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George Berkeley: pictures by Goldsmith, Yeats and Luce

by David Berman

'When the multitude heard, they were astonished at his doctrine'; or so runs the inscription commemorating Berkeley in our College Chapel, an inscription I should like to reformulate: When the biographers heard, they were fascinated by his life; for George Berkeley the man has attracted many biographers. These include at least one major poet, a British Prime Minister, a psychoanalyst and a famous novelist. And yet, amidst the diversity, the work of three biographers — Joseph Stock, A.C. Fraser and the late A.A. Luce — stands out.

Joseph Stock was the pioneer; a Fellow of this College, his *Account of the life of . . . Berkeley* was first published in 1776 and often reissued over the next forty years. As Stock was Berkeley's foremost biographer in the eighteenth century, so Fraser, a Scotsman, established himself as the leading Berkeley scholar of the nineteenth century by his massive 1871 *Life and letters of Berkeley*. Fraser set a precedent not only for high scholarship but also for longevity — in both of which he was followed by *his* great successor, Dr Luce, who, like Fraser, lived into his nineties, and, like Stock, was a distinguished Fellow of this College.

Luce's biographical pre-eminence rests firmly on his *Life of Berkeley*, universally accepted as authoritative since its appearance in 1949. Drawing skilfully on the primary evidence — much of which he himself brought to light — Luce there reveals Berkeley as a man of strong sense, 'sane, shrewd, efficient',¹ a picture that complements his commonsense reading of Berkeley's philosophy. Among the factors that helped the biography to achieve its magisterial position — a position never attained by the philosophical reading — is one I want to stress here, namely Luce's deep appreciation of his predecessors. About Stock and Fraser he comments:

Stock had access to family information, and he laid the foundations upon which later biographers have built, but his [*Account*] was too slender and brief. Fraser had more success. His *Life and letters* is a mine for biographers . . .; but [its] portrait of Berkeley lacks depth and tone, and in some features is untrue.²

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Even more untrue, according to Luce, was the first biographical essay on Berkeley, printed in the *British Plutarch* in 1762. Luce scathingly describes it as a

pretentious, and irresponsible account . . . the source of the general misconception of the man, the *fons et origo mali* . . . The Memoir contains at least three definite errors in fact which can be easily refuted. . . . Its picture of Berkeley in his student days is absurd; he is a recluse and the butt of college, and is by some regarded as 'the greatest dunce in the whole university'; here we have the well-known but baseless, tale, told with gusto, of him and his [student] chum, Contarini, agreeing to hang one another for a while in turn that they might experience the sensations of dying. . . . The Memoir contains a few interesting and possibly true statements which are not found elsewhere; but . . . it looks like a piece of ignorant hack-work without a vestige of authority. . . . That a bantering record of this great man . . . [concludes Luce] should have been the first to appear and should have set the tone for later studies is a matter for keen regret.³

Dr Luce's own portrait of Berkeley as 'the man of affairs, sane, shrewd, efficient' is in clear opposition to this early memoir. But Luce was also reacting to another, more recent misrepresentation, as he saw it, namely, the picture of Berkeley which emerges in the work of W.B. Yeats, particularly in the poet's *Diary* of 1930 and in his fifteen-page Introduction to Hone and Rossi's *Bishop Berkeley*, published in the following year. For Yeats the real Berkeley was 'that fierce young man', a visionary and radical who 'proved all things a dream'.⁴ Indeed, according to Yeats, there were two Berkeleys. Berkeley was 'idealist and realist alike'. He 'wore an alien mask'. Only in his student notebooks, the *Philosophical commentaries*, 'is Berkeley sincere . . . the bishop was a humbug'.⁵ Dr Luce's comment, in a word, is *nonsense*: Yeats's assertions, he says, are 'charming inconsequent nonsense, sparkles of poetic fancy without any foundation in fact. There was only one George Berkeley in actual life; he never wore a mask, and he was transparently honest and single-minded.'⁶ Dr Luce told me that he sent Yeats a detailed critique, to which the poet did not, however, reply.

Curiously, each man focussed his biographical *animus* on a particular Berkeley portrait, both of which are hanging here in Trinity. Thus Yeats exclaimed: 'I hate what I remember of his portrait [figure 1] in the Fellows Room [that is, Senior Common Room] at Trinity College; it wears a mask kept by . . . painters . . . of the eighteenth century for certain admired men.'⁷ 'That philanthropic

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serene Bishop, that pasteboard man never wrote the [*Philosophical commentaries*.]⁸ (One wonders what Yeats would have said had he learned that this hated portrait, by James Latham, has appeared on an Irish postage stamp commemorating the philosopher.⁹) The portrait Dr Luce disliked he explicitly associated with Yeats. 'The false Berkeley Yeats knew is the Berkeley of legend [wrote Luce] . . . it is the long-haired, languishing visionary depicted in that mural decoration [figure 2] which does duty as portrait of Berkeley in the Examination Hall of his College . . .'¹⁰ It is 'the stage philosopher peering into infinity'.¹¹

Of course, Luce's own biographical portrait of Berkeley was formed by many forces, positive as well as negative; among the positive ones are the statements of Berkeley's wife and daughter-in-law, the researches of Benjamin Rand; more negatively, the work of Hone and Rossi and also John Wild. But the main negative influence was what we may call the Goldsmith/Yeats picture. I call it that because, unknown to Luce (and Yeats), we now know that Oliver Goldsmith was the author of that first notorious memoir, 'the *fons et origo mali*'.¹²

What I should like to do, then, is to consider the implications of this surprising development; for the discovery of Goldsmith's authorship by his recent editor, Arthur Friedman, has, I hope to show, a direct bearing on the credibility of that earliest memoir and, of course, on our understanding of Berkeley. I shall then consider some additional evidence — much of it new — which bears on the biographical controversy between Luce and Yeats. Before doing so, however, it will be useful if I pause to sketch the clear, uncontroversial outline of Berkeley's life and work.

George Berkeley, Ireland's most famous philosopher, was born 300 years ago, on 12 March 1685. His early years were spent at Dysart Castle, 2 miles from Thomastown, in Co. Kilkenny. After four years at Kilkenny College, Berkeley entered Trinity College in 1700, where he was elected a scholar in 1702 and a Fellow in 1707. In 1709, at the age of 24, he published his *Essay towards a new theory of vision* — a landmark in the history of psychology — which Adam Smith later described as 'one of the finest examples of philosophical analysis . . . to be found . . . in any . . . language'.¹³ In 1710, the year he was ordained, Berkeley issued his most celebrated work, *The principles of human knowledge*, which expounds his immaterialistic philosophy. The *Principles* were not, however, well received. Attrib-

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uting this partly to style and presentation, Berkeley recast his philosophy in the *Three dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, printed in 1713, a work still studied as pure literature. It is upon these three books, each a masterpiece, that Berkeley's reputation as a cultural leader chiefly rests. They entitle him to be ranked with Plato, Spinoza and Kant. It is gratifying to record here, therefore, that on the title-pages of all three books the author is identified as 'George Berkeley, M.A. Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin'. Even more than Swift, Goldsmith or Burke — those other Trinity demi-gods — Berkeley is, in the fullest sense, a son of this College. For not only was he a Trinity graduate, scholar, Fellow and teacher, but his world-fame derives from the philosophical work he accomplished here, in those heroic years between 1707 and 1713.

Although my theme is Berkeley's life, rather than his doctrine, I cannot omit saying something of the philosophy. Its main thesis is that matter does not exist; hence the name *immaterialism*. To many this has seemed outrageous, as our Chapel inscription bears witness. Yet what is matter? If it is what we see and touch, then Berkeley does not deny it. But what do we see and touch, one may ask, if not material things? Berkeley's answer is that we perceive only sensible qualities or ideas: 'By sight [he states in the *Principles*] I have the ideas of light and colours . . . By touch I perceive . . . hard and soft, heat and cold, motion and resistance . . . Smelling furnishes me with odours; the palate with tastes, and hearing conveys sounds to the mind.'¹⁴ So I know there is a sheet of paper before me because I see a whitish patch, feel the smooth rectangular shape, and smell the distinctive papery fragrance. The paper's existence consists in being perceived.

Why, then, bring in matter? Indeed, what is the matter of the paper? For some, it is the inert substance which supports and causes the paper's sensible qualities. Yet how, asks Berkeley, can we know this material substance if we cannot perceive it? And how can it support and cause sensible qualities, like odours, if it is nonsentient and inert? To say that the material paper is imperceptible but resembles our perception of it, is, Berkeley argues, as nonsensical as saying that an odour is like something that cannot be smelled.

Now to suggest — as I have — that immaterialism is formidable is not to imply that Berkeley exploded all conceptions of matter, or that his philosophy consists solely in such explosions. For Berkeley only two kinds of things exist: minds and ideas. (Few philosophies are so economical.) The Infinite Mind, God, produces sensible ideas in finite minds, such as ourselves. We, too, are able to produce

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weaker versions of these ideas in memory and imagination, and by so doing we gain some notion of God's orderly creation of our world of sensible ideas. In short, God replaces matter: He causes, supports, and guarantees the reality of the world of sense.

Berkeley's immaterialism is easier to dismiss than to refute. Probably no philosopher has been dispatched and resurrected as often as Berkeley. As one poet wrote in 1745: 'Coxcombs vanquish Berkeley by a grin.'¹⁵ Not long after, Dr Johnson vainly tried to refute Berkeley's immaterialism by kicking a stone — without realizing that the resistance and hardness he felt are entirely real for Berkeley, because entirely perceptible.¹⁶ In this century, Lenin interrupted his revolutionary activities to attack Berkeley's immaterialism and its modern (covert) followers. Following Lenin's lead, Berkeley continues to be esteemed in the Soviet Union as an *honest* subjective idealist.¹⁷ In Europe he is considered the father of modern idealism. In America he is honoured as a precursor of pragmatism.¹⁸ Wherever philosophy is taught, there, almost certainly, one will find the three books Berkeley wrote here at Trinity.

Although his connection with College lasted officially until 1724, when he was appointed Dean of Derry, most of his time from 1713 to 1724 was spent away from Ireland and philosophy. In England he wrote for the *Guardian* (1713) and became friendly with Swift, Pope, Steele and Addison. In France and Italy he travelled extensively, crossing the Alps in mid-winter, observing at close quarters an eruption of Mount Vesuvius. By 1722, however, he had turned his attention from the Old to the New World, and boldly determined to found a college in Bermuda. The college, as he explained in his *Proposal* of 1724, was to educate the American colonists and train Indian missionaries to the Indians. During the next decade Berkeley's charm, courage and practicality were amply demonstrated by the wide backing he gained for his project. He received large private subscriptions; obtained a Royal charter and was promised £20,000 by the British government. Even more surprising, Swift's Vanessa left him nearly half her fortune, a legacy Berkeley described as 'providential'.¹⁹ In 1729, newly married, he set sail for Rhode Island, which was to be a base for his projected college. Here he lived for nearly three years, waiting in vain for the promised grant. In late 1731 he returned to London, having been told that the money would never be paid.

Berkeley's second main period of authorship now begins in 1732 with *Alciphron . . . an apology for the Christian religion* — composed in

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Rhode Island — followed by the *Theory of vision vindicated* (1733) and *The analyst* (1734) — a book which one historian has called ‘the most spectacular mathematical event in the eighteenth-century in England’.²⁰ After two years in London, Berkeley was appointed to the bishopric of Cloyne, where he spent the next seventeen years. In 1735-7 he published his *Querist*, composed of nearly 1,000 questions on Irish economic and social matters. From the goods of mind and fortune, Berkeley turned lastly to the good of the body. In *Siris: a chain of philosophical reflexions* (1744), his most enigmatic work, he championed the drinking of tar-water, a medicine of which he learned from America and to which he ascribed universal curative powers. Within a month after publication, *Siris* and tar-water had become the rage. Much of the Bishop’s time was now devoted to defending his medicine and ministering to patients. In late 1752 he left Cloyne, to supervise his son’s education in Oxford. There on 14 January 1753 died that ‘excellently great and very good man’ — as Berkeley was then described.²¹ He was buried in the chapel of Christ Church, Oxford.

Here, then, is the bare outline of Berkeley’s life and works. Nor would it have been difficult to fill in the sketch with other well-documented details displaying the familiar Berkeley — with every virtue under heaven. Yet, particularly here and now — at the University of Stock and Luce, in the tercentenary of Berkeley’s birth — I felt that such a familiar display would hardly be fitting. So instead, I should like to return to the controversial question raised earlier, that is, how much truth is there in the Goldsmith/Yeats picture of Berkeley, the picture so roundly repudiated by Dr Luce? Now, as I mentioned, Dr Luce did not know that Goldsmith was the author of the first memoir. Nor should anyone, I imagine, if a unique copy of the first printing had not been noticed by Prof. Friedman in the Huntington Library at San Marino, California. For the 1762 memoir, as we now know, was originally printed in 1759/60 in the *Weekly Magazine*, a short-lived periodical in which Goldsmith published some of his earliest verse.

More decisive still, there is a crucial phrase in this first printing of the memoir that was omitted from the later reprints known to Luce, Yeats and others. It occurs in the long, circumstantial hanging anecdote. Here we learn that, after Berkeley had been ‘tied up to the ceiling, and the chair taken from under his feet, his [student] companion’, Contarine, waited so long to assist Berkeley that ‘as

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soon as Berkeley was taken down he fell senseless and motionless upon the floor. After some trouble however [he] was brought to himself; and observing his band [exclaimed] bless my heart, Contarine, you have quite rumbled my band.²² Now in the *Weekly Magazine* the writer not only names Berkeley's companion but says that it was Contarine 'from whom I had the story' (*ibid*). Who, then, was this Contarine? There has been only one Contarine at Trinity College and that was the Reverend Thomas Contarine who entered College in 1701 — a year after Berkeley — and graduated in 1706. Equally important, this Thomas Contarine was the uncle and patron of Goldsmith; indeed, he helped to pay Oliver's expenses at Trinity. Goldsmith refers to his uncle in the *Deserted village* in the line: 'More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise'.²³ (Would I be stretching it, if I suggest that Goldsmith is alluding here not only to his uncle's generosity but also to his skill in hanging poor Berkeley up to the ceiling, but evading the proposal — as the memoir puts it — when it was his 'turn to go up'?)

On the memoir's authorship, Prof. Friedman notes: 'Of the small number of men who would be employed in writing for the *Weekly Magazine*, it is highly improbable that anyone except Goldsmith himself would have known his uncle, who spent his [entire] life in Ireland.'²⁴ But why, one might ask, was the crucial phrase 'from whom I had the story' omitted from the *British Plutarch* reprint? The answer, I believe, is that because its biographies were presented in the first person plural, it would have been absurd for the *Plutarch's* piratical editors to have written 'and from whom *we* had the story'.

Once we allow — as I think we must — Goldsmith's authorship of the memoir, we can no longer regard the memoir as, to quote Luce's judgment, 'a piece of ignorant hack-work without a vestige of authority.' For not only could Goldsmith have drawn on his generous uncle Contarine — at whose house he often stayed after leaving College — but he could also have gleaned biographical information from another well-placed relative, the Reverend Isaac Goldsmith, who was Dean of Cloyne from 1736 to 1769, in other words, for fifteen years during which Berkeley was Bishop. The memoir's credibility has also been bolstered recently from another source. One of its (apparently) dubious statements has been corroborated, I think, by the independent testimony of Berkeley's wife. In the memoir, Goldsmith had asserted that 'Doctor Pepusch, an excellent Musician [was] engaged in [Berkeley's] design to establish a College in Bermuda, and actually embarked in order to put it into execution, but the ship being cast away the design unhappily

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was discontinued . . .'²⁵ Because the latter part of this statement was known to be untrue, the first part has also been rejected. Yet in her annotated copy of Stock's *Account of Berkeley*, recently acquired by our College Library, Mrs Berkeley notes that 'one of the first composers and performers in Music of that time had engaged to come' to Bermuda — a reference, I take it, to John Christopher Pepusch, who arranged the music for Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*.²⁶

My conclusion is that Goldsmith's picture of Berkeley cannot now be confidently dismissed. Moreover, his picture fits, in some measure, with that of Yeats; for the youthful visionary, who proved all things a dream, might indeed appear absurd and comical to his fellow students — he might well seem, as Goldsmith puts it, 'the greatest genius or the greatest dunce in the whole university . . .', 'a fool' to those 'slightly acquainted with him', a 'prodigy of learning and good nature to those who shared his intimate friendship'. And while we may not have here the two Berkeleys, as claimed by Yeats, we at least have two very different views of him. The Goldsmith and Yeats accounts cohere also in another interesting respect. It is the young, Trinity-College Berkeley whom Goldsmith and Yeats both see as solitary and especially childlike. The later Berkeley becomes in Goldsmith's memoir more sober; whereas for Yeats, he became more circumspect about revealing his true self. In later years, Yeats claimed, Berkeley's deeper, more anarchic self appears 'but in glimpses or as something divined or inferred'. Perhaps the agreement and coherence of the Goldsmith/Yeats pictures come out most clearly when juxtaposed to Luce's portrait of the straightforward Berkeley, 'sane, efficient, shrewd', the man with vision but in no sense a visionary.

Who, then, saw the real Berkeley? Perhaps I should note at this point that our knowledge of Berkeley is probably very limited. Like other prominent eighteenth-century figures, he seems to have kept himself to himself — which has led some to regard the eighteenth century as an era of superficiality. Certainly, Berkeley was not given to self-revelation, particularly about his early life. Thus, we know virtually nothing of his parents, and the only personal detail we learn of his childhood is from his cryptic note-book entry 'Mem. that I was distrustful at 8 years old . . .'²⁷ Nor have we many more details of his student life, for our main source for that period is Goldsmith's memoir, such as it is. Berkeley wrote no account of his life; and very few of his letters, comparatively speaking, have come down to us. We have neither letter nor even note between himself and any member of his family. Dr Luce published 270 of his letters

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in 1956; since then about 20 new letters have been discovered. But compare that to the published correspondence of Berkeley's two colleagues in the triumvirate of British Empiricism — 1,500 letters for Locke, 600 letters for Hume — and one sees how small the extant Berkeley correspondence is. Yet it is from this source that Luce's portrait is mainly drawn. For Yeats, on the other hand, the real Berkeley, the angry rebel behind an 'alien mask', is to be seen in Berkeley's student notebooks. Only once, Yeats wrote, was Berkeley 'free, when, still an undergraduate [and young Fellow] he filled . . . [his notebooks] . . . with snorts of defiance'.²⁸ Yeats delighted particularly in those four snorts where Berkeley wrote 'We Irishmen', for 'That [Yeats declared] was the birth of the [Irish] national intellect; and it aroused the defeat in Berkeley's philosophical secret society of English materialism, the Irish Salamis.'²⁹ Luce, however, disputed this, arguing that when Berkeley wrote 'We Irishmen,' he simply meant 'we ordinary folk, shrewd judges of fact and commonsense'.³⁰ Luce also argued against Yeats's other fond belief that Berkeley belonged to a secret society devoted to immaterialism. Both issues are a little complicated, but I think it is clear that Luce was right: Yeats was carried away by wishful thinking.

Plainly, a follower of Yeats will not find it easy — even given the new Goldsmith identification — to dislodge Luce's sturdy portrait. For not only is it drawn skilfully from the available primary evidence, but it is broadly supported by earlier biographers, notably by Stock and (with qualification) by Fraser; more recently, by Lord Balfour and Benjamin Rand. Neither Goldsmith nor Yeats could lay claim to their wide acquaintance with Berkeley's life and writings. Luce's picture of the straightforward, sane Berkeley has been confirmed also in a detailed book — published five years ago — on the psychology of philosophers. There Berkeley appears as one of the most normal philosophers of the past 300 years.³¹ And yet, perhaps the poets did see something that the scholars missed.

Clearly the question is complicated. For one thing, some of Goldsmith's statements tend to support Luce's disagreement with Fraser on the Cloyne period. Whereas Fraser portrayed Berkeley as 'the recluse of Cloyne' — 'a caricature', according to Luce³² — Goldsmith paints a picture more gregarious and more in line with that of Luce: 'The gentlemen of the neighbourhood and he [says Goldsmith in his memoir] preserved the closest intimacy; and while [the Bishop] cultivated the duties of his station, he was not unmindful of the innocent amusements of life: music he was

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particularly fond of, and always kept one or two exquisite performers to amuse his hours of leisure.³³ About one such performer, the Italian musician Pasquino, we have a story from Berkeley's daughter-in-law which adds colour to Goldsmith's picture and weight to Luce's case against Fraser. One day at dinner, we are told, the Bishop mentioned that he had disposed of a great many concert tickets for Pasquino among his neighbours, to which the Italian replied with a bow: 'May God *pickle* your Lordship.' After the laughter of the company subsided, the poor Italian said, 'Vell, in de grammar dat my Lord gave me . . . it is printed, *pickle*, to keep from decay.'³⁴

My serious point in all this is to emphasize that we are not being asked to choose between two clearcut, rival pictures of Berkeley. It is not as though Luce, Fraser and Stock saw one Berkeley, Goldsmith and Yeats another. A further difficulty is that given Yeats's impressionistic sketch — in some ways almost a prose poem — it is not altogether clear how completely it differs from that of Luce. I take it, however, that the hanging episode, recorded by Goldsmith, and the young Berkeley's description of himself in entry 465 of his notebooks, agree with Yeats's picture. Here Berkeley writes: 'I am young, I am an upstart, I am a pretender, I am vain, very well. I shall Endeavour patiently to bear up under the most lessening, villifying appellations that the pride & rage of man can devise.'³⁵ The image this 'snort of defiance' — to use Yeats's phrase — conjures up is of a rebellious young man, and it is supported by some new evidence, the testimony of Archbishop King, another distinguished graduate. It has long been known that because Berkeley was ordained without the Archbishop's permission, he was forced to apologize to King, which he did in a letter of 18 April 1710. Dr Luce's comment is: 'The incident did not reflect in any way on Berkeley, who was a victim of a trial of strength between the university and the Archbishop [who] was not an enemy . . . of Berkeley' (*Life*, pp. 43-4). However, a letter I found from King to Ashe, the Bishop who ordained Berkeley, argues otherwise. For there King wryly observes:

. . . your Ldp alledges that Mr Berkly was in a great haste [to be ordained.] I believe he was as soon as my back was turned, but tho' it be three years . . . since he was fellow, yet he never aplyd to me nor I suppose wou'd if I had bin in Dublin, and yet phaps it had not bin the worse for him, if I had discoursed him as I do others before ordination . . .³⁶

Pictures by Goldsmith, Yeats and Luce

From this it seems that King — who, it is generally agreed, was a shrewd judge of character — saw the young junior fellow as a vain upstart, rebellious and arrogant. But this is still a long way from the subterranean Berkeley, whom Yeats describes as ‘solitary, talkative, ecstatic, destructive’.³⁷

However, consider the following dictum of Berkeley recorded by his wife, Anne: The Bishop’s ‘maxim’, she says,

was that nothing very good or very bad could be done until a man entirely got the better of fear of *que dira-t-on* — but when a man has overcome himself he overcomes the world and then is fitted for his *Master’s use* —³⁸

I find this maxim revealing, particularly when taken with another, this time recorded by Berkeley’s friend, Lord Percival: ‘“I know not what it is to fear”, said Mr Berkeley, “but I have a delicate sense of danger”’.³⁹ Both dicta seem to reveal a duality. In the first, there is what people say, public opinion, the world or the worldly; this one must cease to fear if one is to do something either very good or very bad. The other dictum suggests that Berkeley had a natural lack of fear — but of what? I am tempted to combine the two dicta and say that he was naturally fearless of *que dira-t-on*, of what the world says, and that this helps to explain those three bold crusades which largely constitute his life and career — his attempt to reform philosophy in early life by proving the non-existence of matter; his scheme in middle age to establish an arts and missionary college, to ameliorate British society in the New World; and, finally, his advocacy of tar-water as a universal medicine.

Any one of these three projects might have marked its originator as a Don Quixote. Yet that caricature simply does not fit Berkeley. For in each of his three idealistic projects we clearly see the practical man and cautious reasoner, the man with his feet set firmly on the ground, who anticipates and answers our best objections. Berkeley was no romantic, like his immaterialist follower Shelley, carried away by a noble idea in the blaze of its inception. Each of Berkeley’s three projects he publicised only after he had privately deliberated for at least two years. So, while Berkeley may naturally have lacked fear of public opinion, he knew what was needed to persuade others, to alter public opinion. Naturally unworldly, perhaps, he had a delicate sense of what was required if the world was to be changed. In the non-philosophical sense, at least, Berkeley was both an

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idealist and a realist. There is nothing languid, dreaming or visionary in the way that he campaigns for his immaterialism, his Bermuda College or his universal medicine. And yet the goals were extraordinary — astonishing — as Berkeley himself recognised. That he should seriously entertain and publicly defend them — *that* strikes me as visionary and child-like. Yet once we encounter him actually defending them, then we feel that he is the very paradigm of reason. David Hume seems to have felt something of this when he said of Berkeley's philosophical arguments: '*They admit of no answer, and [yet] produce no conviction.*'⁴⁰ One does have the impression, as Yeats suggests, that Berkeley lived in two worlds. We feel at one moment that his ideas are *out of this world*, at another moment we cannot see what *in the world* is wrong with them.

Berkeley's friends, too, seem to have perceived and been struck by the way he combined innocence and experience, shrewdness and selflessness. Thus in 1713 Richard Steele wrote to him: 'Till I knew you, I thought it the privilege of angels only to be very knowing and very innocent'⁴¹ — a tribute supported by Bishop Atterbury, who said of Berkeley:

So much understanding, so much knowledge, so much innocence, and such humility, I did not think had been the portion of any but angels till I saw this gentleman.⁴²

Pope's better-known line — 'To *Berkley*, ev'ry Virtue under Heav'n'⁴³ — dulls rather than sharpens what I take to be the crucial insight: that Berkeley united the (seemingly) incompatible virtues of worldly wisdom and childlike innocence. Certainly Swift saw Berkeley's innocent and unworldly side when in 1724 he described him as 'an absolute philosopher with regard to money, titles, and power'.⁴⁴ Yet Thomas Blackwell, Berkeley's Scottish friend, was plainly impressed by his other side when he wrote:

I scarce remember to have conversed with [Mr. Berkeley] on [any] art, liberal or mechanic, of which he knew not more than the ordinary practitioners With the widest views, he descended into . . . minute detail I have known him sit for hours in forgeries and founderies to inspect their successive operations.⁴⁵

Perhaps Berkeley's capacity to unite other-worldly idealism with this-worldly practicality helps to explain the extraordinary impression he made on the London wits. Thus, there is a story told by Lord Bathurst about a meeting of the Scriblerus Club at his house,

Pictures by Goldsmith, Yeats and Luce

where all the members rallied Berkeley on his Bermuda scheme: ' . . . having listened to all the lively things they had to say, [we are told that Berkeley] begged to be heard in his turn; and displayed his plan with such an astonishing and animating force of eloquence and enthusiasm, that they were struck dumb, and, after some pause, rose up all together with earnestness, exclaiming — "Let us all set out with him immediately [for Bermuda]"'.⁴⁶

I am *tempted*, then, to agree with Yeats that there *was* a deep, unworldly, childlike side to Berkeley. But Yeats was wrong to suppose that Berkeley the Bishop was a humbug. For the deep Berkeley was inextricably bound with the religious man, the Christian, whose aim, as Mrs Berkeley says, was to be 'fitted for his *Master's use*'. That comes out clearly in all three of Berkeley's bold crusades — they are all deeply motivated or guided by his religion. Indeed, it is in Berkeley's zealous commitment to Christianity that we glimpse him, in my opinion, at his unworldly worst: in his Biblical endorsement of slavery; in his approval of kidnapping (for the sake of converting the American indians); in his theological rejection of all rebellion — even if a tyrant were guilty of the most heinous acts; in his suggestion that irreligion should be considered a capital crime no less serious than treason.⁴⁷

Where can the real Berkeley be found? Well, one answer is to go first to our Common Room portrait (which Yeats disliked) and then to the painting in the Examination Hall (which Luce disliked). Clearly, however, that would be facile. The painting in the Examination Hall is an imaginative recreation, with no real authority; whereas there is every reason to believe that Bishop Berkeley did sit for the Latham portrait. Similarly, there can be little doubt that Berkeley sat for Luce's biographical portrait, given its judicious use of Berkeley's correspondence and other hard evidence. Neither Goldsmith nor Yeats inspires such confidence. Goldsmith was well-known for mixing truth and fantasy. Similarly, most of Yeats's judgments are based not on evidence but on intuition, as when he asserts that with Berkeley 'we feel perhaps for the first time that eternity is always at our heels or hidden from our eyes by the thickness of a door',⁴⁸ an assertion which must prompt the question: Is this biography or poetry? And yet for all that, a suspicion remains — as I have tried to show — that there *is* a deeper, wilder and more uncanny Berkeley which neither Latham nor Luce has captured, but of whom Goldsmith and Yeats have caught a distant glimpse.⁴⁹

David Berman

Notes

1. *The Life of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne* (London, 1949), p. 1; referred to hereafter as *Life*.
2. *Life*, Preface, p. v.
3. *Life*, p. 2.
4. J.M. Hone and M.M. Rossi, *Bishop Berkeley: his life, writings, and philosophy* (London, 1931); 'Berkeley: an introduction', by Yeats, p. xv; *The variorum edition of the poems of W.B. Yeats* (London, 1957), 'Blood and the moon', p. 481.
5. W.B. Yeats, *Pages from a diary written in nineteen hundred and thirty* (Dublin, 1944), pp. 38 and 41; *Bishop Berkeley*, Introduction, pp. xxiii and xxvi. Most of this is quoted by Luce in his *Berkeley's immaterialism* (London, 1945), Preface, p. viii.
6. Luce, *Berkeley's immaterialism*, p. viii.
7. *Bishop Berkeley*, Introduction, p. xvi.
8. *Pages from a diary*, p. 38. For a helpful account of Yeats's connection with Berkeley, see D.T. Torchiana, *W. B. Yeats and Georgian Ireland* (Evanston, 1966), pp. 222-265.
9. This 44p stamp, designed by Brendan Donegan, was issued by *An Post* on Thursday, 20 June 1985.
10. *Berkeley's immaterialism*. pp. viii-ix.
11. *Life*, p. 248.
12. Arthur Friedman, *Collected works of Oliver Goldsmith* (Oxford, 1966), vol. 3, p. 35.
13. Adam Smith, *Essays on philosophical subjects* (Dublin, 1795), p. 294.
14. *Works of George Berkeley* (London, 1948-1957), edited by A.A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, vol. 2, p. 41 (referred to as *Works*).
15. John Brown, *Essay on satire, occasioned by the death of Mr. Pope* (1745); in *A collection of poems in six volumes* (London, 1770), vol. 3, p. 328.
16. J. Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson* (London, 1831), edited by J.W. Croker, vol. 1, p. 484.
17. In his main philosophical work, *Materialism and empirio-criticism* (1909), Lenin writes: 'Frankly and bluntly did Bishop Berkeley argue! In our own time these very same thoughts . . . are enveloped in a much more artful form . . . and . . . the "recent" Machists have not adduced a single argument against the materialists that had not been adduced by Bishop Berkeley'". (Lenin, *Collected works* (Moscow, 1972), vol. 14, pp. 28 and 38. Also see H.R. Cathcart, "Berkeley's philosophy through Soviet eyes", *Hermathena* 98 (1964), pp. 33-42.
18. R.H. Popkin, 'Berkeley's influence on American philosophy', *Hermathena* 82 (1953), pp. 136-8.
19. Letter to Percival, 4 June 1723, in *Works*, vol. 8, p. 130.
20. F. Cajori, *History of mathematics* (2nd. edition, New York, 1919), p. 236.
21. See Fraser, *Life and letters*, p. 352. The description is by Thomas Secker, later Archbishop of Canterbury.
22. 'Some original memoirs of the late famous Bishop of Cloyne', reprinted in Friedman, *Collected works of Oliver Goldsmith* (see note 12), vol. 3, p. 35.
23. This identification was first made in Charles O'Connor's *The memoirs of the life and writings of the late Charles O'Connor of Balangare* (Dublin, circa 1796), p. 186.
24. Friedman, *Collected works*, vol. 3, p. 37.
25. *Collected works*, vol. 3, p. 35.
26. See my 'Mrs Berkeley's annotations in her interleaved copy of *An account of the life of George Berkeley* (1776)', *Hermathena* 122 (1977), pp. 20 and 26. Another piece of new evidence, which seems to lend support to the memoir, is to be found in the hitherto unnoticed 'Last Will . . . of Mrs. Elizabeth Berkeley . . . [daughter-in-law] . . . of the Celebrated Bishop of Cloyne.' This extraordinary document, now in our College Library (ms. no. 3530), is composed of more than 130 folios. In the main part of the Will, dated 1793, Eliza speaks of ' . . . the poor insane Son and Daughter of Bishop Berkeley' (f. 20), who are elsewhere identified as 'Henry Berkeley Esq, eldest son of Bp Berkeley and his sister Mrs Julia Berkeley . . . poor suffering persons in their melancholy situations . . .' (f. 8). Berkeley was survived

Pictures by Goldsmith, Yeats and Luce

by three children: Henry, Julia and George (the husband of Eliza). Little or nothing has come down to us of Henry and Julia — certainly nothing of their insanity. Yet there may well be a hint of it in the memoir, where Goldsmith mentions that Berkeley drank tar-water 'in abundance himself, and attempted to mend the constitution of his children by the same regimen: this, however, he could never effect, and perhaps his desire of improving their health *and their understanding*, at which he laboured most assiduously, might have *impaired both*' (*Collected works*, p. 40; my italics).

27. *Berkeley, Philosophical commentaries* (Ohio, 1976), edited by G.H. Thomas, with explanatory notes by A.A. Luce; entry 266, p.31.

28. *Pages from a diary*, p.41.

29. *Ibid*, p. 51.

30. See *Philosophical commentaries* (1976), p. 226, and Torchiana (see note 8) pp. 237-8.

31. Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *The philosophers: their lives and the nature of their thought* (Oxford, 1980), p. 182.

32. *Life*, p. 186.

33. *Collected works*, p. 40.

34. *Poems by the late George Monck Berkeley* (London, 1797), Preface (by Eliza Berkeley), p. ccccxii.

35. *Philosophical commentaries* (entry 465), pp. 58-9.

36. Trinity College, Library MS 750/11; see my 'Berkeley and King', *Notes and Queries* New Series 29, no. 6 (1982), pp. 529-30.

37. *Bishop Berkeley*, Introduction, p. xvi.

38. 'Mrs Berkeley's annotations . . .' (see note 26), p. 22.

39. First published by Luce in 'More unpublished Berkeley letters and new Berkeleiana', *Hermathena* 48 (1933), p. 28.

40. Hume, *Essays and treatises* (Edinburgh, 1793), vol. II, p. 610.

41. *Works*, vol. 7, pp. 176-7.

42. *Letters by several eminent persons deceased including . . . John Hughs . . .* (London, 1772), vol. 2, p. 2.

43. Pope, 'Epilogue to the *Satires*'. Dialogue II, in *Pope: Poetical works* (London, 1966), edited by H. Davis, p.417.

44. Swift, letter of 3 Sept. 1724 to Carteret. In a letter to the Earl of Oxford, 14 Aug. 1725, Swift describes Berkeley as 'a true philosopher . . . but of a very visionary virtue . . .' (*The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift* (London, 1910-14) ed. F.E. Ball. vol. 3, pp. 212-13, 262).

45. Blackwell, *Memoirs of the court of Augustus* (Edinburgh, 1755), vol. 2, pp. 277-8.

46. Quoted in Fraser, *Life and letters*, p.106.

47. See *Proposal*, in *Works*, vol. 7, pp. 346-7 and my 'Berkeley, Christianity and slavery', *The Freethinker* 101 (1981), pp. 52-3; *Passive obedience* (1712), in *Works*, vol. 6, pp. 18, 43-4; and *An essay towards preventing the ruin of Great Britain*, in *Works*, vol. 6, pp. 70-1.

48. *Bishop Berkeley*, Introduction, pp. xxi-ii.

49. This paper was originally delivered as the 1985 Trinity Monday Discourse.