

Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

TCLC 10

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series

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(or author is still living)

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Ernest Hemingway, Iris Murdoch

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Volume 10

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Excerpts from Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1960,
from the First Published Critical Appraisals
to Current Evaluations**

**Dennis Poupard
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**Gale Research Company
Book Tower
Detroit, Michigan 48226**

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PREFACE

It is impossible to overvalue the importance of literature in the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual evolution of humanity. Literature is that which both lifts us out of everyday life and helps us to better understand it. Through the fictive lives of such characters as Anna Karenin, Lambert Strether, or Leopold Bloom, our perceptions of the human condition are enlarged, and we are enriched.

Literary criticism can also give us insight into the human condition, as well as into the specific moral and intellectual atmosphere of an era, for the criteria by which a work of art is judged reflects contemporary philosophical and social attitudes. Literary criticism takes many forms: the traditional essay, the book or play review, even the parodic poem. Criticism can also be of several kinds: normative, descriptive, interpretive, textual, appreciative, generic. Collectively, the range of critical response helps us to understand a work of art, an author, an era.

The Scope of the Book

The usefulness of Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, which excerpts criticism on current writing, suggested an equivalent need among literature students and teachers interested in authors of the period 1900 to 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, and playwrights of this period are by far the most popular writers for study in high school and college literature courses. Moreover, since contemporary critics continue to analyze the work of this period—both in its own right and in relation to today's tastes and standards—a vast amount of relevant critical material confronts the student.

Thus, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)* presents significant passages from published criticism on authors who died between 1900 and 1960. Because of the difference in time span under consideration (*CLC* considers authors who were still living after 1959), there is no duplication between *CLC* and *TCLC*.

Each volume of *TCLC* is carefully designed to present a list of authors who represent a variety of genres and nationalities. The length of an author's section is intended to be representative of the amount of critical attention he or she has received from critics writing in English, or foreign criticism in translation. Critical articles and books that have not been translated into English are excluded. Every attempt has been made to identify and include excerpts from the seminal essays on each author's work. Additionally, as space permits, especially insightful essays of a more limited scope are included. Thus *TCLC* is designed to serve as an introduction for the student of twentieth-century literature to the authors of that period and to the most significant commentators on these authors.

Each *TCLC* author section represents the scope of critical response to that author's work: some early criticism is presented to indicate initial reactions, later criticism is selected to represent any rise or fall in an author's reputation, and current retrospective analyses provide students with a modern view. Since a *TCLC* author section is intended to be a definitive overview, the editors include between 20 and 30 authors in each 600-page volume (compared to approximately 75 authors in a *CLC* volume of similar size) in order to devote more attention to each author. An author may appear more than once because of the great quantity of critical material available, or because of a resurgence of criticism generated by events such as an author's centennial or anniversary celebration, the republication of an author's works, or publication of a newly translated work or volume of letters.

The Organization of the Book

An author section consists of the following elements: author heading, biocritical introduction, principal works, excerpts of criticism (each followed by a citation), and an annotated bibliography of additional reading.

- The *author heading* consists of the author's full name, followed by birth and death dates. The unbracketed portion of the name denotes the form under which the author most commonly wrote. If an author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the biocritical introduction. Also located at the beginning of the biocritical introduction are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertainty as to a birth or death date is indicated by a question mark.

- The *biocritical introduction* contains biographical and other background information about an author that will elucidate his or her creative output. Parenthetical material following several of the biocritical introductions includes references to biographical and critical reference series published by the Gale Research Company. These include *Contemporary Authors*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, and past volumes of *TCLC*.
- The *list of principal works* is chronological by date of first book publication and identifies genres. In the case of foreign authors where there are both foreign language publications and English translations, the title and date of the first English-language edition are given in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- *Criticism* is arranged chronologically in each author section to provide a perspective on any changes in critical evaluation over the years. In the text of each author entry, titles by the author are printed in boldface type. This allows the reader to ascertain without difficulty the works discussed. For purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the journal in which it appeared. For an anonymous essay later attributed to a critic, the critic's name appears in brackets in the heading and in the citation.

Important critical essays are prefaced by *explanatory notes* as an additional aid to students using *TCLC*. The explanatory notes will provide several types of useful information, including: the reputation of a critic; the reputation of a work of criticism; the specific type of criticism (biographical, psychoanalytic, structuralist, etc.); and the growth of critical controversy or changes in critical trends regarding an author's work. In many cases, these notes will cross-reference the work of critics who agree or disagree with each other.

- A complete *bibliographical citation* designed to facilitate location of the original essay or book by the interested reader accompanies each piece of criticism. An asterisk (*) at the end of a citation indicates the essay is on more than one author.
- The *annotated bibliography* appearing at the end of each author section suggests further reading on the author. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights. An asterisk (*) at the end of a citation indicates the essay is on more than one author.

Each volume of *TCLC* includes a cumulative index to critics. Under each critic's name is listed the authors on which the critic has written and the volume and page where the criticism may be found. *TCLC* also includes a cumulative index to authors with the volume numbers in which the author appears in boldface after his or her name. A cumulative nationality index is another useful feature in *TCLC*. Author names are arranged alphabetically under their respective nationalities and followed by the volume numbers in which they appear.

Acknowledgments

No work of this scope can be accomplished without the cooperation of many people. The editors especially wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpts included in this volume, the permission managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in locating copyright holders, and the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, University of Detroit Library, University of Michigan Library, and Wayne State University Library for making their resources available to us. We are also grateful to Jeri Yaryan for her assistance with copyright research.

Suggestions Are Welcome

Several features have been added to *TCLC* since its original publication in response to various suggestions:

- Since Volume 2—An *Appendix* which lists the sources from which material in the volume is reprinted.
- Since Volume 3—An *Annotated Bibliography* for additional reading.
- Since Volume 4—*Portraits* of the authors.
- Since Volume 6—A *Nationality Index* for easy access to authors by nationality.
- Since Volume 9—*Explanatory notes* to excerpted criticism which provide important information regarding critics and their work.

If readers wish to suggest authors they would like to have covered in future volumes, or if they have other suggestions, they are cordially invited to write the editor.

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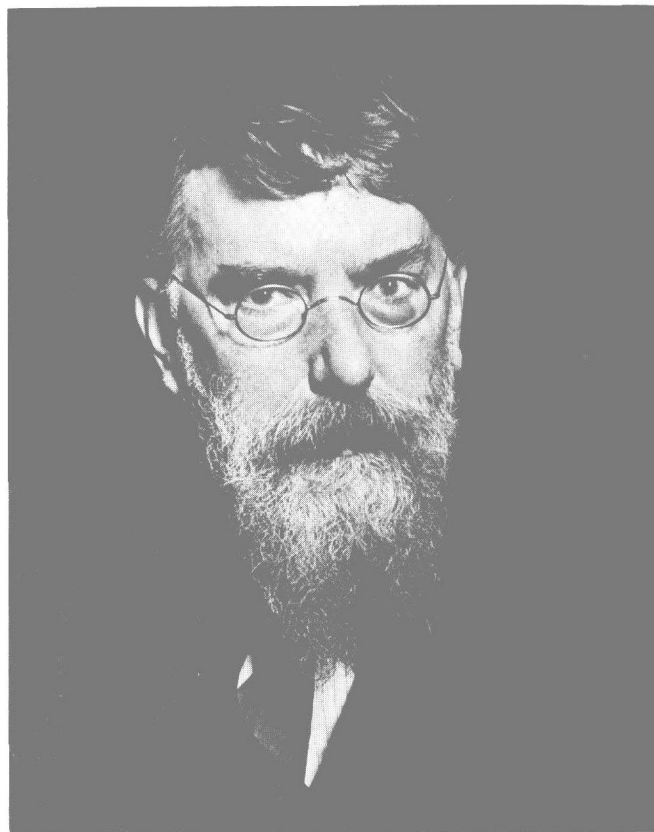
Readers are cordially invited to suggest additional authors to the editors.

(Pseudonym of George William Russell; also wrote under pseudonyms of Y.O., O.L.S., and Gab) Irish poet, essayist, editor, journalist, dramatist, autobiographer, and novelist.

A key figure in the Irish Literary Revival, A.E. contributed more to the movement through his personality than through his artistry. He was a gifted conversationalist, a popular lecturer, and a generous man who brought many of the members of the Revival together. Although A.E.'s interests were varied, he earned a modest literary reputation based on his mystical poems and his drama, *Deirdre*. He was central to the rise of the Irish National Theatre, and, with W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, and Lady Gregory, was one of the founders of the Abbey Theatre. Through his work and his charismatic personality, A.E. was an important influence on the writers of the Irish Revival, a generation which sought to reduce the influence of English culture and create an Irish national literature.

A.E. had a pious upbringing and from his youth was inclined toward mysticism. While studying painting at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, A.E. met Yeats, who became his lifelong friend. Through Yeats, A.E. became involved in the theosophical movement, in which he found a channel for his mystical interests. These interests were a mixture of belief in Buddhism, theosophy, magic, reincarnation, pantheism, and elements of Irish mythology that served as the inspiration for his early poems, collected in *Homeward: Songs by the Way*, *The Earth Breath*, and *The Divine Vision*. The poems of these early volumes are characterized by their colorful imagery, archaic language, and exaltation of the Earth as a life-sustaining mother, which is a recurring motif throughout A.E.'s work. It was during this period that A.E.'s unusual pseudonym was acquired. A typesetter was unable to decipher the scribbled pen name Æon, with which A.E. had signed an article, and so printed only the first two letters. A.E. was delighted with the result and used the pseudonym throughout his life.

By 1905, A.E. had become a guiding force behind the Agricultural Cooperative Movement and was appointed editor of its chief organ, *The Irish Homestead*, which later became *The Irish Statesman*. The political essays he published in the magazine and in his book *The National Being: Some Thoughts on an Irish Polity* propose plans for the development of a more practical Irish government. A.E. promoted Irish Home Rule, but unlike many of his fellow nationalists, he stressed the importance of political moderation and reconciliation with Great Britain. One of A.E.'s most widely read books of political essays, *The National Being*, definitively states the author's economic policies, calling for a cooperative commonwealth for the new Republic of Ireland. In addition to his political activities, A.E. was very involved in the cultural life of Ireland at this time. His only play, *Deirdre*, treats the ancient legend of the Red Branch, and was, with Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, one of the earliest productions of the modern Irish theater. Together, the two dramas contributed to the period now known as the Celtic Twilight, a late nineteenth-century period when Irish artists attempted to give Irish art and culture a distinct



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national and spiritual identity based on ancient Celtic legend. Always interested in encouraging and promoting other Irish authors, A.E. hosted a weekly gathering at his home, attracting such artists as Yeats, George Moore, Padraic Colum, and James Stephens. As editor of *The Irish Statesman*, he also provided a forum for these writers. In his last years, broken by the death of his wife, and saddened by the increasing factional hatred and violence in Ireland, A.E. retired to England, where he died.

A.E. was devoted to the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and shared with him an interest in pantheism and transcendentalism as well as a desire to wed spiritual beliefs with social action. A.E. also recognized his own vision in the life-affirming poetry of William Blake. In *The Candle of Vision*, a work often referred to as his spiritual autobiography, A.E. expressed a thorough and thoughtful elucidation of his development from childhood to adulthood. His discussion of visions and intuition led Leslie Shepard to claim that *The Candle of Vision* "is an essential key, not only to Russell, but also to the mystic life itself, which is the inheritance of everyone." The book won A.E. recognition and respect as a mystic both in Ireland and North America. The essay collection *Song and Its Fountains* is A.E.'s explanation for the creation of poetry. Stating that poetry originates from the divine inner being rather than from

experience, A.E. relates his mystical revelations in an autobiographical style similar to that of *The Candle of Vision*.

Although his poetry is generally characterized by monotonous repetitions of themes and images, critics praise the sincerity of A.E.'s thought and inspiration. Some critics, such as Ernest Boyd, suggest that the repetitiveness of his verse results "because words as fresh as the emotion prompting them are not always to be found." Yeats, whose poetry overshadows A.E.'s, referred to him as "the most subtle and spiritual poet of his generation." But other critics question the legitimacy of A.E.'s spiritual inclinations, and believe that his mystical ideals often outweigh his artistry, and that his poetry is highly derivative and facile. The critical consensus is that he survives not as a painter, poet, or politician, but as the embodiment of the beliefs and principles of the Irish Revival.

(See also *TCLC*, Vol. 3 and *Contemporary Authors*, Vol. 104.)

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Homeward: Songs by the Way* (poetry) 1894
The Earth Breath, and Other Poems (poetry) 1897
Deirdre (drama) 1902
The Divine Vision, and Other Poems (poetry) 1904
Co-operation and Nationality: A Guide for Rural Reformers from This to the Next Generation (essays) 1912
Collected Poems (poetry) 1913
Gods of War (poetry) 1915
The National Being: Some Thoughts on an Irish Polity (essays) 1916
The Candle of Vision (autobiography) 1918
The Interpreters (novel) 1922
Enchantment and Other Poems (poetry) 1930
Vale and Other Poems (poetry) 1931
Song and Its Fountains (essays) 1932
The Avatars: A Futurist Fantasy (novel) 1933
The House of the Titans and Other Poems (poetry) 1934
Selected Poems (poetry) 1935
The Living Torch (essays) 1937
Letters from A.E. (letters) 1961
Selections from the Contributions to the "Irish Homestead." 2 vols. (essays) 1978

W. B. YEATS (essay date 1894)

[Yeats offers an approving review of *Homeward: Songs by the Way*.]

About twelve years ago seven youths began to study European magic and Oriental mysticism, and because, as the Gaelic proverb puts it, contention is better than loneliness, agreed to meet at times in a room in a dirty back street and to call their meetings "The Dublin Hermetic Society." . . . These periodical meetings started a movement, and the movement has begun to make literature. One of the group published last year a very interesting book of verse which he withdrew from circulation in a moment of caprice, and now "A.E.," its arch-visionary, has published *'Homeward: Songs by the Way,'* a pamphlet of exquisite verse. He introduces it with this quaint preface: "I moved among men and places and in living I learned the truth at last. I know I am a spirit, and that I went forth from the self-ancestral to labours yet unaccomplished; but, filled ever

and again with home-sickness, I made these songs by the way." The pamphlet is in no sense, however, the work of a preacher, but of one who utters, for the sake of beauty alone, the experience of a delicate and subtle temperament. He is a moralist, not because he desires, like the preacher, to coerce our will, but because good and evil are a part of what he splendidly calls "the multitudinous meditation" of the divine world in whose shadow he seeks to dwell. No one who has an ear for poetry at all can fail to find a new voice and a new music in [the lines of A.E.]. . .

There are everywhere such memorable lines as "Come earth's little children, pit pat from their burrows in the hill," "White for Thy whiteness all desires burn," . . . and "No image of the proud and morning stars looks at us from their faces."

The book has faults in plenty, certain rhymes are repeated too often, the longer lines stumble now and again, and here and there a stanza is needlessly obscure; but, taken all in all, it is the most haunting book I have seen these many days. (p. 148)

W. B. Yeats, "A New Poet," in *The Bookman*, London, Vol. VI, No. 35, August, 1894, pp. 147-48.

[THE EARL OF] LYTTON (essay date 1899)

[Lord Lytton examines A.E.'s philosophy as revealed in *The Earth Breath, and Other Poems*.]

"A.E." is one of a group of Irish writers whose works have been much ridiculed where they have been but little read. These writers are united by a common bond, and their work is largely directed to a common end. The tie which binds them is a deep-rooted love for Ireland, and the aim which they have set themselves is the revival of a literature which shall be essentially Celtic in its character. . . . The word Celtic is chiefly associated in the mind of the average Englishman with strange dialects which he cannot understand, and long names which he cannot pronounce, and he therefore finds it hard to sympathize with this revival. But the writer who is the subject of this review, is not one of those whose genius lies concealed in a language of which few have knowledge. (p. 254)

["A.E.'s" *The Earth Breath and Other Poems*] reveals the mind of a true poet and an original thinker. His imagination is sometimes so fantastic, and the expression of his ideas so brief and sudden, that it is easy to reject his work for its obscurity, and to leave unnoticed its rare qualities of thought and feeling; but a patient and sympathetic reader will find something delightful in almost every verse.

The central idea of his poetry is the revelation of the divine in nature. Humanity is dwarfed and cramped and surrounded by a "vestiture of pain," but in rare moments when nature speaks to us through cloud or sunshine, dawn or twilight, mountain or sea, we transcend the limits of mortal sense and feel thrillingly our divine birthright. Nature then ceases to be a mere effect of field and sky, a beautiful thing to be described, and becomes an actual being to be intimately known and loved. These poems show us how great a power she can exercise over the human mind when once a communion has been established. "The Mighty Mother" is constantly spoken of as an influence at once soothing and inspiring; she is the recipient of all the poet's secrets, she only knows "the wounds that quiver unconfessed." Thus through the medium of nature we get an insight into the character of the man himself, and become aware of that other great characteristic of the Celt, his "indomitable personality." In reading a poem, for instance, on "*Morning*"

or "Dusk," we are at first chiefly occupied with the scene which has called it forth, but gradually we find our interest shifting to the human being through whose eyes we are looking at the picture, until at last the poet rather than the poem is uppermost in our thoughts. (p. 255)

Another most fascinating characteristic of these poems is their author's firm belief in the connection between our own world and a world of fairies. . . . In Ireland the spirits of earth and sky, of mountain and river, form part of the national life. "They stand to reason," as another peasant said to Mr. Yeats. So it is with "A.E." His fairies are no mere visionary embodiments of ideas, but as real and familiar to him as the most commonplace details of business life are to a London stockbroker. They appear in his poems in three forms. Sometimes they are the lost companions of a former life, now almost forgotten. . . . (pp. 257-58)

At other times they appear as playmates in his everyday existence. . . .

And lastly we see them as companions of his dreams. When the body becomes unconscious, the soul escapes from its prison, and wanders free "down the twilight stairs of sleep," to meet once more on equal terms the inhabitants of the spiritual world. At such times the visions become more glorious, and are described with delightful extravagance—opal fire kings who move on "pathways of rainbow wonder," or flaming stars that "swing along the sapphire zone"—visions that fade with the daylight, leaving only a lingering memory behind. . . .

There are [other poems in *The Earth Breath and Other Poems*] which treat of more palpable subjects and appeal more directly to human interests; and yet even in these he never loses that vagueness and yearning after the infinite which are the very essence of his nature. There are a few poems which deal with human love, though they cannot be called love poems in the accepted meaning of the phrase. It is the abstract more than the actual which appeals to him, and love is represented rather as a spiritual communion of souls than a definite intercourse of persons. . . . (p. 258)

His attitude towards human sorrow is the same. The sadness which is found in his poems is something quite different from morbidness, or from that despair which follows disillusionment and paralyses effort: it arises rather from the consciousness of an ever-fleeting ideal of a goal that is forever out of reach, or from the longing after a loved one that is lost. For this kind of sorrow there are many sources of consolation—nature herself offers a superficial comfort; but above all there is the great faith which opens to his spiritual insight wide domains of unceasing joy, and carries him far beyond the misery of earth. (p. 259)

If examined critically, his poetry, like everything else, has its faults. Many may find it unmusical. It is certainly lacking in the kind of beauty which belongs to the poetry of Tennyson. Its characteristic is not smoothness, but it has unquestionably a music of a wild and irregular kind, a natural open-air music like the sighing of the wind, or the yearning murmur of the waves on the seashore.

Others again may think him obscure and eccentric. Now and then, where he has given free play to his imagination, some effort is certainly required to follow him. But as a rule, if we accept his utterances as merely expressing the transitory moods of a highly imaginative nature, and do not press their meaning too closely, their very extravagance has a peculiar charm.

Those, however, who require great culture and study in a poet will be disappointed. For them "A.E.," the mystic, will have no charm. For while his mind has subtlety, delicacy and beauty, it yet lacks the distinction of a scholarly education, and something also of the great commonplace which humanity requires of its heroes and teachers. For this reason it is possible that he may never appeal to a wide public, but time alone will show whether his merits or his faults are the greater. (p. 260)

[*The Earl of*] Lytton, "An Irish Poet," in *The Living Age* (copyright 1899, by the Living Age Co.), Vol. CCXXII, No. 2872, July 22, 1899, pp. 254-60.

PADRAIC COLUM (essay date 1918)

[*Colum, an Irish-born American poet and dramatist, was one of many young writers whom A.E. admired and encouraged in the early stages of their careers.*]

Before Nietzsche had made known to us his notion that the universe was creation designed by an artist for the aesthetic pleasure of artists, A.E. was speaking of it as the Adventure of the Spirit Errant. Men in his reveries are the strayed Heaven-dwellers; they are divine beings who have descended into chaos to win a new Empire for the Spirit; they are the angels "who willed in silence their own doom"; they are the gods who "forgot themselves to men"; they are kings in exile who await the hour of their restoration. This thought of man as the strayed Heaven-dweller runs through his poetry, his pictures and his economics. The claim in his economics is to make way for man who is divine in his soul and his imaginings.

Like all mystics A.E. is content to express in his poetry a single vision, a single intuition. We are eternal beings. Further, the earth we tread on is alive, the earth is a great being. Poetry of mystical vision seems empty when it is only a call to meditation. But A.E.'s vision, like the vision of Saint Theresa and William Blake and Michael Angelo, is heroic. Heroism is praised in his poetry. . . . As one reads his *Collected Poems* one has a sense of hearing a deep sound in nature, a sound that becomes more significant as one listens to it. How is it that these short poems, very many of them only of three stanzas, give one the sense of fullness and profundity? It is because they are all glimpses of the same river of vision.

One might speak too of a power he possesses, the power that is so effective when a real poet uses it, the power of rhetoric. When one reads his oration, *On behalf of some Irishmen not Followers of Tradition*, one has to acknowledge that eloquence in verse could hardly be more stirring. The oration is by way of reply to the ultra-Celtic party who would deny the Irish heritage to those who are not of Gaelic name and stock. And yet no Irish poet has had such reverence for the Celtic past of Ireland. He has dared to make the obscure deities of Celtic mythology as potent as the Olympians; when he speaks of Angus, Dana, or Lugh he makes them great and imposing figures. The heroic age for him is the heroic age in Ireland.

No poet of our civilization is as cosmic as A.E. Everything he knows, everything he feels, has a history that is before the stars and sun. His own face reflected in an actual river recalls the brooding of the Spirit over the Waters. The sorrow and helplessness that has entered his own heart is the shadow of the dark age that the world has entered into. (pp. 173-74)

It is from such spiritual spaces that A.E. now and again makes a social or political declaration—such a declaration was his eloquent letter to the Dublin employers during the strike of

1913, and such another was his recent letter to the Manchester Guardian on behalf of the Irish Nationalists. Few men can say with as much sincerity as he: "I see all this with grief. I have always believed in brotherhood between the peoples, and I think hatred corrupts the soul of a nation." (p. 174)

Padraic Colum, "'A.E.," Poet, Painter and Economist," in *The New Republic* (© 1918 *The New Republic, Inc.*), Vol. 15, No. 188, June 8, 1918, pp. 172-74.

A. R. ORAGE (essay date 1918)

[Psychologist, theosophist, and editor of the socialist weekly *The New Age*, Orage discusses various ideas presented by A.E. in *The Candle of Vision*.]

"AE's" *Candle of Vision* is not a book for everybody, yet I wish that everybody might read it. . . . "AE's" narrative and criticism of his personal experiences may be said to take the form of intimate confessions made *pour encourager les autres*. For, happily for us, he is an artist who is also a philosopher, a visionary who is also an "intellectual"; and, being interested in both phases of his personality, he has had the impulse and the courage to express both. What the ordinary mind—the mind corrupted by false education—would say to "AE's" affirmations concerning his psychological experiences, it would not be difficult to forecast. What is not invention, it would be said, is moonshine, and what is neither is a pose to be explained on some alienist hypothesis. Only readers who can recall some experience similar to those described by "AE" will find themselves able to accept the work for what it is—a statement of uncommon fact; and only those who have developed their intuition to some degree will be able to appreciate the spirit of truth in which the *Candle of Vision* is written. A review of such work is not to be undertaken by me, but I have made a few notes on some passages.

Page 2. "I could not so desire what was not my own, and what is our own we cannot lose . . . Desire is hidden identity." This is a characteristic doctrine of mysticism, and recurs invariably in all the confessions. Such unanimity is an evidence of the truth of the doctrine, since it is scarcely to be supposed that the mystics borrow from one another. But the doctrine, nevertheless, is difficult for the mere mind to accept, for it involves the belief that nothing happens to us that is not ourselves. . . . The unforeseeable, the margin of what we call Chance, allows for events that belong to Fate rather than to Destiny. (pp. 93-4)

Page 16. "I could prophesy from the uprising of new moods in myself that without search I should soon meet people of a certain character, and so I met them. . . . I accepted what befell with resignation. . . . What we are alone has power. . . . No destiny other than we make for ourselves." I have already expressed my doubts whether this is the whole truth. It is, of course, the familiar doctrine of Karma; but I do not think it can be interpreted quite literally. There is what is called the Love of God, as well as the Justice of God, and I would venture to add, with Blake, the Wrath of God. Judgment is something more than simple justice; it implies the consent of the whole of the judging nature, and not of its sense of justice only. Love enters into it, and so, perhaps, do many other qualities not usually attributed to the Supreme Judge. In interpreting such doctrines we must allow for the personal equation even of the highest personality we can conceive.

Page 19. "None needs special gifts of genius." "AE's" *Candle of Vision* is confessedly propagandist. It aims deliberately at encouraging age to discover eternal youth, and to lay hold of everlasting life. It is to this end that "AE" describes his own experiences, and offers to his readers the means of their verification. He is quite explicit that no "special gifts" or "genius" are necessary. "This do and ye shall find even as I have found." The special gift of genius does not, I agree, lie in the nature of fact of the experience (though here, again, favour seems sometimes to be shown), but it does, I think, lie in the bent towards the effort involved. . . . [Desire], in the mystical sense, is the desire that is left when all the transient wishes or fancies have either vanished or been satisfied. Only such a desire leads the student to make the effort required by "AE," and the possession of such a desire is something like a "special gift" or "genius." (pp. 96-8)

Page 54. "Is there a centre within us through which all the threads of the universe are drawn?" An ingenious image for a re-current doctrine of mysticism, the doctrine, namely, that everything is everywhere. One of the earliest discoveries made in meditation is the magnitude of the infinitesimal. The tiniest point of space appears to have room enough for a world of images; and the mediaeval discussion concerning the number of angels that could dance on the point of a needle was by no means ridiculous. If I am not mistaken, "AE's" problem is identical with it.

Page 89. The Architecture of Dreams. In this chapter "AE" sets himself to casting some doubts (shall we say?) on the sufficiency of the Freudian theory of dreams. Dreams, according to Freud, are the dramatization of suppressed desires; but what, asks "AE," "is the means by which desires, suppressed or otherwise, dramatize themselves?" "A mood or desire may attract its affinities"; in other words, there may be a congruity between the desire and the dream which serves the Freudian purpose of interpretation; but desire can hardly be said "to create what it attracts." Between anger, for instance, and a definite vision of conflict, such as the dream may represent, there is a gulf which the theory of Freud does not enable us to cross. What, in fact, are dreams? *Who* or *what* carries out the dramatization? Assuming, with Freud, that their impulse is a desire, what power shapes this desire into the dream-cartoon? "AE" throws no light on the mystery, but, at any rate, he does not dismiss it as no mystery at all. Its philosophical discussion is to be found in the Indian philosophy known as the Sankhya. (pp. 101-02)

Page 90. "Have imaginations body?" In other words, are the figures seen in dream and vision three-dimensional? "AE" describes several incidents within his experience that certainly seem to suggest an objective reality in dream-figures, and the occasional projection of dream-figures into phantasms is a further evidence of it. But, once again, I would refer "AE" to the Sankhya aphorisms, and to Kapila's commentary on them. The question is really of the general order of the relation of form to thought.

Page 114. Here, and in the succeeding essay, "AE" develops his intuitional thesis that sound and thought have definite affinities. For every thought there is a sound, and every sound is at the same time a thought. The idea is, of course, familiar, and, like many more in the *Candle of Vision*, is found recurring like a decimal throughout mystical and occult literature in all ages. . . . "AE" has approached the problem . . . experimentally, with the aid of his intuition. If, he said to himself, there is really a definite correspondence between sound and

idea, meditation on one or the other should be able to discover it. In other words, he has attempted to rediscover the lost language, and to find for himself the key whose fragments bestrew the ancient occult works. This again, however, is no novelty, but another of the recurrent ideas of mystics and would-be occultists. All of them have tried it, but, unfortunately, most of them come to different conclusions. "AE's" guesses must, therefore, be taken as guesses only, to be compared with the guesses with other students.

Page 132. One of the features of the *Candle of Vision* is the occasional ray cast by "AE" upon the obscure texts of the Bible. . . . "He made every flower before it was in the field, and every herb before it grew." This points, says "AE," to the probability that the Garden of Eden was the "Garden of the Divine Mind," in which flowers and herbs and all the rest of creation lived before they were made—visible! Such a conception is very illuminating. Moreover, it brings the story of Genesis into line with the genesis stories of both ancient India and the most recent psychology. For modern psycho-analysis, in the researches of Jung in particular, is undoubtedly trembling on the brink of the discovery of the divine mind which precedes visible creation. The process is indissolubly linked up with the psychology of imagination, phantasm, and vision.

Page 137. On Power. "If we have not power we are nothing, and must remain outcasts of Heaven." In this chapter "AE" shakes the fringes of the most dangerous subject in the world, that of the acquisition of "spiritual" power. I put the word under suspicion, because while in the comparative sense spiritual, the powers here spoken of may be anything but beneficent. . . . "AE," like his authorities, is full of warning against the quest of power. At the same time, like them, he realizes that without power the student can do nothing. Here is the paradox, the mightiest in psychology, that the weakest is the strongest and the strongest the weakest. I commend this chapter to Nietzscheans in particular. They have most to learn from it.

Page 153 et seq. "AE" makes an attempt to systematize "Celtic cosmogony." It appears to me to be altogether premature, and of as little value as the "interpretation" of Blake's cosmogony, which Messrs. Yeats and Ellis formerly attempted. Celtic cosmogony, as found in Irish legend and tradition, may be a cosmogony, and perhaps one of the oldest in the world (for Ireland is always with us!). But the fragmentary character of the records, the absence of any living tradition in them, coupled with the difficulty of re-interpretation in rational terms, make even "AE's" effort a little laborious. There is little illumination in the *Candle* when it becomes an Irish boglight. (pp. 103-07)

A. R. Orage, "'Candle of Vision'" (originally appeared in *The New Age*, 1918), in his *Readers and Writers* (copyright 1922 by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.), Knopf, 1922, pp. 93-107.

ST. JOHN G. ERVINE (essay date 1922)

[Ervin is critical of both A.E.'s visions and ideals relating to a democratic Ireland as presented in *The National Being*.]

In a strange and, to me, incomprehensible book, called "*The Candle of Vision*," ["A.E."] has wrought his mysticism to such a pitch of practicality that he is able to offer his readers an alphabet with which to interpret the language of the Gods! It manifests itself in some of his pictures, where strange, luminous and brightly-coloured creatures are seen shining in some ordinary landscape, creatures that seemed to me, when I first

saw them, akin to Red Indians. . . . [While] I do not believe that "A.E." saw a fairy, otherwise than in his imagination, I am certain that he believes he saw one, not as a creature of the mind, but as one having flesh and blood. He claims no peculiar merit for himself in seeing visions. "There is no personal virtue in me," he writes in "*The Candle of Vision*," "other than this that I followed a path all may travel but on which few do journey." He tells his readers how they, too, if they have the wish, may see the things which he has seen, and he gives descriptions of some of his visions. (pp. 35-6)

These visions form the foundation of his political and economic faith. (p. 38)

All ["A.E.'s"] political strivings have been directed towards making this "a society where people will be at harmony in their economic life," as he writes in "*The National Being*," and "will readily listen to different opinions from their own, will not turn sour faces on those who do not think as they do, but will, by reason and sympathy, comprehend each other, and come at last, through sympathy and affection, to a balancing of their diversities, as in that multitudinous diversity which is the universe, powers and dominions and elements are balanced, and are guided harmoniously by the Shepherd of the Ages." Whether such a world, balanced in that way, can be rightly described as a democracy is not a matter on which I offer any opinion here, though it seems to me to be a very long way from what the common man considers a democracy to be.

It is when we come to connect his visions and the beliefs he derives from them with the actual circumstances in which we find ourselves that we begin to be most dubious. "National ideals," he says in "*The National Being*," "are the possession of a few people only." That is an argument for aristocracy.

Yet we must spread them in wide commonalty over Ireland if we are to create a civilisation worthy of our hopes and our ages of struggle and sacrifice to attain the power to build. We must spread them in wide commonalty because it is certain that democracy will prevail in Ireland. The aristocratic classes with traditions of government, the manufacturing classes with economic experience, will alike be secondary in Ireland to the small farmers and the wage-earners in the towns. We must rely on the ideas common among our people, and on their power to discern among their countrymen the aristocracy of character and intellect.

With the deletion of the word "Ireland" and the substitution of the word "America," that quotation might stand just as effective for the United States as for Ireland. Why is it certain that democracy will prevail in Ireland? Because the small farmers and the wage-earners in the towns will take precedence over the aristocracy and the manufacturing classes! I do not follow that argument. I have seen nothing in England or America or Ireland or France to convince me that if the small farmers and the wage-earners in the towns were authoritative they would be any more democratic than the aristocratic or the manufacturing classes. I have seen much to make me feel certain that they will use their authority as implacably in their own interests as any aristocrat or manufacturer ever used or ever will use his. (pp. 39-41)

Is not the world at this moment suffering to the point of distraction because the multitude cannot live up to its own ideals long enough to make them practical? "The gods departed," says "A.E.," "the half-gods also, hero and saint after that,

and we [i.e. the Irish people] have dwindled down to a petty peasant nationality, rural and urban life alike mean in their externals." But he does not despair. "Yet the cavalcade, for all its tattered habiliments, has not lost spiritual dignity." And he hopes "the incorruptible atom" in us will make us great again. Divine optimism, but what is there in peasant society to justify it? (pp. 43-4)

St. John G. Ervine, "'A.E.': George William Russell" (originally published in a slightly different version in The North American Review, Vol. CCXII, No. 777, August, 1920), in his Some Impressions of My Elders (© 1922 by St. John G. Ervine), The Macmillan Company, 1922, pp. 25-60.

EDWARD DAVISON (essay date 1928)

[Davison compares A.E.'s poetry with that of Yeats, finding the former to be more ethereal and abstract than the latter.]

The atmosphere in the poetry of A.E. superficially resembles that of Mr. Yeats, but it is essentially different in its cause and quality. Mr. George Russell's (that is, A.E.'s) sympathy with the aims of the Irish literary movement has been more theoretic than practical so far as concerns his poetry. The vital mood underlying his work actually has little in common with the moods of his fellow poets. Where Mr. Yeats and Mr. James Stephens have tended to see the world in terms of Ireland, he has seen Ireland relatively in terms of the world. He has been concerned primarily with the types of things while they delight to particularize, preferably with Irish examples. To put the matter crudely, Mr. Yeats sees his swans at Coole and tells us so. His lake-isle is pinned down to Innisfree. A.E. would have reduced them respectively to swans anywhere and a lake-isle nowhere. . . . There is something [in A.E.'s poetry] of the atmosphere that belongs notably to Shelley's poetry, a certain mistiness, an unreality; the poet is describing a world of his own which, though it may have some counterpart in this physical world, would not appear in the same way to any other eyes. In short, Mr. Yeats and Mr. Stephens see the landscape as it is, while A.E. sees it as it is not, bathed in something of "The light that never was on sea or land." His stress is laid on the feeling, the colour, the atmosphere, never on the concrete form. The resemblance to Shelley appears throughout this poet's work more in the kind of imagery and simile employed than in the philosophic significance of the ideas which are essentially Wordsworthian. . . . A.E.'s poetry is none the worse because it springs from one of the oldest "mystic"—I prefer to say philosophic, if not actually scientific—realizations of a certain type of mind. Most of his lyrics are in the nature of variations on the same theme. (pp. 181-84)

Thus A.E. appears as a poet whose work refers to a point of view, a point of view by no means original in its philosophic character, yet startlingly original by means of the poetic ways whereby it is presented. (pp. 186-87)

*Edward Davison, "Three Irish Poets," in his Some Modern Poets and Other Critical Essays (copyright 1928 by Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.; reprinted by permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.), Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1928, pp. 173-96.**

W. B. YEATS (essay date 1932)

[Yeats often quarrelled with A.E. for failing to question the validity of his mystical revelations as other visionaries had done. In Song

and Its Fountains, however, A.E. attempted an explanation of his mystical experiences and prompted the following critique by Yeats.]

[In *Song and its Fountains*] A.E. attempts to describe and explain some part of his [mystical] experience. Swedenborg, metallurgical expert, scientific speculator, was a man of boundless curiosity, but the author of *Song and its Fountains*—landscape-painter and pastelist, when his visions were still a novelty—escapes with difficulty from mere pleasure and astonishment at the varied scene. I began by hating the book for its language. My friend, whose English at the close of the civil war was so vigorous and modern—I remember an article which found its way into the prisons and stopped a hunger strike—writes as though he were living in the 'nineties, seems convinced that spiritual truth requires a dead language. He writes 'dream' where other men write 'dreams,' a trick he and I once shared, picked up from William Sharp perhaps when the romantic movement was in its last contortions. Renaissance Platonism had ebbed out in poetic diction, isolating certain words and phrases as if they were Platonic Ideas. He has heaped up metaphors that seem to me like those wax flowers of a still older time I saw in childhood melted on the side towards the window. Yet I came to love the book for its thought.

It is almost wholly an illustration and commentary upon Plato's doctrine of pre-natal memory. It traces back A.E.'s dominating ideas to certain impressions, the colour of a wild flower, an image from a child's story, something somebody told him about a neighbour, a vision seen under closed eyelids; always, it seems, to single images, single events, which opened, as it were, sluice-gates into the will. A poet, he contends, does not transmute into song what he has learned in experience. He reverses the order and says that the poet first imagines and that later the imagination attracts its affinities. The more we study those affinities as distinct from the first impulse the more realistic is our art, which explains why a certain novelist of my acquaintance, who can describe with the most convincing detail the clothes, houses, tricks of speech of his characters, is yet the most unobservant of men. The author of *Song and its Fountains* shows the origin of certain of his poems and believes that we can all trace back our lives as a whole from event to event to those first acts of the mind, and those acts through vision to the pre-natal life. While so engaged he came upon a moral idea which seems to me both beautiful and terrible. He had an intuition that in some pre-natal life there had been 'downfall and tragic defeat'; he had begun a 'concentration upon that intuition' and almost at once became terrified. He seemed to be warned away from some knowledge he could not have endured, a warning which may have preserved his sanity while confining vision to a seemingly sensuous and external panorama, and substituting an emotional apprehension for analysis. He thinks that when a man is to attain great wisdom he first learns all the evil of his past, assumes responsibility for his share in that evil, follows out with a complete knowledge the consequence of every act, repents the sin of twenty thousand years, unified at last in thought, and only when this agony has been exhausted can he recall what was 'lovely and beloved.' We do not re-live the past, for our life is always our own, always novel, but dream back or think back to that first purity. Is not all spiritual knowledge perhaps a reversal, a return? (pp. 415-17)

I turn the pages once more and find that my friend has excused his lack of questioning curiosity better than I had thought. 'The Spirit,' as he calls the ultimate reality, gave to some 'the infinite vision,' but he had been content 'to know that it was there,'