THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

BY

W. B. YEATS

AT THE HUT
Monday, June 23rd
Tuesday, June 24th
Thursday, June 26th
Friday, June 27th
1947
INTRODUCTORY NOTE

“The Countess Cathleen,” by the Irish poet, W. B. Yeats, is essentially, that is, by inner right, poetic drama. For it deals with man’s spirit; it presents a central conflict between the absolute power of good, victorious through utter self-abnegation, and the pitiless confidence of demoniac evil. To handle that theme dramatically demands the creative imagination of a poet.

Yeats has given it a “local habitation and a name,” a plot and characters that make it concrete and particular. Though it is of universal significance, it is direct, immediate, not esoteric; it is, in fact, a good play. The time is the time of Celtic legend; the names and some of the vivid details are strange; the awareness of spiritual powers is more natural, being quite free from self-consciousness, than in the “modern times” of which we are now uneasily aware that we cannot be entirely proud. Nevertheless, the play speaks to us of ourselves, and the symbolic intent is as directly evident as in an English Morality Play.

But, to compare this play with pre-Shakespearean English Morality, there is a difference by which Yeats gains incalculably, that is, in the quality of the verse. For the verse of English Morality is not free from clumsiness and pedestrianism. Yeats, however, is not only a great poet, but a great poet to whom the instrument of verse comes made infinitely subtle, sure, and flexible by long generations of sensitive craftsmanship. His verse here is subtly, surely, and flexibly fitted to his needs. It is a blank verse, simple but supple, which without strain can give, equally well, vivid and sinewy peasant conversation, poetic love, demoniac mockery, saintly exaltation. Words of the old Foster Mother, Oona, may here illustrate this range, from her practical and impatient:

“There should be broken bottles on the wall,”
to the words with which she ends the play, lines Aeschylean in the power of their imagery, yet at the same time lines with the pathos and beauty of a Euripidean chorus at the close:

“The years like great black oxen tread the world,
And God the herdsmen goads them on behind,
And I am broken by their passing feet.”

Some years ago the Producer had the privilege of being acquainted with the poet. In discussion of the possibility of a production of “The Countess Cathleen” in Australia, an idea dear to his heart, Yeats stressed two things he would particularly wish: that the half-immortal Aleel, the Poet, should be played by a woman, as at the Abbey Theatre; and, secondly, that the settings should be simple, and should have the effect of missal painting. In order as far as possible to fulfill the latter wish, “The Book of Kells” has been studied in the designing of the scenes for this production. In general, the style and feeling of this production are, it is hoped, akin to what Yeats himself would have wished.
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Players in order of appearance

SHEMUS RUA, a Peasant .................................................. EDGAR WISE
MARY, His Wife ......................................................... STELLA SOBELS
TEIG, His Son .......................................................... WYLTON DICKSON
THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN ........................................ PATRICIA HACKETT
OONA, Her Foster Mother ............................................. IRIS THOMAS
ALEEL, a Poet .............................................................. JOANNE PRIEST
FIRST DEMON, disguised as a Merchant ...................... MARTIN KETLEY
SECOND DEMON, disguised as a merchant .................. HERBERT ALDRIDGE
STEWARD TO COUNTESS CATHLEEN ............................ DAVID GEORGE
YOUNG PEASANT WOMAN ............................................. HELEN WESTERN
OLD PEASANT WOMAN ................................................... BARBARA SHANAHAN
YOUNG PEASANT MAN .................................................. DON FRANCIS

The scene is laid in Ireland and in ancient times

Scene I Shemus Rua’s cabin in the woods
Scene II A wood near the castle
Scene III A hall in the house of Countess Cathleen
Scene IV A wood near the castle
Scene V Shemus Rua’s cabin

Production under the direction of Patricia Hackett

The incidental music is arranged and directed by DUNCAN McKIE
and played by the following members of the
UNLEY HIGH SCHOOL ORCHESTRA:
Tom Parkin, violin; Peter Furness, viola; Dennis Sallis, flute; Eric Furness,
first clarinet; Tasman Brown, second clarinet

Stage Settings .......................................................... MICHAEL JAMES
Stage Decoration ....................................................... GWEN WALSH
Lighting .............................................................. BRUCE WALTON
UNIVERSITY THEATRE GUILD

Patrons:
Professor E. Harold Davies
Dr. C. E. Fenner
Professor J. G. Cornell
Mr. F. S. Johnson

Miss E. Brown
Mr. T. Brown
Dr. T. D. Campbell
Miss Rosemary Fitch
Miss Patricia Hackett
Miss Barbara Howard
Professor C. Jury
Mr. Roy Leaney
Dr. E. McLaughlin
Mrs. J. R. Thompson
Miss G. D. Walsh

NOTICES

Communications, enquiries, and subscriptions may be addressed to the Hon. Secretary, Miss E. Wedd, Lister House, North Terrace (C. 2315), or care of the University.

Those interested in a study class in stage work, which will be started shortly, please communicate with the Hon. Secretary.

Next Production: J. B. Priestley’s “AN INSPECTOR CALLS,” under the direction of Miss Thelma Baulderstone.

(Miss) E. WEDD, Hon. Secretary.

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