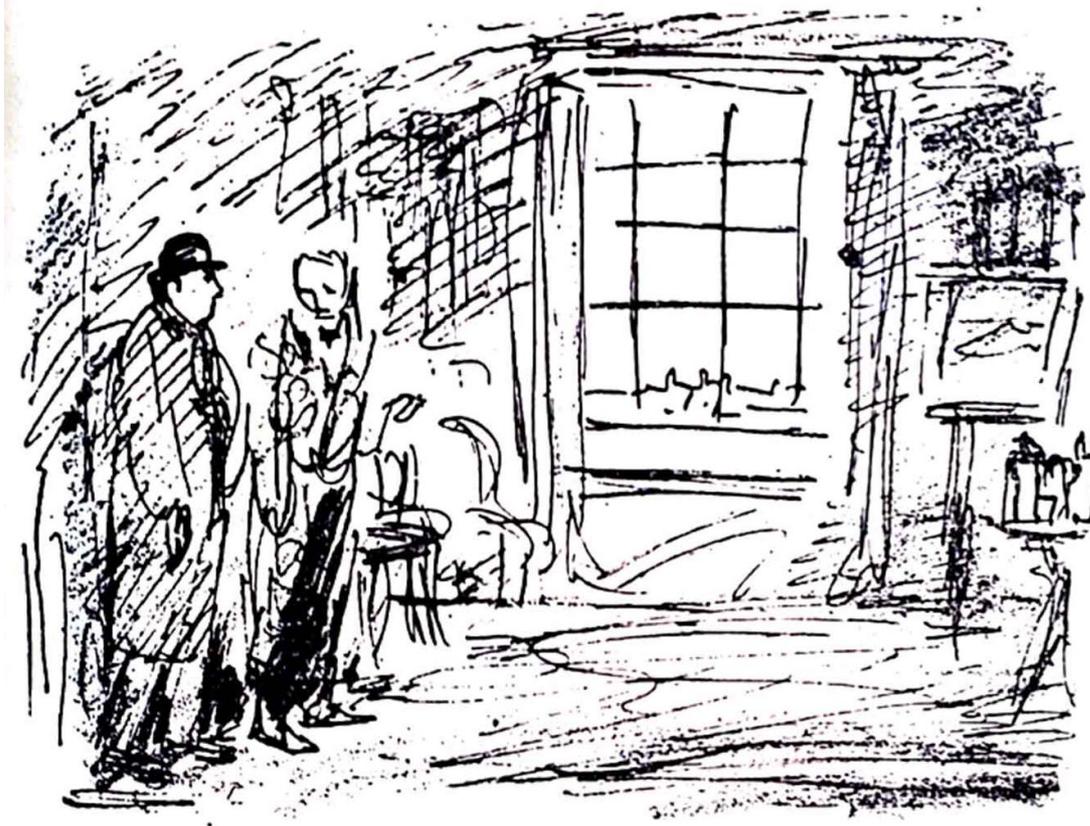




EPISODE 5: 'The Green Wave' - by Jack B. Yeats



Pen & Ink drawing by Jack B. Yeats: The frontispiece to his one-act conversation piece, 'The Green Wave,' published in 1964, as a prologue to his play, 'In Sand.'

[Segment played from archival audio: Interview with the broadcaster Eamonn Andrews and Jack B. Yeats, 10th October 1947, material courtesy ©RTE Archives]

Eamonn Andrews: What would you say to me now if I tell you that there are several of your paintings that I just don't understand?

Jack B. Yeats: The answer to that question could only be completely answered in a lecture. I said that I don't lecture. But I would say you could not possibly understand *all* of any painting of mine, any more than you could understand *all* of the feelings of any living being. And there's no book of

The Model



words, no direction, right, you or anyone else can understand all about painting. If there were such a book it would ring the knell of painting. I dislike the word art as to painting. There is only one art and that is the art of living. Painting is an occupation within that art, and that occupation is the freest of all the occupations of living. There is no alphabets. No grammar, no rules whatever. Many hopeful sportsman have tried to invent rules and have always failed. Any person or group of persons who tried to legalize such rules do a disservice to this occupation of living. They forget that... that painting is tactics and not strategy. It is carried out in the face of the enemy.

[End of segment from archival audio]

[Music played from the soundtrack of the podcast series]

Isabel Claffey: Welcome back to the Model, home of the Niland Collection in Sligo. This is the fifth episode of our podcast series, ‘Encounters with Jack B. Yeats, which celebrates 150 years since the birth of the artist. Jack B. Yeats was also a writer, publishing many of his plays and novels during the 1930s, in work which was as experimental as his later oil paintings.

Jack sets the scene for this one-act play *The Green Wave*, in a room with large window overlooking the roofs of a city. On an easel in the shadows is a framed painting of a wave, and nearby, a small table with bottle of whiskey, glasses, a jug of water and a syphon of soda. Two elderly men enter the room. The first man is wearing an old dressing gown and the other is wearing overcoat, muffler and a hard felt hat.

[‘The Green Wave’ written by Jack B. Yeats, and adapted as a radio play for this podcast]



'The Green Wave' - by Jack B. Yeats

SECOND ELDERLY MAN: Well, here I am up in your sky parlour, what have you got to show me? You've got a view anyway [*walks towards the window and looks out*]. I see all the bounteous beauties of nature laid out before me. I see the Pillar and the Four Courts.

[The sound of footsteps on floorboards]

FIRST ELDERLY MAN: (*singing*) "The British Fleet lying at Anchor and Admiral Benbow." Are the Pillar and the Four Courts natural beauties?

SECOND ELDERLY MAN: They are natural features of the landscape or the rooftops I should say. What about this picture now?

1st ELDERLY: Take off your outdoor things.

2nd ELDERLY: Oh, I won't bother.

1st ELDERLY: If you don't you won't feel the good of them when you go out. [*Helps 2nd Elderly Man out of his top-coat puts it on the chair, brings easel and picture forward out of the shadow and towards the window*]

[The sound of the easel being moved across the floorboards by the 1st Elderly Man]

2nd ELDERLY: What is it?

1st ELDERLY: It is a wave.

The Model



2nd ELDERLY: I know that, but what sort of wave?

1st ELDERLY: A green wave - well - a rather green wave.

2nd ELDERLY: What does it mean?

1st ELDERLY: I think it means just to be a wave.

2nd ELDERLY: I like things to mean something, and I like to know what they mean, and I like to know at once. After all, time is important, the most important thing we know of, and why waste it in trying to find out what something means, when if it stated its meaning clearly itself we would know at once.

1st ELDERLY: If that wave could speak it might say, “I’m an Irish wave and the Irish are generally supposed to answer questions by asking questions,” and the wave might ask you what was the meaning of yourself!

2nd ELDERLY: Agreed! agreed! the wave could do that. If the wave could speak but I wouldn't tell him - not that.

1st ELDERLY: You're quite right you keep it to yourself.
[Moves easel nearer to the window so that the sunlight falls full on it]

[The sound of footsteps walking across the floorboards]

2nd ELDERLY: I see you like it fully illuminated.

The Model



1st ELDERLY: Yes, I have a feeling that a wave seems less cruel when lit up.

2nd ELDERLY: You've been treating me in terms of wave. So I suppose you think I'd be less cruel if I was better lit up?

1st ELDERLY: I wouldn't like to play any experiments with you.

2nd ELDERLY: No, I wouldn't like to have any experiments played with me! But I'm not such a Philistine as you might think. I admire a wave for its... its... art content, pattern, and these things. But the sea, the ocean itself, is just a great stretch of water to me. It's nothing but size - it's - moods that make it.

1st ELDERLY: And yet you are impressed with bigness. I've heard you say that you felt smothered in a city of ordinary buildings - you longed for skyscrapers, twenty and thirty storeys high, so that you could feel you were "Expanding Upwards," you said.

2nd ELDERLY: That's a natural physical longing with the ordinary honest-minded man. We want to be rising above the sordid. I don't mean to say that Art is always sordid; Anyway I object to having any sort of Art shoved down my throat.

1st ELDERLY: Yes, that's your only hope, keep on objecting. But don't you ever want to create a work of Art yourself?

2nd ELDERLY: Who? Me!

1st ELDERLY: You! Why not, unless you feel that man himself - the man in the street - is a work of Art.

The Model



2nd ELDERLY: You've said it in a nut-shell. That's exactly how I feel. An honest man is a work of Art and an honest man who doesn't owe anybody anything and can go to his bank, can't push in the door of the manager's office. No, nobody on earth could do that. They're not so brave or reckless as all that. Everybody must, at least, turn a handle. Well, I say the man who's in on one's debt and can turn the handle and stump into his bank-manager and put a healthy sized lump right on top of his over-draught, just to keep it from blowing away, and no nasty questions asked about what he wants it for - I say that man is a work of Art.

1st ELDERLY: And I believe – [*looking at the 2nd Elderly Man*] - he stands before me now. Yet I have known some men who might be called works of Art and who could not do what you can do.

2nd ELDERLY: Yes, that's just the sort of people you would know, and if they are works of Art, as you say they are, well then they don't know it. They haven't got any confidence in themselves and that's what makes them paint pictures, and try and make works of Art just to look at; that's an idea! Talking to you, and looking at your wretched wave brought that out in me. I never had an idea about this sort of thing before. At least I *never* put it into words. Perhaps it was lying dormant until you annoyed me with your green wave.

1st ELDERLY: If my Green wave annoys you we can easily turn our backs on it - but here better still – [*goes to the easel and turns face of picture inwards*] - we'll turn its back on us.

[The sound of footsteps on the floorboards followed by the sound of the easel being turned around by the 1st Elderly Man]

[*2nd Elderly Man joins 1st Elderly Man by window; 1st Elderly Man opens window and both look down*]

The Model



[The sound of footsteps, followed by the sound of a sash window being pulled up. The sounds of Dublin street life and horse traffic from the street below, fill the room]

2nd ELDERLY: Look down there. I see men as flies lies walking, and horses drawing carts and old-fashioned side-cars, jaunting cars! I don't believe I ever saw a jaunting car from as high up as this - do look how extraordinary the jarvey looks with his whip held out horizontal as if he were fishing, and the horse looks very odd and long shaped, and the passenger too looks very funny, most undignified and sprawled. It's funny to think you would look like that, if you were in the car down there, seen from up here.

1st ELDERLY: And so would you look funny too, and lots of people, even more consequential than yourself, would look mighty funny when seen by a bird, if a bird would bother his little cage about such things.

2nd ELDERLY: I don't suppose he would and anyway if you were down there, on that car, and I was up here, I was down there and you up here, neither of us would be able to draw the other's attention to the ridiculous appearance of the other.

1st ELDERLY: Look! there's a man I know. I'm sure I do. There's something about the way he cranes his head forward that's familiar to me, and look he's buying a newspaper from a boy, and he's waiting for the change. I bet it's a shilling, yes, yes, I'm sure, that's elevenpence the newsboy had to fish out for him.

2nd ELDERLY: [*Turning from the window*] What about having one more look at that picture of yours?

1st ELDERLY: Better leave it as it is.

2nd ELDERLY: Who painted it anyway?

The Model



1st ELDERLY: I don't know. It's not signed and no one I have shown it to has any idea.

2nd ELDERLY: Where did you pick it up anyway? In some old junk shop up on the Quays, I expect.

1st ELDERLY: I didn't pick it up in any old junk shop on any old Quay - I bought it from a man who sold nothing but pictures - had a shop full of them, all sorts. Well, he did sell something else, he sold home-made toffee. He couldn't tell me who painted the picture, but he said it looked at me as if it liked me, so I bought it. But I see it's beginning to worry you again, so next time, before you come, I'll get some artistic friend of mine to paint some buttercups and daisies on the side of my green wave and turn it into a green hill-side, and then it won't worry you anymore. But come – [*walks towards table*] what about shoving down our throats some of the native wine - [*hands bottle to 2nd Elderly Man who helps himself*] what will you have, plain or fizzy?

[The sound of footsteps, followed by the tinkle of glasses and the sound of liquid being poured into a glass]

CURTAIN

**[END OF ONE-ACT CONVERSATION PIECE: 'THE GREEN WAVE,'
WRITTEN BY JACK B. YEATS]**

The Model



[Music played from the soundtrack of the podcast series]

Isabel Claffey: Join us next week for a specially commissioned musical composition by Seamus Harahan and Owen Kilfeather - *Sarabande 77*. Until then, from us at The Model, home of the Niland Collection, Sligo, take care and thank you for listening. This series was kindly funded by the Decade of Centenaries Programme. For credits, bios and further information, please see our website, www.themodel.ie

[Music played from the soundtrack of the podcast series]

END OF PODCAST

RUNNING TIME: 11 minutes

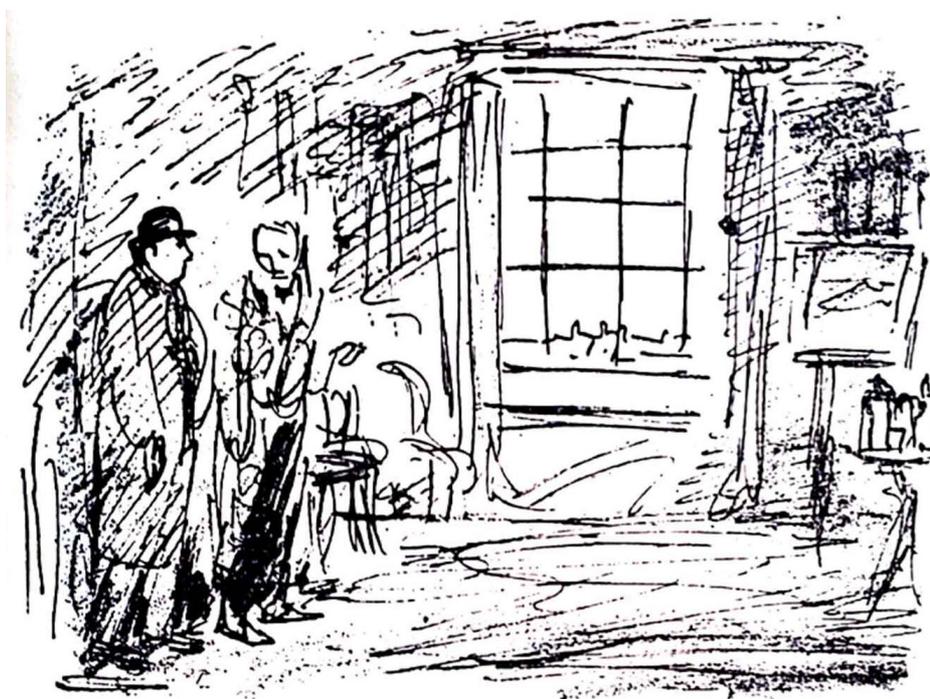
The Model, home of The Niland Collection
The Mall
Sligo
+353 (0)71 914 1405
www.themodel.ie

The Model



SHOW NOTES: EPISODE 5 - The Green Wave

In the fifth episode of 'Encounters with Jack B. Yeats,' The Model home of the Niland Collection, present a one-act conversation piece, *The Green Wave*, written by Jack B. Yeats, and adapted for this podcast as a short radio play. The parts of the two main characters are performed by actors, Ciarán McCauley (1st Elderly Man) and Bob Kelly (2nd Elderly Man). *The Green Wave* was initially intended as a companion piece or prologue to Jack's last full-length play *In Sand*, which was written in 1943,¹ during the period of the Second World War, when Jack was 72 years old. *The Green Wave* was never performed during the artist's lifetime.



Pen & Ink drawing by Jack B. Yeats: The frontispiece to his one-act conversation piece, 'The Green Wave,' published in 1964, as a prologue to his play, 'In Sand.'

Two elderly men discuss the meaning of the mysterious painting of the title, *The Green Wave*, which the first elderly man had bought '...from a man who sold nothing but pictures ...' 'Well, he did sell something else, he sold home-made toffee.'

¹ John W. Purser, 'The Literary Works of Jack B. Yeats,' 1991, pp.20-21

The Model



The set-up is simple. The stage directions and the small pen and ink drawing that accompanies the piece, show an apartment overlooking Dublin City, or ‘sky parlour’ as the second elderly man describes his friend’s place, and in the shadow of the room, sits a painting on an easel.

The conversation that ensues between these two men, poses a series of questions, such as art versus commerce... what it means to be Irish? And also, looks askance at ‘ways of seeing’ and representation in life and art. The sea is painted on a canvas or cut from a board, dividing this ‘wall of water’ from the vast and unbonded ocean, and this wave now sits on an easel, delimited by a picture frame in the first elderly man’s apartment. What is the object of this non-figurative work? Could it be turned into a mountain or is the object - water?

John W. Purser wrote, ‘A wave looks green when the blue of the ocean comes upon the yellow of the sand. For the same reason, yellow and blue, mixed on the palette, will make green. Land and sea combine.’²

The Green Wave plays with ideas around representation, and the concept of time is also touched upon, when the second elderly man, says; ‘I like things to mean something, and I like to know what they mean, and I like to know at once. After all, time is important, the most important thing we know of, and why waste it in trying to find out what something means, when if it stated its meaning clearly itself we would know at once.’ Jack’s enduring concern with chance - and the nature of time are set in motion with this piece, as it prefaces his full-length play *In Sand*.

In this short one-act piece, we are invited into the first elderly man’s sky parlour to talk about the mysteries of time and space, ways of seeing, ways of being, materiality and representation. What do you see... when the green wave spills across the sands? In this short dense piece, there is much to be unpick. First of all – there is the question of the mysterious painting – is it a wave or could it be a mountain – and as the elliptical conversation moves forward, we are left with more questions than answers. Duality and non-binary representation rest on this image - an image that the audience can’t see. There is also the question of the symbolic representation of Ireland as a green wave - as part of a vast ocean. An Ireland in stasis or is it a wave about to break on the shore - mutable, changeable, undefinable?

And this question, posed by the two men’s conversation, ... what is Ireland? and what does Ireland represent... and again, this is the perennial question of - art versus commerce - a question that is still pertinent in Ireland today. This series of questions opens up the space for further questionings, and as the curtain falls on *The Green Wave*, the audience are left with an interesting array of options.

² John W. Purser, ‘The Literary Works of Jack B. Yeats,’ 1991, p.104

The Model



EPISODE CREDITS

Copyright for the one-act conversation piece, 'The Green Wave,' written by Jack B. Yeats, was used with permission from United Artists LLP and ©The Estate of Jack B. Yeats, courtesy of the Yeats family.

Sound clip from archival interview with Jack B. Yeats and Eamonn Andrews, 10th October 1947, and used with permission from ©RTE Archives.

Researcher: Lara Byrne

Sound Effects: Isabel Claffey

FIRST ELDERLY MAN: Ciarán McCauley

SECOND ELDERLY MAN: Bob Kelly

ARTIST BIOS:

Lara Byrne is an arts researcher based in the northwest of Ireland.

Isabel Claffey is a founding member of Shared Light Theatre Company - and has worked in the industry since the 2000s as a performer and director. Recent recorded work includes radio plays for The Dock with Old Time Radio and the part of Mag in "Murmur" for Magpie Productions at the Camden and Edinburgh Fringe Festivals.

www.sharedlighttheatrecompany.com

Bob Kelly is an actor and writer from the west of Ireland. A regular collaborator with Sligo's Blue Raincoat Theatre company, he is currently writing a musical adaptation of *Breakfast on Pluto* for Landmark Productions, and recently shot his second short film 'Vote Matty,' a satire of casual racism and the rise of the alt-right movement.

Ciarán McCauley is from Sligo and has been making theatre and working as an actor for 30 years. He is also a lecturer in Sligo IT where he teaches on the Performing Arts BA and the Creative Writing BA.

The Model



SERIES CREDITS:

This series is kindly funded by the Decades of Centenaries Programme (2013-2023)

Episodes introduced by Isabel Claffey

Sound Engineer: Daniel Bannon

Sound Editor: Colm Condrón

Soundtrack to Podcast series, 'no man's land,' (2020) composed by Karen Power

Transcriptions by Lara Byrne

Producer & researcher-writer: Lara Byrne

Curated by the Artistic Director of The Model - Emer McGarry