usher in “the great race that is to come”. One of his immediate sources for the play, Edwin Ellis’s *Sancan the Bard*, he had recommended to Katharine Tynan earlier in the same year as the letter to O’Grady, in the very letter in which he had asked her to lend him Nora Hopper’s *Ballads in Prose*. In the light of his exchange with O’Grady, Hopper’s use of the Irish legends, and his own, can thus be seen to have another level of significance, a link with the bardic order. The letter to O’Grady went on to praise O’Grady’s version of the story of Cú Chulainn’s death as “not less than any epic tale in the world”. Yeats’s own version of that story, in his last play, ended with the image of the artist, a last inheritor of the bardic tradition, recreating the legend once again in order to restore that “most ancient race”:

No body like his body  
Has modern woman borne,  
But an old man looking back on life  
Imagines it in scorn[.]

The process of accretion exemplified in the instances I have explored here will grow more richly textured with every succeeding volume of the *Collected Letters*. Splendidly begun, the edition must inevitably come to be recognised as a fitting record of one of the greatest, most fascinating creative minds in history, one of those few, in Eliot’s words, “whose history is the history of their own time, who are a part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them”. We await, with even more anticipation, volume II.


**Reviewed by Richard Allen Cave**

A first glance might suggest we possess a peculiarly full array of materials from which to reconstruct the creative process that went to the shaping of *Purgatory*: scenarios; a sketch for a possible stage-setting; two verse drafts; four typescripts with holograph revisions; page-proofs corrected by Yeats of the ill-fated Longford edition of *On The Boiler* in which the play was designed to appear first but which was abandoned and, with the exception of a handful of copies, destroyed at Mrs Yeats’s request after the poet’s death; the Alex. Thom edition of *On The Boiler*; and the Cuala *Last Poems and Two Plays* of 1939. However, the complex and messy publishing history of the play and the absence of two crucial and related items complicate matters considerably. Composition of *Purgatory* as with *The Death of Cuchulain* was remarkably intense. The scenarios create with surprising fullness the plot-line of the play which underwent little change as the initial idea was realised as a dramatic text; amplification and revision were
directed at character-delineation primarily; the quality of the handwriting suggests composition in energetic bursts. The manuscript materials intimate an acute imaginative engagement on Yeats's part – an excitement growing out of sustained reverie. Soon after the play’s conception Yeats sensed its relation to the pattern of ideas that had gone into the writing of On The Boiler, which he was completing alongside the drafting of the drama between March and May of 1938. A decision to stage Purgatory at the Abbey with a revival of On Baile’s Strand in that August seems to have clarified in Yeats’s mind the decision to publish the play and essay together to coincide with the performances so that audiences might read Purgatory as well as see it and above all else set the play in the intellectual continuum in which it was conceived. Haste was clearly essential if that objective was to be realised, but at this point Yeats gave a copy of the manuscript to F. R. Higgins to arrange the printing; Higgins failed to appreciate the urgency of the situation and offered the material to Longford, a printer who had little experience of publications of this kind. Sandra Siegel dates this as occurring at the end of June. From here the confusions begin.

The play was staged as planned to largely adverse critical reaction, which the availability of a text might have checked; but the edition was not ready. More performances were prepared for early December and again possibly in the New Year and Yeats repeated through the autumn and winter to Higgins his wish that the edition be ready for publication to coincide with these revivals. Yeats received and corrected galleys and a first set of page proofs at uncertain dates (he was of course wintering abroad); but his hopes were still not realised. What is interesting in all this is Yeats’s insistence regarding the Abbey’s revivals of the production: “I want Purgatory played from ‘On The Boiler’ version (my italics).” Sandra Siegel quotes this hitherto unpublished letter from Yeats to Higgins dated 24 December 1938 which is now in the possession of the Humanities Research Center at Austin, Texas; but she does not explore its possible implications regarding the extant material.

Four typescripts survive, here labelled TS4, TS5, TS6 and TS7 to reflect the catalogue-references in the National Library of Ireland. Professor Siegel convincingly argues that their chronological ordering should be TS6, TS4, TS5 and TS7; only the last two are reproduced in this volume, TS5 being considered the best version in relation to the subsequent printing history of the play. By piecing together bits of information which Professor Siegel records but does not comment on, it seems clear that TS4 has potentially an unusual and distinctive status. Compared with the other typescripts it has, we are told, been much folded – “in half once horizontally and then folded once again. It also bears a crease mark from having been folded vertically in half”. Later in a section headed “Notes on Textual Problems in TSS 5, 6, and 4” we learn that TS4 has throughout a number of stage directions written in pencil, “possibly in Yeats’s hand” which “suggest that this typescript might have been used as a rehearsal text”. If so, this would have to have been for the first production at the Abbey in August 1938, as Yeats was out the country during subsequent stagings by the company in his lifetime. That this supposition is more than likely is strengthened by the nature of