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1968

extensive number of documents relating to W B Yeats. Extracts from Yeats's poems and Professor McHugh's *At, Sweet Dancer* are reproduced by kind permission of Macmillan and Michael Yeats.

Addendum

Since I wrote this article my friend Professor J B Lyons of Dublin has told me that Yeats's Steinach operation was mentioned in some letters written by Gogarty to Horace Reynolds, a lifetime friend and a Boston man of letters, which are now in the Houghton Library at Harvard. In October 1934 Gogarty says that Yeats "has undergone Steinach's operation and is now trapped and enmeshed in sex. When I parodied his poem into

I heard the old, old men say  
Everything's phallic

little did I think he would become so obsessed before the end. He cannot explode it by pornography (as Joyce) or jocularity as I try to do."

On 9 March 1955 Gogarty mentions that Yeats "submitted to that humbug, Steinach . . . he never consulted me . . . Ethel Mannin told me that she 'did my best for him' after the operation; but of course without effect!"

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BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL VOLUME 287 24-31 DECEMBER 1983

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## The origin of "Awakenings"

OLIVER SACKS

I have been asked by the editor to write about the genesis of *Awakenings*. This necessitates a sort of medical autobiography—but a sort that I hope may have some real interest and not be merely egocentric or confessional.

I had been fairly orthodox in my neurological training and in my early days as a neurologist had not felt impelled to step out of the formats of established medical formulation and writing. Thus my first book, *Migraïne*, originally written in 1967, was well within the established medical "canon."

When, early in 1969, I embarked on the work which was later to become *Awakenings* I conceived it in quite limited, and narrowly "scientific," terms—as a 90 day double blind trial of levodopa in a large group of patients who had become institutionalised after having encephalitis. Consciously, at least, I thought of it as little more than this, but there must have been, unconsciously, complex depths below—depths of uncertainty, depths of concern—which caused me, as I did, to hesitate for two years (Cotzias's famous paper had been published in February 1967). These were not "ordinary" patients with Parkinson's disease: they had far more complex pathophysiological syndromes, and their situations were more complex, indeed without precedent—for they had been "institutionalised," and "out of the world," for decades—sometimes since the time of the

great epidemic. Thus, even before I started, I was faced by scientific and human complexities, complexities and perplexities of a sort which had not arisen in previous trials of levodopa, or, indeed, of any treatment in the past. Thus there was an element of the extraordinary, the unprecedented, the unpredictable. I was setting out, with my patients, on an uncharted sea. . . .

And, indeed, it became obvious within a month or less that the original format would have to be abandoned. The effects of levodopa in these patients was decisive—spectacular; while, as I could infer from the precise 50% failure rate, there was no significant placebo effect whatever. I could no longer, in good conscience, continue the placebo but had to try levodopa in every patient; and I could no longer think of giving it for 90 days and then stopping—this would have been like stopping the very air that they breathed. Thus what was originally conceived as a limited 90 day experiment was transformed instead into an historical experience: a story, in effect, of life for these patients as it had been before levodopa, and as it was changed, and as it was to become, after starting treatment with levodopa.

Thus I was impelled, willy nilly, to a presentation of case histories or biographies for no "orthodox" presentation, in terms of numbers, series, grading of effects, etc, could have conveyed the historical reality of the experience. In August 1969, then, I wrote the first nine case histories, or "stories," of *Awakenings*.

The same impulse, the same sense that one had to convey stories and phenomena—the drama of stories, the delight of phenomena—led me to write a number of "letters to the editor," which I despatched to the *Lancet* and the *BMJ* early the next year. I enjoyed writing these letters, and, as far as I could gather, readers of these journals enjoyed reading them too. There was

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