

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

Beltaine

The Organ of the Irish Literary
Theatre

Edited by
W. B. Yeats



Beltaine

First published in 1970, this book is a faithful representation of the original edition of *Beltaine*, a literary magazine edited by W. B. Yeats from May 1899 to April 1900. *Beltaine* was the first of several magazines of the Irish Literary Theatre (later to become The Abbey Theatre) in which Yeats's editorial role was of utmost importance. It was an occasional publication and focused on promoting current works of Irish playwrights whilst challenging those of their English opponents.

The magazine mainly consists of a series of essays on the theatre in Dublin, and supplementing these are explanations and discussions of new plays, excerpts from which are often included. This book will be of interest to those with an interest in Yeats, early nineteenth-century literature, and Irish theatre.

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BELTAINE

The Organ of the Irish Literary Theatre

NUMBER ONE TO NUMBER THREE

May 1899 — April 1900

Edited by
W. B. YEATS

Reprinted in One Volume

With an Introductory Note by
B. C. BLOOMFIELD

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The main reason, of course, for reprinting *Beltaine* (and this holds true for *The Arrow* and *Samhain*) is that it contains much of the recent history of the Irish Literary Theatre and, in particular, the contribution which W. B. Yeats made to that movement. As to why such a reprint is contained in a series calling itself 'English Little Magazines', we can plead T. S. Eliot's authority: "Thirty years ago Irish and English literature were in a state of partial amalgamation. That is to say, the literary movement in England was largely sustained by Irishmen . . ." (*The Tyro*, No. 2 (1922), p. 11). Certainly while the Irish Literary Theatre was part of a general movement to identify and represent a distinctive Irish, as opposed to English, national literature and was associated with the movement for political independence, there were at this period similar nationalist movements in European literature and they are reflected in English magazines at this time. Yeats and the Irish Literary Theatre added certain mystical or occult elements.

The idea of the Irish Literary Theatre was first set out by Yeats in an article in the *Dome* for April 1899, which is reprinted in the first issue of *Beltaine*. Yeats and Lady Gregory, joined by Edward Martyn and other guarantors, sponsored the first performances of *The Countess Cathleen* and Martyn's *The Heather Field* at the Antient Concert Rooms in Dublin in May 1899. (The Theatre was subsequently stated to be operating under the auspices of the National Literary Society.) The original collaborators were later joined by George Moore who was persuaded to return to Ireland, and the whole venture was planned to last three years. Copies of the first issue of *Beltaine* were on sale at these performances, and numbers 2 and 3 were issued in February and April 1900 for the Theatre's next Spring season. The three issues are priced originally at threepence, sixpence, and one halfpenny, which casts a sidelight on the editor's idea of the relative worth of the contents! The three numbers were subsequently re-issued in brown paper boards with the addition of a general title page and a table of contents to the first number as a 'first annual volume'. It is this issue which has been chosen for reprinting. The name *Beltaine* is that of an ancient Irish Spring festival and was chosen to reflect the timing of the Theatre's season.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Fully to trace the history of the Irish Literary Theatre through its early days and its transmogrification to the Abbey Theatre one needs not only *Beltaine*, but also *The Arrow* and the longer-lived *Samhain*.

B. C. BLOOMFIELD

Blackheath

May 1970