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| **Celtic Twilight, The (1893; revised 1902)** |
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| *The Celtic Twilight* is a collection of folk tales gathered by William Butler Yeats during his interviews with rural working people in western Ireland. These tales feature larger-than-life Irish personalities, Celtic mythological figures, eerie landscapes, strange beasts, theurgic cults, haunted houses, ghosts, and faeries (or the *Sidhe*). *The Celtic Twilight* has since become an important document of Irish national culture. Tim Wenzell has observed that ‘from an existence almost entirely devoid of the material [of a written history], it becomes necessary for the poor people of Ireland to defer to their imaginations’ to fashion one (21). As surely as the rural people of Ireland continued to imagine and invent a cultural history, so too did Yeats. *The Celtic Twilight* can be seen as a Yeatsian ‘antithetical’ cultural history (see *A Vision*), an invented history relying as much upon creative vision as it does upon established facts or academic rigour. As Kathleen Raine explains in her introduction to the 1981 Smythe release of *The Celtic Twilight*, ‘the imagination of the people transmutes fact into legend; and that legend, recorded in *The Celtic Twilight* just as Yeats heard it, he raised to a greater grandeur in *The Tower*’ (21). Indeed, the invention of legend and myth, whether Celtic or personal, fascinated Yeats right up to the end of his life.  File: Yeats\_portrait\_Celtic\_Twilight.jpg  Figure 1: Frontispiece portrait of W.B. Yeats in *The Celtic Twilight* (1893). <http://www.celtic-twilight.com/ireland/yeats/celtic\_twilight/yeats.jpg>.  First published in 1893 (Bullen), *The Celtic Twilight* was revisited by Yeats in 1902. In his typical revisionary fashion, Yeats would subsequently declare in the 1925 prefatorial note to *Mythologies*, which contains the updated version of *The Celtic Twilight* along with other works mostly from the 1890s, that his earlier versions were ‘as first published, written in that artificial, elaborate English so many of us played with in the [1890s], and I had come to hate them’ (i). That ‘artificial, elaborate English’ to which Yeats refers is the ‘Kiltartanese’ dialect, which, as Raine puts it, had been ‘much decried by the critics’ (8). Along with improving his diction and removing a critical essay, ‘The Four Winds of Desire’, Yeats added many new stories, most of which were ‘of a better quality […] than any in the first version’ (7-8).  *The Celtic Twilight* followed earlier works exploring similar subject matter. These works include *Fairy and Folk Tale of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), *Representative Irish Tales* (1891), and *Irish Fairy Tales* (1892), which Raine characterizes as having ‘involved much reading and were more or less hack work undertaken for money’ (7). Raine sharply distinguishes these works from *The Celtic Twilight*, however, for its genesis ‘not from books, but from life; memories of things heard, seen, and felt in his native county Sligo, the home of his family’ (7). As Robert Welch and Bruce Stewart point out in *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, Yeats mythologized real-life figures that he knew, including George Russell (or Æ), Lucy Middleton, Mary Battle, and Katherine Tynan’s father in addition to documenting various supernatural phenomena said to have occurred in Ireland (92). Welch and Stewart further claim that these supernatural stories ‘convey Yeats’s belief in the otherworld’ given his ‘avoidance of argument or speculation’ regarding these strange happenings (92). The extent to which Yeats believed in occult or other supernatural phenomena has spurred much debate within the scholarly and critical discourse of Yeats’s *oeuvre* as a whole. |
| Further reading:  (Finneran)  (Foster)  (Raine)  (Wenzell)  (Yeats)  (Yeats, A Vision) |