady Gregory, Yeats had been told before he met her. The Irish mystic poet A.E. (George Russell) had found her "patronising." Arthur Symonds misunderstood the situation and thought that by creating new interests for Yeats—the theatre, Irish folklore, the holiday in Italy—she was taking him away from his poetry; and he called her a witch, an Italian witch, a *strega*. Epstein's bust of her in the Dublin Municipal Gallery of Modern Art has none of the duality of her character, showing only the hard masculinity and dominance and nothing of the chatelaine, the woman of gracious old-world manner.

Maud Gonne MacBride has given an acid account of this woman whom women feared:

She had called on me in Dublin,—a queer little old lady, rather like Queen Victoria. She told me she was learning typewriting to be able to type Willie's poems and plays. She was also translating from French translations of Irish literature appearing in Gaidoz' *Revue Celtique*. Then she asked me if I would marry Willie Yeats. It did not seem exactly her business, and I had answered rather shortly that we were neither of the marrying sort, having other things which interested us more; and I had thought she seemed rather relieved. I had felt astonished and not very pleased when she deserted the Hibernian Hotel where she used to stay in Dublin, and took rooms in the house where I lived in Nassau Street. Through Willie she had got to know all John O'Leary's literary group and invited many of them to stay with her in her Galway home; I wondered if it was because of her newly-found interest in Gaelic literature and the Irish theatre or of a desire to draw them away from too vehement expression of Irish independence.

—Lady Gregory and I were gracious to each other but never friends and in the later struggle in the theatre group, —Art for Art's sake, or Art for Propaganda,—we were on different sides. I had been much amused in Dublin watching the rivalry between Lady Gregory and a rich English woman, Miss Horniman; both were interested in Willie and both were interested in the Irish theatre. Miss Horniman had the money and was willing to spend it, but Lady Gregory had the brains. They should have been allies, for both stood for art for art's sake and deprecated the intrusion of politics, which meant Irish freedom; instead they were rivals; they both liked Willie too well. Lady Gregory won the battle. Miss Horniman's money converted the old city morgue into the Abbey Theatre, but it was Lady Gregory's plays that were acted there. Miss Horniman brought back Italian plaques to decorate it, but Lady Gregory carried off Willie to visit the Italian towns where they were made, and Willie's national outlook underwent a complete change. There would be no more poems against English kings' visits.



No tensions troubled Lady Gregory. Yeats was often confused in his adjustment to life. His first visit to Coole was a turning point for him: it brought him to ground. With Lady Gregory he visited the cottages in the neighbourhood and collected folk stories. From the cottages back he went to the aristocratic calm of Coole. It helped to solve the first great emotional tension in his life, and he ever after used Coole as his retreat from contacts that confused him.

Knowing nothing of the writing of drama, and seemingly with no imagination for writing, Lady Gregory developed rapidly from the time she met Yeats. He turned to her for collaboration after a quite impossible partnership with George Moore, whom he described as "embarrassing, unsubduable, preposterous." That partnership, producing the joint Moore-Yeats play, *Diarmuid and Grainne*, had brought useful notice to the young theatre movement when it was produced in 1901. Yeats then went to Coole, "asked the assistance of Lady Gregory," he says in *Dramatis Personae*, and in a fortnight completed a tragedy, *Where There is Nothing*. It was not a good play. Lady Gregory, too, was trying her apprenticeship hand at play-writing. Some years later, again with Lady Gregory's help, Yeats made of it *The Unicorn From The Stars*. In those early years the Gregory-Yeats collaboration produced *The Pot of Broth*, and *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Then Lady Gregory branched out on her own as a playwright, with six Irish folk-history plays, five comedies, followed by the seven short plays the dedication to which is a memorial to her indebtedness to Yeats: "To you, W. B. Yeats, good praiser, wholesome dispraiser, heavy-handed judge, open-handed helper of us all, I offer a play of my plays for every night of the week, because you like them, and because you have taught me my trade."

Lady Gregory wrote her plays for the Abbey Theatre. It was the spark that fired her dramatic imagination. The Irish theatre of intellectual excitement, the theatre of poetry, which is what Yeats had wanted, took its development, through her comedies with their laughter-raising and humanising influence, towards the theatre of Irish realism and subter-realism. And when, with dogged perseverance, she had mastered the technique of playwriting and become a success in the theatre, she helped others. "I am rather a good play-doctor," she wrote to me; and, in her eightieth year she said, "I have Abbey business a good deal on my mind and see secretary or stage manager every day, and am reading through a pile of plays, not very promising so far. In one I read yesterday on the Betrayal of Judas, Mary Magdalene says to S. Matthew—Don't stand there gaping like a fish, Matt. You've got to chuck your sneers about what I am or what I do."

Besides her work as a playwright, she was, as her close friend Bernard Shaw described her, "the charwoman of the Abbey Theatre." Without her grit, it is by no means certain that it could have survived its early very lean years. Later in her life, when the Abbey had become popular, she wrote to me: "I used so often to quote to our actors in the early days of discouragement (not a dozen people in the Abbey): Grip is a good dog, but Hold Fast a better."

It was she who looked after all the details of management and brow-beat the actors into continuing on the wage that the theatre could afford, contrary though it might well be held to be to even the meanest conceptions of social justice. Fortunately for this woman who, like all theatre managers and most writers for the theatre, was altogether free from sentimentalism, the early Abbey players were not.

In his Nobel Prize lecture to the Royal Academy of Sweden, Yeats explained that the two best male actors were a stage-struck solicitor's clerk and a working man who had got his stage experience from touring Ireland in a company managed by a negro. "We got our women, however," he said, referring to Sara Allgood and Maire O'Neill, "from a little political society which described its object as educating the children of the poor, or, according to its enemies, teaching them a catechism that began with this question, 'What is the origin of evil?' and the answer, 'England' ." But of all of them, he said that if they had come with more theatrical and with fewer patriotic ambitions, "they would have imitated some well-known English player and sighed for well-known English plays." They were literal amateurs. Did they not demur at playing *The Rising of the Moon* because it showed the possibility of a policeman being capable of patriotism? Did they not get Lady Gregory to make a change in her comedy *Twenty-Five*, reducing the money the returned emigrant had brought back to Ireland from £100 to £20, because the £100 would encourage emigration to the United States?

In the 1916 Revolt, one of the Irish volunteers who was killed, Sean Connolly, headed an attack on Dublin Castle, with fifty men and nine women, including his sister. Hoisting the Irish tri-colour over the City Hall, he was shot dead. I had heard that he had been on the Abbey stage. I asked Lady Gregory about it, and received this reply:

Yes, Sean Connolly acted at the Abbey one winter when the Company were playing in America, and I stayed in Dublin to get up classes, and put on some plays with what material we could find. Sean Connolly came in, to a class, but I think had acted some

small part before, and I saw at once he was a very fine actor, and put on my old play 'Kincora' with him as King Brian, and 'The Lord Mayor' (McNulty's) with Sean in the name part. He was wonderful, both in tragedy and farce, and had a very sweet disposition and charm of manner. I asked him if he would join us permanently, and he said No, because he was in the Civil Service and wanted to stay in it, that there might be some provision, a pension, for his children later. I often think of this as tragic—his going straight to his death—he fired the first shot and was the first to be killed when the Castle was attacked. He was so much in my mind that I (not a poet) began joining lines about that tragedy in my mind, and then went on till a poem I daresay you have never seen 'The Old Woman Remembers' came into being. But when it was completed, that first name and origin of it was driven out—seemed too personal in a poem of generalities—Yeats pounced on that at once.

"Came in, to a class. . . and I saw at once he was a very fine actor"—it was in such ways that the world-famous actors were built up, out of material from offices and shops, the material of the amateur who is interested in the message of the theatre. Under the guidance of Lady Gregory, the Abbey became not only a theatre but a dramatic workshop.

From the nineties to 1916, various influences in Ireland were all focussed in one direction, not consciously moving together, yet with the fatality of a drama drawn towards the same climax, from the scholars, like Eugene O'Curry; the popularisers, like Standish O'Grady; the conservers of the old language and traditions, like Douglas Hyde; the seers of visions, like George Russell—to Yeats.

Yeats has his place in the world of literature; but, altogether distinct from that, he has another place and a different kind of position in the moving life of Ireland—as a personality, a suggestive personality, a leader, perhaps all the more a leader who made men work and write because of his aloofness. His particular importance in Ireland is not confined to letters. It has to be remembered that not only the aristocracy but the middle class of Ireland had been fully destroyed by the beginning of the nineteenth century; but the "hidden Ireland", so well covered in Professor Daniel Corkery's book of that title, was surging for an outlet. The revival might have come even earlier with Thomas Davis if he had lived a normally long life, if there had been no Great Famine, if national education had not been schemed in anti-Irish minds but had been allowed to develop organically from the hedge schools of the penal days. In Yeats, the hidden Ireland had its leader, in the important sense that he re-introduced dignity into the literature of Ireland and that he re-linked the stream of Irish literature with its original, long underground, springs of inspiration.

In 1915, a great shadow fell on Lady Gregory's life. Her nephew, Sir Hugh Lane, was lost on the "Lusitania" on May 7, 1915. He was the

son of Adelaide Persse, her elder sister, the beauty of the family, who shocked the "county" by marrying a divinity student, which was, as Lady Gregory later recounted it, like having a death in the family.

Lane had been Director of the National Gallery of Ireland and had bequeathed a valuable collection of French moderns to that Gallery. The codicil to his will in which the bequest was made was signed by him, but his signature was not witnessed. No doubt was cast on the genuineness of signature or of the bequest, but the British Government took advantage of the technical omission to condemn the codicil and fall back on an earlier disposition of the collection. Hugh Lane had wanted the Dublin Municipality to build a transpontine gallery over the Liffey to house these paintings; and in a fit of pique with their lack of response, he had in 1911 bequeathed the group of pictures to the London National Gallery. Then after his appointment in 1914 as Director of the National Gallery of Ireland, he wrote the codicil in February, 1915, and locked it in his desk in the National Gallery. It gave the valuable collection to Dublin and appointed his aunt, Lady Gregory, as his sole trustee.

On such a clear issue as to intention, Lady Gregory had no doubt that the codicil would be honoured. With the help of influential friends, she expected a speedy and favourable decision. In this she was sorely disappointed. In her life of Hugh Lane, written five years after Hugh's death, she incidentally referred to the disastrous effect on her own creative work: "I have, I will not say wasted, but spent unceasingly time and energy and strength that might have been better used than in refuting quibbles, striving to carry out the trust that he placed in me. I have never given up assurance, because as I have felt and said from the beginning, we have 'the Cloud of Witnesses' on our side." She, who had won in worlds where genius and imagination and fine-pointed intelligence are plenipotentiary, lost this grim battle with bureaucracy.

On Easter Monday, 1928, she wrote to me in London where I was giving a little help in her campaign for the Lane pictures:

In sorting papers last week I came across, and am typing copy, a diary I had written in London in 1916 when our fight first began. The diary tells of my appeals to all sorts and conditions with Yeats as helper; being to newspaper offices, to the Prime Minister, Asquith, and to Lord Northcliffe—these last sympathetic and helpful. I little thought then that it was but the beginning of a 12 years' struggle. Rather heartbreaking. But the help of real friends, you arriving there, warms one's heart and keeps courage up.

Right up to her death in 1932, this business tormented her. In August, 1930, writing me that she had finalised legal arrangements appointing me as a trustee and executor of her will, she said:

I remember having asked you, when you were here, if you would consent to be a Trustee and executor of my will; you did not refuse. I hate putting any more business on you, but this will not be very troublesome, because, even in case of my death now, the trusteeship would only be for a few years. And of course I may live those few years—yet, but I don't want to. I have had much happiness, and I think have been of some use. But I do hope to see Hugh's pictures at last secure for Dublin before I pass away.

But the Lane Pictures, literally willed to Dublin, still remain in London.

Yeats took a prominent part and gave a considerable amount of his time and energy to both the "battle of the sites" in Dublin, concerning the bridge dispute, and the Lane Picture issue with the British Government. "Poems Written in Discouragement" refer to the first, "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing" and "To a Shade" to the second.

He took pride in his election to the Senate of Ireland. He had, after the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, been sent as a Sinn Fein delegate to the Irish Race Congress held in Paris in May, 1922.

On one of my summer holidays in Coole, I found Yeats poring over sketches for coins. He was chairman of a Commission appointed by the Irish Government to advise on designs for the new coinage introduced in 1928, and still in use. To the Report of that Commission, Yeats wrote the introduction, "What We Did or Tried To Do," beginning:

As the most famous and beautiful coins are the coins of the Greek colonies, especially of those in Sicily, we decided to send photographs of some of these, and one coin of Carthage, to our selected artists, and to ask them, as far as possible, to take them as a model. But the Greek coins had two advantages that ours could not have, one side need not balance the other, and either could be stamped in high relief, whereas ours must pitch and spin to please the gambler, and pack into rolls to please the banker.

Apart from being an Irish nationalist, Yeats had no party political affiliations. His only son is a member of the Fianna Fail party, led by Mr. de Valera, and a member of Parliament; and one of the Fianna Fail centres is called after W.B. Yeats. If there could have been a political party based on the aristocracy of intellect, it would have had Yeats' allegiance; but then, it would not be a political party. He thought that politics is like a simple roulette board, with only two or three colours for the voters to back their fancy, but that an intelligent man might very readily prefer a colour that is not on the board, or a mixture of the colours on the board; yet he must put his fancy away and bang his money on one of the official colours.

Both Lady Gregory and Yeats had considerable business ability. Lady Gregory used emphatically to deny this when asking me to help her fill out her income-tax forms. Yeats, too, was wont to pretend to a lack

of business acuteness; but he had a great sense of organisation, which began in the self-control and self-discipline and organisation of his own life, and which, with his impressive personality, he was able to encourage in those who were associated with him in the early years of the Abbey.

Yeats believed in a bilingual Irish nation, and thought that in three generations this could be achieved, and that the language whose literature had, in translation, been such an inspiration to his own work, could be saved.

What manner of man was Yeats? He was naturally an individualist, a strong believer in character, and an enemy of all that levels men to a dead uniformity. He habituated himself to wear over his real personality a mask or mantle, which did effectively conceal a sub-surface character that was shy, even timid, and self-conscious. So deliberate was the mask that the impression he gave was of arrogance and self-assertion. It might be said that what he appeared to be was the emphasized opposite of what, to himself, he was. He could seem embarrassingly odd, especially on a first meeting. I had occasion for many private meetings with him to discuss the publication of the diaries of Lady Gregory, and in these conversations he put aside the mask and got down to details of business. In external appearance, he was everything that one could expect a poet to be—peculiar even in his manner of walking, his head literally in the air, raised more often than not as if he were listening for voices out of the world; his friend and disciple, F. R. Higgins, described him as stately and sacerdotal, a complex-looking individual. At his unbuttoned ease, he was a courteous listener, a keen and careful negotiator of affairs, precise about detail, cautious and prudent in money matters, a good two-way conversationalist, more inclined to draw out a speaker than to hold the talk to himself. He used to say that public speaking is the best school of exactness for a writer. He himself was a good public speaker and gave many lecture tours in the United States.

He had an ever-questing mind, the most inquisitive mind of anyone I ever met. It was that that kept him young and experimental in his work; and when he left Dublin in 1938 for a rest and a change of climate in Rapallo, being then in his last year of life, aged seventy-three, he was still planning new work.

In 1935, when I was Director of Broadcasting in Ireland, Yeats spoke to me about verse-speaking experiments on the radio. He encouraged the younger Irish poet, Austin Clarke, along these lines and himself came to the studios to try out his notions in rehearsal. Some time later, in October, 1936, he broadcast from London on modern poetry, and he discussed with the B.B.C. his ideas about radio programmes of poetry, with chanting of



refrains. "The Poets' Pub" programme in April, 1937, with music by W. J. Turner, was the result, followed by "My Own Poetry," with music by Edmund Dulac in July, 1937, and a similar programme in September; and then, poor health, considering the great care and intensity he put into even ephemeral broadcasting work, put a stop to these essays. His last word in that broadcast on modern poetry was on the reading of poetry:

When I have read you a poem I have tried to read it rhythmically; I may be a bad reader, or read badly because I am out of sorts, or self-conscious, but there is no other method. A poem is an elaboration of the rhythms of common speech and their association with profound feeling. To read a poem like prose, that hearers unaccustomed to poetry may find it easy to understand, is to turn it into bad, florid prose. If anybody from public platform reads or recites poetry as if it were prose, I ask you, speaking for poets, living, dead or unborn, to protest in whatever way occurs to your perhaps youthful minds; if they recite or read by wireless, I ask you to express your indignation by letter.

I had got Lady Gregory, a year before her death, to come from Coole to London to speak at the St. Patrick's Night dinner in Grosvenor House of the National University of Ireland Club, which I had founded in London in 1929. Another guest in that year, 1931, was Augustine Birrell, who had piloted the Irish Universities Bill through the House of Commons. These, then, were last letters from Lady Gregory: "What a responsibility to reply for Ireland," she wrote to me in February, 1931, ". . . and 500 diners. Little did I think of facing such a crowd. But of course as I am your guest I must face it as creditably as the weight of years (added to my birthday on the 15th) will allow." And on her return on April 22, 1931, she wrote: "As to my London visit, it did me good to see so much youth and brightness. And meeting Robin Flower was a real delight."

That year, I could not spend a summer holiday in Coole, which disappointed her, and she wrote on August 1st, 1931: "W. B. Yeats is here, and Jack B. Yeats has just left, so you would have had good company and I should have listened to good talk. The disappointment has flattened August prospects for me." The end of her life was now approaching and on December 30, 1931, she wrote me: "W. B. Yeats has been spending these last months here and will stay until the New Year."

The last letter I had from her was written on May 9, 1932. She died on May 22. I had air-freighted her some flowers from London:

A parcel just opened has disclosed a bunch of lovely carnations—quite fresh—and now happy with stalks in a narrow jug of water—a jug I had bought the first day I was in Portugal and carried around with me. (I wanted you to go there for one of your short holidays). Many, many thanks. I think of you as I look at them. I actually sat

outside the hall door for an hour yesterday, with Yeats; my first outing for many months. I have never been so long away from the garden and the woods; but cold and damp have kept me in again today; so the lovely carnations came the more welcome.

Six days before his death in January, 1939, Yeats wrote to me from Hotel Ideal-Séjour, Cap Martin, France:

You asked me the last time I saw you whether I thought Lady Gregory's diaries should remain under your executorship. For some weeks I have had it in mind that I should state in writing what I think may be important in their contents. It is some years since I have seen them, and I admit that the latter part which moved me deeply might not affect someone who knew Lady Gregory less in the same way; to me those fragmentary sentences called up very clearly that simple and profound woman. There are certain passages however of obvious importance. In the earlier part of the Diaries she writes down the stories told her at the door by countrymen and countrywomen of Black and Tan atrocities committed in her neighbourhood. Much of this she published in a series of anonymous articles in 'The Nation' at the time; they got to be known as her work, and the Gort Black and Tans made threats against Coole House. Printed articles however are not the same thing as the statements written by her own hand immediately after they were made.

I have been here for the last two months and shall be until some time in March. I am doing a great deal of work. W. B. Yeats.

That was written on January 22. He died on the 29th of that month in 1939.

It was what Yeats in that last letter to me called "the stories told her at the door" that gave Lady Gregory the fantasy of her plays; the odds and ends of comment and gossip such as she collected in her books, *The Kiltartan History Book*, *The Kiltartan Poetry Book*, and *The Kiltartan Wonder Book*, that gave the simplicity and the mystery of her writing, and helped to mould "that simple and profound woman." The folk tales of Ireland, told in her books of prose (*Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*, *Gods and Fighting Men*, *Saints and Wonders*)—these were the leaven that made living a woman whose life began at fifty. These and her meeting with Yeats.