

From a 'Small Cultural Underground' to Sligo Folklore:
The Early Years of the Yeats International Summer School

Warwick Gould

'THERE ARE THINGS YOU WILL LEARN IN SLIGO AND NOWHERE ELSE', said my supervisor to me in 1969. She had been one of the 20 students at the first Yeats International Summer School in 1960. I was just 22, from a non-Irish, non-Catholic background, and had come 12,000 miles from Australia. A scholarship to the 11th Yeats Summer School, 1970, where there were over 200 students¹ changed my life.

I had spent nearly a year in the British Museum Reading Room, where Yeats did his early reading, three inadequate weeks among his MSS in the National Library of Ireland, and a few days in the Aran Islands where the strange light and limitless prospects of the West 'caught the heart off guard and blew it open', to slightly adapt words Seamus Heaney was yet to write.²

The Yeats Society of Sligo, and a Yeats Country Arts Festival in May 1958 had been established by what Jim McGarry, one of the seven original plotters, called Sligo's 'small cultural underground'.³ It had included a lecture on Yeats from Roger McHugh of UCD. An occasional lecture series from Padraic Colum, Ethel Mannin, briefly a mistress of Yeats's, who donated his letters to the Sligo Co. Library, and Thomas Rice Henn, author of *The Lonely Tower*, in 1959, followed. The pharmacist, Tony Toher, on the corner of O'Connell and Wine Streets, had on display a set of 38 photographs of Sligo sights prepared and a 'Yeats County' map made up to show those pilgrims who came in search of Yeats the geography of the county according to the places in the poems.⁴ Meditating on Yeats's theme, 'Choice and Chance' in his opening lecture in 1965, the Centenary Year, Henn remarked:

It is clear to me (and one day the history of this School will be written) that Choice and Chance have operated powerfully in its beginning, its development, its fantastic growth. Chance: a request for a single public lecture for summer visitors: the sight of a map of the Yeats Country in a chemists' shop in Wine St.: the advice of a lecturer (now a Professor) from University College Dublin. Choice: because those who founded the Yeats Society had some idea (however vague it may have been at its inception) of founding some organization at which visitors to the town and countryside could combine a pilgrimage with a holiday, and both with instruction.⁵

1 On its growth see Henn's *Five Arches: A Sketch for an Autobiography and 'Philoctetes' and Other Poems* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd, 1980), 203. The 11th Summer School was opened on 7 August by Charles Haughey, TD, Finance Minister, later Taoiseach, 1979-1981, 1982, and 1987-1992.

2 Seamus Heaney, 'Postscript', *The Spirit Level* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 70.

3 As noted in Jim McGarry, *The Dream I Knew: Memories of Thirty Years of the Yeats International Summer School* (Coo looney: Jim McGarry, 1990), 2. Hereafter, 'McGarry'. The Society's shift in nomenclature from 'County' to 'Country' was a masterstroke, particularly for American visitors accustomed to the advertising gambits of the time, e.g., 'Marlboro Country'.

4 See McGarry, 8, fn. On Toher, see Des Moran and Damien Brennan, 'Tony Toher: An Appreciation', *Irish Times*, 06-03-17).

5 See 'Choice and Chance' in T. R. Henn, *Last Essays* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd, 1976), 51-64 (at 62-63).

The map had given him the great idea of a 'living memorial' to Yeats whose centenary was in prospect in 1965 before he walked up Stephen Street to meet Nora Niland at the County Museum.⁶ Henn drew up the academic plans for the inaugural Summer School in 1960. By 1965, the centenary year, Henn was able to look back at the pre-history of the Summer School. Sligo's spirit of place, its *genius loci*, had brought an increasing number of 'pilgrim visitors'.⁷ 'No poet in history has such an incomparable scenic background', Henn wrote:

The two legended mountains, Knocknarea and Ben Bulbin, still dominate the scene ... There is scarcely a place-name within a ten mile radius that does not appear in the poetry and plays. ... Inevitably the work takes additional life and texture, depth and richness, from the unchanged surroundings out of which it came.⁸

Yeats had spent roughly 3 years and 9 months in Sligo, county and town in his first 23 years. Two years (1772-74), at the formative ages between 7-9, were in continuous residence, six months in 1869, various summer holidays, and, in 1887, 4 months collecting folklore and drafting *The Wanderings of Oisín*. He was not a Sligo native—though his mother was—and great-grandfather John Yeats, 1774-1846, had been vicar of Drumcliffe. As the Bishop of Elphin, Most Rev. Dr Vincent Hanley⁹ observed at the opening ceremony of the first Summer School, William Allingham (1824-89) the poet of Ballyshannon 50 km north of here in Donegal, had set Yeats a precedent. Yeats—enviously I think—wrote of Allingham as a 'distant celebrity' and 'literary influence'—his words—and that it had been Allingham's 'pleasant destiny' to be 'the poet of his native town'¹⁰.

His native Ballyshannon will some day be very fond indeed of this child of hers, and may even be a place of literary pilgrimage some day. He will make the little town he loved very familiar to the twentieth century, the little town he sang of so wistfully:

A wild west Coast, a little Town,
Where little Folk go up and down,
Tides flow and winds blow:
... What is little, what is great?
Howsoe'er the answer be,
Let me sing of what I know.¹¹

6 Henn's remarks were reprinted from the 6th Summer School Handbook (1965) in the 50th anniversary Summer School handbook (2009), 11-13, and in McGarry, as 'What it is all about' (59-61). See also his remarks on the School's 'organic growth' from the map in 'The Place of Shells', his opening lecture in 1968, *Last Essays*, 24.

7 *Five Arches*, 202.

8 50th anniversary Summer School handbook (2009), 11-13.

9 McGarry, 26.

10 'Modern Irish Poetry' (1894) repr. from *A Book of Irish Verse Selected from Modern Writers*, ed. W. B. Yeats (1895, rev. 1900), *Prefaces and Introductions: Uncollected Prefaces and Introductions by Yeats to Works by other Authors and to Anthologies edited by Yeats*, ed. William H. O'Donnell (London: Macmillan, 1988), 106.

11 "Chevalier Burke --- "Shule Aroon" --- Carleton and the Banims' Novels --- An Autograph Sale at Sotheby's --- William Allingham --- Miss Ellen O'Leary (1889)", *Letters to the New Island* edited by George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer (London: Macmillan, 1989), 25. 'Let me sing of what I know' is chosen as the first poem in *Sixteen Poems by William Allingham: selected by William Butler Yeats* (Dundrum: Dun Emer, 1905), [1]. Allingham's last line lies behind Yeats's "'word of advice'" to Clifford Bax, "'Always write ... about what you know'": see his

'... to fully understand these poems one needs to have been born and bred in one of those western Irish towns; to remember how it was the centre of your world, how the mountains and the river and the roads became a portion of your life forever; to have loved with a sense of possession even the roadside bushes where the roadside cottagers hung their clothes to dry. That sense of possession was the very centre of the matter. Elsewhere you are only a passer-by, for everything is owned by so many that it is owned by no one... there... it seemed to you that *a portion of your life was the subject*.¹²

As late as July 1932, he told an audience in Ballsbridge, Dublin that

He had become a poet because of the place where he lived with his grandparents as a child and young man—Sligo. Whenever he looked from his window at Benbulbin, a verse written by William Allingham came to his mind:

Up the heathery mountain
Down the rushy glen
I dared not go a-hunting
For fear of little men¹³

He made up his mind that he would try to do in verse for Sligo what Allingham had done for Ballyshannon, and he took for his motto the lines 'the little town where the little folk went up and down' [*sic*]

A 'portion of [Yeats's] mind and life' (VP 325), Sligo was viewed without sentimentality. In Yeats's semi-autobiographical novel, *John Sherman* (1891), Sligo becomes Ballah. Margaret Leland blames 'that miserable little town you come from, with its sleepy old shops and its sleepy old society' for Sherman's passionlessness.¹⁴ Sherman's former love Mary Carton,

Inland Far: A Book of Thoughts and Impressions (London: Heinemann, 1925), 36-38, also reproduced in *W. B. Yeats: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. E. H. Mikhail (London: Macmillan, 1977), 2 vols, 43-44.

¹² 'The Poet of Ballyshannon' (1888), *Letters to the New Island* edited by George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer (London: Macmillan, 1989), 72, emphasis added.

¹³ See 'Why "Innisfree" was written: Poet tells how Sligo inspired him', *The Sligo Champion Sesquicentenary 1836-1986*. Sligo: *Sligo Champion*, 1986, 73. This reprints a report of an informal talk given by Yeats in July 1932 at St Bartholomew's Vicarage, Clyde Road Ballsbridge. Whether the quoted text of Allingham is what Yeats actually uttered, or whether it includes reporting errors is unknown. 'Up the airy mountain' is more usual in Yeats's quotations from Allingham: see, e.g., the first line of 'The Fairies' in *Sixteen Poems by William Allingham*, 12. 'A wandering, airy music' is found in Yeats's ['At the Grey Round of the Hill']: see *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957, corrected third printing, 1966), 783, hereafter VP. 'This is an airy spot' in the second of the 'Three Marching Songs', is footnoted by Yeats: "'Airy" may be an old pronunciation of "eerie" often heard in Galway and Sligo', VP 614). 'Heathery steep' is quoted in Yeats's first critical essay, 'The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson II': see *Early Articles and Reviews: Uncollected Articles and Reviews written between 1886 and 1900*, eds. John P. Frayne and Madeleine Marchaterre (New York: Scribner, 2004), 25. The word is adopted by Yeats in 'Tracking our way along the heathery mountain', a line from 'The Outlaw's Bridal | Ireland 16—', a poem never published in his lifetime. See George Bornstein's edition of *The Early Poetry, Volume II: "The Wanderings of Oisín" and Other Early Poems to 1895* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 466-67.

¹⁴ *John Sherman AND Dhoya*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), 36.

upbraids him for returning to 'this little town because here is idleness and irresponsibility.'¹⁵ Success was to take Yeats to all the great cities from San Francisco to Rome, but he had a *penchant* for seeing the cultures of the world and contemporary life in terms of the local, the rooted. 'Down at Sligo,' Yeats wrote to Katharine Tynan in 1889, 'one sees the whole world in a day's walk, every man is a class. It is too small for minorities' (CL1 153). Sligo remained the prototype of the 'little town' for Yeats, and, 'little towns' remained dear to him.¹⁶

Yeats had discovered in Sligo that Druidic and Christian 'tapestry' which, he tells us, 'filled the scene at the birth of modern Irish literature' and which 'hangs behind all Irish history'. He had heard 'in Sligo cottages or from pilots at Rosses Point endless stories of apparitions, whether of the recent dead, or of the people of history and legend, of that Queen Maeve whose reputed cairn stands on the mountain over the bay.' Following up this lore at the British Museum library, he was 'enraged' at the 'disfiguring humour' in

'stories [by] Irish writers of the forties and fifties [who] had written of such apparitions, but ... turned the country visions into a joke.'

... Our mythology, our legends, differ from those of other European countries because down to the end of the seventeenth century they had the attention, perhaps the unquestioned belief, of peasant and noble alike; Homer belongs to sedentary men, even today our ancient queens, our mediaeval soldiers and lovers, can make a pedlar shudder. I can put my own thought, despair perhaps from the study of present circumstance in the light of ancient philosophy, into the mouth of rambling poets of the seventeenth century, or even of some imagined ballad singer of today, and the deeper my thought the more credible, the more peasant-like, are ballad singer and rambling poet.¹⁷

Now back to those scholars who inhabited Yeats's tradition and built the Summer School into it. T. R. Henn (1901-74) was the son of a Sligo Resident Magistrate. He spent his first 13 years here, later remarking that Sligo, the 'nursing mother of Yeats', had been and 'perhaps remains, a small provincial town redeemed from sordidness by the two mountains that are in constant sight, Ben Bulbin and Knocknarea ...'.¹⁸ His Anglo-Irish landed family had owned a big house, 'Paradise', in Ballynaclarry, Co. Clare, since 1685.¹⁹ He studied at St. Catharine's College, Cambridge, where he was elected Fellow in 1926.²⁰ Later a British Army Intelligence Officer, and a staff officer in Supreme Allied Command, Brigadier Henn CBE

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 74.

¹⁶ See Appendix below.

¹⁷ 'A General Introduction to my Work', *Essays and Introductions* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1961), 513-14.

¹⁸ *Five Arches*, 13.

¹⁹ See http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/genealogy/don_tran/fam_his/henns/part5.htm 'At the time of my birth and childhood the houses had not spread far along the road to Ballisodare and Dublin, and the square ugly house in which I was born stood almost on the outskirts, in its own grounds, and was called, perhaps in some excess of Victoria patriotism, Albert House. The garden was large, raised well above the road, and held a tiny wood at one end. ... Along one side of the walled garden lay a deep sunken lane, leading to the yard and the coach-house (*Five Arches*, 13). As Resident Magistrate (RM) in Sligo, Francis Blackburne Henn (1848-1915) lived with his family in Sligo, although returning to Paradise for some weeks in the summer and around Christmas. They moved permanently to Paradise, which he had inherited on his father's death in 1901, on his retirement as RM in 1913. See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Rice_Henn.

²⁰ Educated in Fermoy and later at Aldenham School, he had gained an Exhibition at St Catherine's.

returned to St Catherine's College, where became President (1951-61). The writing of *The Lonely Tower* (1950) had taken him back to Sligo for the first time since 1913, via Ballylee, its cottages in the ruin Yeats had foretold. Yeats's "Under Saturn" came to his mind:

"You have come again,
And surely after twenty years it was time to come."
I am thinking of a child's vow sworn in vain
Never to leave that valley his fathers called their home.²¹

In 1958-60, Henn saw himself simply as the 'servant of the Yeats Society'. After studying the Stratford Shakespeare Institute's Summer School, Henn set out founding principles for the Yeats Society's Summer School. It seemed proper, he wrote,

that the [Yeats] society and its work should remain autonomous rather than to seek to place itself under the "umbrella" of any particular university' [despite] 'recurrent approaches on these lines from North America. If we had accepted we should no doubt have solved many of our financial difficulties, but at the cost of sacrificing the character of the school, possibly at the expense of turning it into a kind of "overseas annexe". ...it [also] seemed undesirable to forge any firm link with any one of the ... Irish universities ...²²

Henn confronted local difficulties with military efficiency.²³ As *éminence grise* he installed Denis Donoghue as titular Director for the first Summer School, Oliver Edwards for the second and remained Director himself from 1962-68, his name attracting the best Yeats scholars of his times from around the world. Were I to chant the names of the great scholars whom he enticed to Sligo and the titles of their books, we'd be here all night, because Henn insisted that the lectures and seminar teaching should be research-based. The harvest of this policy can be gauged from the collections of Sligo-based essays which have, over the years, mounted up to the extent that Sligo as a research engine would now constitute a research project in itself.²⁴ In Henn's view, however, there was a residual 'difficulty ... to persuade lecturers to lecture, rather than read learned papers; ... not all realized the difference between lecturing and essay techniques.²⁵

Henn wanted a teaching occasion, a Summer *School*. He dispensed with the granting of credit based on written and graded papers which, he felt, would have destroyed its

²¹ VP 391.

²² *Five Arches*, 204-05.

²³ The echoing auditorium in the Town Hall lacked a microphone amplifier and speakers. Henn's vast administrative and academic experience were tried by other constraints such as accommodation, and the constraint of a fortnight fixed by the vacations of the Sligo Grammar School. There, the dormitories' angle-iron beds and palliasses were, I recall, a challenge which took me back to the miseries of my own school.

²⁴ In addition to Henn's *Last Essays*, one thinks especially of the centenary collections, W. B. Yeats 1865-1965: *Centenary Essays*, edited by D. E. S. Maxwell and Suheil B. Bushrui (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1965); *An Honoured Guest: New Essays on W. B. Yeats* edited by Denis Donoghue and J. R. Mulryne (London: Edward Arnold, 1965), and *In Excited Reverie: A Centenary Tribute to William Butler Yeats 1865-1939* edited by A. Norman Jeffares and K. G. W. Cross (London, Melbourne, Toronto: Macmillan, St. Martin's Press, 1965).

²⁵ *Five Arches*, 207. He dispensed too, with the idea of publishing the lectures. An annual volume of published talks seemed too ambitious and involved copyright problems, whilst letting the lecturers develop their talks into essays to be published where they would help to disseminate the Summer School's name more widely.

character. Dispensing, too, with the idea of publishing the lectures, he sought to avoid an annual Yeats Conference consisting merely of research papers, preferring

a teaching organization for 'a wide spectrum of students, ranging from scholars of the highest repute, or promise, to visitors who sought to 'fit in' the School as part of an Irish or ... European tour'.²⁶

Lecturers were expected to give up to three lectures per summer school. Given the fractious nature of universities at the time, and the Leavisite critical Calvinism spreading out from Henn's own university and inf(lecting) the teaching of literature, Sligo became an antidote to the universities.²⁷ Let me honour the precepts of just one of those first lecturers, Frank Kermode, who wrote of academic factionalism, and the basic imperative for research-led teaching:

In their own time they can read what they like and deconstruct or neo-historicise what they like, but in the classroom they should be on their honour to make people know books well enough to understand what it is to love them. If they fail in that, either because they despise the humbleness of the task or because they don't themselves love literature, they are failures and frauds. I hope I make myself clear.²⁸

Sligo offered teaching to all levels of engagement with Yeats, with sometimes electrifying rewards: an elderly Dominican nun from Albuquerque, Sister Marybride Ryan, in a seminar of Barbara Hardy's on 'Among School Children' told her startled class about Senator Yeats's inspection of St. Otteran's School, Waterford, on 22 February 1926. Shown her poems, he called her forward: she then, had been the 'paddler', the 'living child' remembered in the poem. She subsequently published her memories of the occasion, and a poem about Yeats.²⁹

What 'blew' one's mind 'open' here in the West was oral history, and a sweep of Irish historical and cultural learnedness unknown in undergraduate Literature studies, and little found at the time in graduate research topics. I think of the lectures of Professor Kevin Nolan on the Land Wars. Or of Professor Francis John Byrne on the Irish Mythological Background. To walk out of those lectures into a landscape where every field, every rock and hill, even every tree, had its history and geography was to encounter not just myth, folklore, history, but, it seemed, the sacredness of the land and landscape—handed on, then as now, by the well-informed volunteers from the Yeats Society. And the rootedness of Yeats within it, 'rooted' being a word Yeats himself of course applied to Synge, Lady Gregory, and the chestnut tree in 'A Prayer for my Daughter'.

²⁶ *Five Arches*, 203. See also 'The Place of Shells' in *Last Essays*: '... many people come to Sligo with, as it were, empty hands, saying in effect: 'I don't know much about Ireland, or Yeats, or indeed poetry. But I want to learn about these things' (22).

²⁷ For a short, trenchant student's perspective on F. R. Leavis as 'self-saboteur' and his impact on Cambridge in the 1960s, see Clive James, *May Week was in June: More Unreliable Memoirs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), 63-68.

²⁸ Emphases added. Kermode insisted that it is essential to 'keep the road open', to maintain, somehow, a style of talking about literature ... which will preserve the reading public, and—quite simply—literature (which we must presume to recognise) from destruction. I regard this as by far the most important single element in the task of university teachers of literature; it is nothing less than the preservation of what we give that name.' See his 'The Men on the Dump: A Response', in *Addressing Frank Kermode: Essays in Criticism and Interpretation* edited by Margaret Tudeau-Clayton and Martin Warner (London: Macmillan, 1991), 103.

²⁹ Sister Marybride Ryan, 'The Paddler's Heritage: Yeats's Visit to St. Otteran's School, 1926', *Yeats Annual* 7, edited by Warwick Gould (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1990), 207-08.

Magical as Sligo's unique academic mood seemed, it had been painstakingly assembled by Henn. His autobiography, *Five Arches*, describes the principles and processes by which he did it. He was, as he says, 'perhaps the only man in England who knew intimately [Yeats's] country, both in Sligo and Clare, who was, like him, of Anglo-Irish stock, and who was thus qualified to have some knowledge at least of the background.'³⁰ His *Last Essays* collect many based on his Sligo lectures, but in my first year, Henn lectured on 'The Big House'. His own family's big house, 'Paradise' had survived the burnings following the Easter Rising, but succumbed to a suspicious fire in October 1970 just two months after that lecture.³¹

As a soldier, Henn looked at Sligo's topography and history from a military and strategic perspective, but as a poet, Henn *heard* the poetic values in its place names: he deepened the landscape he had known and loved so well from boyhood into a soundscape. The annotations in his teaching copy of the old *Collected Poems* concentrate almost exclusively on the sonics of the poems—that was always his point of departure. He would fill the awed silence of a seminar with his majestic, "'great cathedral voice'",³² in dramatic reverie, as if he were channelling Yeats himself. He 'believe[d, and affirmed] that our dead watch us, and that they sometimes return'.³³ So, the soldier could be '[c]aught', like Yeats confronting the affable irregular at the tower, 'in the cold snows of a dream'. Yeats's 'Long-legged Fly' in Henn's autobiography is associated with his days as an Intelligence Officer playing war-games, anti-invasion exercises with Generals Auchinleck and Alexander poring over maps at Wilton House, Wiltshire. Illustrating Caesar at the crossing of the Rubicon in a seminar on the poem, Henn conjured an *aide-de-camp* watching General Wavell in his tent in the Western Desert in the battle with Rommel, '[h]is eyes fixed upon nothing, | His hand under his head. | Like a long-legged fly upon the stream | His mind moves upon silence.' (VP 617). After the seminars he would fill his big BMW with students and drive them erratically around Lough Gill, pointing out sites from Yeats's poems, and chanting the lines.

Before I had left Dublin, I had gone to a debate at Trinity, staged by the Dublin Maoists. I could not understand their line on Yeats—viz., that 'Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge were Fascist traitors', but then they didn't either.³⁴ Nor did they respond to my sole contribution, 'Yeats is bigger than this'. They vowed to march on Sligo in a few days' time. Henn and the Director, Professor A. Norman (Derry) Jeffares were well prepared and tipped off the Gardai. Potential 'majestic measures'³⁵ proved unnecessary. Evidently Chairman Mao Tse-Tung's *Little Red Book* (1964) offered no advice on how to deal with men of the calibre of Tom Henn and Derry Jeffares, so they meekly sat out Henn's lecture before the long march back to Dublin.

The very first lecture at the very first Summer School had been delivered by Jeffares, 'Yeats: The Man and the Poet'. He was Henn's anointed successor as Director from 1969. A Wexford

30 *Five Arches*, 192.

31 Henn tells us in 'The Centenary Yeats' that 'Paradise' had been 'under sentence of burning' for half a century before it was destroyed in October 1970. See *Last Essays*, 72 and n. 1.

32 As described by Tom Mullaney, Sligo solicitor and one of the prime movers of the Summer School, as remembered by Kathleen Raine in 'A Joyous Meeting Place', McGarry, 49.

33 Address by Thomas Rice Henn, *President of St. Catherine's College, Cambridge, on the occasion of the gift of Duras House, Kinvara to An Óige Irish Youth Hostel Association, to be dedicated to the Memory of W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, and Florimond, Count de Basterot, Kinvara, 20 August, 1961 (Dublin: printed by courtesy of The Irish Times, [1961]), [3].*

34 The quoted words are Henn's, see *Last Essays*, 29, n. 1, and Foreword, x.

35 For Jeffares's memories of these plans see his 'Early Days', McGarry, 30-35 (34-35).

Protestant, Jeffares, had been schooled at Yeats's Dublin school, the Erasmus School, where he had edited the school magazine, *The Erasmian*. In 1937, Jeffares had asked Yeats for a poem. Yeats warned him that the poems he was then writing were not suitable for schoolboys but Jeffares, as any who wrote for him will tell you, never took 'no' as other than a challenge: 'What Then?' duly appeared in *The Erasmian* in April 1937. Jeffares, a contemporary of the Yeatses' son, Michael, had interviewed Mrs Yeats and Maud Gonne and other associates of the poet for his 1944 TCD doctorate, the basis for his great *Commentary* on Yeats's poems.³⁶

The traditions of the Summer School were established and consolidated by these two great Anglo-Irishmen, Henn from Sligo and Jeffares from Wexford, both 'brought up to leave' Ireland, in Jeffares's phrase,³⁷ just as Yeats had been. But they, like Yeats, knew the value of the local as a lens through which to focus on the universals of poetic knowledge. I think too of the independent scholars they enlisted—the Pound scholar Patricia Hutchins, the Balzac scholar, Daphne Fullwood, and the poet, Kathleen Raine. All who created this School worked directly in the tradition of Yeats's Druidic and Christian 'tapestry'.

In 60 years, the Summer School itself has passed into Sligo folklore—the great tapestry. Sligo—place and space, focus and amplitude—still directs the student's attention onto the 'Identity of Yeats' and away from current obsessions, whether fashionable identity politics or Poundian ideas of excellence, those which Yeats described as 'something so international that it is abstract and outside life'.³⁸

Sligo's mission to bring here the poets of the day is a venerable tradition. In 1970, Seamus Heaney lectured on 'Yeats's Diction'; an austere Geoffrey Hill lectured on 'History as Poetry in Yeats',³⁹ Brendan Kennelly on 'Synge and Yeats', Thomas Kinsella on 'Ancient and Modern Irish Poetry', Michael Longley on 'Yeats the Tragedian'. Ordinary lecturers were offered the usual open slot for them to read their own poems—if they dared. In 1972, John Unterecker sweated through his epic on Dutch Elm Disease. Way over his allotted time, he paused. 'Fitt the Second' he said, as attention withered, like the boughs. Kennelly slipped to the floor like a bag of shot and crawled along my row. Chairs scraped and feet shuffled as he squirmed out. With a final lunge across the clear six feet at the end of the row and through the spring-loaded exit doors, and with every envious eye on the final wriggle of his builder's cleavage, Brendan Kennelly, former Associate Director, poet *and* critic, was free. Lucky fellow.

By 1971, Heaney and Longley had set up a nocturnal alternative summer school in the old Imperial Hotel, with readings over four nights for Eliot's *Four Quartets*. This was in

³⁶ First published in 1965. Jeffares's first biography, *W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet*, had appeared from Routledge and Kegan Paul in 1949.

³⁷ *Brought up to Leave* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd, 1987) is Derry Jeffares's second volume of poems, balancing *Brought up in Dublin* (also Colin Smythe Ltd, 1987).

³⁸ To invoke the title of a book by another early Sligo lecturer, Richard Ellmann. Yeats's 1930 diary deplures 'Pound's conception of excellence, [which] like that of all revolutionary schools, is of something so international that it is abstract and outside life. ... A good poet must, as Henley said of Burns, be the last of a dynasty, and he must see to it that his Court expels the parvenu even though he gather all the riches of the world (*Explorations*, sel. Mrs W. B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1962; New York: Macmillan, 1963, 24-95).

³⁹ Later published as "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure": A Debate', *Agenda* 9:4–10:1 (Autumn-Winter 1971/72, 14-23. On the bus trip to and from Ballylee and Coole, he defended the spare seat beside him from all comers.

competition with the noise of the bar, where pints of Guinness flowed, despite Tom Henn in pyjamas and dressing gown at the top of the stairs 'upbraiding the revellers' on behalf of the would-be sleepers, just like Malvolio, as Daphne Fullwood recalled.⁴⁰ Some of us managed an hour's sleep before climbing Ben Bulben at sunrise. Now, to those able enough to do it, that climb really *is* unforgettable.

APPENDIX

I wrote this six weeks ago in Rapallo, just 100 yards from what is now 34, corso Cristoforo Colombo,⁴¹ where Yeats lived during 1928-30, and where there is a plaque in his honour. The words on the plaque open *A Packet for Ezra Pound* and are translated in revised form from *A Vision* (1937).

HERE LIVED 1928-1930
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS (1865-1939)
IRISH POET, WRITING
A VISION AND WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

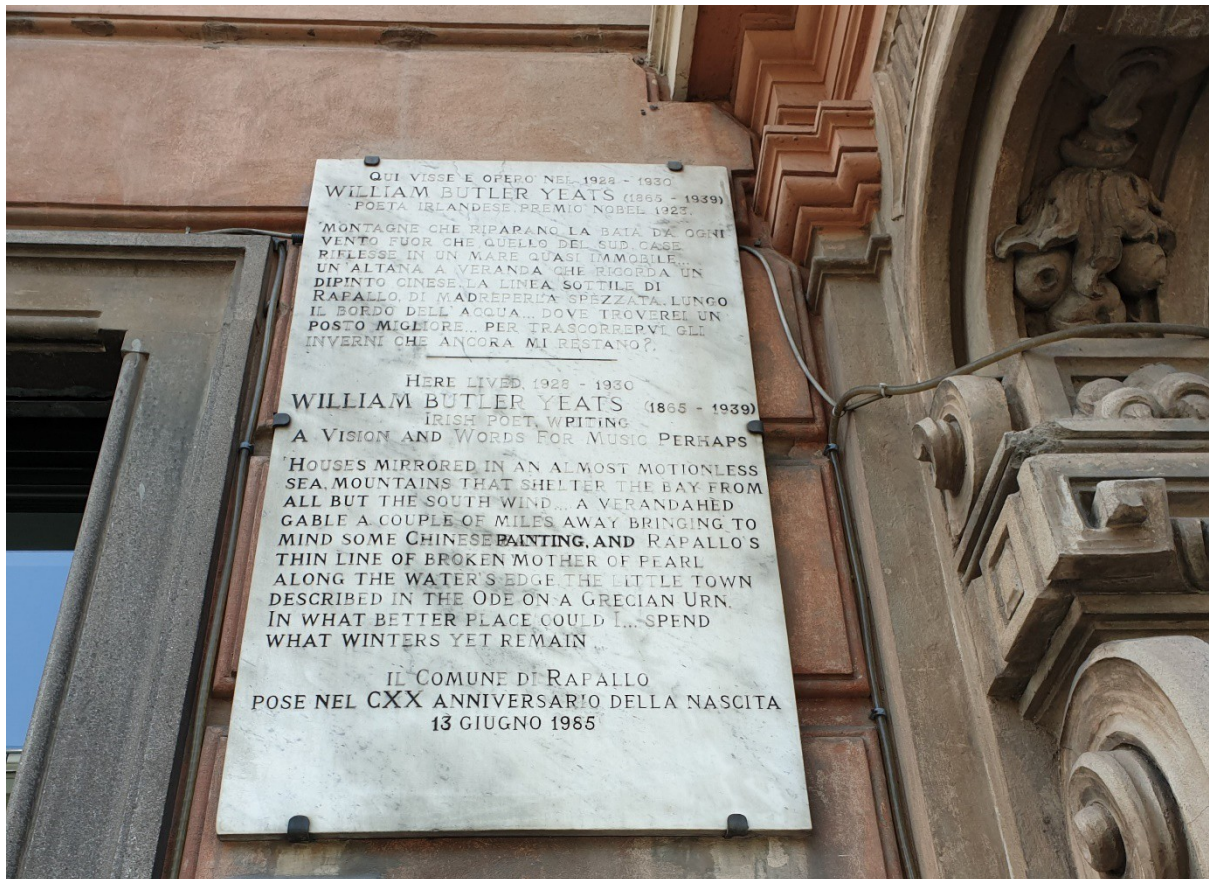
'HOUSES MIRRORED IN AN ALMOST MOTIONLESS SEA, MOUNTAINS THAT SHELTER THE BAY FROM ALL BUT THE SOUTH WIND ... A VERANDAHED GABLE A COUPLE OF MILES AWAY BRINGING TO MIND SOME CHINESE PAINTING, AND RAPALLO'S THIN LINE OF BROKEN MOTHER OF PEARL ALONG THE WATER'S EDGE. THE LITTLE TOWN DESCRIBED IN THE ODE ON A GRECIAN URN. IN WHAT BETTER PLACE COULD I ... SPEND WHAT WINTERS YET REMAIN?'

Keats had asked 'What little town, by river or sea shore': Yeats had no doubt. Rapallo was 'Sligo in Heaven' he 'murmured', to Ezra Pound, who jotted the murmur into *Canto 77*. An image follows.

WG, 01-08-19.

⁴⁰ 'Memories of the Yeats International Summer School', McGarry 38-41 (40).

⁴¹ In Yeats's day, 12/8 via Americhe. The name of the street was changed after the outbreak of war between the United States and Mussolini's Italy (information, Massimo Bacigalupo).



Plaque at 34, corso Cristoforo Colombo, Rapallo, © Warwick Gould