

## BOOK REVIEW: IRISH UNIV. REVIEW

W.B. Yeats, *Essais & Introductions* [Edition Intégrale dirigée par Jacqueline Genet avec la collaboration d'Élisabeth Hellegouarc'h] (Paris : Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2012), Présentation, Glossaire, pp. 586. Paperback.

Jacqueline Genet, "*Words for Music Perhaps*": *Yeats's "new art"* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaire de Septentrion, 2010), Bibliography, List of Sources, Index, pp. 220. Paperback.

Francophone and Anglophone Yeatsians have recognized over the years the scholarly stature of Jacqueline Genet for the clarity, profound erudition and thoroughness of her Yeats criticism. French students of Yeats and general readers interested in Irish literature but unable to command a high enough level of English to read Yeats in the original are also indebted to Professor Genet together with other translators for the great number of translations of works by W.B. Yeats that have appeared under her general direction. She continues in the wake of translations triggered by Yeats's winning the Nobel Prize and, after the Second World War, by individual translators such as René Frechet and the distinguished art historian and translator, Yves Bonnefoy, himself a major poet. We remember also with a great deal of warmth the late Patrick Rafroidi and his team.

The present book is a great contribution not only to the French understanding of Yeats but to translation studies in themselves. At its end there is a selected list of modern translations into French. Professor Genet over many years has mustered an expert team. Those involved with this book have as a first principle of translation tried to be faithful to Yeats's text. When the same word or phase reappeared in different essays they tried to keep the same translation of it throughout. The idea was to give the impression of a single translator rather than a mélange of differing styles. In addition, an essay by Yeats on Blake or Spenser, for example, had to have a translator who was also an expert on the one or the other. Once the translation of an essay or an introduction had been drafted, Genet read it in consultation with the bilingual Professor Hellegouarc'h, a native speaker of English. Before any draft was judged "ready" there was discussion with its translator to ensure that all tricky points were resolved to their general satisfaction.

A basic problem for the French reception of Yeats is how to render his esoteric ideas, his subtle "path of the chameleon" thinking, into French, that language with a firm base in Cartesian logic—even if this be often absent in French people themselves, especially when elections are in the offing! In his essay, "The Holy Mountain" Yeats asserted that "No two civilisations prove or assume the same things, but behind both hides the unchanging experience of simple men and women."/ "Il n'y a pas deux civilisations qui prouvent et acceptent les mêmes choses, mais derrière ces deux choses se cache l'expérience personnelle, immuable, des gens simples. » (*Essays and Introductions*, p. 448/ *Essais*, p. 445). And perhaps that is one response to the whole problem of translation and the incongruity of cultures. At the same time, I note that Yeats's "both" refers back to different *civilisations*; the French translation, to me, would do better to repeat the word "civilisations" rather than "choses".

When we delve into Yeats's essays we sometimes re-encounter, often with astonishment, passages we have read before and have not remembered with a clear enough sense of what he was expressing. If we then consult the French version in *Essais*, we may find a wonderfully clear reflection of Yeats's thought. A case in point is the second section of "Prometheus Unbound" (pp. 420-421/ *Essais*, pp. 412-413). The French version is not only accurate but it is accompanied with footnotes of great help in elucidating references that Yeats was too impatient to bother with or that he assumed we readers would know. Modern French readers are saved by this French volume from spending a great deal of time tracking down such references. These useful footnotes throughout the volume appear in addition to the translated footnotes of Yeats's original text. There is also at the end of *Essais* a glossary containing notes on a number of people, events, places, and so on, that French readers might not know about. Some of the team were responsible for the glossary entries alone rather than essay translations. The glossary reminds us of the astonishing range of Yeats's cross-cultural interests and experience and would be convenient for many an Anglophone reader.

This volume is also equipped with Genet's "Présentation" an introductory essay which is not called "Introduction" because it would be somewhat inelegant as well as confusing to have it then followed by Yeats's "Introduction" in a volume called *Essais et introductions*! Here Genet works through a series of headings referring to the subjects of Yeats's essays. Thus we have a brief discussion of reality and the supernatural under the heading of "L'Irlande"; there follows a section "Métempsychie, Recherches Ésotériques" and then several others on 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, the Orient, Yeats's view of literary history and finally the longest section, "Son Esthétique" in which Genet's summaries of Yeats's ideas are accompanied by astute warnings to her readers. An example is that in discussing Yeats's specificity, she ends with, "Ce souci du concret ne signifie aucunement que l'art doit être réaliste." ["This concern with the specific in no way means that art has to be realistic"](*Essais*, p.26) .

Why should we be concerned with Yeats's *Essays and Introductions* and why should the French be concerned to make a very serviceable translation? Jacqueline Genet at the end of her "Présentation" gives us a very convincing answer. She tells us that Yeats found a way through the labyrinth of his eclectic studies of symbol and creative imagination to find his personal and authentic synthesis. *Essays and Introductions* gives its readers a way in to contemplate that "alchimie qui precede la création." ["the alchemy that precedes the creative act"] (*Essais*, p. 31). This book is a valuable contribution indeed to studies of Yeats and of translation. Professor Genet provides for the French (and for readers of French) another Ariadne's thread to help them through the labyrinth of Yeats's astonishing mind.

Andrew Parkin  
Paris-Vancouver, 2012

Bionote:

Andrew Parkin is Professor Emeritus of English Literature of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. A member of Court of Bristol University, he is also an Honorary Adviser to

the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing) and to the Chinese Canadian Writers' Association. His third academic study of Yeats was his edition of Yeats's manuscript materials for *At the Hawk's Well* and *The Cat and the Moon* (2010), published in the Cornell University Press series. More details in *Canadian Who's Who* and at [wix.com/andrewparkin/author](http://wix.com/andrewparkin/author).

**Bionote:**

Andrew Parkin spends his time in Paris and Vancouver. As a widely published poet-critic, he is Honorary Adviser to the Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, and to the Chinese Canadian Writers' Association. His latest academic book was his edition of *Manuscript Materials of At the Hawk's Well and The Cat and the Moon by W.B. Yeats* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 2010).