

novels, which are on the whole, I think, less successful than the earlier ones, indications of a more consistently sombre view of existence and, if one may argue from an inability now to render what in earlier novels *was* rendered, there is also a possible lack of real imaginative faith in any realization of the ideal. Comedy does reassert itself in *The Italian Girl*—after the hiatus of *The Unicorn*—but it is a *comédie noire* in which the habitual violence of Miss Murdoch's world of contingency acquires a Dostoevskian quality reinforced by the new thematic preoccupation with guilt. Whether Miss Murdoch is indeed groping towards new directions will not be clear until her next novel. Whether she is or not, or whether she succeeds or not, the body of her fiction to date represents a remarkable and on the whole successful attempt to demonstrate that "a novel must be a house fit for free characters to live in; and . . . combine form with a respect for reality in all its odd contingent ways."

READING YEATS ON THE BEACH

John Wheatcroft

Stark sun renders his page too white,
 Yeats' alphabet too dazzling black
 for eye to cypher naked against
 the sand glinting like some cyclopsian
 mirror scanning our closest star.

Smoked glasses help—as if the A's
 and Z's were iron bars patterned
 on the floor of a sun-filtering pool.

Then when beside me you, roused from
 cat sleep by child's laugh, sit hostage
 to silence, arms cincturing tucked knees
 and shoulder, sole shadow against the sky,
 obscuring the poem. I fathom Yeats.