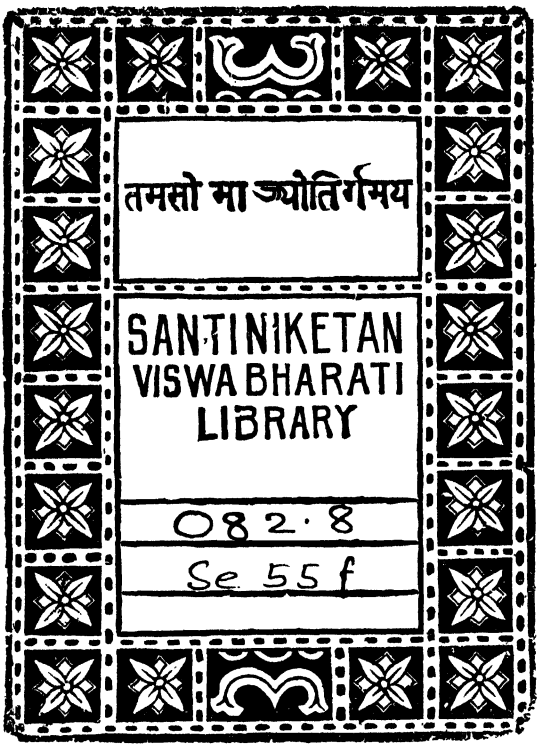
# FOUR ESSAYS ON THE POETRY OF YEATS

S. C. SEN

VISVA-BHARATI
SANTINIKETAN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# PREFACE

The four essays on Yeats included in this volume have been written over a period of five years. The first three were published in the *Bulletin of the Department of English*, Calcutta University, which I edited. My students in the Post-graduate classes liked them and told me that they found them useful for studying the poetry of Yeats. Perhaps the main reason for this was the element of exegesis which has an important place in my comments. The business of interpretation can only be ancillary to that of criticism. I found that I had difficulty in explaining my critical position without adequate reference to the text, which I tried to examine from my point of view. By and large I was concerned with the development of Yeats's poetic genius and have tried to indicate the process in the comments I have made.

The essay on the vocabulary used by Yeats has been written as the last of the series. It arose out of a lecture I gave at our Departmental Seminar at Visva-Bharati. I found that my approach was appreciated, and accordingly developed the brief notes I had prepared on the occasion into the present form. As I had no opportunity to refer to the Yeats Concordance, which I understand, has been produced by an American scholar, I had to depend upon my own reading for ascertaining the use of particular words and phrases by Yeats on a chronological basis. It is likely that on occasions I may have committed inaccuracies as regards the appearances and disappearances of words. But an oversight about such details, I am confident, will not falsify the picture that I have endeavoured to present.

Yeats in one poem seems particularly critical of the ways of scholars in dealing with poetry. I do not think that this gives a correct picture of what he actually felt and I am inclined to treat it as an expression of a momentary irritation with some inept performance:

> Bald heads forgetful of their sins,
> Old, learned, respectable bald heads
> Edit and annotate the lines
> That young men, tossing on their beds,

Rhymed out in love's despair
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.
(The Scholars)

Fortunately for me not a single detail in the statement will apply to me; both physically and intellectually I do not conform to the account but I have to plead guilty to the charge of 'annotating' the lines which the poet 'Rhymed out in love's despair'. Whatever may be the reason for the passionate protest, which appears in these verses there is no doubt that most of the poets of the world, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, would have been inaccessible to us without the aid of the scholars in establishing the authentic text and interpreting it in the light of their historical researches. It will be wrong to assume that Yeats was unaware of the role of scholars. Hence, the explanation for the outburst is the excesses perpetrated by impercipient critics and not surely the help scholars offer for the adequate appreciation of a poet or other writer.

The essays I have written record my individual reaction to the poetry. I have not, therefore, made any attempt to study the various critics on the poetry of Yeats so as to discover whether or not I share their views. Critical literature has a rate of growth, which will frighten even the most voracious reader, and as there is a famine of books in India, I have made no effort to see what is being written, finding in the circumstance an adequate reason for what otherwise may be interpreted as indolence. But personal reactions may also have a justification and this is my reason for seeking publication. I have made certain small corrections in these essays at the time of preparing the MS. for publication. These revisions have been made at the instance of Professor A. G. Stock, formerly of Calcutta University and Mr. K. P. Jochum of the University of Frankfurt to whom I wish to convey my sincere thanks for the help.

28 July 1966
Visva-Bharati
Santiniketan.

S. C. S.

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# CHAPTER I

## THE IRISH ELEMENT IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE POETRY OF W. B. YEATS

### A SCHOOL OF IRISH POETRY

THE survey is undertaken to enquire into the implications of the Irish element in the development of Yeats as poet, comprising the Irish heroic and other tales, the belief in magic, the conception of *Anima Mundi*, and finally, references to *A Vision*, where all the disparate beliefs are assembled and systematized. The symbols will be examined as the most significant material for the embodying of the gradually intensifying vision and its increasing complexity from early life until the middle years and later. What is striking about Yeats's achievement is that even the last phase of his work shows that he is attempting ascent to fresh altitudes without sign of decline, without fatigue of imagination, or exhaustion of creative power. Leavis in his *New Bearings* has remarked upon the absolute value of the Irish content of his poetry: "Mr. Yeats starts in the English tradition, but he is from the outset an Irish poet"(1). This was said after the poet's death but it was hardly a just estimate: the stress laid on a particular aspect of the poetry seems less than fair to the total achievement. Ezra Pound, writing almost a generation earlier, drew attention to the precise contribution which the poet had made to rehabilitate Irish poetry: "Mr. Yeats brought a new music upon the harp . . . the sound of keening and the skirl of the Irish ballads, and (had) driven out the sentimental cadence and memories of *The County Mayo* and *The Coolun*"(2). But as he observes in the same essay, Yeats by this achievement did not merely consolidate his position in Anglo-Irish poetry; his significance was even at this early date (1914) much wider: "up to date no one has shown any disposition to supersede him as the best poet in England, or any likelihood of doing so for some time." Ezra Pound's estimate thus expressed was generous; it has since been proved just.

The point of view which I shall try to maintain is that in the early years Yeats was too much under the Irish spell to think and

feel as a European. In the middle years of his life, the situation changed distinctly. He then began to dominte his material instead of being dominated by it. This transition may not perhaps be unreasonably described as a transition from the Provincial to the Metropolitan. Sir Kenneth Clark in his Presidential Address to the English Association has defined Provincialism as "simply a matter of distance from a centre, where standards of skill are higher and patrons more exacting."(3) The latter term, according to the same authority, means truth to nature and individual judgement. We shall regard the 'Metropolitan' element as the European in the present context, adhering to the view proposed by Sir Kenneth. Yeats's work in the early phase, which seemed to extend until 1910, showed that the strength of his appeal lay in the use of Irish material. In the application of symbol and diction, his practice, generally speaking, was neither contemporary nor did it ally him markedly with what was significant in the European tradition. His homespun material did not touch the centre of contemporary life, and served only to limit his vision. It did not possess universality to make it 'Metropolitan'.

Yeats from the beginning of his poetic career had a kind of Irish programme to assist his imagination. Although he never denied its soundness he broadened the basis of his practice by a readiness to incorporate material from other sources. This fertilized the Irish ground of his imagination till it yielded a golden crop about whose worth no-one has ever expressed doubt. The later realism of his outlook was characterised by an immense complexity of feeling and thought, and also by a full-blooded element in contrast with the somewhat sickly, ethereal, and non-human creations of his early period. We shall now proceed to see what he thought about his Irish programme, in what it consisted and how he embodied it in his own poetry.

Yeats was barely twenty-two when he began to formulate in a letter to Katharine Tynan his ideas about "a school of Irish poetry, founded on Irish myth and history, a neo-romantic movement"(4). This could be an impediment to the freedom and shaping power of the imagination but it need not be so as he explained to the same correspondent about three months later: "but remember, by being Irish as you can, you will be more

original and true to yourself and in the long run more interesting even to English readers" (5). In February, 1895, he furnished *The Daily Express* with a list of thirty books, describing them as the most memorable record yet made of Irish habits and passions (6). Yeats was moved almost to a religious sense in the presence of the mythologies of his land. In an article in praise of Lady Gregory's English version of *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* he wrote (March, 1902): "If we will but tell these stories to our children, the land will begin again to be a Holy Land, as it was before men gave their hearts to Greece and Rome and Judea"(7).

Yeats sought converts to his views among his friends and fellow poets. In a letter to George Russell (A. E.) written in January 1898 he said: "Absorb Ireland and her tragedy and you will be the poet of a people, perhaps the poet of an insurrection"(8). The implication seems to be that political Ireland cannot realise unity of purpose until its imagination is fired by a sense of sharing in common a glorious heritage. His own practice accorded with his precept. In a letter to his sister Lily Yeats (July, 1898) he gives assurance of his deliberate pre-engagement in the cause: "I had almost forgotten, by the by, that I have begun Irish and am getting on fairly well with it"(9). Yeats often thought of the Irish exiles, divided from home by hundreds of miles, when he wrote his plays. He seems to have anticipated what Rupert Brooke wrote much later in his sonnet:

> If I should die, think only this of me:
> That there's some corner of a foreign field
> That is for ever England.

but, of course, in an entirely different context and with an entirely different purpose. Yeats wished that by his writing the exile's nostalgic sense would at least for the time being be replaced by a feeling of being at home and among his own people. He will discover in his imagination an Ireland wherever he may be through the illusion of art. Yeats explains the idea in a letter addressed to John Quinn, an American lawyer: "Let my plays be acted, sometimes by professional actors if you will, but certainly a great many times by Irish societies in Ireland and throughout the world. Let exiles when they gather together to remember the country where they were born, sometimes have a

play of mine acted to give wings to their thought." When Yeats was more than fifty he mentioned in a letter to Joseph Hone (2 January, 1916) how persistently he had written on Irish theme, how completely it had imbued his work: "I know that my work has been done in every detail with a deliberate Irish aim, but it is hard for those who know it in fragments to know that especially if the most they know of me is about some contest with Irish opinion" ([10]).

Yeats has used the language of symbol from the beginning of his poetic career. But he seems to have found nearly all that he needed for the purpose in his native Ireland. The French symbolists do not seem to have much relevance to his practice. He used an expression "Trembling of the Veil" out of Mallarme to name a portion of his *Autobiographies* (Allan Wade, *Letters*, July 21, 1921, p. 671). But any evidence of a direct influence does not apparently exist. As for indirect or unconscious indebtedness, we must rely upon his statement made in a letter to Ernest Boyd (Feb. 1915): "My interest in mystic symbolism did not come from Arhur Symons or any other contemporary writers. I have been a student of the medieval mystics since 1887 and found in such authors as Valentin Andrea authority for any use of the rose.

"My chief mystical authorities have been Boehme, Blake and Swedenborg. Of the French symbolists I have never had any detailed or accurate knowledge."([11])

To understand the mind of Yeats is one of the first requisites for an understanding of his poetry. The contents of his mind were a singular combination of strange beliefs and modern critical ideas. The former had their origin in Irish life, the latter came from a wide, though rather desultory, reading. Professor A. G. Stock has stressed the supernatural element in popular belief in Ireland: "The land", she observes, "is alive with spirits who are known and respected. Their deeds in different places are remembered; history trails away into myth and myth projected forward into history" ([12]). Belief in magic and mysticism was constant throughout Yeats's life. Writing to John O'Leary on July 23, 1892 (Allan Wade, *Letters*, p. 210) with reference to the study of magic, he said "I decided deliberately four or five years ago to make (it), next to my poetry, the most important

pursuit of my life." It was at the turn of the new century that he began to formulate his ideas about "Anima Mundi". His essay "Magic" speaks of this latter as integral to magical practice and thus states what he means by it: "That the borders of our mind are ever shifting and..... many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy... that this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols"([13]).

The date and provenance of his belief as regards "Anima Mundi" cannot accurately be ascertained but there are reasonable grounds to hold that one particular experience described in "Magic" may be the immediate cause of its formulation and the time, shortly before the writing of the essay (1901). The account he gives is that of a young Irish woman, educated at a convent school. The reference to the religious background of the education seems intended as a guarantee of her *bona fides*. She fell into a trance and "saw the Tree of Life with ever-sighing souls moving in its branches instead of sap, and among its leaves all the fowl of the air, and on its highest bough one white fowl wearing a crown." On return home from the place where he had witnessed the extraordinary incident, he read in *The Book of Concealed Mystery* (translated by Mathers in *The Kabbalah Unveiled*) what seemed in all essential respects an account of the same experience. He states his own conclusion, forestalling his subsequent reflexion on the subject: "Almost every one who has ever busied himself with such matters has come in trance or dream, upon some new and strange symbol or event, which he afterwards found in some work he had never read or heard of.([14])"

From what has been said above, it may perhaps be reasonably concluded that Yeats found in Ireland all the principal interests and pre-occupations of his life, including psychical research and the association with the Hermetic Students, founded by McGregor Mathers. (W. B. Yeats: *Autobiographies*, Macmillan, 1956; 575 f.)

In a letter to George Russell (April, 1904) Yeats made an important piece of self-criticism. In this ability to judge his own work lay the promise of the progressive concentration and visionary power of his poetry. "In my *Land of Heart's Desire* and in some of my early lyric verse of the time", he wrote,

"there is an exaggeration of sentiment and sentimental beauty which I have come to think unmanly" ([15]). The criticism was reiterated shortly before his death in his reference to "my early sentimental poems" ([16]). He thought he had improved his writing by discarding what he called "Shelley's Italian night" and this made him declare confidently, "now I think my style is myself" ([17]). Yeats explained in a letter to John Quinn (June 29, 1905), what led to his personal style, the cause of which was only negatively implied in relation to his changed attitude to Shelley; more positively, it was the outcome of his increasing reliance on the resources of common idiom in poetry: "I believe more strongly every day that the element of strength in poetic language is common idiom, just as the element of strength in poetic construction is common passion." Allan Wade in his introduction to Part Four of the *Letters* (p. 518) seems to say much the same thing in his comment on *The Green Helmet* poems which in his opinion illustrate the beginning of his "second manner", and represent a more colloquial style, the result, as he thinks, of "his continuous work in the theatre." In *The Seven Woods* (1904) volume, common passions are not, however, so much in evidence; the publication being close to the date of the poet's remark, quoted above, it is legitimate to expect that it should illustrate his new critical ideas. His practice bears out what he says about the colloquial element being poetic and the volume also reveals an unfailing craftsmanship:

> For to articulate sweet sounds together
> Is to work harder than all these, and yet
> Be thought an idler by the noisy set
> Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
> The martyrs call the world.([18]).

Perhaps the remark may be ventured that the sentimentality of his early work is partly the outcome of a stress on the dream element. T. S. Eliot in "Homage to John Dryden" has pointed out the importance of dream as an element in nineteenth century poetry and F. R. Leavis confirmed and elaborated the view with the remark: "Nineteenth century poetry, we realize, was characteristically preoccupied with the creation of a dream

world" ([19]). For this statement he takes as his authority half a dozen well-known and representative poems including "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", "The Lady of Shalott", and "A Forsaken Garden". Yeats's fancy which continues the 19th century tradition had no roots in psychology nor in a strong personal feeling. His work in the theatre, however, enabled him to achieve a greater simplicity of expression as well as integration and precision of statement. In the use of symbol Yeats seemed in his early practice to emphasize a decorative design rather than the purely expressive element. It is curious to see that Yeats himself was aware of this limitation, as appears from a remark he made in 1906 in "The Cutting of an Agate": "As I imagined the visions outside myself my imagination became full of decorative landscape and still life" (*Essays*, p. 36). This does not, however, mean that the result was always unsatisfactory. For occasionally he produced an effect of great beauty:

> And we fear no dawning morrow,
> Nor the grey wandering osprey Sorrow.
> (*Oisin*, CP, 419).

But while the image of osprey as a bird, a fishing eagle, swift and strong in attack, makes a picture, its association with sorrow is less clear and persuasive, unless we compare the human role to that of the underwater fish, exposed to the depredation of its merciless beak and claws. The image appeals as an ornament, but hardly as a symbol if we closely examine its implications. For depth and subtlety of thought are not there to justify a resort to symbolism. Until the need to communicate is pressing, symbols never acquire a real power over the imagination, which belongs only to what is intensely imagined. It is because of this deficiency that Yeats could tell Katharine Tynan (Feb. 6, 1889) that "Oisin" needs an interpreter ([20]). Later in life his symbols formed an element in the structure of his thought and feeling. Their intricacies reflect adequately the soul's conflicts in a world of chaos and disorder. In this later use of the symbol we have the clearest evidence of a struggle to achieve truth to nature and individual judgement, which was the way of his salvation from 'Provincialism'.

In *Rosa Alchemica* (1897) Yeats declared that Symbolism was a necessity to his mind but his early symbols, to quote his own comment on a poet whose thoughts he had found unintelligible, seem "counters of an unknown coinage". The extraordinary effectiveness of his mature usage may partly be the result of the impact of pain, bitterness and frustration. He needed the experience for his development, and seemed to provide an example by his life of an Indian saying he quotes: "The passionate-minded love bitter food" ([21]). He produced a great number of obscure symbols before the love of bitter food helped him to achieve clarity of vision. In "Oisin" the symbol of a hound chasing a hare* (*So described in *Explorations*, p. 392, but in the *Collected Poems*, p. 413, the passage reads, "now a hornless deer passed by us, chased by Phantom hound / All pearly white") is said to be "emblematical of eternal pursuit" ([22]). Animal symbols abound and the figure of a "hound with one red ear" occurs again in another poem, which also contains a reference to "the Boar without bristles" ([23]). We shall content ourselves with a list of some bird and animal symbols, indicating where they may be found in the *Collected Poems:* "Black Pig" (CP. 73), "Polar Dragon" (CP. 135), "butterfly" (CP. 159). The list is far from exhaustive. Other types of symbols are not mentioned here. One important class belongs to dream experience. Yeats explains some examples of this class in his *Autobiographies* (371f) along with a few he had learned from Mathers. Of the dream symbols two are worth mentioning, a galloping centaur, and "a naked woman of incredible beauty, standing upon a pedestal and shooting an arrow at a star" ([24]).

The symbols may sometimes be traced to definite sources but they are mostly unfamiliar to the educated general reader. Their use, as already observed, has a decorative rather than expressive bias. Yeats the painter is more evident in them than Yeats the poet. In a letter to Florence Farr (Feb. 1906) Yeats shows once again that the deficiencies of his early practice had not escaped his notice: "I once cared only for images about whose necks I could cast various 'chains of office' as it were. They were so many aldermen of the ideal, whom I wished to master the city of the soul. Now I do not want images at all, or chains of office, being content with the unruly soul" ([25]). This seems

to point to an interest in a personal and psychological element as a new feature of poetry.

### THEMES AND IRISHNESS

We shall now proceed to make an enquiry into his themes so that the Irish element may be put into correct perspective and its significance assessed. We shall then take up a more or less detailed survey of the symbols belonging to his mature usage. To forestall the results of the enquiry, we may state that these later symbols are marked by a greater inwardness and psychological truth: the dream interests him less than the dreamer, and as he advanced to this intensity of vision he declared: "Now I may wither into the truth", and more vividly, "For there's more enterprise / In walking naked" ([26]). About twenty years divide his early work from the later when the pronouncement was made, indicating the distance he had travelled from his dreams of anaemic beauty and the twilight landscape, which had first supplied nourishment to his imagination. He has now awakened to reality.

A condensed summary of his attitude will involve some minor repetitions but his progressive views as well as his permanent beliefs cannot otherwise be seen with any degree of perspicuity. Yeats said in a letter to Katharine Tynan as far back as August 1887 that to be Irish is to be original and interesting ([27]). Not only this, he wanted his fellow Irishmen, wherever they lived "to think of Ireland as a sacred land" ([28]). In "Under Ben Bulben", written in 1939, which contains his epitaph, he urges the Irish poets "to learn your trade", explaining that the advice comprehends attention both to subject and technique. The latter takes precedence in his consideration, their work must be "well made", and they must reject scornfully the increasing volume of writing in verse "All out of shape from toe to top" as "Base-born products of base bed", because of "Their unremembering hearts and hands". What they forget is Ireland and the country's "seven heroic centuries". The poets he addresses must not expose themselves to criticism by their choice of subject. Their songs should be about peasants, hard-riding country gentlemen, holy monks, boisterous drunkards, and

about "lords and ladies gay" who have lain buried for centuries of a heroic tradition. Finally, their vision and inspiration must not owe to contemporary sources:

> Cast your mind on other days
> That we in coming days, may be
> Still the indomitable Irishry [29].

We may examine Yeats's poetical work until the publication of *The Green Helmet and other Poems* (1910) as representative of his earlier phase of production and notice the use to which the Irish element is put in relation to his subsequent practice. From such an investigation we can expect a correct picture of the connexion and relationship between the different stages of his poetical progress. For the purpose of this enquiry we shall refer to *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1889), *Crossways* (1889), *The Rose* (1893), *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), and *In the Seven Woods* (1904).

In *Oisin* Yeats evokes a legendary past as his theme: his subject matter is Irish [30]. One can almost walk out of *The Celtic Twilight* into the shimmering world of the lovers with its mysterious experiences, hardly noticing any difference. In emphasizing love as a dominant theme Yeats seems to depart from the spirit of the original. One example will show the romantic love which forms the main element:

> I loved no man, though kings besought,
> Until the Danaan poets brought
> Rhyme that rhymed upon Oisin's name[31].

As will be seen presently, Yeats himself noticed this defect and tried to correct it in his *Last Poems*. K. H. Jackson in his *Celtic Miscellany*[32] points out that love plays a very small part in Celtic literature, that almost without exception it merely supplies the motive of a tale. "Oengus falls in love with the fairy woman but the story is concerned merely with the way in which he finally succeeds in winning her". Referring to Robin Flower's *The Irish Tradition* (Oxford, 1947), he declares that the origin of the impulse which led to the rise of the love poetry in Ireland

during the 14th to the 17th century is to be found in French love-lyric. Jackson does not think that Yeats was correct in his view of Celtic Literature as "Full of mournful languishing, mysterious melanchloy, of the dim, 'Celtic Twilight' (Yeats' term)" (33). He claims to have the advantage of knowing the Celtic literatures at first hand and thus to have the right and necessary equipment to give his views on the subject. His assertion seems, therefore, worthy of credence: "In fact, Celtic literatures are about as little given to mysticism or sentimentality as it is possible to be; their most outstanding characteristic is rather their astonishing power of imagination". (34) *Oisin*, so far as its atmosphere goes, does not, therefore, seem authentically Celtic. This does not necessarily detract from its merits as a poem, which with its dreaminess and distance from life may still be valued as a work of some interest, even as one capable of pleasing, though perhaps a little too 'ninetyish in its attitude and expression for some tastes. The symbols used in it show the inadequacy of their imaginative basis. In a letter to Katharine Tynan in September, 1888, he said: "In the second part of 'Oisin' under disguise of symbolism I have said several things to which I only have the key" (35). The chief symbolisms in this section are those of the "lady with soft funeral tapers", tied with a wave-rusted chain to two eagles, of a foam-white sea-gull, and of a "dusky demon dry as a withered sedge". The lady and the foam-white sea-gull apparently form one group, the other is formed by the eagles and the demon. The latter reveals the marks of old age and tyranny, the former those of beauty and an ideal element. One may take the first two images as representing the struggle of the spiritual element for freedom and self-expression, the latter two as ruthless material powers, asserting themselves to overwhelm whatever is most worthwhile in life. But if this commonplace interpretation covers most of the facts, there seems to be a further implication to which the poet alone holds the key. To claim this is in a way to admit the inadequacy of the symbols. The early poetry is sometimes flawed by this inadequacy. The explanation is that the poet's imaginative resources were not yet fully at his command. Another possible explanation is that there is a tendency to a wrong emphasis—on the decorative rather than on the ex-

pressive element, preventing him from soaring freely on his *wings.*

*The Irishness of his* early work is its dominant feature. There is direct evidence of this in the names of persons and places introduced in the poems; sometimes its presence may be indirect and allusive. His men and women are mostly Irish. King Goll (CP. 17) has a kingdom extending from Ith to Emain and also to Amergin; Orchil (CP. 19): her long dark hair hides the sun. The spatiality of the imagery is worth noting. This seems to be an early characteristic and its effect is often incongruous. A crowd of place names are used evocatively: Glen Car, Knocknarea, Knocknashee, Coolney, Tiraragh, Ballinafad, Inishmurray, Kinsale, Dromhair, Lissadell, Scanavin, Lugnagall, Connemara, Clooth-na-Bare, Cum hat, Dathi, Kedron, Dooney, Kilvarnet, Mocharabuiee, Tara, Paire-na-lee, etc. Mythical and other persons are also mostly Irish in origin: Fergus, Diarmuid and Grania, the Countess Cathleen, Father Gilligan, O'Driscoll, Wandering Aengus, Fand, Emer, Red Hanrahan (Yeats's own invention), Maeve, Uladh, Naoise, etc. The technique is apparently intended to create atmosphere and a sense of topography, apart from the sound effect, which by itself could be justification enough.

In the first hundred pages of the *Collected Poems* non-Irish names do not feature prominently. This part of the volume gives roughly the poetry of the early period. One example of the Irish element entering allusively is found in "The White Birds" ([36]). The poem begins with the words: "I would that we were, my beloved, white birds on the foam of the sea". This seems to be reminiscent of the dream of Oenghus who contracted a wasting sickness from loving a beautiful girl, who came to him at night with a lute in hand and disappeared the moment he wanted to touch her. At last a countrywide search established her identity. She was Caer Ibhormheith, daughter of Ethal Anubhuail from the hill of Uamhan in the land of Connaught. It was not, however, easy to have access to her because "she is in the shape of a bird every other year, and in human shape the other years." The secret of the periodic transformation was known to her father alone who was forced to yield it and as a result "she went to him. He cast his arms about her. They

fell asleep in the form of two swans, and went round the lake three times" (37).

We have indicated above the predominantly Irish character of the material. The mode of its treatment may be described as on the whole dream-like, characterized by the lack of an adequate psychological basis, the use of arbitrary symbol, and a tendency to poetise over faces and views, not infrequently resulting in sentimentalism.

> And I dreamed my lost love came stealthily out of the wood
> With her cloud-pale eyelids falling on dream-dimmed eyes (38).

The poem suggests that Yeats at this time was very much an outdoor man in his attitude by the spatiality of his imagery:

> I thought the last steps were
> Hung from the morning star (39).

> When you have told how I weep endlessly,
> Flutter along the froth lips of the sea (40).

Another example from the 1889 volume ("Crossways") will throw further light on the point:

> And he called loudly to the stars to bend
> From their pale thrones and comfort him (41).

As illustration of the sentimental excess we may refer to "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", "When you are Old", etc. The following quotation will conclude the discussion of the subject:

> And cover the pale blossoms of your breast
> With your dim heavy hair,
> And trouble with a sigh for all things longing for rest
> The odorous twilight there (42).

### THE FOUL RAG-AND-BONE SHOP OF THE HEART

In the change from the dream-like romanticism of the early period to the austerity and the complex emotion of his artistic maturity are involved certain factors which demand attention and careful analysis. We may now proceed to examine these

factors, and to aid our preliminary efforts, we may resort again to the practice of compiling a list of proper names as an index to new interests and a shift in emphasis in the poet's outlook. *In Last Poems* the names of Cuchulain, Niamh, and Oisin occur along with those of his Irish friends, compatriots, and his ancestors. But the classical names and the English references seem to possess a greater significance. The former class includes Empedocles, Troy, Hector, Callimachus, Plato, the Muses, Antaeus, Pythagoras, the Delphic Oracle, Peleus, Thetis, Helen, and Caesar. In the famous poem, "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" one of *Last Poems*, he makes an important statement, which seems to amend considerably his earlier programme to "Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways" ("The Rose"). We quote below the verses which imply the significant change of outlook:

> .....all that we said or sang
> Must come from contact with the soil, from that
> Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong (43).

The verses seek an alliance with the common every-day life, to use the material and means which link naturally to the basic modes of existence, and the position may easily be so fundamental as to lose sight of the purely local, and even of the national aspect of things. This can be regarded as an important step in the direction of that "Metropolitan" element from which his poetry received that last transforming touch, endowing it with the broadest human appeal. Such a view seems all the more tenable if we regard the expression "Antaeus like" as a tribute to the inspiring power of Hellenic myth and its capacity to strengthen and renew the creative imagination.

Of the sysmbols we come across in *The Last Poems* none seems to be specifically Irish in origin. The first poem in the volume "The Gyres" attests a subject close to his thought for a great number of years, and is a symbol of the cyclic change in human affairs:

> The workman, noble and saint, and all things run
> On that unfashionable gyre again (CP. 337).

In "The Old Wicked Man", the mocking refrain at the end of every stanza "Daybreak and a candle-end" has been interpreted by Vivienne Koch as "maleness deposed, the end of vitality, the extinction of the principle, in short, which illuminates experience". His attitude to the Naimh-Oisin theme registers a significant change. The pale anaemic creature, the pearl-pale, high-born lady whose lips were like a sun-set, has certainly grown with the poet and is now described with little deference to romantic sentiment:

> Man-picker Niamh leant and sighed
> By Oisin on the grass (44).

But the manner reflects accurately the full-blooded Irish legendary heroine. The ninth century account of how Deirdre won Noisi, the son of Uisliu, should dispel from our minds the romantic view of a coy, bashful woman, waiting to be wooed by flattering words and attention: "At that she (Deirdre) leapt at him (Noisi) and seized his ears on his head. 'Two ears of shame and derison are these', she said, 'unless you carry me off with you' (45)". Although Yeats has not given us symbols and images from Irish life, comparable in excellence with what he has done with some other kinds of material, he has at least corrected an earlier romantic picture with the help of a new insight, which embitters while it reveals. Thus we see not merely a re-orientation of a legend but an expression of a changed way of looking at the world, a sense as we go on further that pleasures and occupations do not in themselves represent values:

> First that sea-rider Oisin led by the nose
> Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,
> Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,
> Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems,
> That might adorn old songs or courtly shows (46).

He discovers in the theme no invigorating or inspiring element: it belongs to a faded world of "old songs or courtly shows" because of its distance from reality, because of its vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose. Yet what he in his old age considers, perhaps cynically, vain could at one time bring a throb to his

heart and a stir to his imagination. In the same poem he declares his intention to lie down "In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart". This is an unambiguous declaration of his preoccupation with psychology, the inwardness which has so greatly enriched his poetry. The outside spatial view, however fascinating, gives way to an interest in the accumulations of the heart, even its unclean interior, which becomes for him the central motive of his poetry.

## THEMES AND SYMBOLS

We shall endeavour to analyse some of the important symbols in Yeats's later work and discuss the trends they reveal. We shall begin by studying *Last Poems*, and go back to the work of the middle years in an attempt to discover and relate the significant elements which belong to the mature use of the symbol as a technique of expression.

"A Bronze Head" is believed to be Maud Gonne's portrait. It acquires a symbolic significance as the poem develops. Vitality looks out of the eye although the body is decayed. The spiritual power of the bright eye was not the only fact about her worth noting. She had also a glowing physical presence and a touching modesty of character but her true essence may still be subject to speculation, and philosophers may after all be right in their idea of a composite substance, meaning in her case a great vitality united with a constant preparedness for death. She began life with an exuberance of energy, and a skin which was delicate, soft and fresh, but the disenchantments of life were a blow to her spirit. Nearness to her made him of imagination all compact, and he broke out into words of pity for her as he recalled her suffering: or may be, she was a supernatural being, gazing with severe eyes at the world's rapid decline with everything around her turning to rottenness, all the precious heritage cast into the sty and the great ideals laughed at and scorned by fools and rogues. What could be saved or was worth saving out of this welter of corruption and decay? "A Bronze Head" as a symbol seems to be a detached and critical attitude, which judges and condemns what is unworthy by maintaining a distance from it as great as that divid-

ing life from death. In life which, for its owner, was good and gracious, the human personality achieved a sense of proximity to death by a psychological preparedness, hence an integrity, which without this would have been lost in the surrounding corruption.

"Hound Voice" ([47]) contains several symbols, 'bare hills', 'stunted trees', 'blood track', and the principal one is of course supplied by the poem's title itself. Hound voice is a mark of kinship between the poet and his women friends. Because of this they understand "what none have understood", explained as "Those images that waken in the blood". If we compare the poem with "A Prayer for Old Age" we may obtain a clue to its symbol:

> God guard me from those thoughts men think
> In the mind alone;
> He that sings a lasting song
> Thinks in a marrow-bone.([48])

It is this capacity to think in the marrow-bone which he shared with his friends and which made them singular. Their distinguishing character lay in a unified sensibility. The 'hound voice' is a reminder of the pastoral civilisation in which men made their homes on bare hills and among stunted trees, having no experience of the boredom of the desk or the spade. Neither did they have the abstract faculty of thinking in their minds. "What hour of terror comes to test the soul" alludes perhaps to the assault of passion, violently shaking them. They are the last to choose the settled ground, the poets are the last to submit to domestication, and still remember the hound voice. Some day before dawn, the voice may thrill them again and they may stumble upon the blood-dark track, chanting like the hunters of old the song of victory, though scarred all over with wounds. Thus "Hound voice" is the primitive element, the heroic element, it is the delight of battle and chase, which half slumbers in them but may wake again and reassert its power, doing away with the decorous trappings of a civilized exterior.

"The Three Bushes" ([49]) is based upon an incident described in Abbe Michel de Bourdeille's *Historis mei Temporis.* A lady

loves a young man but sends her chamber-maid to sleep with him in the darkness of the night. If she were to lose her chastity, she said, she would drop down dead. If also she stopped loving him, she could not live. The young man was killed by an accident and she died as a result of the affliction. Two bushes were planted on their graves, and a third on the maid's grave when she followed them some years later. One picking a rose from the bush would not know where its roots began. In this symbol of three bushes, the claims of the body and the soul are fused together and nothing is said or implied as regards which is higher in significance than the other. On the great questions of life and conduct there is no final answer, not tainted by dogmatism. But the silence is meant to be an affirmation of the greatness of both, accompanied by an idea that their relative value cannot with any propriety be ascertained.

The symbols of the *Tower,* and *Leda and the Swan* are perhaps the most valuable to be found in the poetry of Yeats. The latter poem is undoubtedly one of the most-discussed poems of the century. Giorgio Melchiori in his book, *The Whole Mystery of Art,* writes mainly about the Leda poem and its sources. More light on the subject has come recently from two short articles published in *The Times Literary Supplement.* Charles Madge in his short account (T.L.S., 20 July 1962) states what he thought to be the source of its inspiration. He ascribed it to a bas-relief, exhibited in the Etruscan Room of the British Museum, a product of the 1st century A.D., its motif, however, going back to the late fourth century B.C. The view has been challenged by Charles B. Gullans who wrote in the T.L.S. on 9 November 1962, claiming that the details of the poem more obviously corresponded to a woodcut bookplate, designed by T. Sturge Moore for A. G. B. Russell. Sturge Moore is also author of an ode "To Leda", which according to the same writer, has close resemblances with Yeats's poem, suggesting that this, too, may be considered a source. He, however, concedes that the bas-relief may also be thought to be among the possible sources.

Charles Madge has commented upon the symbolism of the Leda poem in his article in the T.L.S. mentioned above. We shall quote his words because they deal adequately with the question: "The symbolism of this 'Classical Annunciation' is,

of course, one which Yeats was to develop at great length in *A Vision* and which is of much interest from an anthropological and psycho-analytical as well as from an aesthetic point of view. There was a reckless hardihood in this comparison by an Irishman of Pagan Leda, from whose eggs come Love and War, with the Christian mother of God."

The Tower as a symbol seems to have a clear personal context. As the name of the 1928 volume it seems to impart to the poems contained in it a certain quality of outlook and elevation, reflecting the dominant image. It means old age, but not simply old age—it means an ascent, a step-by-step progress, which secures detachment and distance from the affairs of life and also, an ability to take a sweeping survey of the whole landscape of the mundane existence. In "Blood and the Moon" he adds an interpretation which he seems evidently to favour:

> Is every modern nation like the tower,
> Half dead at the top? (50)

The first poem of the volume is significantly "Sailing to Byzantium"—where the poet, now an aged man, describes himself as a paltry thing, looking no better than a scare-crow, a tattered coat upon a stick. He can achieve dignity by a greater power of the soul, by the study of its noblest manifestations in art, and the visit to Byzantium is intended to secure the end. The world of everyday is no place for an old man with its sensual preoccupation and unconcern for any order of spiritual reality. The contrast implied is between the body and its lusts on the one hand and the intellect or the soul soaring to a timeless existence on the other. To the Holy Saints depicted in gold mosaic on the wall at the Cathedral he appeals to come to his assistance, to consume away the last traces of his heart with its oppressive desires, imcompatible with his decayed body, and to transform him into a work of art, which time cannot destroy. If he can escape from the bounds of nature, ruled by desire and sensuality, he will never again seek a natural form for himself. Instead, he will rely upon the perfect craftsmanship of the Grecian goldsmiths to hammer for him out of gold and enamel a form whose beauty will satisfy the most exact taste and will charm even the Imperial

*Lord of Byzantium out of a sense* of bodily needs. Or, he may become a bird, perfect in shape, perched on a golden bough, singing to a time-bound world, himself free from its power.

We should read this poem along with the later "Byzantium" to ensure full appreciation of the images and symbols and their interconnection. This work will, however, be postponed for a little so as to enable us to attend to a question of a more immediate concern for our purpose, namely the implications of the tower symbol in relation to some of the other poems of the volume and to see how they reflect its central significance. The above poem, which has been briefly analysed, indicates the kind of old age or its alternative, desired by the poet. Man-made and commanding an elevation, the tower affords an opportunity for a survey of the human situation, for images and memories, to which the bird's role as a singer from a golden bough "of what is past, or passing, or to come" provides a fairly close parallel. "Meditations in Time of Civil War" brings out the aristocratic elements of the Tower symbol as the golden bird also does, implying that aristocracy is rooted in tradition. What he sees and records, the terrors of the times, are tower views. "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" has more meditation than visual experience and its source, again, is the Tower. The significant poems of the volume give an indoor effect, of comfort and contemplation, of the gifts of an aristocratic environment but not of security because of the disturbed and chaotic conditions which prevailed.

It is interesting to note Yeats's advance from the dim, dreamy spatiality of Celtic Twilight into the broad daylight of his later realism. The progress seems increasingly accompanied by an indoor quality, by a tone of greater intimacy and by the emergence of a psychological interest. In the earlier volume *Michael Robartes and the Dance* (1921) the indoor element is already prominent; his interests there diverge into philosophy and contemporary politics. He knows art to be timeless. He has now a sense of wonder, which he is able fully to communicate in his "Easter, 1916" as he discovers common people of his acquaintance transform themselves by a heroic death into timeless symbols. The sense that "A terrible beauty is born" of the sacrifice obsesses his imagination. Hampering the ceaseless

flow that is life, a stone lies, as it were, in mid-stream, defying the flux, a symbol of the unchangeable in the midst of the changing akin to the sublime that human imagination has discovered in the realm of art. "The Second Coming" with "The blood dimmed tide" alludes to the experience of the Easter massacre, and by the imagery of the widening gyre, proclaims his faith in the cyclic order of history, a view which Vico had tried to establish. He notices the signs of disintegration—things falling apart—of confusion, "The falcon cannot hear the falconer", and of widespread chaos. The redemptive sacrifice of innocence has turned meaningless, and between those who have no belief and those who are a prey to violent partisanship, no way seems to lie clear. This is surely the time for a new turn of the wheel, for a fresh beginning, for the Second Coming. Scarcely had the thought crossed his mind than an image from the *Anima Mundi* takes shape before his eyes. He sees in a remote desert a creature with a lion's body and a human head, and an eye blazing like the sun, its gaze blank and pitiless, while birds frightened and indignant because of this invasion of their pastures by the Sphinx, hover above, borne on unsteady wings; "moving the thigh" seems to indicate a desire for mating; "its hour come round at last" seems to mean the hour of the child's birth. "What rough beast" does not necessarily mean that a beast is being born. The birth of Christ vexed the world with nightmare, it led to the massacre of the Innocents. The new birth will also have its terrors, and fear is likely to be a first reaction to the event. "What rought beast ....." may thus easily be the question asked by a terrified world, and not by any means, a statement of fact. One critic interprets "The Second Coming" as that of the antichrist. In that case the words, Second Coming, are misleading, as also the expression, "some revelation is at hand", which seem both to imply a divine birth. After the account of the chaos, a change is expected, and this is more likely to be a new order rather than a worse disorder. The lines quoted below breathe hopeful expectation:

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

The critic ([51]) who seems to have misunderstood the poem

connects it with "A Prayer for My Daughter", which follows, and explains "the great gloom" mentioned in it as an apprehension for the advent of the anti-Christ. Whatever the prophecy intended, the arrival of the anti-Christ could hardly be so close as to threaten the safety of the poet's daughter, lying in her cradle. The right explanation will link it up with the circumstances of the time, and the drift to chaos, described in "The Second Coming". The poem is equally impressive by its symbols and the fulness of its visualization. A certain ambivalence in the interpretation of the Sphinx image may perhaps be allowed, but there are also hints for tightening up the idea in the poem's title and in the term "revelation", which could hardly apply to the anti-Christ. The chaos and turbulence of the first stanza seem to be pictures of the end of an epoch, and the note of expectancy struck in the following, that of a beginning, a new movement of the gyre, a shift in the lunar phase according to the poet's esoteric system.

The Sphinx is set at the centre of the poem to diffuse an atmosphere of awe and mystery, to symbolize the inscrutable Will of the Divine and to suggest that terror is our first reaction in our speculations as regards the mode of its embodiment. The infant Christ inspired terror, and the rough beast slouching towards Bethlehem is a projection of terror, as already stated, and not a rational description of the anticipated event.

"A Prayer For My Daughter", placed next to the poem we have just discussed in the volume, carries on the same mood, and the expression "Because of the great gloom that is in my mind" clearly establishes the connexion: the chaotic times haunt his imagination like a bodeful image of ruin. He picturesquely characterized Maud Gonne's transformation from an adorable woman into a loquacious political propagandist and platform speaker, "an old bellows full of angry wind". For his daughter he has a different hope; the other woman's throwing away of the horn of plenty should convince how mistaken the choice is, and enable his daughter to build her life around the abiding values of custom and ceremony.

In the Tower volume, one of the great poems, Yeats wrote is undoubtedly "Among School Children". The sixty-year old poet on a visit to a convent school is the occasion of the poem.

John Wain's exegesis (*Interpretations*, Routledge, 1956) is as near complete as a job of the kind can be and I do not propose to attempt doing a work which has already been done so well. I shall, however, try to say a word or two where I differ from him or see the scope for an additional comment.

"The subject matter of the poem", John Wain justly observes, "is the relationship or interpenetration of matter and spirit" ([52]), and with much less justice, "the last sentences (of the poem) are interrogative, reminding us that a poet differs from other kinds of sage by the fact that he makes his poems out of ignorance as much as certainties" ([53]): If Yeats had tried to give an answer, this would have been dogmatic. In the particular case the question itself indicates an awareness of the problem, and the final interrogation invites the reader to share the mystery, which because of human limitation, must always remain a mystery. The question asked at the end of the poem makes us think in the first instance of a particular mystery, and then almost imperceptibly, aided by an excited imagination, we step up into wider horizons and become involved in the great mystery of existence itself. The question "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" is like a pebble thrown into the pool of our minds where ever-widening circles are described reaching out to the very limits of the universe; the subject-matter ceases to be a school, little girls, or the change from childhood to age, and becomes at the end a means of a confrontation with the ultimate mystery of Being. The symbol leads to an ever-enlarging view by its own inner impetus and thus represents the highest power of the symbolic figure.

The last poem of the *Tower* volume which we shall consider is "The Death of the Hare". In a letter to Maurice Wollman (September 21, 1935) Yeats explains what he means by its symbolism: "I don't want to interpret "The Death of the Hare". I can help you to write a note, if that note is to be over your own name, but you must not give me as your authority. If an author interprets a poem of his own he limits its suggestibility. You can say that the poem means that the lover may, while loving, feel sympathy with his beloved's dread of captivity"([54]). The expression, the death of the hare, seems to mean that the woodland wildness is being destroyed by the lover's forging

fetters under the mistaken belief that these will please his beloved. The fetters may perhaps be interpreted as publicity and 'the yelling pack' the publicists.

In *The Winding Stair* volume (1935) *Byzantium* is probably the most significant poem. Here more than in its companion piece, written a few years earlier, symbols fit into their places as an unobtrusive medium of thought and feeling, and because these are so complex, a rich ambiguity is acknowledged by critics. Practically every expression in the poem has a symbolic value and the compression thus produced gives the poem an extraordinary intellectual and emotional range. "Sailing to Byzantium" has a comparatively simple texture. Its thought and emotion owe to a contrast between the timelessness of Art and the time-bound sensual life. Finally, it expresses the poet's somewhat whimsical desire to abjure all natural forms for himself, and enchant his audience as a bird, made of gold by Grecian smiths, as an object of art, which time is powerless to injure. "Byzantium" has a far more complex structure. If the Byzantium of the earlier poem stands for the timeless in Art and the human intellect, in the later poem it becomes the home of spiritual and artistic reality, inspiring and guiding men with an undecaying and deathless power. The five stanzas of the later poem have each a different thought but they are finally linked and harmonized as a profound vision of Art and human life.

In the first stanza, the pealing sound of the Cathedral gong seems to sweep away the last traces of sensual life, the drunken soldier and the harlot's song. The huge dome of the Cathedral, bathed in heavenly light, dominates the mid-night world with serene majesty. The base elements of human nature are discarded and forgotten. In this solitude of the night the poet encounters an image from the past, some one discharging a function not unlike Dante's Virgil, who though long parted from the scene of the world, has wisdom to communicate for human benefit. From him and from the world of the dead in general, he learns about purgatory, of the souls purified and ready for ascent into Heaven with a second choice to revisit the glimpses of the moon and to sing of the tragic human destiny, of the victims of time and sensual complexity, while the singers themselves, like the golden bird of the earlier poem,

will dwell without fear of their afflictions. The poet, aided by the guidance of the dead, has a vision of how Byzantium's noblest art is made by the power of tradition and the inspiration of the past. The dead teach the living artists, guiding, inspiring, and removing from them the limitations of human nature which hamper vision. The artists use the gross material of human nature yet remain uncorrupted by it. They work with marble which attains in their hands a wonderful flexibility as an expressive medium for depicting the human scene. These images of their hands perpetually feed the sensitive imagination which seeks its material in the spectacle of the drama of life in the context of eternity.

Perhaps we can fittingly conclude the section with a brief reference to his epitaph:

> Cast a cold eye
> On life, on death.
> Horseman, pass by !

Written a few months before death, the three lines of verse are not only a valedictory motto but a triumphant expression of the simplicity and the symbolic power, achieved by the poet through a life-time of devotion. They are like Leonardo Da Vinci's drawings, perfect, and yet full of simple lines, almost effortlessly made. The poet seems to think of time as a relentless pursuer; it is a horseman chasing his prey. Yeats has passed out of the temporal dimension and the horseman has no more the power to harm or terrify. Other points which are noticeable include the painter's attitude, and the interest in medieval life and thought. In both subjects, Yeats had always taken great interest.

## Conclusion

In the preceding pages our enquiry was mainly twofold: the study of the Irish element and of symbols in the poetry of W.B. Yeats, and an attempt at indicating their interconnection whereever possible. The endeavour led to analyses of poems with comments upon the poet's intention and the nature of his achieve-

*ment. Remarks, however unsystematic, were also made to suggest* an evolution in poetic attitude and technique. It is on the last subject that we propose to offer our final comments and in doing so, to follow a more methodical procedure.

Yeats wrote on many Irish themes, on Oisin and Niamh, on Baile and Ailinn, on Aengus, Cuchulain, Countess Cathleen, Conchobar, and on contemporary Irish characters, on beggars, fools, and mad men. His most successful poems are not, however, Irish in origin nor are his significant symbols. In his treatment of Irish themes, he enters a mythological region and describes loves and heroisms of an impossible kind. They have the charm of the old world but the pale, unearthly views, the bird songs, the flowers, and the trees belong to a bloodless plane. In Shakespeare's treatment of the fairy element we have a feeling that we enter a new dimension of imagination, of freedom and enjoyment. In Yeats the experience is much less liberating although there are extensive landscapes, the might of the elements, and hints of vague, bewildering things. Their main defect is that they give the dream rather than the dreamer, they are devoid of a psychological basis.

An example will perhaps make the point clear:

> The host is rushing 'twixt night and day,
> And where is there hope or deed as fair?
> Caoilte tossing his burning hair,
> And Niam calling *Away, come away.*
> ("The Hosting of the Sidhe", C P, 61)

The spatiality of the view is not a drawback but we shiver in it a little and long for a more indoor atmosphere, for action more clearly motivated and for feeling to which we can have better access. Yeats understood well that the Irish element would mean a limited audience for him. In a letter to John Quinn (June 28, 1903) he discussed the question and showed that the prospect did not disturb him: "I do not ask even a fiftieth part of the popularity Burns has among his own people. But I should like to help the imaginations that are most keen and subtle to think of Ireland as a sacred Land". ([55]) The limitations of 'Provincialism' are corrected by building upon a universal

culture. No European can cast aside the universalism of Greek culture and yet hope to be 'Metropolitan'. The Greeks had a great treasure to give and the world accepted it because what a treasure can always do it did for it—it enriched the world. Yeats was fully sensible of the fact and his later artistic achievement owed to the knowledge and recognition of the foundation of European culture as the basis of his own work. How the new values enter his thought can be illustrated from numerous poems written since the middle period of his life. They are significantly present in a poem belonging to a much later date, "Her Vision in the Wood" (CP. 312). It is a fragment of experience woven out of Homer, Greek mythology and Italian painting. The poem seems to mean, art and life are not apart but form one whole in which the two realities fuse together. The sources of inspiration for this poem indicate the trends in European culture which mastered his imagination. In these we can discover what gave Yeats his marvellous power of utterance. Yeats who was dominated by the love of symbol as the chief vehicle of expression needed the wealth of the antique world above everything else. C. S. Lewis points out what to the poet must have appeared as one of the principal attractions of Greek Literature and thought: "Symbolism comes to us from Greece. It makes its first effective appearance in European thought with the dialogues of Plato. The Sun is the copy of the Good. Time is the moving image of eternity. All visible things exist just in so far they succeed in imitating the forms". ([56]) Yeats himself admitted the inadequacy of the Celtic material. It failed to give him intensity without which poetry has little power to move. Irish could give him a foothold but there was no sense of a fulness of life without Greek. He insisted upon a knowledge of both, for stability and intellectual breadth are complementary and the two are equally needed: "Teach Irish and Greek together, make the pupil translate Greek into Irish, Irish into Greek. The old Irish poets lay in a formless matrix; the Greek poets kept the richness of those dreams and yet were completely awake. Sleep has no bottom, waking no top. Irish can give our children love of the soil underfoot; but only Greek, co-ordination or intensity". ([56])

Yeats seems more indoor and intimate in the volume *Responsibilities* (1914), and he is certainly more contemporary in his mode of feeling—self-justification, pride, pity, indignation are among the emotions which find expression. In the poetry of the middle years of his life Yeats could stand apart from all types of material and consider it with detachment as grist to his mill—as something on which he has to impose a form and from which he has to draw a sense, a sense namely, that he has discovered on the basis of experience and insight. Thus he was less subject to external influences; Shelley, Rossetti, Morris, even Irish legends and tales, came to mean much less than they had once done. What he took from these sources conformed to his attitude and met his needs. He did not try to conform to them, because they happened to tell what he did not know. By this means he fought the outside world to be more internal, and thus to overcome his 'provincialism' achieving truth to nature and individual judgement.

If we examine his progress, we shall see that by constant self-criticism and the criticism of his own work, he realised that the Irish heritage even as a store-house of metaphors, did not give enough food for his imagination. He struggled to find an adequate idiom for his thought and feeling and saw that the ancient life of his people contained romance and heroism but not the savour, the salt taste, of the modern world. Even love which he felt and which he tried to express needed a greater range and subtlety than the simple modes of the old Irish tales. The Greeks made him feel more at home. Latin, he disliked and the cause he assigns for it is not perhaps entirely capricious: "The Roman people were the classic decadence; their literature is form without matter". (57) His personal temper made him a European but for long years he had striven to be exclusively Irish. The situation is too complex for a simple statement of this nature. For even in 1889 ("Crossways") he had lamented in Orphian strains the loss of Arcadian pastoralism: "The woods of Arcady are dead". But for years to follow he was to be up to his neck in the tales of Sidhe, the fairies and Cuchulain fighting the sea. These tales have their interest but they pose no problem of psychology or behaviour for the adult mind. They, however, present a decorative view and at best can suggest

resemblance to a rich tapestry. In his play, *The Countessof Cathleen* (1892) he seems to have done something enduring out of an Irish theme, more or less based upon a comparatively recent tradition. He has given an unorthodox answer to the question, what constitutes sin in the eyes of God, in defending the supreme sacrifice made by the Countess who sold her soul to Satan to save her people.

> .....The Light of Lights
> Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
> The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone. ([59])

The Irish themes in his poetry which have shot beyond the 'provincial' mark are taken from contemporary life—"Easter, 1916". "Among School Children", "Meditations in Time of Civil War", "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" and a few others. The purely Irish symbols seem not to make much impact upon the imagination. The "rose" which is only half Irish, is a little threadbare in certain contexts. In its application with a purely religious value, its strength of appeal remains, however, undiminished, but Yeats seems at times to turn it into an object of delicate, febrile beauty, and at others into a phantom too elusive and too grand at the same time, and our hunt for its subtle implications does not seem worth the quarry.

Irish themes in our view seem to have impeded the development of Yeats as a major poet. On a lower level they justify themselves by their charm, but they do not provide scope for the anguish of the heart, or for the complex, bitter feelings, which form so important an element in the later poetry. When he wanted to find words to express his intimate admiration for Maud Gonne, he went to the Greeks to aid his imagination. She was for him a Helen—"Was there another Troy for her to burn?" (CP. 101). Thus, we can see how powerfully the Greek element influenced his poetic outlook and imagination.

Sex seems to have heightened his perceptivity and given him insight. With a new boldness, he discarded the anaemic modes of murmuring a little sadly how love had fled or envying the Heavens their embroidered cloth of stars, which he might have chosen as a gift for his beloved. The Bible brought into his

poetry the full-blooded element: it crossed with a strain which was its opposite and thus seems to prove the correctness of his theory about Will and Mask.(59) In his poem, "On Woman", he refers to Solomon and Sheba, describing their sexual life with a frankness entirely new to his poetry until the date (1919), although it makes subsequent appearances, more obviously clad in Freudian clothes:

> Count all the praises due
> When Sheba was his lass,
> When she the iron wrought, or
> When from the smithy fire
> It shuddered in the water.(60)

In a verse of four lines "The Spur", we may read how much the physical element preoccupied his thought and imagination:

> You think it horrible that lust and rage
> Should dance attention upon my old age;
> They were not such a plague when I was young;
> What else have I to spur me into song? (61)

Vivienne Koch has interpreted "Daybreak and a candle-end" in "The Wild Old Wicked Man" as "maleness deposed, the end of vitality", and has commented upon the persistence of the sex symbol in *Last Poems*. This direct and bold use of the symbol, we have reason to believe, entered his poetry with the Bible. The Hellenic and Hebraic strains are thus the two main forces of liberation for his imagination, which have between them transformed him from a Provincial into a a Metropolitan artist. This is perhaps not so straightforward a record of progress as the statement may suggest. Yeats had matured throughout and could turn influences to adequate use because of his maturity rather than because they were in themselves salubrious. The union of the two forces gave him the best metaphors, endowed him with masculine energy and a power of direct utterance. Sometimes the difficulty in the understanding of his poetry encouraged the belief that a key to it is provided by the supernatural ideas out of which he had made a system. Yeats the lover of magic and the supernatural was also the poet. It is,

therefore, natural to assume that in his work, too, the two worlds met and merged. The prominence accorded to *A Vision* by critics has given to such a belief the necessary authority. The gyres and cones might or might not explain history. Yeats certainly did not think that he had found the ultimate truth about the matters set forth in the book. They are only one mode of looking at things, and the title shows that he did not care to claim "A Vision' as personal to him. Even the supernatural agents did not suggest that the value of the communication extended beyond being potential material for poetry. "We have come to give you metaphors for poetry", they asserted. In a letter to L. A. G. Strong (June 25th, 1925) Yeats said, referring to *A Vision*, "It mightn't be of any value to you, for a great deal of it is exceedingly technical, a form of science for the study of human nature, as we see it in others, and so, less personal than the little book you speak of".([62]) If this book is technical, as the poet himself declares it to be, we should consider it as irrelevant to the study of the poetry. What Wordsworth said about technical matters being used in poetry has not lost its point nor is it likely to do so ([63]).

We have already pointed out that his work in the theatre has been said to be a cause of the simplicity of style he attained. This desire has, however, been persistent in him and may be linked to Lady Gregory's quotation from Aristotle: "Think like a wise man but express yourself like the common people". Yeats himself referred to this dictum with slight changes in its wording at least four times in his writings.([64]) There may also be something in his statement: "After *The Wanderings of Oisin*, I had simplified my style by filling my imagination with country stories". ([65]). He had almost always thought wisely on the question of simplicity of style but until the middle of his life, his practice did not substantially conform to his ideas. Simplicity of style is one of the last things one masters, and the delayed achievement in spite of a sound theoretical background shows that not knowledge but long and strenuous effort can alone bring this about.

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18. "Adam's Curse", CP. 89.
19. *New Bearings*, p. 10.
20. Allan Wade—*Letters*, p. 111.
21. *Explorations*, p. 272.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 392.
23. CP. 68. Sir C. M. Bowra has offered explanations of some of the Symbols. They are not perhaps the only views possible as to their implications. But they do provide valuable clues and I therefore quote his words: "when he (Yeats) wishes for the end of the world, his beloved becomes the "White deer with no horns" and he himself "a hound with one red ear", animals who represent forces of desire, and the coming destruction are figured in the "boar without bristles", "an old image of death" (*The Heritage of Symbolism*, Macmillan, 1954, 188-189).
24. *Autobiographies*, p. 372.
25. Allan Wade, Letters, p. 469.
26. C P. 142.
27. Allan Wade, *Letters*, p. 51.
28. Ibid., June 28, 1903, p. 406.
29. "Under Ben Bulben", CP. 400.
30. Yeats wrote a letter to the Editor of *The Spectator* on July 29, 1889, explaining how he had come by the material he had used in his *Oisin:* "The first few pages are developed from a most beautiful old poem by one of the numerous half-forgotten Gaelic poets who lived in Ireland in the last century. In the quarrels between the saint and the blind warrior I have used suggestions from various ballad dialogues of Oisin and Patrick, published by the Ossianic Society. The pages dealing with the three islands ... are wholly my own, having no further root in tradition than the Irish peasant's notion that Tir-n-oge (the country of the young) is made up of three phantom islands".
31. CP. 411.
32. *A. Celtic Miscellany*, 1951, p. 97.
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38. CP. 74.
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45. Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany*, p. 50.
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48. CP. 326: Compare also "The Thinking of the Body", a short discussion included in "The Cutting of the Agate", *Essays*, pp. 361-363.
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52. *Interpretations*, p. 196.
53. Knowledge and ignorance ar not things on which poetry is written. One would imagine, poetry has to do mainly with experience and insight. The epigram does not thus seem to have any legs to stand upon.
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57. *Explorations*, p. 439.
58. *The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats* (Macmillan, 1953), p. 50.
59. A. G. Stock, *W. B. Yeats, His Poetry and Thought* (p. 124).
60. CP. 165.
61. CP. 359.
62. Allan Wade—*Letters*, p. 709.
63. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings." Wordsworth: Poetry and Poetic Diction; *English Critical Essays* (The World's Classics, p. 16).
64. Allan Wade, *Letters* 846, 853; *Autobiographies* 395; *Explorations*, 371.
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## CHAPTER II

### THE LOVE LYRIC OF YEATS

### 1. The 'Island' Theme

The love lyrics of W. B. Yeats reveal qualities of thought, feeling and expression, which may be studied profitably on a chronological basis. They testify to a maturing process in technique and attitude, and lend themselves to a tripartite division, each with certain analysable qualities of its own. The early period extends from *The Wandering of Oisin* to the publication of *In The Seven Woods* (1904), the middle phase includes this volume and all the others except *Last Poems* (1936-39). The first period lasts for about 15 years; its characteristic is the prominence of the dream element, an exaggeratedly romantic diction, a desire to withdraw to an island, and live there either alone or with a beloved mistress. In short, this is the period of the Celtic Twilight. He had to struggle hard against its spell in order to gain his full poetic stature. The change, when it came, transformed his poetry from the 'Provincial' into the 'Metropolitan'. In an earlier chapter comments have been made upon the development of his technique and outlook. Joseph Hone has said that the poet's rejection of the 'Celtic' was deliberate, an expression of critical judgement: "He (WBY) found in some of his early work—perhaps in *The Rose* poems particularly—an 'unmanly' exaggeration of sentiment and sentimental beauty, and he began to feel a horror of the word 'Celtic', which the newspapers still continued to apply to his work." (*W. B. Yeats*, 1865-1939. Macmillan. Second Edition. p. 184).

But Hone is not perhaps justified in choosing *The Rose* poems as the special target for the attack. *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) is not much less vulnerable from the point of view in spite of its later date:

> And I dreamed my lost love came stealthily out of the wood
> With her cloud-pale eyelids falling on dream-dimmed eyes.
> The Collected Poems, Macmillan, 1958, p. 74.

The 'Celtic' in a pejorative sense will imply a vagueness and imprecision in language and imagery with a tendency to sentimentality. The recurrence of terms like 'pale', 'pearly', 'dim', 'moan', 'murmur', 'snow-white', 'mournful', etc. often betrays its presence. Until the date of *In The Seven Woods* volume, they are found in all sorts of contexts. Some actual examples may be quoted:—'the mournful wonder of his eyes' (C P. 39); 'Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair' (C P. 69); 'O Cloud-Pale eyelids, dream-dimmed eyes' (C P. 74), and even in *In The Seven Woods* we come across the expression 'Pale silver-proud queen-woman of the sky (C P. 92). The periphrastic manner and the swooning style of expression seem almost entirely absent from *The Green Helmet And Other Poems* (1910) and the subsequent publications.

In *Reveries Over Childhood And Youth* Yeats describes the background to his Innisfree poem. Here, too, may be discovered an explanation for his haunting dream of love on an island, of which the early poems speak so often: "My father had read to me some passages out of *Walden*, and I planned to live some day in a cottage on a little island called Innisfree . . . I thought that having conquered bodily desire and the inclination of my mind towards women and love, I should live as Thoreau lived, seeking wisdom." (*Autobiographies*. Macmillan. 1956. pp. 71-72).

The poet does not, however, contemplate except in 'Lake Isle of Innisfree' a solitary existence, dedicated to the quest of wisdom. The first of the 'island' poems appeared in *Crossways* (1889) and is earlier in date than the Innisfree lyric. *The Wanderings of Oisin* is also earlier and is concerned with love and life on three successive islands. The two separate motives behind the 'island' theme may justify the resort to a glib classification between head and heart. It is well to remember that 'Innisfree' has mainly a literary origin; the poet in sacedortal robes, speaking with the tongue of angels, is far from moving as a picture. Its highly romantic setting seemed to have caught popular imagination at the date of publication and accounts for its being a favourite piece with anthologists.

*The Wanderings of Oisin* is a love poem, cast in a heroic, epical mould. Three islands are visited, each at the end of a hundred years; the first of these had music and dance, the

second endless war, and the third a century-long repose to offer. Yeats refers to Niamh disparagingly in 'News For The Delphic Oracle' as 'Man-picker Niamh' (CP. 376), and to the poet-lover and warrior of the piece as 'that sea-rider Oisin', led by the nose

> Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,
> Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose. ("Circus
> Animals' Desertion," CP. 391).

The tone seems a trifle tired; the poet has grown impatient of the dreamy, romantic manner of his early days. The poem may be described, not unreasonably, as a re-writing of the Shelleyan *Prometheus*, a vindication of human values against the tyranny of authority; 'two old eagles, full of ancient pride', playing the role assigned to Jupiter but in circumstances less propitious to unlimited power.

*Oisin* debunked by its own author, illustrates how far Yeats had travelled from his original conception as poet and lover. He has indicated his changed attitude in a poem of four lines, 'The Nineteenth Century And After' (CP. 271):

> Though the great song return no more
> There's keen delight in what we have:
> The rattle of pebbles on the shore
> Under the receding wave.

and in 1914, when he was nearing fifty, he proclaimed his break with the earlier decorative, tapestry-work style of writing:

> For there's more enterprise
> In walking naked ('A Coat', CP. 142).

*Oisin* is a youthful vision, it embodies innocence and inexperience, expressed in a language, which followed the mode of the times. Niamh is a somewhat bloodless creature with a beauty of the devitalised kind. The poet's attitude is that of adolescence—placing woman on a pedestal to worship her with 'a devotion to something afar from the sphere of our sorrow'. Her first appearance sets the pace for the whole poem:

A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
On a horse with bridle of findrinny;
And like a sunset were her lips (CP. 409).

For her love's claims transcended all things else, and love in her was inspired by Oisin's fame as poet and warrior:

I loved no man, though kings besought,
Until the Danaan poets brought
Rhyme that rhymed upon Oisin's name
(CP. 411).

Oisin's response was instantaneous: he fell 'Into a desperate gulph of love', and promised as befitted his reputation:

'You only I will wed', I cried
'And I will make a thousand songs,
And set your name all names above,
And captives bound with leathern thongs
Shall kneel and praise you, one by one
At evening in my western dun' (CP. 411).

The anaemic style of beauty reaches its extreme in the description of the beautiful woman tied with a wave-rusted chain to two old eagles, for whose liberation the hero makes every effort like another Redcross Knight out of the *Faerie Queene*:

A lady with soft eyes like funeral tapers,
And face that seemed wrought out of
moonlight vapours (CP. 425).

The lovers travel from the Islands of Dancing and of Victories to the Island of Forgetfulness. Their journeyings are through a landscape, never bright, never clearly seen, but appropriate as a background to heroic dreams and action. One has the feeling that the pair must have bored each other by the songs and kisses, and Oisin's return to his earthly home and old age provided relief. The 'Oisin' theme is, however, partly mythical, and the poet may have felt an obligation to adhere to its main framework.

'The Indian To His Love' has also the 'island' theme like 'To An Isle In The Water', both included in *Crossways*. The former of the two poems has nothing specifically Indian about it to justify the title. In fact, no Indian poet seems to have sung of such a desire, and no Indian, on account of the vast peninsula he inhabits, seems to have felt the impulse to withdraw to an island. On the other hand, he may have taken shelter in a wood, as a means of living in solitude, and one would imagine that he could dwell there with a wife or mistress if he chose to do so. The Indian of the poem proposes to accompany his beloved in a lonely ship to an island, dreaming under the dawn with peahens dancing on a smooth lawn and a parrot upon tree, angered by its reflexion in the polished surface of the sea. They will walk about with clasped hands and murmur while they kiss how well they are out of the big world's turmoil. They are the only two to be thus sheltered and protected by the boughs while their love like a meteor, formed out of the burning heart, will grow as a kind of natural force resembling the tide or the wings of flying birds. And when they are no more, their spirits will wander on the glimmering shore. This is an idyllic picture but perhaps a little out of focus for us of the twentieth century. 'To An Isle In The Water' describes the poet's beloved as shy, self-withdrawn, but good at simple duties of the household. She is shy in the doorway, shy in the gloom and shy as a rabbit. The poet's resolve,

> To an isle in the water
> With her would I fly. (C P. 22)

seems a little selfish for what she needs is more society and not more solitude.

In the same volume (*Crossways*) 'The Stolen Child' describes a leafy island, the home of fairies and the resort of herons and water-rabbits. The child falls to the lure of the supernatural call:

> Come away, O human child!
> To the waters and the wild
> With a faery, hand in hand,
> For the world's more full of weeping than
> you can understand.

But he will, the poet thinks, miss the common sights and sounds of home and its surroundings. The picture of these simple objects acquires a power over the imagination greater than that of the supernatural happiness and security promised:

> He'll hear no more the lowing
> Of the calves on the warm hillside
> Or the kettle on the hob
> Sing peace into his breast,
> Or see the brown mice bob
> Round and round the oatmeal chest.
> (CP. 21)

This poem, considering its early date, is a remarkable example of simplicity of diction and the power of minute observation. Yeats luckily cast aside the robes of the dreamer and the prophet to speak with the accents of ordinary life, and in the intervals that he did so, he discovered the precise image and the perfect expression. What is significant in these lines is that they give exactly and economically the view, most likely to stir the nostalgic sense. As an unsentimental picture of home, it has the power to touch the imagination. A child, however, cannot contemplate home in these terms, and therefore, the poet speaks in his person, and while the fairies steal the child, he recounts the losses in sober words. Yeats is fascinated at this stage by the thought of an island with its aloofness and tranquillity as a possible refuge for lovers, and perhaps also, for the meditative temper but his love of the common earth and its simple pleasures cannot thereby be impugned.

Among *The Rose* (1893) poems "The White Bird' brings up the island theme in connexion with love. The poet's desire for himself and his mistress is to be a pair of 'white birds... buoyed on the foam of the sea.' Of the islands to which his mind travels, the compelling attraction is that they are not in bondage to time and that they can live there and love for ever:

> I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a
> Danaan shore,

Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow
come near us no more (C P. 47).

In *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) volume, one poem recurs to the theme but the island surrounding, instead of being directly evoked, requires to be reconstructed on the basis of the hints given. The poem, 'The Lover Tells Of The Rose In His Heart' has good lines like 'The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told' but the presence of an affectation is felt when among unshapely things are listed the cry of the child by the roadway, the creak of the lumbering cart, and the heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry mould. These sounds wrong 'your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart'. The child's cry may be for natural causes, to express anger, irritation, hunger, or physical pain. It may also be due to chastisement. The heavy steps of the ploughman are not an unwelcome sound to normal ears. The poet's desire for withdrawal has two aspects—one, to leave the world for a solitary dwelling, the other, to contemplate its unpleasant features as inducement and justification for the withdrawal.

I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,
With the earth and the sky and the water, re-made, like a
casket of gold (C P. 62).

The attitude is perhaps a little akin to that of Omar Khayyam as translated by Fitzgerald, and there may also be a verbal echo or two in the phrasing but the resemblance is in any case slight.

There is another example of the union of love and island, this time in a dramatic poem, *The Shadowy Waters* (1906). Dectora, whose husband is slain, is at first ready to instigate the murder of Forgael, the Captain of the enemy ship, but at heart a dreamer, yet in a few moments everything is changed, and she exclaims to Forgael, 'Have I not loved you for a thousand years?" (CP. 493). She imagines an island, consecrated to the most intense form of existence—in fact, to love as the place where the voyage will terminate:

.....some island where the life of the world
Leaps upward, as if all the streams o' the world
Had run into one fountain. (CP. 497)

The best-known of the 'island' poems is, however, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', included among *The Rose* poems. It is as mentioned at the beginning of the section, more a poem inspired by literary example than one written to embody a personal vision. From the opening line 'I will arise and go now' we notice a deliberate solemnity of temper, sustained all through by the reference to the 'bee-loud glade' and to peace 'Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings', and which seems assumed more for its likely effect upon the reader than for meeting a personal need. Ezra Pound in 'The Lake Isle' presents his author *in deshabille*, wishing to run a tobacco-shop or be installed in any profession 'Save the damn'd profession of writing' offers, perhaps without intention of parody, a picture more in accord with normal desire than that we find in the eye-raising meditative among his thrifty bean-rows and cabins of clay and wattles. Perhaps the very conception of the island theme, whether dedicated to Romance or Philosophy, is basically artificial, and Yeats in his search for reality outgrew it because its inherent tendency seems rather to deny life than to discover it.

## II. The Maud Gonne Cycle

### (I)

Indisputably the most valuable of the love lyrics are those written about Maud Gonne. The meeting with her took place on January 1889 at the poet's Bedford Park residence. She apparently came to see his father, armed with an introduction from old John O'Leary, the Fenian leader. Of her first unforgettable impact, the poet gives an account in *The Trembling of the Veil*. What he says there seems to form a picture, indeliably stamped on his memory. In many poems we can hear its echoes, and at any rate, it serves as background to all he wrote to express his love and affliction, well worth remembering. The passage is quoted below:

"To-day with her great height and the unchangeable lineaments of her form, she looks the Sibyl I would have had played by Florence Farr, but in that day she seemed a classical impersonation of the Spring, the Virgilian commendation 'She walks like a goddess' made for her alone. Her complexion was luminous, like that of apple-blossom through which the light falls, and I remember her standing that first day by a great heap of such blossoms in the window." (*Autobiographies*, Macmillan, London, 1956, p. 123).

In 1919 he wrote a short poem 'Memory':

> One had a lovely face,
> And two or three had charm,
> But charm and face were in vain
> Because the mountain grass
> Cannot but keep the form
> Where the mountain hare has lain.
> (CP. 168)

Somewhat cryptic in expression, the poem represents a habit of thought, whose terseness seems one source of its power and eloquence. The meaning seems to be that his memory is the mountain grass; it has received the impress of the hare, which has lain there, so as to make an ineffaceable mark. The hare figure is made to suggest 'a classical impersonation of the Spring' but it does not stand alone. The mountain association gives it the necessary height and elevation, and 'grass' in the context may convey the idea of growth, and so, indirectly, of spring.

The identifications of the sort attempted seem partly to falsify the idea suggested. While admitting the presence of a persistent idea or image in a poem, we shall yet fail to discover it in any tangible form. From the first day's meeting a subtle stream seems to flowi nto each picture he paints, not altering its proportions but giving it a hue, recalling the luminous apple-blossom complexion, inseparable from the majesty of stature.

The Maud Gonne poems may perhaps be studied as a series or cycle. They may be classed with Spenser's *Amoretti*, D. G. Rosetti's *The House of Life*, and Mrs. Brownings *Sonnets from*

*the Portuguese.* These earlier poets celebrate love ending in marriage, and the sonnet-form gave their poems a unity under which the progress of their feeling, emotion, and thought stood out clearly. In Yeats we perhaps see more progress and complexity than in his predecessors writing sonnet-sequences but the variety of forms in which the poems are written interfere with their sense of unity. Often references to Maud Gonne and descriptions of her occur where the principal interest is something entirely different. *On Baile's Strand* (1904), a play containing the characters of Cuchulain and Conchubar, gives a picture of Aoife, based on the likeness of Maud Gonne:

> With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers
> Thrown backward. (The Collected Plays. Macmillan 1953. 258-259)

The Maud Gonne poems, again, are spread over a period of more than 45 years, from *The Rose* (1893) to *Last Poems* (1936-39). The poet did not think of presenting them as a series but they have need of this form of publication. To study them for the appreciation of the poet's deepening conception of life is a highly rewarding attempt. This will correct an error prejudicial to true appreciation, namely, that the Maud Gonne episode was an episode of frustration. For some of the poems, read by themselves, are likely to produce this impression. In 'Words', a poem belonging to *The Green Helmet* (1910) volume, we come across a view of what actually happened. 'The world will thank me for not marrying you' Maud Gonne had told him, and the poet seems almost to accept the position as true. For the poem ('Words') says that he wrote to please Maud Gonne, wrote and experimented to make her understand. If she had accepted his offer of marriage, he would have thrown poetry aside, being content to live. In him there was thus a conflict between rival claims, and his poetry is at once a record of a failure and a triumph.

Maud Gonne refused marriage but she did not refuse love—her conversion to Roman Catholicism was another cause of alienation. He did not expect that Heaven could give them anything better than what they had known on earth; there is in his words no sign of frustration:

And I that have not your faith, how shall I know
That in the blinding light beyond the grave
We'll find so good a thing as that we have lost?
The hourly kindness, the day's common speech,
The habitual content of each with each
When neither soul nor body has been crossed.
('King And No King', CP. 102-103)

In Robert Browning's 'The Last Ride Together' a lover, rejected by his mistress, dreams of eternity as a perpetuation of their last ride together, this being a favour conceded as a gesture of goodwill and friendship at the time of parting. The moonstruck lover finds the experience so satisfying that he desires an eternity of it:

What if we still ride on, we two,
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity—
And Heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

The wish in its utter falsity is an example of the sentimental in literature. Yeats by comparison is singularly honest in his estimate of the flesh-and-blood state as basis for human love.

(II)

The sonnet-cycles except Sidney's, celebrate love, crowned with marriage. Yeats's experience was different but not necessarily inferior. He himself had pondered over the question:

Does the imagination dwell the most
Upon a woman won or woman lost?

The question is asked in *The Tower* (1928). A married man with two children, the poet was sixty-two at the date. The season was, therefore, propitious for a stock-taking. He admitted the loss without denying the increasing ascendancy of imagination:

And that if memory recur, the sun's
Under eclipse and the day blotted out.
(CP. 222)

One point of difference is noticeable between Yeats and the writers of the sonnet cycles. When the latter saw their beloved, they were more conscious of the change and upheaval produced in them by the beautiful objects of their contemplation than of their beauty as something that others also could see and admire. Spenser writes in *Amoretti*, Sonnet No. 16 :

One day as I unwarily did gaze
On those fayre eyes, my loves immortal light;
The whiles my stonisht hart stood in amaze,
Through sweet illusion of her lookes delight;
I mote perceive how, in glauncing sight,
Legions of loves with little wings did fly;
Darting their deadly arrowes, fyry bright,
At every rash beholder passing by.
One of those archers closely I did spy,
Ayming his arrow at my very heart.

Spenser is performing a ritual of love through his poetry. A ritual pre-supposes tradition, sailing gracefully down the stream with its flags and buntings and using the passions of the heart as modes of additional ornament. The show takes the eye but leaves the heart untouched. Love is a chase and its successful conclusion is borrowed from the hunting field. The view is conventional, stylized, and lacks the authenticity of a personal emotion:

Lyke as a huntsman after a weary chace,
Seeing the game from him escapt away,
Sits down to rest him in some shady place,
With panting hounds beguiled of their pray:
So, after long pursuit and vaine assay,
When I all weary had the chace forsooke,
The gentle deare returned the selfe-same way,
Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brooke:

There she, beholding me with mylder looke,
Sought not to fly, but fearlesse still did bide;
Till I in hand her yet halfe trembling tooke,
And with her owne goodwill hir fyrmely tyde.
Strange thing, me seemed, to see a beast so wyld,
So goodly wonne, with her owne will beguyled.
(Sonnet, No. 67)

D. G. Rosetti in *The House of Life* also describes love from the point of view of its impact upon him. The sonnet (No. 3) is called 'Love sight', which seems to confirm the point I am trying to make. The beauty of the beloved is transformed into a power, which affects the lover and drives him to see all sorts of things, or rather to dream them instead of seeing her objectively as she might be seen by others:

When do I see thee most, beloved one?
When in the light the spirits of mine eyes
Before thy face, their altar, solemnize
The worship of that Love through thee made known?
Or when in the dusk hours, (we two alone,)
Close-kissed and eloquent of still replies
Thy twilight-hidden glimmering visage lies,
And my soul only sees thy soul its own?

Mrs. Browning's attitude in the matter is of a piece with that of the others—she also recorded the effect upon her of what she saw: she did not see her lover's personal appearance or the kind of impression it generally tended to make:

Straightway I was 'ware
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair.
(Sonnet, No. I)

As against the marrying couples, Yeats always attempted to *describe*, he did not count the heart-throbs at the approach of his beloved as material for his poetry. On the other hand, what he described reflected the excitement—Maud Gonne was Helen, Athena, a cloud of glory:

A crowd
Will gather, and not know it walks the very street
Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning cloud.
('Fallen Majesty', CP. 138)

The two attitudes thus seen are worth examining. In Spenser, Rossetti, and Mrs. Browning, whatever is suffered or enjoyed arises from a relationship either existing, or missed with a feeling of pain. The seen reality is coloured and distorted by the way of looking. In Yeats the approach is different. Maud spreads her power without reference to the poet. This because she cannot help being what she is:

Why, what could she have done, being what she is?
Was there another Troy for her to burn? (CP. 101)

She crossed his path like destiny. What he suffered was part of the decree of fate. All his life he studied the phases of the moon, he became a kind of astrologer, trying to discover what the fates held in store for him. Compared with the other attitude, there is a certain humility in Yeats's, which to note is to ensure subtler enjoyment.

The poem 'No Second Troy' deserves a longer notice as giving us an attitude of self-effacing love, ready to accept as inevitable what another would have complained against as unjust or cruel. The poem is an enquiry and an answer, a sense of suffering and a knowledge that it is ineluctable. He had suffered by loving Maud Gonne, the cause is her high, isolated, stern nature, she being of the heroic mould. Had her beauty made an adequate impact, a frenzy would have seized the multitude, making them fight madly. The unheroic age was too timid, and the expected did not happen. Maud was Helen without a Troy to burn, and the poet's affliction is only a poor substitute for the ruin her beauty could wreak.

(III)

The Maud Gonne cycle is unlike any series of love poems—and this for two reasons; it extends over a period of nearly half a century and is interpolated by a fresh love affair—with Maud's

daughter—and by his own marriage. The circumstances produced a change in his attitude; he had anticipated it in a poem, published in *The Rose* volume but the cause suggested there would not be valid in explaining the new situation. Old age did not solely account for the reorientation of his emotional life nor that of Maud:

> And bending down beside the glowing bars,
> Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
> And paced upon the mountains overhead
> And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.
> ('When You Are Old', CP. 46)

The language is a trifle too solemn, it belongs to the early period, and the tone, of one in priestly robes with a conscious elevation of manner. But the expression of his love for Maud had been throughout restrained. No great physical intimacy is implied in the association yet the accents are often undisguisedly passionate. We shall try to watch his thought and feeling on a chronological basis but shall step over the limits of time whenever necessary in the interest of our analysis.

Among *The Rose* poems there are five lyrics, more or less concerned with Maud Gonne. Of these the first in order of publication is 'The Pity of Love'; the real emotion, not conveyed by the title, is, however, one of anxious interest in her safety, of fear that harm may come to her from a variety of sources—from men, from clouds, winds, and from wood and stream. With her luminous, apple-blossom complexion, she was more than usually exposed to danger, and the poet as lover certainly felt disturbed at the prospect of what she might suffer. Maud's political interests increased the anger and at a later date Yeats's pity turned into indignation when he thought of the way she threw away her most precious gifts:

> Because of her opinionated mind
> Barter that horn and every good
> By quiet natures understood
> For an old bellows full of angry wind?
> ('A Prayer For My Daughter', CP. 213).

In *Last Poems* he recurs to the idea but its expression is now without the touch of the indignation, which marked his earlier attitude, implying no more than a simple disapproval:

> I thought my dear must her own soul destroy,
> So did fanaticism and hate enslave it.
> ('The Circus Animals' Desertion', CP. 392)

The next poem in the volume 'The Sorrow of Love' is one of the five lyrics, arranged one after the other, and bearing upon Maud directly or indirectly. The girl described in the poem is both Maud and Helen, and her appearance seems to give us a sense of the mystery, perhaps, also of the greatness of the human destiny. Nature, in spite of her sublime aspects and beauty, serves merely to set off man and his suffering. In this poem Yeats for the first time hints at a similarity between Maud and Helen, which later he regards almost as a case of identity.

'When You Are Old' contains words, characterizing a semi-religious attitude, such as 'murmur', 'crowd of stars', 'pilgrim soul', 'shadows deep', 'glad grace'. His beloved is not old yet. To project oneself into the future for this type of meditation is tainted by artificiality. Among the 'ifs' of life, there is the chance of their both growing old. Exploring this possibility, the poet creates a sentimental situation for sighing over, a past that is yet to be as an aspect of the change time will bring about. Apparently, the poetical fare is thin but may be well-suited to an idle moment. 'The White Birds' has no direct reference to Maud Gonne but his mind, permeated by Ireland's myth and legend, seems to recreate an old tale as a lover's paradise for himself. As already noticed, this poem also belongs to 'Love on an island' fancy, forming a strong element in the early poetry. The following image appears graceful:

> I would that we were, my beloved, white birds on the foam of the sea (CP. 46).

suggesting a connexion with Aphrodite 'sprung from the foam' and combining with it the idea of purity, which the word 'white' implies. 'The Two Trees' perhaps owes its origin to

MacGregor Mathers but the thought he presents is his own. He seems to ask Maud Gonne to 'gaze in thine own heart', and avoid reflexion, analysis, and critical thought, forming 'the *dim glass the demons hold*'. *This* tree, one of the two about which he writes, has 'The ravens of unresting thought' flying through its broken branches with 'cruel claw and hungry throat'. He adjures her solemnly not to gaze in the bitter glass, not to reflect, but to dwell on the plane of feeling and instinct, which brings fulness of life:

> There the Loves a circle go,
> The flaming circle of our days,
> Gyring, spiring to and fro
> In those great ignorant leafy ways...
> Beloved, gaze in thine own heart (CP. 55).

Perhaps the first thing the poet said in a poem about her was the concern, the solicitude he felt for her welfare. The poem ('The Pity Of Love') has already been discussed and the comment made on it was that pity did not rightly suggest its emotional content. But pity may still be the govering feeling in the background—a feeling of tenderness for one not sufficiently able to take care of oneself. In 'Old Memory' there is pity but only as one of the elements in what seems a complex fabric:

> be nothing said
> That would be harsh for children that have strayed
> (CP. 87).

The reflexion is not perhaps meant for Maud alone. A summary of the argument will indicate its implication. The poet seems to address his thought to fly at the day's end, awakening old memory. It will tell her: your strength which is noble, generous, and great—it can create a new age, modelling itself upon the heroic world of long ago—is only partially yours. Your lover kneaded you like dough and never expected that all that he had done would come to mean nothing, and that the words, expressing his passion, would seem like an idle speech, conveying no sense. But he had already said everything. The ways of the wind are unpredictable, so are those of love. If more can

be said, let it not be uncharitable to those lovers of the future, lost in the mazes of the emotion like children.

An earlier reference has been made to 'A Bronze Head'. In this poem, written in old age, the note of pity is heard again, 'And wandered murmuring everywhere, "My child, my child!" and her political activity criticised in a number of earlier poems, seems here no discredit to her, being regarded as a justifiably severe attitude to a world at the lowest stages of decline:

> Ancestral pearls all pitched into a sty,
> Heroic reverie mocked by clown and knave.

In the poems now to be examined the poet oscillates between moods and fancies, desiring once to be romantically unique, he changes to irony, and warns not to love too long. He has again the feeling that he has missed love and says how he shakes from head to foot in thinking about Maud. There is a short lyric describing an ecstatic transformation. The poems representing these changes of mood and feeling belong to the decade between 1904 and 1915.

To love uniquely, to love as 'no one has ever loved but you and I' seems to be the poet's ambition. The delicate-stepping stag and his lady, sighing as they see their reflexion in the water, are his rivals; the moon, the proud queen of the sky, loving the sun are a second pair, whom he wishes to outvie. He is anxious to hurry with his beloved into the ragged wood from which he will send away all other lovers so that the uniqueness of his love may not be challenged. The idea seems to be an aspect of the 'love on an island' theme discussed above. In the next poem, his tone recalls that of the cavalier poets, and is slightly tinged with irony:

> Sweetheart, do not love too long:
> I loved long and long,
> And grew to be out of fashion
> Like an old song. (CP, 93)

'Drinking Song' which belongs to *The Green Helmet* volume, dating six years later (1910), seems to be a picture of unfulfilled love. While drink is for the mouth and thirst is easily appeased,

love which is for the eye remains out of reach. The idea seems to be that he must suffer agonies because his beloved is unrelenting. The contrast between love and wine is, however, too pointed, and the poem may perhaps be justly estimated as a form of 'wit-writing'. 'Brown Penny', also of the same volume, has more wit than emotion. The expression 'I am looped in the loops of her hair' indicates a kind of chivalrous attitude which supplies the key-note to the poem. The Brown Penny's advice that he should love if 'the lady be young and fair' suggests a courtly rather than passionate style of writing. The cavalier mood is again in evidence and the poem seems an excursion into amorous verse without personal feeling to put into it.

In *Responsibilities* (1914) there is a jostling together of poems on Maud and Iseult. Love is expressed in both but delicately graded so that the two attitudes appear fairly distinct. 'A Memory Of Youth' is an attempt at a retrospect. The poet delicately renders the situation and the atmosphere. Prompted by love's wisdom and his own share of mother-wit, he readily obtained his beloved's approval of what he said yet a cloud came from the treacherous North, overshadowing the landscape. What happened seemed like fate against which there was no contending. He spoke with perfect sincerity, admiring the beauty of her person and her mind till her eyes glowed with pride, her cheeks blushed with pleasure, and her steps grew light with vanity. Yet a darkness fell upon them, an unexpected misunderstanding arose, threatening a complete rupture. Silently as she sat by him, he felt that his love had been pitilessly stifled. Then a little bird sang out, too little for notice, and set everything right between them. The moon sailed out from under the clouds and their happiness was restored. The account obviously relates to the poet's association with Maud Gonne.

The interlacing of moods and memories offers the basic pattern of these lyrics. The range of feeling they demonstrate presents a surprising variety. In a poem of the early period ('He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead'), he thinks that by dying Maud would come closer to him. The poem is important as an indication of the relationship with Maud which he had contemplated. Apparently, his approach does not seem to be physical. Even if she dies, passing into a non-material existence, the lovers

could still hold communion, in fact, their communion would be sweeter because without fear of interruption. That is why the poet would like her to die. She would come to him as a disembodied spirit, and he would lay his head on her breast, while she would murmur words of love. She would forgive him, being no more of the living world. She would not leave him hastily even if she were as flighty as an untamed bird. She would know that she belonged to the stars, the moon, and the sun as much as to him. And so he would wish her dead and lying in the ground under the dock leaves, while the lights vanished one by one from the sky as the day approached.

Maud has given him the tremor of ecstasy. In 'Friends', which belongs to the 1914-volume, he speaks of three women, Augusta Gregory, Olivia Shakespeare, and last of all, Maud Gonne:

> How could I praise that one?
> When day begins to break
> I count my good and bad,
> Being wakeful for her sake,
> Remembering what she had,
> What eagle look still shows,
> While up from my heart's root
> So great a sweetness flows
> I shake from head to foot (CP. 139)

In the poem which immediately follows in the collected edition, the poet describes a state of ecstasy in which the burden of old memories and disappointments drops from him. In a sudden glimpse of the sky in which birds soared like liberated souls, he saw ice turning into fire without ceasing to be ice. The contradictions of the material world were reconciled in this sudden vision. His feeling and imagination rushed to meet this new dimension of experience, all the oppressive thought disappeared and the memories that remained were not those of youthful passion and frustrated love. Discarded and forgotten was all the reproach he could feel against Maud. He seemed shot through and through with light and trembled violently. He seemed to have been released from the body. The spirit thus

born by its liberation from the flesh, goes unarmed to meet its fate but its new freedom comes as an unjust punishment, its journey being through unmapped country without the lodestar of love to guide its course.

Of the beauty of Maud he has spoken in a number of lyrics. In 'A Woman Homer Sung', he not only writes admiringly of her beauty which showed in her youthful steps years ago:

> And trod so sweetly proud
> As 'twere upon a cloud,
> A woman Homer sung (CP. 100).

but also of an ambivalence of feeling, made by its impact upon him between jealousy when others watched her with more than ordinary interest, and a sense of bitter wrong when they passed her by, taking no notice. He began then to write about her till age turned her grey so that people could say in coming time:

> 'He shadowed in a glass
> What thing her body was' (CP. 100).

In 'No Second Troy' she is described as a Helen without a Troy to set fire on. In 'Her Praise', written in 1919, the tribute is repeated. There is so much excitement and ardour of emotion in the poem that one would imagine a man in his twenties speaking rather than one past fifty. The mental state is reflected in his inability to hold himself quiet. He moves from room to room, and up and down the house like a man who has published a new book or a girl dressed in a new frock. Finding no one to share his enthusiasm within the house, he tells us that he will walk by the thorn tree and will discover some beggar, sheltering from the wind. If he has sufficient rags to wrap himself in, he will hear her name and will be well pleased to remember it. In the Trojan days, Helen had young men's praise and old men's blame. But among the poor, old and young alike were fond of her.

In *The Wild Swans At Coole* (1919), the poem 'His Phoenix' describes Maud as a unique beauty. As Helen she already more or less possessed the attribute. The superlative distinction is

now explained and elaborated. The poem is half-playful in its challenging tone. The poet gives Maud his highest praise, noting other beauties by name and mentioning their triumphs but his Phoenix has nothing to fear from rivalry. Where could one find that simplicity of the child with the pride in her eyes, drawn from the heart of the sun? He is overwhelmed with pity for her lonely life but it seems to be the will of God.

> And that proud look as though she had gazed into the burning sun,
> And all the shapely body no tittle gone astray.
> I mourn for that most lonely thing; and yet God's will be done (CP. 172).

'A Thought From Propertius', placed next to the above poem in the Collected Edition, contains a no less striking tribute to Maud, who is exalted to the rank of a pagan deity. Her physical proportions are described. The long flowing line from head to her shapely knees gives Maud a noble, even a godly appearance. She could walk to the altar and take her place beside Pallas Athene like another pagan deity and her compeer, or she might have been the mate of a Centaur, nourished by the purest drink. One of the last tributes to her beauty is paid in *The Winding Stair And Other Poems* (1933). Maud like himself was old at this date. There was in her appearance little of that beauty which had amazed and delighted him. But this wonderful possession, he believes, cannot be lost and so he presents a view of personal immortality, holding it as certain that all lives that has ever lived. The old sages knew well what they said when they asserted this out of their wisdom. Somewhere beyond time, there still lives the beautiful woman whom he once described as a 'Classical impersonation of the Spring', quoting Virgil. The following verses recall this picture:

> That shone before these eyes
> Targeted, trod like Spring. (CP. 286).

'A Bronze Head' contains the final celebration of her remembered beauty. Nothing of it remained in the portrait except the eye. 'Everything else withered and mummy-dead'. But this is so different from her youthful self:

No dark tomb-hunter once; her form all full
As though with magnanimity of light
Yet a most gentle woman (CP. 382).

Perhaps she combined in her two opposite qualities and there is no knowing which of them expressed her true self:

and in a breath
A mouthful held the extreme of life and death (*ibid*).

(IV)

We shall now proceed to examine the poems in which elements of personal history are embedded. This will be followed by an account how to the poet's imagination, Maud seemed to run away from life, and finally, there will be a few comments upon the use of religious imagery in connexion with her.

In one of the beautiful lyrics on Maud Gonne, 'Broken Dreams', the poet writes of her grace and physical perfection about which people in future will ask those old enough to have seen her

'Tell me of that lady
The poet stubborn with his passion sang us
When age might well have chilled his blood' (CP. 173).

But the poet also loved something imperfect in her and expressed alarm lest she should visit Lourdes and resort to miraculous cure for her defect:

You are more beautiful than any one,
And yet your body had a flaw:
Your small hands were not beautiful,
And I am afraid that you will run
And paddle to the wrist
In that mysterious, always brimming lake
Where those that have obeyed the holy law
Paddle and are perfect. Leave unchanged
The hands that I have kissed,
For old sake's sake (CP. 173).

The poem belongs to *The Wild Swans At Coole* (1919) series. At the date he was fifty-four years of age. 'King and No King',

which belongs to *The Green Helmet* (1910) volume reads like a page out of an intimate diary. 'No King' who afterwards became King, desired everything except words, to him no more than noise, trusting as he did to the resources of the cannon. He, however, prevailed by its means somewhere or somehow, and Old Romance hospitably offered him a nook in its enchanted palace. He and Maud Gonne, however, found and lost their worlds in words—they thought they would re-live Old Romance but Maud frustrated the purpose by taking the vow in an angry moment never to marry him. She turned Roman Catholic before marrying Major McBride, evidently led to the step by her faith in a life beyond the grave.

'Reconciliation' also contains personal history. The telegram announcing Maud's marriage, was like a bolt from the blue, blinding his eyes and deafening his ears. He stopped writing verses, and composed plays instead, concerned with kings, helmets, and swords. Some would blame her because he could not write any more poetry as a result. But while he wrote about helmets and swords, he found them somehow to reflect her personality. Now, after reconciliation, he can turn to poetry again, the world having grown like what it used to be. As they laugh or cry according to the mood, let them get rid of the heroic themes. He desires her to come closer to him because after her marriage, his thoughts had gone dry, he had lost his creative powers.

> But, dear, cling close to me; since you were gone.
> My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone
> (CP. 102).

It will be interesting to enquire as to the extent of Maud Gonne's contribution to the development of his poetic genius. He admits that the temporary breach in their relations made him poetically unproductive, and expects to regain his powers now that their old friendship has revived. The study of the series of poems written about Maud provides sufficient evidence for the conclusion that she was indirectly responsible for his increased poetic stature—Yeats had a rich emotion to explore—and for his insight, imagination, and verbal skill aiding him in his active efforts.

In 'Presences' he speaks of a strange and exciting night's experience, making the hair on his head stand on end. Since sunset, he had dreamed of laughing, timid, or wild women, climbing up his creaking stair to his room. The first to come was the harlot, the second was Iseult, and the third, Maud. They stood at the door between the lectern and the fire-place, so close to him that he could hear their heartbeats. To Iseult he refers as a child without knowledge of sex, and to Maud as a queen and superior to the rest.

In 'That The Night Come' included in *Responsibilities* (1914) Maud is seen to be more in love with death than with life. The poet looks upon her with a feeling of strangeness, discovering that she is not for the common joys of life, she is not for love and ordinary fulfilment. She can get what she desires only in the final peace of death. This view of her character makes him think of a king who orders kettledrums, cannon, and trumpet on the day of his marriage so that he may hasten his death. The king figure is a tribute to Maud's majesty, the kettle-drum etc. a symbol of the strife which filled her life, and the night is death, which would engulf her in a final darkness through which nothing more could be seen or known.

In 'The Lover Speaks To The Hearers Of His Song In Coming Days', the poet speaks of his love for Maud as the way of his redemption. He addresses women of a future day, praying by the altar-rails in church. His songs and the flame of his passion rise above prayers, they rise above myrrh and frankincense, drifting in the air like cloud. He is urging the women to pray devoutly for the sin of love, which made the songs he wrote. The Attorney for Lost Souls will then cry to him and his beloved in his sweet tones, promising them salvation from the penitential stage. Their love will thus bring about their redemption.

In a poem in *The Swans At Coole* volume with the simple title 'On Woman', he thinks of a future life. His impulse for the thought comes from the exquisite happiness that Solomon enjoyed with Sheba. He does not expect that he could have in the present life all that made Solomon happy. Whatever God may withhold from him, he prays that He may grant him—but not in this world, for he can scarcely be so bold as to hope

for so priceless a thing with old age upon him but if there is truth in the belief that the moon in its pestles grinds everything anew, let him then be born again to find and possess what once he had and to know what once he had known. He will then live with her like Solomon and Sheba in perfect accord.

Religious figures are used by the poet to describe his feeling for Maud. We have already mentioned his idea about redemption through love. Maud is transfigured into a spiritual power in the following biblical metaphor, quoted above in a different context: 'Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning cloud' (CP. 138). In the following passage there seems on the other hand an attempt to rescue her from transformation into a Platonic concept so that she may continue human and within reach:

> Dim Powers of drowsy thought, let her no longer be dim
> Like the pale cup of the sea,
> When winds have gathered and sun and moon burned dim
> Above its cloudy rim;
> But let a gentle silence wrought with music flow
> Whither her footsteps go (CP. 80).

Comparing the Maud Gonne poems with the sonnet cycles we may perhaps conclude that these more than the others represent what T. S. Eliot describes as the first voice in poetry, the voice of the poet talking to himself. *The Sonnets From The Portuguese* always contemplated an audience at least of one person, the Rossetti poems frequently describe a mutuality between the lovers, Spenser wrote graceful exercises in a conventional style. Yeats did not think of an audience. He did so after the poems were written. His expression varies from poem to poem, because the length and the form both depended upon what he had to say. This circumstance made his poems a powerful instrument of sincerity. In two obvious respects he is closer to Sidney than to the other authors of sonnet-sequences. He looked within his heart and wrote, seeking no models or literary examples to guide him, and he did not marry the woman he was in love with. Apart from this, Sidney, perhaps more passionate than Spenser, was almost equally under the influence

of a traditional form. Yeats impresses us as one of the most original of those who had sung on the love-theme with a genuine passion prompting his utterance.

### III. The Iseult Group of Poems

The Yeats-Iseult imbroglio is difficult to explain. Richard Ellman gives the following facts as explanation: 'After the death of McBride Yeats went to Paris and proposed to Maud Gonne on condition that she give up politics. As he had anticipated, she refused, and then became infatuated with her beautiful adopted niece Iseult' (*Yeats The Man And the Mask*, Faber Paper-Back, 1961, p. 222). Norman Jeffares in *W.B. Yeats Man And Poet* tells us that Maud was surprised to find him falling in love with Iseult but in 1917 she told him that she had no objection to his proposing to her. He then adds the valuable information without, however, indicating its source: 'In fact, it was Iseult who had made the first proposal when she was fifteen, and had been refused because there was too much Mars in her horoscope'. (Paper-Back, Routledge, 1962, p. 190).

'Before 1917 the poems written to Iseult had all contrived to turn themselves into praise of her mother!' (*ibid*). What is clear is that the poems have a tone and indicate a quality of feeling, which was at first half paternal. The poet writes from a consciousness of belonging to a different world. Ellmann uses the word 'infatuated' advisedly. His love was a kind of folly, the passion a flicker yet the period represented by the poems is well over a decade, from 1914 to 1928. What seems disturbing is that he was writing poems to the mother and the daughter at the same time. The problem involved is more delicate, and difficult to understand than in *Henry Esmond*. The desire to possess a very young wife may be far from wrong but to be in love with the mother and the daughter at the same time seems a rather extraordinary manifestation of the amorous sensibility. The only point in the poet's favour was that Iseult was a niece and only an adopted daughter.

A detailed study of the poems will throw light on the nature of the relationship. The poet was charmed and delighted, and desired her in a half-shrinking way, knowing that the difference

between them was too great to be bridged, that he could not give her the passion, which was her due, being a relatively old man himself.

The first of the Iseult poems describes her as a child and is followed by another, 'Two Years Later', both presented as a series. 'To A Child Dancing In The Wind' is included in the 1914 volume of poems. This is not a love poem. Iseult is here seen as a sheltered child with no embittered experience of the fool's triumph, of frustrated love or of the premature death of Synge, described as 'the best labourer' with all the sheaves to bind. Entrenched in her innocence, she has no need to fear the raging storm. The outside world of trouble has no meaning for her. The poet's pursuit of Maud Gonne, and later, of her daughter will seem to most people unusual, and the poem on the child, although apparently belonging to a different category, will find a place among the love poems because in the picture of the innocence there is already an element of a desire to enrich himself by what she has and he is without.

The reference in the next poem, 'Two Years Later' to 'those daring/Kind eyes' shows that if the poet stood outside the border of the love-theme in the preceding poem, he is well within it in this. Iseult has beauty, what she is without is knowledge. The poet wonders if no-one has made comments on the fact. The moths, burned in the fire, are in despair. The image suggests that the girl too may be caught in the glare and suffer the same fate. She should be warned of this: the poet could have warned her but she is young. This is a barrier to communication, the other is that she speaks a different tongue, French being her vernacular. She does not doubt or distrust, accepting everything with a believing disposition, and looks upon the world as her friend. As a result she will suffer greatly, she will suffer as much as her mother had done, and like her too she will become another broken reed. He is old and she is young, 'a different tongue' of the first stanza becomes 'a barbarous tongue' in the following with implications of crudeness, roughness, and perhaps, also of a mixture of motives in his speech, which she is unable to understand. The poet's love is faced with the problem of communication. The old and the young live in different worlds, the hopes and ideas of the latter must seem as little familiar to

the former as the thought and experience of the old to the young. Nature's barriers are insurmountable. 'The Living Beauty' belongs to *The Wild Swans At Coole* (1919) volume, dating two years after his marriage with Miss George Hyde-Lees. Its character is seen in a profound sense of the deprivations of age: the most vital women are meant for younger men. As an old man he cannot possess any interest for them. Comparing his old age with a lamp whose wick and oil are spent, with one whose blood no longer flows warm through the veins, he declares that he must be content with beauty in bronze and marble. It does not console one's solitude and is no more than an apparition from beyond the shores of life. He is old and beauty is for younger people. He cannot pay its tribute of wild tears, he lacks the capacity for passionate feeling, the freezing blood is a sign that this capacity is lost. Living is on this view an emotional experience for the young and love belongs to that experience. Hence the poet broods on age and its deprivations with bitterness.

'To A Young Beauty', published in the same volume, is addressed to Iseult. Here he lays down a code of behaviour for maintaining a distance from the common herd, and declares a sense of his own personal worth. An artist, he says, must not mix with the common people. To do so is to invite their fate, to tumble down with Jack and Jill. Iseult's companions should, therefore, be of the best quality. To reach the ideal standard, she may be passionate but must not be too ready to bestow favours as common beauties may do. The poet knows what to expect from beauty, how little she pays her servant yet he will praise the cold indifference he has suffered. He himself is no friend of fools and will be esteemed after his death the equal of Landor and Donne. His rejection by Iseult is an old story but it rankles in his mind and he seems indirectly to suggest that one as worthy as himself was worthy of her. He has endured the mother's coldness yet he has no criticism to make of it. She should also be cold as a measure of self-protection, as a means of defence against crowds of undeserving youngmen, all too ready to admire and seek her favour.

*The Tower* (1928) contains several poems about Iseult. He has been a married man for eleven years and yet the sore is far from healed. There is a sense of bleeding agony in the verses.

What surprises is that his tone is sadder and more bitter than at the date of Iseult's refusal. On Yeats emotion seems to have had a delayed effect. Instead of being allayed, it grew worse with the passage of time. *Owen Aherne And His Dancers* belongs to 1928, but its impetuosity exceeds that of the earlier poems aboug Iseult. Professor Jeffares in a note explains the fictitious characters Aherne and Robartes: 'He (Robartes) first appears in *Secret Rose* (1897). Another imaginary figure was Owen Aherne (described to me by Mrs. Joseph O'Neill as representing the Christian elements in Yeats); they are both part of 'Ego Dominus Tuus' completed in 1915. Perhaps the best way to describe them is to use Mrs. O'Neill's explanation that they resembled the imaginary friends that sensitive children will create and hold conversation with, until they become more important than real persons'. (A. N. Jeffares. *W. B. Yeats Man And Poet.* Paper-Back, p. 319).

The name 'Owen Aherne And His Dancers' may have been chosen as an attempt at obfuscation. The poem contains no dancers nor does Aherne make his appearance in it. Obviously, it is about himself and Iseult with an allusive reference to Mrs. Yeats: 'O her heart would break to learn my thoughts are far away'. His concern is with his bewildering passion for Iseult and with how it was crossed by her. He met her upon the Norman upland and among the poplar shades in England. At first, the passion was all that mattered yet it seemed too much of a burden to bear. His heart was overwhelmed by its impetuosity. Longing and despair, pity and fear, increased the complexity of his feeling. He was afraid that he might hurt her by his impetuosity and was at the same time frightened that she might embitter his days by her coldness. The tension of the situation distracted him. When passion threatened his sanity he ran away from Iseult. The poem is a colloquy between his heart and his mind. He has spoken of the heart's madness because it made him take to his flight from the 'young child'. How could she marry a man of fifty with that untamed nature of hers? He is a cage bird and among cage birds he must find one to mate with, leaving Iseult free to choose someone after her own taste. In giving this advice the poet thought that his heart concocted murderous lies, lies wiping out all the prospects of his happiness, so that

his wretchedness might grow worse still. He did not find any cage bird by his side, no one who could be his mate. Then he recalled his wife, his thoughts by thus wandering from her, would rend her heart in two. He has been cruel to her, he remembered with regret. But his heart assured that he could speak out all that was in his mind, and nobody would be the worse for this. It is evident that he cannot prevail upon the child to marry him unless she mistook gratitude for love, agreeing to marry a man of fifty. So let her choose a young man and be happy with him, sharing the wildness, which each could give the other.

The above is a close summary of the poem. The dancers may recall the matrimonial dance:

> The association of man and woman
> In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie—*East Coker.*

More likely, the word refers to the two orders of madness, of the heart and of the senses, which the poem describes. Madness or wildness is a form of dance or ecstasy. But the dancers withdrew from each other because they danced to two different tunes. At the date of writing the poem the poet was well over sixty but the poem describes him as a man of fifty. The incidents of the broken match with Iseult thirteen years before are therefore the theme of the poem; his marriage took place shortly after the refusal. His wife could not complain that his heart had wandered away from her before the date of the marriage. She has, however, reason to do so on account of his indulgence in a feat of the memory, driving her from his side. But the poem seems more than a simple reconstruction of what had happened—the sense of its continuation into the present appears as one of the causes behind the passionate intensity of the statement.

'A Young Man And Old' is a general title for eleven short lyrics, not all of which are about Iseult. 'First Love', introducing the series, seems to be an account of his love for her. But she was not in any case his first love. Why should the poet try to create a wrong impression in the reader's mind? Two explanations seem probable. The poet did not wish that any attempt

should be made to identify the lovers; the other explanation seems to be that every love, when genuine, is a first love. Iseult like the sailing moon, possessing beauty's murderous power, walked and blushed, standing on his pathway until he thought she had a heart of flesh and blood. But he has since tested her heart and found it stone. He had tried to do many things afterwards but nothing was done, for everyone travelling the path of love is driven to lunacy. She smiled on him and he was transfigured but she left him a fool, wandering aimlessely here and there, dimmed out of thought as stars are out of their light in the moon's neighbourhood.

The next poem 'Human Dignity' seems a continuation. Iseult has the kindness of the moon, shining gently on all but without the power of understanding. To her his sorrow seemed no more than a painted scene, hung on a wall. He lies like a bit of stone under a broken tree. If he had screamed and given vent to his heart's misery even for the passing bird to hear, he could have lived but he remained dumb from a sense of human dignity.

'The Mermaid' is the third poem of the series. The facts of the case are altered, a fable is invented, but the sense that the two of them belonged to different worlds—in the poem, different elements—is preserved. It is from what is retained that we can see the personal context in spite of the dissimilarity of the situation conceived. A mermaid, the poem tells us, found a swimming lad and chose him for her lover, pressing her body to his, laughing with pleasure. She went down to the bottom of the sea, forgetting in her selfish happiness that it could be no home for her lover. If Iseult is the mermaid, she seemed to have encouraged him, leaving him afterwards to brood on his misery.

'The Death of the Hare' has no clear connexion with Iseult but being of the same series and based upon the love-theme, some sort of association with her is not improbable. The woman about whom the poet writes might have been Wordsworth's Lucy:

A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!

—Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

The poet seems to have let in the yelling pack of journalists and lion hunters upon the privacy of his beloved, for he had believed that she would be flattered and pleased by the attention she would receive from the quarter. He had even expected that she would bestow upon him some especial favour because of this. On the contrary, she felt distracted by this invasion of her solitude, and he watched with a pained realization the ruthless destruction of the peace and mental serenity, depending upon the life in seclusion.

A personal poem of bitter disappointment follows as the fifth of the series with the title 'Empty Cup'. It speaks of the miseries of frustration in love and of marriage, which brought him little comfort because he had lost his youth and the capacity for enjoyment. Driven mad by disappointment, the poem tells us, and on the brink of death as a result, he found a cup, which symbolized love, but he was afraid of involving himself in the passion, imagining that through the evil influence of the moon, another disappointment, emptying the cup of its contents, would burst his heart. Last October he found the cup through marriage but his youth having passed it proved empty.

The above gives a critical summary of the poems about Iseult. One is surprised to notice in some of them a kind of violent passion, which we do not come across in the Maud Gonne poems. In the latter there is present a love, capable of transcending the bounds of flesh. It soared to visions of a spiritual altitude but in the Iseult poems on the other hand the love seems to be more physical, and disappointment almost maddening in its effect. This love did not as an experience attain to sublimation. His fatherly affection at the beginning was something that seems to militate with the passionate phase he later developed. The two attitudes are not easily reconciled.

In the early poems Yeats often described the feminine tresses. He seemed to observe them with attention and found in them a graceful ornament for the head. An early poem describes the lover's neck, breast, and arms being 'drowned in her long dim hair' (CP. 64). He writes of 'The shadowy blossoms of my hair'

(CP. 67), of 'Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair', (CP. 69); of 'a cloud of hair' (CP. 72), and once in a ritual sense:

> We will bend down and loosen our hair over you,
> That it may drop faint perfume, and be heavy with dew,
> Lilies of death-pale hope, roses of passionate dream.
> (CP. 79)

Yeats makes no reference to the hair of Maud or of Iseult. This is an omission on which comments seem called for. Rossetti in *The House of Life* and Mrs. Browning in her sonnets both write of the hair as a pledge of love:

> and lo!
> Across my breast the abandoned hair doth flow,
> Where one shorn tress long stirred the longing ache.
> Sonnet VI *The House of Life.*

And Mrs. Browning writes:

> I never gave a lock of hair away
> To a man, dearest, except this to thee.
> Sonnet, No 18.

The absence of such a reference in the love poems by Yeats may be an evidence that the poet did not receive such a pledge either from Maud or from her daughter.*

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# CHAPTER III

## TIME-THEME IN THE POETRY OF YEATS

### I

Scientists and philosophers have tried to define time but there is no method of analysing time exhaustively. The mystery persists, and when we propose to examine a poet's attitude to Time, we do so with no illusion that he will succeed in providing a clue where others have failed to do so. Our object is merely to see his reactions, to discover in his meditations a changing pattern, which may secure a closer understanding of his progress and maturity as thinker and visionary, and the final reconcilement with a power he has bewailed, and cursed, and triumphed over. In the *Collected Edition* of his poems "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" introduces the time theme on which he has played innumerable variations; in the last poem he wrote shortly before death he returned to it to record a triumph, half mixed with scorn and indifference.

His earliest reference to time occurs in the phrase "the cracked tune that Chronos sings" (CP. 7) and also in "all the many changing things", explaining why "The woods of Arcady are dead". In the midst of the changing scene he mentions "words" as the only element in the human world not subject to change: they "alone are certain good". For although the warring kings did not recognize their value, their own memorial is still found in "An idle word" as testimony to their glory, a word "By the stammering schoolboy said". The idea stated is the same as Browning's "Ten lines, a statesman's life in each" ("The Last Ride Together"), the occasions evoking the comment are, however, different. Yeats declares indirectly that as poet he does not work in the dimension of time, its fetters may bind in general but he is free. For him the only truth resides in the heart. Philosophers and astronomers do not tell anything worth knowing. His poetical creed, thus stated, describes his attitude during the entire "Celtic Twilight" period. The "cracked tune" of Time gives a sense of broken harmony, experienced as we move from youth to old age. Its opposite is found in dance, whose rhythm,

as he says in *Rosa Alchemica* "was the wheel of Eternity, on which alone the transient and accidental could be broken, and the spirit set free". (*Mythologies*, Macmillan, 1959).

In "Meditation of the Old Fisherman" (CP. 23), change again is the theme of contemplation but change within much narrower limits. For the fisherman looks back to his youth "When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart"; things then possessed an ideal aspect for him. The waves were gayer, the creel more easily filled, and the girls on the shore combined pride with much greater charm. This is how old men speak of the past, exalting it at the cost of the present; "with never a crack in my heart" seems, however, to have a special meaning. It should signify an emotional relationship which did not bring pain but fulfilment. That sense is not perhaps intended when read in the context of the beautiful girls, proud and apart, who stood on the shore watching the fishing nets being dragged back. The 'crack' in the line appears to have the same meaning as in "the cracked tune that Chronos sings", quoted above. The fisherman enjoyed such a fulness of life in his youth that it seemed to resemble a tune played without a single discordant note.

References to old age, particularly in the "Celtic Twilight" period ascribe a habit of dreaming to old age, which seems to be far from typical and may be an example of the misunderstanding of the young about the old. In the "Ballad of the Foxhunter" the dying man's "old eyes cloud with dreams" (CP. 28); and if dream does not possess old men, they seem to be "full of sleep" (CP. 46). In a later poem, "The Song of the Old Mother" a different view is, however, expressed, "the young lie long and dream in their bed" (CP. 67). Here the poet seems to report more correctly.

Yeats has mentioned Chronos and his cracked tune. His conception of Time often suggests a net in whose meshes he is caught, struggling to escape. In "That the Night Come", he describes Maud Gonne under the metaphor of a king preparing for war on his marriage day "to bundle time away" (CP. 140). "Time" here would mean "life", as the next line "That the night come" makes plain, "night" being "death" in the context. The metaphor of river has been used to suggest both time and life. In "Easter 1916" a flowing stream is used as image of time, and

hearts "Enchanted to a stone" to suggest Eternity in whose presence he is appalled, and aware that "A terrible beauty is born" (CP. 205). In "Roger Casement" (CP. 315) Time is a judge, "Before the bench of Time". Such images are drawn from a familiar stock, and in using them the poet does not evidently give any proof of an alert or original mind.

## II

Yeats in his poetry refers to time in specific terms; the exact year and its effect upon him and the world in general. "Easter 1916" may head the list of such poems from the point of view of significance. The idea it suggests is that our common-place earth has burst into a splendour so great and unexpected as to give him for the first time a sense of the sublime in human affairs. The Easter Massacre of the year is the immediate occasion for the poem. The poet has known the men killed; they did not strike him as heroic or exceptional in their daily lives but by their death they have created an undying symbol. The feeling that came to the poet was not unlike that of a man who contemplates a wonderful flower springing from the common soil and is amazed to think how this could happen. The terrible beauty is a rehabilitation of the common man, a recognition of his potentiality for courage and sacrifice. Yeats had thought of the heroic as the prerogative of the aristocrat. When he saw it in the ordinary ranks, he felt deeply stirred. It was not what he had conceived as possible but the evidence left no doubt in his mind, and he paid a magnificent tribute.

"The Second Coming" bears no date. Published in 1921, it is a reflection on the contemporary world. A new era, predicted by the scriptures, is near at hand. The borderland between an end and a beginning gives rise to terror and suspense. The poet offers a series of images, rendering the scene of a disintegrating world and of the Second Advent in a way which combines the horrors of the known and the unknown and is yet no mere nightmare because of the relevance of all that is said to the facts and events of the day. It is also a prophecy and so he wrote to Ethel Mannin (April 8, 1936): "If you have my poems by you, look up a poem called *The Second Coming*. It was written some sixteen or seventeen years ago and foretold what is hap-

pening. I have written the same thing again and again since. This will seem little to you with your strong practical sense, for it takes fifty years for a poet's weapons to influence the issue". (Allan Wade, *Letters*, p. 846).

"Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" describes the Civil War in Ireland and the violences perpetrated by the Black and Tans. It speaks of the loss of values in a tone of regret, "And gone are Phidias' famous ivories". What seemed once "protected from the circle of the Moon", what was acclaimed as sheer miracle by the multitudes in Athens is now lost to the world. The guarantee of justice and impartiality which came from law and public opinion at a later date and created the feeling "That the worst rogues and rascals had died out" seems no more than an illusion. So also is the idea, once lovingly held, that "All teeth were drawn", that if an army was still maintained it was "but a showy thing". Although the cannon was not beaten into ploughshare, Parliament and king seemed equally on the side of peace. If they allowed the burning of a little powder, it was by way of providing a safety valve, otherwise "The trumpeters might burst with trumpeting". But the real situation was, however, far different:

> Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
> Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
> Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
> To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;
> The night can sweat with terror as before
> We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
> And planned to bring the world under a rule,
> Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.
>
> (CP. 233)

From what was happening all around, one lesson emerged quite clearly, namely that no work would endure, no honour would leave its monument behind and that the sacrifice of health, wealth, and peace of the mind would not alter the situation. The ironical comfort is that in the solitude of the grave there will be no sense of an enduring triumph to disturb the memory.

In fact, as the poet goes on to reflect, the tragedy arises from man's being in love with the mutable, with what vanishes. Nobody will have the courage to admit even if he should know it that all around the country bigots and incendiaries are active and ready to destroy, should there be a chance, even the remains of the Athenian Acropolis and the famous treasures of antiquity. In the second section of the poem there is a prophecy that the heavenly bodies are returning to their original relative positions, that the Platonic year was being made manifest, whirling out new right and wrong, whirling in the old instead. Here is a view, already stated in "The Second Coming" but while in the earlier poem, attention is focussed on the Second Coming to which the chaotic times seem to be a prelude, in this account, however, ordinary actors fill the stage, dancing "to the barbarous clangour of a gong". The violence and disorder are thus the expression of a primitive life and are no preliminaries to an event of cosmic significance such as in "The Second Coming".

In the third section, the poet exiles himself as it were from the scene of universal chaos and seeks his own internal resources as a means of distracting the mind. Some sage or poet has described the soul as a swan, he tells us, and the idea in his opinion merits consideration. Man, involved in the labyrinth of art or politics, does not attain liberation even after death. Some Platonist holds that death which should be a deliverance from the body, does not, however, effect this; old habits continue their sway, and it is a lucky death at which the passing of the breath brings all our works to an end. For triumphs invade even the emptiness of the grave.

The soul like a swan is in its flight in the empty sky. The vision is a signal for the ecstasy to end all that the poet has tried to do, including work half attempted or left incomplete. But what about the dream of reform, the desire to relieve mankind of its ills, to free it from the wrongs by which it is oppressed? But now, past his fiftyfourth year, with the winter wind blowing he feels that the dreams which possessed him were crack-pated. They were mad and meaningless.

In the fourth section there are only four lines of verse. Its isolation as a separate unit is to emphasize what is said in it.

Here the poet is deliberately specific about time. The date of the poem is 1919 as noted at its bottom in the *Collected Edition* (p. 237). Seven years ago, i.e. in 1912, he says, he and his friends talked about honour and truth. There is now on the contrary unconcealed pleasure in the same rank at any evidence of double-dealing and brutality. There is indeed cause to declare

> All men are dancers and their tread
> Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.
> (CP. 234)

In such a world, therefore, the ideal is mocked at and the dream of doing good to society thought to be crazy.

In section five, the poet ironically falls in with the mood of the times, and proposes to scorn the great who under the influence of a dream or ideal served some cause with the spirit of self-dedication, little knowing how the envious times would demolish their hope of fame. He would first scorn the wise and describe their frustrations. He would next mock at the good. The levelling wind of falling standards has buried them in oblivion, and there is no knowledge of the worth which gave them their eminence. Finally, the poet will mock at the mockers themselves. These latter would not take the slightest trouble to help the good, the wise or the great so that they could survive the onslaught of the levelling wind. The poet will embrace mockery as the main business of his life. Where nothing can be done to advance human welfare, the negative attitude seems the only one to adopt.

In the sixth and the final section, Yeats returns to the idea of the Platonic Year; we see it whirling out new right and wrong. The scene shifts back to remote times. Horses, garlanded and carrying handsome riders, recall the order of knight errantry. They go through their paces as it were and vanish when the Year's whirling motion distances them from the view. Yeats describes evil gathering head. "Herodias' daughters have returned again", the whirling movement, a sudden blast of the dusty wind, brings them back. The chaos of thundering feet and images rises to view, but what we see, the men and women, the crowds, crying and cursing, are only a form of

dance "to the barbarous clangour of a gong", in which there is no individual will but a behaviour imposed by the whirligig that has caught them up and caused their reappearance. They are blind, driven by a force they cannot resist and are soon replaced by other scenes. The swift movement of the time is stayed for a while, the wind drops, the dust settles, and the climate becomes clearer for a more leisurely view. Hence in the next picture there are details. We now see Robert Artisson, an insolent fiend, with his big eyes devoid of the capacity for thought, unsteady in gait, a creature of the fourteenth century and Lady Kyteler infatuated by him and bringing him gifts such as may please his savage taste. This picture ironically concludes the long poem, and seems to affirm the belief that lust and brutality are as rampant today as in the past.

Yeats meditating on the year 1919 has before him the facts of the late War and the disturbed political situation in Ireland. In the six sections of the poem a very wide area is covered. The links are not always clear because his thought moves on many different planes, of time, circumstance, sentiment, and irony. In the first section allusions to Hellenic triumphs in the field of Art, the British in the field of law and order are made. Brutality is, however, let loose by man's incorrigible blood-lust, and the triumphs, therefore, seem to have been meaningless, no more than ephemeral in character. A Chinese dance suggests the Platonic Year, and the comment is made that some tempestuous passion or fanaticism drives the masses in every age. In the next section the individual soul is suggested under the aspect of a swan. With this thought in the mind, the triviality of everything else in the human world is borne in upon him. At the same time he is distressed by his unfulfilled design of reform of everything that caused man's suffering. With old age coming upon him, he realizes that such ambitions can find place only in a mad man's imagination. In the fourth section he says that two years before the War, honour and truth meant a good deal to people. In 1919 they have nothing but a spirit of revenge to move them. In the fifth section, he suggests an ironical remedy—the levelling wind leaves no greatness behind. Hence he will laugh at the wise and the good and finally at the mockers themselves, who had done nothing to succour the wise,

the good, or the great against malice and slander. In the final section he sees the Platonic Year throwing up a momentary vision of lust and guilt, incarnating evil in one of its most persistent aspects. This end of the poem suggests that the primary fact about life is lust and brutality, and so the poet stops where he does in his meditation on the past without exploring times nearer to us.

"September 1913" is the expression of regret at the emergence of the petty tradesman's standards, replacing the selfless spirit and sacrifice of such men as Edward Fitzgerald, Robert Emmet, and Wolf Tone. Hence his lament,

> Romantic Ireland's dead and gone
> It's with O'Leary in the grave. (CP. 121)

There is deep passion in the words in which he contrasts the noble background of Nature and recent history with his countrymen's fumbling in a greasy till and adding the half-pence to the pence—

> Was it for this the wild geese spread
> The grey wing upon every tide;
> For this that all that blood was shed...

'Meditations in Time of Civil War" has no specific date. Written four years after "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" its concern is more or less with the same period of time but his reflections run in a different channel. The poet comments upon the glory and the greatness of the life which stoops neither to the mechanical nor the servile—this is the life of the aristocrat who creates the heroic tradition and promotes arts and culture. The loss of this tradition is threatened and the poet's mind is filled with misgivings. He describes his own house and also its original founders. He will leave it to his heirs, who will find in the climate and the surroundings resources "To exalt a lonely mind". In a more intimate picture of his habits and thought, Yeats gives an account of the table where he works. Besides his pen and paper, Sato's gift sword is also there, made before Chaucer was born. Its presence under his eye has a steadying effect upon his imagination. A changeless work of art, the sword gives him an

insight into how objects of art are made. An aching heart, he declares, is indispensable. At the time the sword was made, the soul's beauty was most adored in Japan. Some even held passionately to the belief that "none could pass Heaven's door/ That loved inferior art". (CP. 228). The poem concludes with the words:

> The abstract joy,
> The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,
> Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy.
> (CP, 232)

The Civil War, the violence, the bloodshed are remote from his world. He may write about them but never as a partisan, never with the feeling that the country should arm and retaliate. His sorrow is for the outrage on man, and hardly because the man happens to be an Irishman. The vision of the present moment seems to get mixed up with magical unicorns, with ladies whose hearts are full of sweetness and bodies of loveliness: the present merges in a half-mythical past and the poet is lost in reverie.

"The Nineteen Century and After" is also about art rather than politics, which does not sufficiently excite his imagination. This short poem in four lines admits the loss of heroic tradition in poetry but finds in the contemplation of the pebbly shore matter enough for a symbolic view no less moving to him.

Yeats wrote two poems on Lady Gregory's estate which she sold to Government. "Coole Park, 1929" mentions the visitors whom Lady Gregory received and entertained at her house, Hyde, Yeats, Synge, Shaw-Taylor and Lane. These men will, after the trees are cut down and the Park gone, with no trace of the great house left, gratefully remember the laurelled head of Lady Gregory, who had as hostess brought diverse talents under her roof. "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" expresses regret at the loss of the romantic tradition of which the poet and Lady Gregory were among the last representatives:

> But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
> Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
> Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.
> (CP. 276)

We shall conclude this section about the poet's reference to specific time by a brief notice of a poem he names, "A Meditation in Time of War". In five lines of verse he says that as he sat on an old grey stone under an old broken tree, he realized the supremacy of the one universal spirit and mankind appeared to him to be no more than a fantasy. The attitude bears resemblance to the Hindu doctrine of *Maya* or universal illusion and may be an example of its influence.

Yeats in his conception of a specific year or period of time, represents a series of temporal relationships, deploring the loss of values, and attitudes abandoned on the way. Myths and fables are also introduced for establishing coherence in a changing view. In the temporal dimension he thus avoids solitude or isolation, favouring continuity, which is, however, not a continuity of progress but of assimilation. He desires periods of time to maintain and preserve traditional patterns, of Homer, Quattrocento, and of the heroic ideal of his Cuchulain. There is also a mystical element, annihilating the dimension of time. Myth and legend, the past and the present mingle in his unifying vision to form a single whole:

> Violence upon the roads: violence of horses;
> Some few have handsome riders, are garlanded
> On delicate sensitive ear or tossing mane,
> But wearied running round and round in their courses
> All break and vanish, and evil gathers head:
> Herodias' daughters have returned again,
> A sudden blast of dusty wind and after
> Thunder of feet, tumult of images,
> Their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind.
>
> (CP. 236-237)

## III

Yeats in some of his poems speaks of reversing time as a means of seeing things at a new angle or giving a chance to do or enjoy what was once left neglected. Time on this view is like an adjustable machine, which can be made to revolve back to the point desired. But the desire is, of course, unfulfilled and the time-mechanism continues its endless gyrations without the

hoped-for reversal taking place. In "September 1913" he is thinking of the exile and anguish suffered by O'Leary and others, their great sacrifice on the one hand, and of the mean, calculating selfishness which kept the people cold and indifferent on the other:

> Yet could we turn the years again,
> And call those exiles as they were
> In all their loneliness and pain. (CP. 121)

But he bitterly reflects that the second opportunity to do justice would be as much wasted as the first. Nobody would come to their help, nobody would realize their loneliness and anguish and the extent of their sacrifice. The poet's hope that justice might be done to those who had laboured in their country's cause with noble unselfishness is extinguished by his knowledge that those he is appealing to would remain deaf. His attitude of indignation is patriotic. In his celebrated poem, "Among School Children" he, however, makes an attempt to travel back in time, to imagine how Maud Gonne looked as a little girl attending school:

> And thinking of that fit of grief or rage
> I look upon one child or t' other there
> And wonder if she stood so at that age—
> For even daughters of the swan can share
> Something of every paddler's heritage—
> ...
> She stands before me as a living child.
> ( CP. 243)

Here there is imaginative realization: the time is reversed, and the magic which brings this about, casts a spell on the reader as well. In "Three Songs to the One Burden" we have the following verses:

> Could Crazy Jane put off old age
> And ranting time renew...
> Throw likely couples into bed
> And knock the others down. (CP. 371-372).

The word 'ranting' applied to time, presents some difficulty as regards the poet's intention. In "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" there is a similar use:

> For Nature's pulled her tragic buskin on
> And all the rant's a mirror of my mood. (CP. 275)

In "To Ireland in the Coming Times" there is a further parallel "When Time began to rant and rage" (CP. 56), and still another in "A roaring, ranting journeyman". (CP. 291). The sense may be 'boisterous' with the implication of 'youthful'. If time could grow young again, if Crazy Jane could recover youth, then could an injustice be redressed and she could live a happy wife.

## IV

In "Stories of Red Hanrahan" Yeats gives an account of Hanrahan's meeting two "dark and half-hidden forms standing as if in the air just beyond the rocks". (*Mythologies*, p. 250). One of them with the sorrowful eyes of a beggar said to him in a woman's voice, "Speak to me, for no one in this world or any other world has spoken to me for seven hundred years". Here we have an instance of mythological time not commensurate with human experience. In the poetry and other writings of Yeats, the poet makes an astonishingly liberal donation of time as a means of increasing happiness or misery a hundredfold. Occasionally an infinite duration is attributed to supernatural beings to indicate privilege and superiority. The couple whom Hanrahan met were Dervorgilla and Diarmuid; "it was our sin brought the Norman into Ireland". A play by Yeats is also written on the same subject. The couple wander about in misery, and because of the curse laid upon them, cannot have even the slightest physical contact. The curse will be lifted if only somebody of their race forgives them and says so to their hearing. ("The Dreaming of the Bones", *Collected Plays*, p. 442). Although they love, for "Seven hundred years our lips have not met"—(*ibid.*, 443). They have been dead for these long centuries but are doomed to revisit the earth as a mode of penance.

While the ghostly existence may stretch to aeons, that of

human beings has a far more limited duration. Methuselah who lived for 969 years (Gen. 5. 27) sets an impossible standard of longevity. In fables and mythologies, time is reckoned in terms of thousands of years. The shortness of human life is evidently a limiting circumstance and man's imagination has toyed with the idea of an indefinite extension of time, replacing the niggardly allowance of three score and ten. Yeats in "Wanderings of Oisin" and elsewhere has lengthend life to hundreds of years. Bernard Shaw in seeking to do the same has proceeded on an evolutionary conception of man's unrealized possibilities of further development. Yeats in "Oisin" makes his hero visit faery islands and live there for three hundred years, untouched by time. As he returns to his country at the end of the period

> I fell on the path, and the horse went away like a summer fly;
> And my years three hundred fell on me, and I rose, and walked on the earth,
> A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle on his beard never dry.
> (CP. 445)

Oisin's long life was a boon conferred upon him yet he did nothing with it that could not have been done within the limits of a normal life. What point was there in his living for three hundred years, is not made plain in the story. Oisin found love, pleasure, he also engaged in war and relaxed on a timeless scale yet he hungered to return to his own land. This perhaps foreshadows a view, exalting the ordinary life of ignorance and pain we find in a poem Yeats wrote in old age:

> I am content to live it all again
> And yet again, if it be life to pitch
> Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
> A blind man battering blind men. ("A Dialogue of Self and Soul", CP. 267)

In "A Faery Song" the faery life is measured by "Thousands of years,/If all were told". (CP. 43). This song, the poet says in a note introducing it, is sung "over Diarmuid and Grania in their bridal sleep under a Cromlech". As we do not know

about these airy creatures, their life could be put at any figure without causing surprise. The song intended for a couple of lovers has the further excuse of producing an atmosphere of enchantment and the language of fantasy may, therefore, be in keeping with the occasion.

In "The Hour Before Dawn", the sleeper claims that he has already slept for about nine centuries and that he proposes to sleep away all time within the cave where the lame beggar discovers him. The sleeper will wait for God in his drunken sleep, his intoxication being produced by the beer he drank in large quantities. He could not, however, sleep all these nine hundred years as soundly as he had desired because of the occasional disturbance coming from the manifestations of life —a subject to which he referred with unconcealed irritation:

> The lapwing at their foolish cries
> And the sheep bleating at the wind. (CP. 132)

The lame beggar, described as "A cursing rogue with a merry face" protests against this denial of life, and when the sleeper goes to sleep again, he gives him "a great pummelling" without, however, being able to wake him up. He then left the place, distressed by the sleeper's perversity, and gave God thanks only when "The clouds were brightening with the dawn". He found himself once more back at the place where life obviously had meaning. The sleeper had said "All life longs for the Last Day" (p. 233) to explain his attitude and behaviour. Yeats wrote many years later:

> What disturbs our blood
> Is but its longing for the tomb. (1928, CP. 237)

The death wish also occurs in a poem about Maud Gonne:

> But lived as 'twere a king
> That packed his marriage day
> With banneret and pennon,
> Trumpet and kettledrum,
> And the outrageous cannon,
> To bundle time away
> That the night come. (CP. 140)

The three poems in which this rejection of life is implied are "The Hour Before Dawn", "That the Night Come", and "The Wheel". The first is a narrative poem with dramatic elements while the other two are lyrics. The sleeper is "A lad with a beery face" and his questioner is a cursing rogue in rags, lame yet cheerful. The former declares that the death wish is universal and that he being the only person to be blest, is allowed to keep "Like some old rabbit to my cleft/And wait Him in a drunken sleep" ( CP. 133 ). After this remark, he drew beer from a tub, drank it, and went to sleep contentedly. The 'rogue', lame and poor, has reason enough to curse life yet he sings of its glory. Not being among the favoured people, glutted with the good things of life, his testimony has more than usual value. In "The Night to Come" Yeats discovers, not without admiration, that Maud Gonne's qualities destine her for heroic action and death. For such a one as she life possessed few attractions and its rejection is not, therefore, unexpected. The poem is an objective study of an exceptional character whose force and power he is impelled to praise and admire but nothing indicates that he personally shares the view or recommends it to others for acceptance. In "The Wheel" the poet in old age records "a longing for the tomb". The seasons follow one another in cyclic order. In Winter one looks forward to Spring and in Spring to Summer. While the Summer is past or passing, the wheel comes full circle and Winter seems the Year's natural end and not unwelcome:

> Through winter-time we call on spring,
> And through the spring on summer call,
> And when abounding hedges ring
> Declare that winter's best of all. (CP. 237)

This is the time when a longing for the tomb overtakes the poet, because in life unlike Nature there is no second spring— "Because the spring-time has not come" (p. 233). This longing for the tomb is not the same as a death wish. It disturbs the blood because after spring, after summer and winter, death must await the end of the journey and the awareness of this is instinctive. To interpret it as meaning a death-wish on the part of the poet would be to ignore the more positive declarations, made at

nearly the same time with a clear affirmative import. "The Wheel" belongs to the 1928 volume; five years later in "Winding Stair and other Poems" (1933) there is a convincing testimony to his faith in life, and the willingness to do and suffer everything rather than lose the great privilege that life means. One of the afflictions he mentions arises from wooing "A proud woman not kindred of his soul" yet he is prepared to sing a paean to the glory of life:

> We are blest by everything,
> Everything we look upon is blest. (CP. 267)

## V

Quite frequently Time is imagined as a robber and enemy in the poems. From Shakespeare's Sonnets to Arnold Bennett's "Old Wives' Tale", Time has been usually viewed in this aspect, for it is the one which moves us most to pity in contemplating the human scene. Yeats is especially sensitive to "the curtain/Of distorting days" (CP. 286), principally because he saw with anguish that even Maud Gonne's beauty had no protection against it. Of himself as an old man he also spoke, half denying and almost scorning the power, which gave him the appearance of age and infirmity:

> This caricature,
> Decrepit age that has been tied to me
> As to a dog's tail. (CP. 218)

For him age did not mean a loss of power; if anything, it proved an accession of strength:

> Never had I more
> Excited, passionate, fantastical
> Imagination, nor an ear and eye
> That more expected the impossible—
> (CP. 218)

He might look ridiculously like a scarecrow, "A tattered coat upon a stick", but for him there was plenty of compensation. A due discipline would teach him how to secure this: "Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing/For every tatter in its mortal dress". ("Sailing to Byzantium", CP. 217). It is

interesting to note that Yeats has borrowed from the *Bhagavat Gita* the conception of the body as a suit of clothes for the soul in his reference to "every tatter in its mortal dress". Yeats does not accept physical infirmity as a condition of old age:

> You think it horrible that lust and rage
> Should dance attention upon my old age;
> They were not such a plague when I was young;
> What else have I to spur me into song? (CP. 359)

It is, therefore, clear that on his own account old age did not distress him. Occasionally he gives the impression that it was an advantage, that he received admiring looks because of being old:

> The children's eyes
> In momentary wonder stare upon
> A sixty-year-old smiling public man.
> ("Among School Children", CP. 243)

What then was the cause that made him so bitter against the depredations of time? Examining the references to himself as an old man we cannot yet account for words such as these:

> I had forgiven enough
> That had forgiven-old age. (CP. 286)

It would be wrong to assume that he did not feel an occasional pang that he had become old. He ironically dismisses the idea that "men improve with the years", and describes himself as "A weatherworn, marble triton/Among the streams" (p. 153). The regret for his loss of youth is called forth by Iseult: "O would that we had met/When I had my burning youth!" Later when he thought of himself as unsuitable for Iseult's hand, he wrote:

> How could she mate with fifty years that was so wildly bred?
> Let the cage bird and the cage bird mate and the wild
> bird mate in the wild? (CP. 248)

The sorrow and bitterness of the lines are not so much for old

age as for the discrepancy in years between him and Iseult. The triton-image half compensates the loss he contemplates. His own dreams ("But I grow old among dreams") and the Hellenic myth to which he refers, combine to make a picture of placid content from which little is detracted even by "weather-worn" as an epithet applied to "marble triton". It is Maud Gonne's losing her beauty with the passage of time that seems to have caused most of the bitterness and sorrow he felt.

In "Quarrel in Old Age" he declares his faith that "All lives that has lived" as an assurance that Maud who "trod like Spring" would not lose her beauty to relentless time. It is his love for her and admiration for her beauty that made him believe in the imperishability even of physical beauty. At first when this belief did not fortify him, he asserted that the love he gave her would outlive her beauty:

> Time's bitter flood will rise,
> Your beauty perish and be lost
> For all eyes but these eyes. (CP. 79)

The "beauty" to which he refers is not in this context physical, because other eyes will not see it. It may be her personality, character, or spiritual essence, some indestructible quality, which he alone could discern because of his love. In "The Poet Pleads With the Elemental Powers", he appeals to wave, wind, and fire to "Encircle her I love and sing her into peace" (p. 80). Day and night, which of course mean time, are here viewed as barring the way to freedom. The intervention of powers is necessary to remove the net, guaranteeing the poet and his beloved the unfettered association, which will bring his old care to an end.

## VI

Time is also seen in a beneficent aspect, as bestower of gifts which are valued. The aristocratic tradition belongs to this class, and written speech, which is the last to come, has the greatest significance for him and is a byproduct of the same tradition:

> Gradual Time's last gift, a written speech
> Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease. (CP. 107)

In making language an instrument of passion and precision, the aristocrat needs a tower or castle to cultivate his fearless objectivity and his eagle thoughts. If his houses fall into decay, the peasant and the poorer classes may benefit but the price will be too great to pay. In "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" "Words alone are certain good" because they have the power to defy Time. In this poem, we are told that the perfect word is time's gift. Thus Time in creating the perfect word creates an instrument to cripple its own power. Though made by time, words prove superior to it because they can embody "a vision of reality" ("Ego Dominus Tuus", CP. 182). Tom the Lunatic speaks of the world as a child of the union between Eternity representing the male principle, and Time, the female:

> 'The stallion Eternity
> Mounted the mare of Time,
> 'Gat the foal of the world'. ("Tom at Cruachan", CP. 306)

In "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" Yeats gives a more orthodox account:

> The wandering earth herself may be
> Only a sudden flaming word.

On a comparison of the two poems, we can see that the world is related by descent to Eternity while the word achieves Eternity by association with art. At the same time its parenthood is ascribed to Time. The word as logos is not, however, in bondage to Time. There are other gifts, too, which Time bestows. In a poem of four lines, "The Coming of Wisdom with Time", the poet compares himself with a tree—in youth flowers and leaves grew on it but as they are no more to be seen in the winter of his life, they are thought to be lies and illusions. He will now "wither into the truth" (CP. 105). The gift of wisdom on such terms does not appeal to him,

> Bodily decrepitude is wisdom: young
> We loved each other and were ignorant.
> ("After Long Silence", CP. 301)

He will instead accept the wisdom of the heart:

Those men that in their writings are most wise
Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts.
("Ego Dominus Tuus", CP. 182)

Although the poet is in love with youth and all that belongs to its unpremeditated ways, he has at least once watched with satisfaction the sobering effect of time on Maud Gonne's features and has thought this a good thing:

Ah, the peace that comes at length,
Came when Time had touched her form.
(CP. 103)

## VII

A separate section is allotted to a dramatic poem, "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner" because the way in which it expresses anger against Time is not matched elsewhere in the poems. Perhaps the mode follows an objective model. The poem belongs to the 1893 volume when the poet was still a young man. He may well have met the kind of man he describes with a peculiar violence of utterance. This dramatic lyric should be isolated from the rest of the poems expressing a certain attitude to old age. For it seems clearly to stand out of the main stream of the poet's own thought and sentiment. The hallucinatory feeling which identifies Time as a person may be a weakness of old age but never that of Yeats:

I spit into the face of Time
That has transfigured me. (CP. 52)

The Old Pensioner describes his grievances. Once at every assembly he occupied the place of honour, his chair stood nearest to the fire. In his old age he forfeited the distinction as well as the favour of women:

There's not a woman turns her face
Upon a broken tree.

The voice of pain and anguish is authentic enough. Perhaps to look upon Time as a person may be a hallucination not

unusual to extreme old age but the word 'transfigured' in the sense of 'changing for the worse' is contrary to usage. The dictionary gives the following meaning: "Change the aspect of, invest with a more spiritual or elevated character". "Transfigured" in the context may, therefore, be used for bringing into contempt the idea that old age is the cause of any kind of advantage. The poem thus denies wisdom as a gift of time.

## VIII

"To the Rose upon the Rood of Time" (1893) contains four lines of verse, expressing the poet's earliest concern with the relation between Time and Eternity in an imaginative form. Yeats explains in a note, appended to the *Collected Poems* what he means by "Rose": "The Rose differs from the Intellectual Beauty of Shelley and of Spenser in that I have imagined it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar". (CP. 524). The lines are addressed to "The Rose":

> Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,
> I find under the boughs of love and hate,
> In all poor foolish things that live a day,
> Eternal Beauty wandering on her way. (CP. 35)

"Love and hate" are contradictory terms, "poor foolish things that live a day" and Eternity form another pair of contradiction. Eternal Beauty as conceived by the poet is a perpetual flux, arising from these opposites, and no-one can have access to it until a visionary power is developed by overcoming the effect of blinding sorrow, felt on account of life's brevity. 'Sailing to Byzantium" also contemplates the same aspect of human life, though from a more philosophical angle, and states the cause of brevity as twofold: living on the sensual plane and ignoring the spiritual, "Monuments of unageing intellect". The remedy proposed to overcome the blindness is to be spiritually aware and alive so that

> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> For every tatter in its mortal dress. (CP. 217)

The Everlasting Voices in a poem are asked by the poet to be still because, he says, "our hearts are old" (CP. 61). These voices have a better audience among birds, the wind on the hill, the shaken boughs, and the tide on the shore. The word 'old' will mean 'time-ridden', 'in bondage to time'. The poet's response is not possible because the creature of time is limited; and this comes from an awareness of time's hold upon us, which does not weigh upon and fetter the objects he mentions as worthy of the message of eternity. What these voices are, the poet does not say. Are they voices of the soul, god or nature? It may perhaps be assumed that the 'Everlasting Voices' are an agency calling upon the poet to be ruled by standards which belong to the timeless dimension. The poet's comment is that he is unable to rise to the height. He has said earlier that one could find "Eternal Beauty wandering on her way" (CP. 35). Thus it would seem that our only access to Eternity is by way of art. All other roads are closed to us.

Physical existence has a purely temporal basis. The poet has deplored this not so much because one must die at the end as because even the most wonderful beauty has no defence against Time and Death. He clung to the belief that Maud Gonne's beauty would resist the hand of time and would remain imperishable:

> Somewhere beyond the curtain
> Of distorting days,
> Lives that lonely thing
> That shone before these eyes
> Targeted, trod like Spring. (CP. 286)

## IX

In one of the Crazy Jane poems true love is said to have no opportunity of revealing itself until Time was gone. (CP. 292). This point has been made in the poems on love on an island. The special significance of Crazy Jane's assertion is to set it in a less exalted context and by so doing, to recognize the universality of the emotion.

The islands Oisin visited with Niamh enjoy immortality.

Nobody dies there, nobody grows old. In "The Shadowy Waters" Forgael tells Dectora that the birds flying over them are piloting them to

> A country at the end of the world
> Where no child's born but to outlive the moon. (CP. 496)

The final suggestion that Forgael makes as Dectora covers him with her hair is that love will confer immortality on the couple:

> Beloved, having dragged the net about us,
> And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal.
> (CP. 500)

"Love on an Island Theme" discussed in an earlier chapter is a mode not of conquering Time but of escaping from its harmful operations.

> I am haunted by numberless islands...
> Where Time would surely forget us. ("The White Birds", CP. 47)

The escape is desired by lovers, and the island, situated outside the dimension of time, ensures the enjoyment of the boon:

> A woven world-forgotten isle
> Where people love beside the ravelled seas;
> That Time can never mar a lover's vows. (CP. 49)

In writing about the ways escape from time may be effected, Yeats seems to display the ingenuity of thought we find in Wordsworth's "Daisy":

> I sit and play with similes,
> Loose types of things through all degrees,
> Thoughts of thy raising.

His language is often fanciful, and the cosmic nature of the problem is lost in the homely analogies used but even when the right scale is applied, the vast image, as it were, trundles along the whole space of our visual range, without revealing connec-

tions the mind can grasp, and what is meant to exalt seems only to confuse as a result. The Everlasting Voices, the poet says, may bid the guards of the heavenly fold wander, obeying their will "Flame under flame, till Time be no more" (CP. 61). The word 'guards' has been used by Shakespeare. In *Othello* (II I, 15) we have "And quench the guards of the ever-fixed pole". The 'guards' are the two stars in the Little Bear next in brightness to the Pole Star. The poet, therefore, appears to mean that the stars will flame through the heaven, and in the fierce heat engendered Time will be consumed away. This interpretation is unsatisfactory because it conceives Time as a substance yet a subsequent use seems to confirm the view:

> Until God burn time
> Before the unlabouring stars and you. ( CP. 75)

"unlabouring" is an unexpected epithet to describe the stars. They are not condemned to toil, the only toil in the context is apparently movement. The term, therefore, means the same as "unmoving" or "fixed". The expression "Flame under flame" has near equivalents in some other poems, and the expression seems to be a favourite with the poet:

> But flame on flame, and deep on deep
> Throne over throne where in half sleep,
> Their swords upon their iron knees,
> Brood her high lonely mysteries.
> ("He Remembers Forgotten Beauty", p. 70)

The exact shade of meaning attached to the expression may offer a baffling problem but it seems to provide a mystical symbol of infinite power.

There are some images about Time dying out or disappearing, which please by their authenticity. There is no room, so far as these are concerned, to enquire how much or how little conformity is achieved with facts as we know them. Imagination provides its own justification:

> Time drops in decay,
> Like a candle burnt out. ("The Moods", CP. 62)

Another example has also this satisfying effect:

> And God stands winding His lonely horn,
> And time and the world are ever in flight.
> ("Into the Twilight", CP. 66)

The poet seems to think of time and the world in terms of a couple of racing hounds, whom their master can call by a blast on the horn; if time here is not actually ended, we can see that there is a power lodged somewhere, which can effect this.

In "The Song of Wandering Aengus" there is an ingenious suggestion about how time can be annihilated. If the fruits are destroyed, the cause too will cease to be:

> And walk among long dappled grass,
> And pluck till time and times are done
> The silver apples of the moon,
> The golden apples of the sun. (CP. 67)

Aengus, it is to be noted, seeks to end time under the impulse of love. The silver apples of the moon, the golden apples of the sun, are not descriptive labels for fruits and other objects known to us. We are, however, curious to know how time can end by his plucking them. The time in the context seems to be the cause of things that are. In a garden these are fruits, golden and silvery. If Aengus could pluck them, if the effect could thus be removed, he indulges in the illusion that the cause, too, would disappear.

"Harp of Aengus" depicts the union of young Aengus and Edain. At the tower of glass where this takes place, "time is drowned in odour-laden winds/And Druid moons" (CP. 477). Magical ritual is resorted to for providing the lovers with a timeless background. What happens is limited to a small area and is a form of prerogative for a pair of exalted lovers.

Forgael in "The Shadowy Waters" speaks of the dispersal of the time-stream, a scattering of the tide so that all coherence is lost, and there is no sense of continuity or progress in the affairs of men:

> The movement of time
> Is shaken in these seas, and what one does

One moment has no might upon the moment
That follows after. (CP. 487)

This situation immediately precedes Dectora's surrender. She was reluctant, even hostile to Forgael when he declared his love for her but a little later all was changed. Some power greater than herself made her exclaim "Have I not loved you for a thousand years?" (CP. 493). The timeless state is anticipated by the distintegration of the temporal pattern, and birds on wing pilot them to "a country at the end of the world/Where no child's born but to outlive the moon". (CP. 496). This would provide the essential condition for the realization of love.

Yeats does not neglect to give also the orthodox Christian view of the end of time and the world:

When we come at the end of time
To Peter sitting in state. (CP. 82)

The lines, quoted from the 1899 volume, are dramatic in intention and are attributed to the Fiddler of Dooney. They represent a religious belief and the poet seems merely concerned with reporting.

## X

Far more interesting as a personal expression is his idea about how Time can be conquerd or transcended. To end it by magic or some other power may be a kind of liberation but this does not involve transcendence. What human resources are available for this purpose are fairly well known. Other poets and thinkers have unburdened their minds upon this important subject. There is not much that can be added to the stock, and Yeats does not do this. He has only added a personal testimony, and in the verses which serve as his epitaph, he has recorded his own triumph. When Time exacts its utmost, when its enormous scythe takes the body, there is still something which does not perish, which transcends its power and proclaims its invincibility. Of this residual source of human worth, the poet becomes aware through long years of meditation, and the progress of his thought is reflected in his poetry. The earliest reference to this trans-

cendence is by way of love. In other instances already examined, there is either a quest for a timeless state for realizing the fulness of love, or an attempt to do away with Time so that the right setting for love may be obtained.

In "The Heart of Woman" the experience of love brings about the transfiguration:

> I am no more with life and death,
> My heart upon his warm heart lies,
> My breath is mixed into his breath. (CP. 68)

In "Sailing to Byzantium" eternity is described as a gift of art. The poet seeks it, heart-weary and sick in body, because of age, and he will choose for himself "such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make":

> Consume my heart away; sick with desire
> And fastened to a dying animal
> It knows not what it is; and gather me
> Into the artifice of eternity. (CP. 218)

His choice is dictated by the sense that to be in bondage to Nature is to be a victim of Time. If he becomes instead a bird of hammered gold, made by the craftsmen of Greece, he will put himself beyond the power of Time in two ways. The bird is the symbol of emancipated soul and in the context, being a work of art, it will be doubly insured against the hand of time. His dream is to live as a work of art, to dispense its blessings to the discriminating and to escape from the burden of animal existence, to which he owes a decaying body and a heart, fretting itself away by passion and desire. Another way of conquering time, of being completely unaffected by its ravages, is a philosophical training, which the poet proposes for himself so that things that afflict him may seem no more than the landscape, where changes will be external and of little account for him:

> Now shall I make my soul,
> Compelling it to study
> In a learned school
> Till the wreck of body,

Slow decay of blood,
Testy delirium
Or dull decrepitude,
Or what worse evil come—
The death of friends, or death
Of every brilliant eye
That made a catch in the breath—
Seem but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades;
Or a bird's sleepy cry
Among the deepening shades.
("The Tower", CP. 224-225)

"Easter 1916" is a record of the poet's awed recognition of the sublime in ordinary life resigned to the casual comedy. Clerks, teachers, and other men with whom he had exchanged a mocking tale or a gibe when he met them are transfigured by the act of martyrdom, "A terrible beauty is born". The seasons change, time flows on, but their hearts like a stone respond to no change. The horse, the rider, the birds that roam cloud high, all register the effect of time, minute by minute. The stone lies in their midst, no longer in the temporal dimension, having triumphed over time and change. It was a dream that made them lay down their lives and by so doing they

Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born. (CP. 275)

It is interesting to note that an occasion, memorable for a heroic sacrifice of life in the cause of Ireland's freedom and independence, moves the poet as a testimony to the power of dream. He does not exalt the heroic or the patriotic elements. They are without doubt of the first importance but is content with contrasting the mean, trivial round of duties which bound their lives with the upsurge of a visionary ideal making them transcend time and achieve a symbol of abiding value. The poet is stirred in an extraordinary manner because he did not believe that dream could have such a sway in the contemporary world. The poem is not only a homage but a self-correction:

My songs of old earth's dreamy youth:
But ah! she dreams not now; dream thou!
For fair are poppies on the brow:
Dream, dream, for this is also sooth.
(CP. 8)

He saw in the Easter Rising evidence that nobility still existed and that the power of dream was unabated:

We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead. (CP. 204)

The poet has seen the enactment of a great tragedy, whose significance is timeless. That it could have been avoided, that England might have been trusted to keep her faith, are wholly irrelevant to the event he contemplates. The terrible beauty born of the lives sacrificed is not a loss but a gain for the world. Time crawls minute by minute, and the figure used suggests a servile movement; the stone images an immutable reality, above and beyond the reach of Time "To trouble the living stream". The 'trouble' is the process of transformation, of elevation; it is the contagion by which the "terrible beauty" will make its power felt in a commonplace world.

Transcendence of time takes place also through religion:

The incorruptible Rose

'That drowsily drops faint leaves on him
And sweetness of desire,
While time and the world are ebbing away
In twilights of dew and fire'.
("The Blessed", CP. 77.)

## XI

## The Epitaph

We shall wind up this part of the survey by a reference to the poet's Epitaph, concluding his poem "Under Ben Bulben". This mountain was the playground of his childhood; as a boy

he had climbed its back to spend a whole summer day, and in "The Celtic Twilight" he describes its supernatural associations. On its southern side, some hundreds of feet above the plains, there is a small white square in the limestone. "It is the door of Faeryland. In the middle of night it swings open, and the unearthly troop rushes out. All night the gay rabble sweep to and fro across the land, invisible to all, unless perhaps where, in some more than commonly 'gentle' place—Drumcliff or Dromahair, the night-capped heads of 'faery-doctors' or 'cow-doctors' may be thrust from their doors to see what mischief the 'gentry' are doing". (*Mythologies*, p. 70). With the title of the last poem the wheel comes full circle. The travelled, now famous poet stands once again under the same old rock and in its shadow remembers the faith that had sustained him, and in its light delivers his message to fellow artists, living in an age in which thought and purpose are equally confused.

Ben Bulben has always been a supernatural region for the poet. The poem to which the mountain gives its name denies the reality of death. The authority for the statement is derived from the superhuman beings seen riding the wintry dawn around Ben Bulben. The poet pretends that he is merely rendering their thoughts:

> A brief parting from those dear
> Is the worst man has to fear.
> Though grave-diggers' toil is long,
> Sharp their spades, their muscles strong,
> They but thrust their buried men
> Back in the human mind again.
> (CP. 398)

Thus the poet rejects death, and perhaps we shall best understand the epitaph against the background suggested by this view:

> Cast a cold eye
> On life, on death.
> Horseman, pass by!

Professor Unterecker sees in the "horseman" of the epitaph an

allusion to "the supernatural horsemen that ride from mountain to mountain thundering on silent hoofs across the Sligo landscape" (*A Readers' Guide To William Butler Yeats*, p. 294). A little later he thinks that the "high horseman of the future" descends "finally from Ben Bulben to harry the world". (p. 295).

There are not many references to horses and riders in the poems. "Reveries Over Childhood and Youth" tells us that the poet in his childhood had a red pony and a garden where he could wander. (*Autobiographies*, p. 6). Again, he refers to an early adventure on horseback. "When I must have been still a very little boy, seven or eight years old perhaps, an uncle called me out of bed one night, to ride the five or six miles to Rosses Point to borrow a railway pass from a cousin". (*ibid.*, p. 8). There are three or four references to horses in "Wanderings of Oisin", once in "The Ballad of the Foxhunter", and symbolical images of "Shadowy Horses" and "Horses of Disaster" occur in "He Bids His Beloved be at Peace". Pegasus is alluded to as "our colt" in "The Fascination of What's Difficult". There is a reference to "great Juan riding by" in a poem expressing indignation at the reception given to Synge's play. Other references to horses are found in the poem on Robert Gregory, in "At Galway Races", and of course in "Under Ben Bulben". A few more occur but none of them is especially significant, and a study of these references does not enlighten us about the prominence given to the "horseman" in the epitaph. The equestrian metaphor is meagrely used by the poet and direct references to horse as an animal are far from numerous in the poems. There is, however, a short poem of six lines, "Tom at Cruachan" (CP. 306), which may perhaps help clarify the idea behind the image:

> 'The stallion Eternity
> Mounted the mare of Time,
> 'Gat the foal of the world' (CP. 306)

Time, World, and Eternity are thus suggested by an equestrian figure. The poem belongs to the 1933 volume and is thus fairly close to the date of the epitaph. If we try to interpret the

'horseman' of the epitaph with the aid of Tom the Lunatic's symbol, perhaps the following elucidation may be made: Addressing his shade after death under the image of a horseman (horse being equated with eternity according to the poem quoted), the poet observes that living in eternity, he has no further concern with the manifestations of time (Life, Death). The epitaph gives a final sense of escape and transcendence. Death has released him, it has given him courage and amplitude, and he can see with unwinking eyes what once blinded him with pain. The conquest of time is by death. Other modes are neither denied nor affirmed. The 'cold eye' is what one would cast on an enemy—the open hostility is ended by death and the roads now lie in different directions.

## XII

Yeats in his comments upon the phases of the moon in *A Vision* has also shown his preoccupation with temporal constructions with reference to the body and the mind. We shall briefly review his ideas on the subject because apart from their being a store-house of metaphors, they also illustrate some important beliefs embodied in his poetry. The lunar phases give, however, the temporal pattern. They do not direct attention as to how the ultimate reality is to be attained. As Professor A. G. Stock observes, "Reality, he (W. B. Yeats) says, is a phaseless sphere, timeless and all inclusive" (p. 130). The same critic sums up the main trend of *A Vision*: "Every life was a step in a dance rather than in a journey, for the goal of the step was not a consummation which left life behind. He thought of living itself as an activity and a mode of knowledge the soul desires" (*ibid*).

The theory of Will and Mask seems to be a declaration of the freedom of choice man enjoys in shaping his destiny. We shall quote Professor Stock again, for her comments on Yeatsian esoterism provide the most helpful elucidation. The Will, she writes, interpreting the poet "sets before itself an image, shaped from moments of exaltation in past lives, of all it can conceive as most admirable, all that is most opposite to its actual incarnate self, and strives towards that" (*ibid.*, p. 124).

In "An Acre of Grass" included in "Last Poems" there is a reference to the kind of mask or anti-self he desires for himself:

> Grant me an old man's frenzy,
> Myself must I remake
> Till I am Timon and Lear
> Or that William Blake
> Who beat upon the wall
> Till Truth obeyed his call. (CP. 347)

Lear, Blake, Michael Angelo are the masks by which he desires to effect his transformation and achieve "An old man's eagle eye". The cyclic order of time belonging to the lunar phases covers about 2000 years according to his theory, which significantly enters his poetry. One example of this is the celebrated poem, "The Second Coming." But nowhere does the poetry lean so much on this esoteric doctrine as to be meaningless without the support.

A *Vision* is the poet's careful study of temporal patterns, which recur at intervals of time, governing human personality and the course of history. *A Vision* suggests a see-saw relationship between the values of the mind and those of the objective world—when one is up, the other is down, and each degree of gain made by the one registers an equal measure of decline in the other, "each one living the other's death, dying the other's life". There is a neatness and finish in the formulation, which argues an orderly mind, docketing the particulars conscientiously. But the fantastic can never be made to look like acceptable fact. *A Vision* is best dismissed as a storehouse of metaphors; otherwise it has very much the character of an Old Wives' Tale. We shall still need to look at it because of some correspondences between it and the poetry. "Ego Dominus Tuus" is concerned with the theory of Will and Mask, and the poem, "The Phases of the Moon" describes the twenty-eight phases of the Moon, in terms of their effect upon human beings. One example from the latter will indicate the nature of the poet's esoteric conceptions about the lunar influence:

> Hunchback and Saint and Fool are the last crescents.
> The burning bow that once could shoot an arrow

Out of the up and down, the wagon-wheel
Of beauty's cruelty and wisdom's chatter—
Out of the raving tide—is drawn betwixt
Deformity of body and mind. (CP. 188)

Although Yeats is concerned with giving a measure of the temporal dimension in *A Vision*, he also briefly describes what way is open for escape into the phaseless sphere, which is the name he adopts for reality. The view has been referred to earlier in this section. The following quotation will further clarify it:

"Within it live all souls which have been set free, and every Daimon and Ghostly Self; our expanding cone seems to cut through its gyre; spiritual influx is from its circumference, animate life from its centre". (*A Vision*, 1937, p. 209; A. G. Stock, p. 136). The references to gyres and cones in the passage quoted have not been explained. They are integral to his system, and it takes a good deal of time to understand what they mean. The gyres suggest the perpetual conflict between opposing forces out of which cultures are produced as well as human personality. In this struggle new areas of the mind or of the objective world are cleared. They acquaint us with the type of character or civilization, expected or prevailing at a particular point of time.

*A Vision* is puzzling to most literary students. Very few among them will care to turn to it. The reason is that it is difficult to have patience with an abstract system with its uncertain bearing upon the poetry written. One trying to make the effort will soon discover that one's labours are not sufficiently rewarding because the poems can be understood even without reference to its elaborate machinery.

## XIII

When Wordsworth declared his faith "In years that bring the philosophic mind" his audience was with him. The view stated was of a kind that struck on-one as eccentric or controversial. Yeats seems, however, to reject such an attitude. 'The years' do not mean for him what they did for the nineteenth century

poet. Once however, he ironically accepted their beneficent power: "men improve with the years" (CP. 153). Evidently he looks upon old age with abhorrence and seems mainly aware of its ridiculous aspect:

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
> A tattered coat upon a stick. (CP. 217)

For himself old age is a period of deteriorating physique but this does not, as has been already stated earlier in this article, imply a loss of power. What is seen is a caricature of the actual fact. For he does not know of any decline in mental vigour. There seems on the other hand an added strength, an added capacity to feel and see:

> this caricature,
> Decrepit age that has been tied to me
> As to a dog's tail. (CP. 218)

The image suggests not disabling infirmity but merely a piece of wanton cruelty, practised by Nature to satisfy, so to speak, a puerile humour. For the verses that follow report, as has already been stated, not a loss but an accession of strength:

> Never had I more
> Excited, passionate, fantastical
> Imagination, nor an ear and eye
> That more expected the impossible—(CP. 218)

The philosophic mind or wisdom does not attract the poet. Life for him possesses other modes of expression and its energy flows into completely different channels. Love and hate, these antinomies, explain life, and in his eyes, endow it with significance:

> For wisdom is the property of the dead,
> A something incompatible with life ("Blood and the Moon", CP. 269)

Yeats had a great respect for the body. He could never reconcile himself to the idea that its waning powers were a benefit. He even found in Christian Sacrament support for the view:

> Did God in portioning wine and bread
> Give man His thought or His mere body?
> ("Michael Robartes and the Dancer", CP. 198)

In any case wisdom with bodily decrepitude as the price to pay did not attract him:

> Bodily decrepitude is wisdom; young
> We loved each other and were ignorant.
> (CP. 301)

In "Blood and Moon" he refers to the Bishop of Cloyne, Burke, Goldsmith, and Swift, whose wisdom he did not underrate. How did they come by it? Not surely by merely growing old but by contact with reality in the open and continuing the nature and habits of children:

> They walked the roads
> Mimicking what they heard, as children mimic;
> They understood that wisdom comes of beggary.
> (CP. 273)

Thus Crazy Jane, Tom the Lunatic, and the Fools about whom he writes, have wisdom, such as he values, because these are the people who render a true account of life. Ignoring orthodoxies, they record their experience, and the mode of their arrival at this maturity is not to "wither into truth". A good deal of this wisdom seems to be based upon the reconciling of opposites:

> 'But Love has pitched his mansion in
> The place of excrement;
> For nothing can be sole or whole
> That has not been rent'. ("Crazy Jane", p. 295)

"Tom at Cruachan" sees the opposites of Time and Eternity reconciled in the creation of the world.

Yeats has described his nature, the things that he most values, and also the men he most likes to resemble. A passionate quality seems inborn in him, perhaps a Pollexfen heritage:

> I carry from my mother's womb
> A fanatic heart. (CP. 288)

And his prayer for himself is:

> That I may seem, though I die old,
> A foolish passionate man. (CP. 326)

He will seem a fool for the song's sake:

> He that sings a lasting song
> Thinks in a marrow-bone. (CP. 326)

But this is far from being a fool in the ordinary sense. And the wisdom which he seeks to avoid is what "men think/In the mind alone". This seems to re-echo something he had said at the beginning of his poetic career:

> There is no truth
> Saving in thine own heart. (CP. 8)

In his "Last Poems", Yeats makes a final statement about the kind of truth he desires and the way to attain it. It is not within reach of fancy nor can it be achieved by a close scrutiny of experience. The secret will not yield itself to discursive intellect either. An old man's frenzy, a passionate turbulence of the heart, can alone break down the impediments, standing in its way. Timon, Lear, William Blake had this passionate quality to win wisdom. Michael Angelo had another, it was a mind that could pierce through heaven, and lashed by frenzy, explore the region of the dead, discovering truth that lay buried and forgotten. This is "An old man's eagle eye" (CP. 347), which he desired to possess himself. Thus the truth Yeats sought for would not be secured by intellectual speculation but needed

the passion of the heart as well as of the mind for access to its treasures.

## XIV

The time-theme has perhaps a more intimate bearing on Yeats's poetry than we have succeeded in indicating. His imagination seems continually preoccupied with it, and moreover it contributes a basic element to his attitude as poet. In this concluding section we shall make an attempt to analyse some new examples from his poetry to illustrate the time-theme and add our final remarks. The picture, which we have tried to present above, will not be altered, but perhaps the new quotations will further reveal the substantial unity of the poet's attitude and confirm our view regarding the significance of the subject.

The worst that time can do, Yeats says in his poem "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz", is done to the innocent and the beautiful but what the poet wishes to do as a measure of relief appears to be a riddle:

> The innocent and the beautiful
> Have no enemy but time;
> Arise and bid me strike a match
> And strike another till time catch;
> Should the conflagration climb,
> Run till all the sages know. (CP. 264)

To end time resort is made to fire but it is not clear what follows the experiment. Is it implied that when time is consumed away, wisdom will need reorientation, and that the sages and thinkers will have to be informed immediately so that they will know how to re-formulate their ideas in accordance with what happens? The tendency to unintelligibility seen in this poem and elsewhere in Yeats has an esoteric character like magic, and may represent a doctrine and an attitude well worth exploring rather than a faulty compression of thought. In another poem, "cannonade" serves to "thunder time away" (CP. 280). The idea seems to be to treat time as a dangerous enemy and to wage war

on him with troops and engines of destruction. In one poem Yeats speaks of eternity as an accumulation of time, and the former seems to lose as time unwinds. This thought is offered as a comment on the conception of "Plato's spindle".

> Eternity may dwindle,
> Time is unwound. (CP. 299)

In "Girl's Song" there seems to be an allusion to the simultaneous apprehension of the present and the future. The poet describes a girl waiting for her lover. The man who comes in is, however, old, relying on a stick to hold himself upright. The girl then asks herself:

> Saw I an old man young
> Or young man old? (CP. 296)

He is the lover and his aged appearance is a vision of old age, which would transform him. The poet has often betrayed disgust with old age: in "Oisin" he describes the hero's transformation into old age as soon as he touched earth after his sojourn in a timeless dimension: "A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle on his beard never dry". (CP. 445). In his famous poem, "Among School Children", he says that no young mother would face the pangs of child bearing were she to visualize her child as an old man. Time as an agent of human deformity gives him a sense of physical disgust,

> Shift Time's filthy load,
> Straighten aged knees. (CP. 287).

In "Meeting" the man and the woman repel each other, but they could love were they young instead:

> Could we both discard
> This beggarly habiliment—
> Had found a sweeter word. (CP. 315)

In "Politics" (1939 volume), he declares that youth and love are more to his taste than cutting a public figure,

But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms! (CP. 393)

As we have already seen, old age does not commend itself in his eyes by producing the philosophic mind. It has, it is true, some gifts to offer but they are none of them of the first importance for him. Curiously enough, he associates mystical experience with age. In "Demon and Beast" he escapes from hatred and desire for a few minutes, and wishes to make the experience "linger half a day". He regards this vision as a gift of old age,

And that mere growing old, that brings
Chilled blood, this sweetness brought.
(CP. 210)

Yeats also attributes this ecstasy to ascetic practice and places it above imperial power: "What had the Caesars but their thrones?" On the other hand, St Antony and others inhabiting the Theban desert withered to a bag of bones but had like him realized this sweetness. Perhaps it was the same experience that came to him after his fiftieth year when he sat in a crowded London shop, with an open book and an empty cup on the marble table-top,

While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless. (CP. 284)

Yeats seems to have borrowed some of his ideas from Hindu philosophy. One of these occurs in the poem "To Ireland in the Coming Times" ("The Rose", 1893)

From our birthday, until we die,
Is but the winking of an eye. (CP. 57)

The divine moment extends to aeons in terms of human life. If this reckoning is adopted, the whole of life "Is but the wink-

ing of an eye". The eye, however, is that of Brahma, the leader of the Hindu Pantheon.

Yeats in the short poem "The Spur" has spoken of lust and rage spurring him to song in old age. Perhaps these can be identified with Beast and Demon of the poem referred to above, describing a mystical experience, which he wished to prolong. The word "Spur" suggests an equestrian image. Such images are of rare occurrence in the poetry of Yeats. In the Epitaph the expression "Horseman pass by" may thus imply a farewell to "lust and rage", and, therefore, to poetry itself. This idea may be one among several embedded in the verse. "The Spur" and the Epitaph both belong to the volume, "Last Poems". The interpretation proposed seems all the more likely because of this and avoids being far-fetched by the close association in time.*

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# CHAPTER IV

## A CRITICAL STUDY OF YEATSIAN VOCABULARY

MALLARMÉ HAD said, Poetry is made with words and not with ideas. The significance of the medium, of the vocabulary used, has not been so emphatically stated by any one before him but the fact that words are important for a poetical statement has always been recognised[1]. Aristotle in his "Poetics" assigned a significant place to diction. The point need not be further laboured. The purpose of the present essay is to examine the words used by Yeats in his poetry for a specific purpose — namely, to estimate the increasing complexity they indicate with the poet's advance in years and his growing technical skill. Not all the words are going to be examined; to do this may mean a greater comprehensiveness but this will be to the detriment of a subtler analysis which will confine itself to a selected area, and the thoroughness of the enquiry is expected to achieve a better standard of precision as regards the view presented.

The narrowing of the area of examination will be justified on the assumption that certain words or groups of words are more suggestive than others for guiding our enquiry. Here there may be a scope for a difference of opinion, and the principle of selection I propose to follow may not appear to all as basically sound. Perhaps abstractly considered, such a view challenging the method proposed may be conceded to be unobjectionable but with reference to the poetry of Yeats its soundness will not convince. I shall concentrate on phrases containing nouns and adjectives and also generalized proper names because the compounds with nouns and adjectives as elements suggest a way of looking at things, which helps the observer to notice how a progressive complexity is registered in the poet's attitude. For this it is necessary that the same term should be studied in a number of different examples, and its modification by the context carefully examined. The function of the proper names will not

[1] In "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" (*Crossways*, 1889) Yeats writes; "Words alone are certain good". (CP. 7).

be identical but their examination will also be useful as data for the establishment of the causes and circumstances contributing to the poet's maturity.

I shall take up only one word and show by a series of examples representing work of different periods how the final clarity and precision is achieved. This preliminary attempt is intended as evidence of the reliability of the proposed method; for although a considerable number of words will be later analysed, the procedure will be slightly varied. Instead of seeing them in isolation, as in the present case, they will be related to groups and by this means, their implications will be more fully shown.

I take the word 'dim'. I give below the early uses and along with them, an occasional comment to suggest their vagueness and inadequacy. The definition of the word by COD will provide an authoritative frame-work of reference for any observation that may be made: "Faintly luminous or visible; not bright, clear, or well-defined; obscure; seeing or seen, hearing or heard, apprehending or apprehended, indistinctly." 'The dim grey sands' (*The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, Macmillan, London, 1958. p. 20); 'the dim sleepy ground' (CP. 39); 'Bow down archangels, in your dim abode' (p. 41); 'Were drowned in her long dim hair' (p. 64); 'dream-dimmed eyes' (p. 74); 'Dim Powers of drowsy thought' (p. 80). The usage the last expression illustrates may not be altogether inauthentic but it sounds a little absurd because of an overdose of "The Celtic Twilight" element. An example taken from the next page (81) has also a similar defect: 'The blue and the dim and the dark cloths'. What intermediate colour 'dim' is meant to convey between blue' and 'dark' it is not easy to estimate from the account. The next example shows a marked departure from this vagueness; it occurs in "The Second Coming" (1921. p. 211). Here the complexity introduced is an important element in the poem's total value: 'The blood-dimmed tide is loosed'. The word, now used as a verbal adjective, suggests symbolically the obscuring or loss of the great civilized values. My final example is from "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931": (the waters) 'Run for a mile undimmed in Heaven's face'. Here the objective precision forms a new achievement. The

dreamy accents are no more; instead, there is the normal human voice, speaking with a new power. This happened quite late; the above example shows 1921 as a possible date for its location.

As a contrast to the earlier examples we may quote Milton. His two uses which we quote provide visual and not merely mental pictures:

> 'Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot,
> Which men call earth' (*Comus*).

and from 'Il Penseroso'' comes the famous line:

> 'casting a dim religious light'.

Milton and Shakespeare are compared by Eliot, inevitably to the former's disadvantage: ''With Shakespeare, far more than with any other poet in English,' he observes, 'the combinations of words offer perpetual novelty; they enlarge the meaning of individual words joined.....Milton's images do not give this sense' (*On Poetry and Poets*, Faber, 1957 p. 140). But the expression 'dim religious light' has this enlarging effect in spite of Eliot's view to the contrary. By comparison with the earlier Yeats, Milton is far more precise and objective but the expression 'blood-dimmed tide' shows Yeats to be more gifted as a manipulator of words, and one may, therefore, well believe that his phrases, too, 'enlarge the meaning of individual words joined'.

After this preliminary comment in connexion with a single example which seemed necessary to expose the possibilities of the mode of exploration proposed, I may now turn to scrutinize more words and phrases; these will be seen in relation to certain groups. Although alphabetical order would have imposed an easy and simple structure on the material to be considered, the principle of grouping based on the meaning and implication of the words has been followed instead.

Words implying emotion, 'sad', 'mournful', 'passionate', 'wild'. The word 'sad' seems to have passed out of the poet's vocabulary quite early in life. The last example appears to belong to the volume *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899): 'And

never was piping so sad' (CP. 63). Perhaps the poet's alliance with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood cooled down and the elimination of certain words from his vocabulary is, therefore, as signicant as the inclusion of others, which he required to express a greater range of thought and emotion. Some of the examples which follow will indicate that the word ('sad') is restrictive in its connotation and incapable of suggesting a state of freedom and fulness of life : 'the sad dweller by the sea-ways lone' (p.9) ; 'Or comes in laughter from the sea's sad lips' (p.42), and on the next page (p. 43), 'The sad, the lonely, the insatiable'. From *Oisin* (1889) is selected the final illustration: 'the fluttering sadness of earth' (p. 440). The disappearance of the words from the poet's vocabulary provides a negative evidence of a developing technique, and maturity. Ezra Pound drew attention to 'the mournful ulalu' in Yeat's writings and commended this as an element of considerable interest: 'Mr. Yeats brought a new music upon the harp... the sound of keening and the skirl of the Irish ballads, and (had) driven out the sentimental cadence and memories of *The County Mayo* and *The Colun*' (*Literary Essays*, edited by T. S. Eliot, Faber Paper-back, 1960, p. 378). Yeats had used 'mournful' in various combinations: 'mournful ulalu' (p. 19), 'mournful din' (p. 29), 'mournful wonder of his eyes' (p. 39, *The Rose*, 1889), 'mournful pride' (p. 41), 'mournful lips (p. 46), 'mournful beauty' (p. 48). After 1893 the word seems to drop out of the poet's vocabulary to reappear in *Last Poems* (1936-39), "One asks for mournful melodies' (p. 339). Yeats had used 'mournful' in relation to sound, the earliest example being found in *Crossways* (1889). The revived use indicates no new element. There is scope for speculating why he should return to a word he could do without for more than 40 years. The obvious explanation is that he needed the idea and therefore the word. Another and a more likely one is that there was no touch of *Celtic Twilight* in what he wrote in later life and he did not bother to keep out a particular phrase from fear of a relapse to the earlier style. This explanation, if valid, would reveal the confidence of maturity.

'Passionate' and its cognate 'Passion'. In his "Reveries over Childhood and Youth" Yeats writes about his grandfather,

William Pollexfen. His words suggest a background, which will be found useful in understanding the attitude of mind, which often controlled or influenced his approach to the subject-matter of Passion: "Even to-day when I read *King Lear* his (William Pollexfen's) image is always before me, and I often wonder if the delight in passionate men in my plays and in my poetry is more than his memory' (*Autobiographies*. Macmillan, 1956, p. 9). As a result, the combinations into which the word enters do not reveal a progressive complexity based upon a ripening experience or advancing technique. I shall choose my examples from an early work like *Oisin* and go on to later years to see whether there is any sign that his developing powers are reflected in an added depth of meaning which the word expresses: 'Hung in the passionate dawn' (p. 428); 'Through the demon love of its youth and its godless and passionate age' (p. 446). In "The Wild Swans at Coole" (1919) he uses the term practically in the same combination as in the first example above: 'And passionate as the dawn' ("The Fisherman", CP. 167). The shade of his grandfather may not be far off from his conception of 'dawn' and 'passionate' but the idea of 'passionate dawn' even then remains uncertain. Perhaps the poet is thinking in terms of a power latent but still unexpressed in the dawn image. "The Fisherman" is a late poem (1919) and we cannot attribute to it a deficiency either in language or sentiment such as we can associate with his early work. Perhaps a better view of the phrase is to take it as an extension of the picture of the fisherman himself. Of the fisherman he writes: 'A man who does not exist,/A man who is but a dream' (p. 167). This statement will aid the attainment of clarity as regards the meaning intended. The fisherman is an ideal, a promise, and dawn too has largely the same character. But 'passionate' is an attribute of the fisherman and is transferred to the dawn. He is the poet's dream because he delights in passionate men, as the passage quoted above from his "Reveries" makes plain. But the *Oisin* verse, containing the same words, lacks its complexity: (cloudlets) 'Like drifts of leaves, immovable and bright,/Hung in the passionate dawn' (p.424). The word 'passionate' in the context does not have a precise meaning and is apparently introduced as an ingredient in a

colourful image. Two further examples, both late, will conclude this note:

> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity ("The Second Coming", CP. 211).
>
> Never had I more
> Excited, passionate, fantastical
> Imagination. ("The Tower", CP. 218)

These two examples belong to the period of his highest poetical achievement. A "passionate intensity" reverses the admiring attitude he seems to have maintained throughout; he has discovered a new dimension in which passion is uncreative and a source of human degradation. This is fanaticism, and the fact that the poet chose the word he had so often used to record human worth in an opposite context is an indication that he can transcend the limited view of his earlier days in the interest of a more complete grasp of reality. In the verses quoted from "The Tower", 'passionate' occurs in association with two other words. This is new in his poetry and, as far as I know, unexampled either in early or late work. 'Passionate' standing isolated seemed to possess a unique meaning and purpose. The poet now associates it with a larger whole. By this shift in his attitude, he indicates an awareness of the relativity of human values. What is good in itself may be abased to something reprehensible when the context of events is changed. Thus passion, admirable in many ways, suffers from its liability to degradation. This view is clearly an element of maturity.

With 'wild' we come to a word which has a subjective sense as well as an objective one. Yeats uses both in his early poetry: 'Wild flames of red and gold and blue' (*Oisin*, CP. 417); Quiet's wild heart, like daily meat' (p. 465). Other combinations include 'wild duck' (469), 'wild summer' ('all the wild summer was in her gaze', CP. 86), 'wild geese' (p. 121), 'wild swans' (p. 158), etc. In the expression 'To find if hearts be wild and wise' ("The Mask", CP. 106), there is a suggestion of the interdependence of passion and intellect, which Yeats states more

precisely in "A Prayer for Old Age": 'He that sings a lasting song/Thinks in a marrow-bone' (CP. 326). For himself his prayer, which follows a few lines later, is : 'That I may seem, though I die old/ A foolish, passionate man'.* The word 'wild' in the context ('wild and wise') means *passionate* while with reference to geese and swans, of which examples are given, it means *instinctive*. Wisdom will thus appear, according to Yeats, to issue out of an instinctive life, lived at a passionate level. Although the sense of 'untamed' seems more appropriate to early usage ('wild duck'), the later sense seems to point to passion oftener than to the untamed condition, e.g. 'wild lady' (p. 154), 'wild thought' (p. 158), but the other sense reappears in 'wild poppy', (p. 16), 'The scullion gone wild' (p. 167). The maturity which I am trying to observe does not lie in stressing a single meaning but in passing from one sense to another and sometimes uniting both symbolically as in 'wild moon' ("Solomon and the Witch," CP. 199). One might wonder what the poet means apart from its obvious irony by the expression: 'All the wild witches, those most noble ladies' (CP. 164) but the difficulty ceases when this is read along with the two verses that follow: 'For all their broom-sticks and their tears,/Their angry tears, are gone'. The poet's nostalgia for the holy centaurs which had vanished from the hills is to be soon united with a longing for the magical world of the past, which his imagination conjures up.

Perhaps the most complex sense is found for the word in the following verses in which it is rendered in italics:

> And that a slight companionable ghost,
> *Wild* with divinity,
> Had so lit up the whole,
> Immense miraculous house
> The Bible promised us,
> It seemed a gold-fish swimming in a bowl.
> ("All Souls' Night," CP. 257)

*These words recall Lear's remark about himself on recovery from madness: 'I am a very foolish fond old man' (*King Lear* IV, VII 60), and 'foolish' as used by Yeats, may be an element in his conception of passion.

The standard of maturity is fully reached, and the sense which is neither 'passionate' nor 'untamed' demands a further sense which may be found in the following words, 'intensely eager' 'excited', 'frantic', 'mad'. These are all taken from the COD, and the Yeatsian usage is, therefore, not a departure nor quite an enlargement but only a highly imaginative application.

We shall now examine a miscellaneous group of words, which refer to sound, texture, movement, and flavour. The point of maturity in respect of these words is achieved when they transcend their plain implications and develop a suggestive or symbolical meaning, embodying a complex emotion or a deeper insight. As already stated, an advanced attitude is sometimes attested by the discarding of a word, which no longer serves. The word 'woven' is frequently used till 1893 (*The Rose*) but disappears after the date. I shall give a few examples before an explanation is offered to account for the behaviour: 'Woven woods' (p. 12), 'woven hands' (p. 15), 'woven world-forgotten isle' (p. 49), 'woven shade' (p. 48), 'woven changeless roof of boughs' (p. 49). The word suggests not a way of looking at things but a mannerism. Yeats was a sound critic of his own practice and saw quite early in his life the artificiality and unnaturalness of such descriptions. But he does not develop an original style merely by avoiding a few pitfalls. This he does by coming closer to the soil and yet extending his vision to the mountain height. His own statement is clear enough on the point:

> All that we did, all that we said or sang
> Must come from contact with the soil, from that
> Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.
> ("The Municipal Gallery Revisited," CP. 369)

Another term to disappear after the publication of *The Rose* (1893) is 'shadowy', though 'shadowless' ('All day long from shadowless moon', "Solomon and Sheba," CP. 155), and 'shadow' survive longer. But 'Shadowy' occurs in the name of a volume of poems ("The Shadowy Waters") published in 1906. Yeats is evidently casting overboard the poetical jargon of the preceding generation. The heritage interfered

with his personal development, and he took no time to discard it. 'Murmuring' had the same fate. After *The Rose* volume, it, too, is consigned to limbo as far as his poetry is concerned. I shall give below the examples, they are five in number, the last in date appearing in *The Rose* in 1893:—'murmuring barbs' (p. 12), 'murmuring sea' (p. 36), 'murmuring silk (p. 412), 'low murmurs' (p. 417), and 'murmuring greenness' (p. 51). It is curious to note that another early favourite 'wandering' was also nearly cast out after its appearance in *The Rose*. It seems that the date of this publication forms a significant landmark in his poetical career. His self-discovery grows apace after this year and his poetry achieves a sense of direction but the attainment of full maturity belongs to a later date. I shall give a list of the phrases in which the word 'wandering' is found. A very slight examination will show that it has no potentiality for expressing a complex emotion—at least that is the estimate one is forced to make and which Yeats also evidently made after his explorations: 'wandering earth' (p. 7), 'wandering quiet' (p. 12), 'wandering fire' (in the sense of 'madness', p. 18), 'wandering cry' (p. 28), 'wandering feet' (p. 41), 'wandering mind' (p. 409), 'wandering moon' (409), 'wandering land' (413), 'wandering dances' (417), 'wandering ruby cars' (418), 'the wandering many-changing ones' (452), 'far wandering-shadows' (453), and 'dishevelled wandering stars' (p. 49). The last phrase and an earlier one 'wandering feet' belong to the 1893-volume. All the others precede this publication but 'wandering', one can easily see, is an unpromising word and there is a marked decline in the frequency of its use in the later volumes apparently because it does not promise to meet the poet's needs.

The words Yeats excluded from his poetic vocabulary after some years of experiment provide what may be called a negative evidence of his advance in technique and complexity of attitude. Certain words were also adopted by him later in his career, and these often indicated an awareness of opposite emotions co-existing in a single experience. Here one perhaps notices something more reliable as evidence than the other kind just considered. Of the group of words possessing this value, 'bitter' seems one of the most significant. Its first appearance also belongs to *The Rose* volume and is seen in the title poem:

'Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways: Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide' (p. 35), and the second, which follows a few pages later in the poem "Who Goes with Fergus?": 'And no more turn aside and brood/Upon love's bitter mystery' (p. 49). To this poem T. S. Elliot gives very high praise. He ranks it as an early poem but the true description for it is that it looks forward and in doing so, its connexion with early work becomes tenuous. To adopt a chronological point of view in respect of a performance so strongly anticipating the later style is to misread the significance of what is achieved. This is the comment which Eliot makes: 'There are some (among the early poems), such as *Who Goes with Fergus?*, which are as perfect of their kind as anything in the language' ("Yeats". *On Poetry and Poets*. Faber, 1957, p. 254). It is, however, the word 'bitter', suggesting a new element of complexity, which communicates a power and impressiveness to the statement the poet makes. Ultimately, it is the maturity that the word conveys, which accounts for the effectiveness of the poem.

The word enters into more than 40 compounds and is occasionally changed to 'embittered' (as in 'embittered sun', p. 164). Its use may, to some extent, entitle Yeats to the praise which Eliot bestows on Shakespeare and which has already been quoted above: 'With Shakespeare, far more than with any other poet in English, the combinations of words offer perpetual novelty; they enlarge the meaning of the individual words joined'. One has often this sense that meaning is being extended and enlarged in reading Yeats. In "The Two Trees" (CP. 55) one comes across the line: 'Gaze no more in the bitter glass'; 'glass' in the context seems to have the value of the Latin 'Speculum' and one of its derivatives 'speculation'. The poet's admonition is not to gaze in the bitter glass but to 'gaze in thine heart'. The implication is that analysis and intellectual speculation are inimical to true happiness which belongs to instinctive life and is symbolized by the heart. In *Last Poems* the word has been used six times; in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933) and *The Tower* (1928) there are seven examples in all. In these late volumes, the word almost establishes itself as a synonym of 'passionate'. As individual phrases will not be adequate as illustration, verses will be quoted instead in support

of the interpretation: 'Death and life were not/Till man made up the whole,/Made lock, stock and barrel/Out of his bitter soul' (CP. 223). The meaning is perhaps even clearer in the following line: 'Some violent bitter man, some powerful man' (p. 225). 'Bitter' also conveys the sense of 'fanatical' as in the following: 'In this blind bitter town' (p. 286). I shall give a few more instances from different periods; they have often symbolical implications, especially when they include a reference to some aspect of the phenomenal world as in 'bitter storm' (p. 67), 'bitter flood' (p. 79), 'bitter sea' (p. 206). In 'Break bitter furies of complexity' ("Byzantium", p. 280), the sense appears to be a contrast between the disturbing multiplicity of the human world and the unity and serenity of the artistic, whose creative force is never spent; 'bitter' in the context suggests the recalcitrance of the material to the artistic process.

Another point worth nothing is that about the year 1910 ("The Green Helmet and Other Poems"), there is a visible change in the medium the poet used. In this respect T. S. Eliot's observation fails to offer reliable guidance, for he writes: 'Returning to his earlier poems after making a close acquaintance with the later, one sees, to begin with, that in technique there was a slow and continuous development of what is always the same medium and idiom' (*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 254). From the year 1904, the year of the publication of "In the Seven Woods", Yeats's language becomes increasingly unadorned; adjectival phrases less crowd the pages and his accents come closer to life. To examine the difference in style between the two volumes, I propose to study the first poem of each, and use the expressions found in it for comparison with those found in the other volume. In doing this adjective compounds will alone be included in the survey. Perhaps this scrutiny will be more rewarding if carried further back, and I may, therefore, start with the 1893-volume ("The Rose"). The first page which prints the title poem contains the following expressions: 'ancient ways', 'bitter tide', 'grey, wood-nurtured, quiet eyed', 'silver-sandalled', 'rose-breath', 'heavy mortal hopes', 'bright hearts', 'Red rose', 'proud Rose' (p. 35). The first page of the next volume ("In the Seven Woods", 1904), contains two poems, 'In the Seven Woods' and 'The Arrow' and between them they

use not more than half a dozen of such phrases: 'faint thunder', 'unavailing cries', 'old bitterness', 'her wild heart', 'a cloudy quiver', 'wild thought'. The adjective compounds grow fewer in number and the quality of the phrases also shows a difference. They are obviously less 'poetical' and nearer to life. But even this volume has an occasional romantic periphrasis in the old manner as 'Pale silver-proud queen woman of the sky' (p. 92), which shows that the accents of life were not yet fully mastered. In "Green Helmet" (1910) there is a sense of fuller mastery of this when the same test is applied: "gaudy stern', 'gaudy bed', 'sweet name', 'running crowd', 'whole night', 'glittering ship', 'ecstatic breath'. These phrases can enter normal speech without appearing affected. But many of the earlier ones were too literary from this point of view. In the famous poem "Leda and the Swan", the poet uses his style with triumphant art. 'The feathered glory' of the poem is not a dull ornament, borrowed from the metaphoric usage of a former time. It is alive as symbol and fact, both deriving from a myth, which the poem reconstructs with supreme success, using no more than 113 words for the purpose. An analysis of Yeats's art from the point of view of the changes it undergoes will reveal that he at first employs ornaments, later discards them in the interest of realism but resorts to them in his maturity to convey a complex vision, entirely free from any design to achieve mere beauty of expression. T. S. Eliot does not estimate the exceptional element in Yeats' unbroken progress and his view therefore appears to be deficient in so far it ignores a fact of such significance in Yeats' art.

In "Responsibilities" (1914) the poet announces his decision to abjure decorative writing:

> I made my song a coat
> Covered with embroideries
> Out of old mythologies
> From heel to throat.

but now his practice will be different:

> For there's more enterprise
> In walking naked (CP. 142)

This decision he holds to with some degree of consistency but when he apparently departs from it, as he does in several poems of outstanding value (e.g. "Byzantium", "Her Vision in the Wood", etc.), it is not to return to his old manner, to the 'embroideries' with which he had covered his coat but to achieve symbolism and a new dimension of meaning. His use of language bears analogy to the dialectical process in philosophy, the decorative gives way to the naked, and the latter is sometimes replaced by a metaphorical treatment, involving considerable complexity. I shall quote a passage from *The Winding Stair* (1933), illustrating the mature unadorned style, for comparison with another passage taken from a poem of the same year of publication, but containing a considerable measure of the oblique, metaphorical element:

> I am content to follow to its source
> Every event in action or in thought;
> Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
> When such as I cast out remorse
> So great a sweetness flows into the breast
> We must laugh and we must sing,
> We are blest by everything,
> And everything we look upon is blest (CP. 267)

The metaphorical rising to the symbolic is found in the following, taken from the same volume:

> Dry timber under that rich foliage,
> At wine-dark midnight in the sacred wood,
> Too old for a man's love I stood in rage
> Imagining men. Imagining that I could
> A greater with a lesser pang assuage
> Or but to find if withered vein ran blood,
> I tore my body that its wine might cover
> Whatever could recall the lip of lover.
> ("Her Vision in the Wood", CP. 312)

A look at the two passages will show clearly enough that Yeats is a master of the tool he is using; no more are there vague

phrases and ornamental expressions. Everything is firmly conceived and clearly stated without any tint of the 'poetical', which in early life had crippled statement and led him astray by the seduction of a word or phrase he admired. It has already been seen how the same words used in early and late poetry registered the change, for which an apter term is perhaps transformation. To keep this important circumstance fresh in the mind, I shall give another example with 'fade', a verb used as participle: 'he bent down his fading head' (CP. 17). One does not quite know what is meant by 'fading' but 'ageing' or 'decaying' is likely to be the sense, however little this is warranted by usage. In "The Rose" (1893) 'the fading coals' (p. 56) represents a legitimate use but without nuances of any kind. In "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" (1933) the contrast suggested achieves a mature attitude and craftsmanship: 'The wooden scabbard bound and wound,/Can, tattered, still protect, faded adorn' (p. 265).

The Romantics never began a poem with 'because'[2]; its argumentative and prosaic elements are obviously incompatible with the needs of an imaginative style. Yeats has written five poems which begin with this conjunction, the first of them belongs to 1919: 'Because to-day is some religious festival' (p. 178). One would not claim that each example is the gem of a poem but the experiment is audacious and some out of the five do exhibit undoubted power:

> 'Because I am mad about women
> I am mad about the hills (CP. 356).

And nobody can overlook the intimacy and eloquence of the statement:

[2] T. S. Eliot seems to be under the influence of Yeats when he begins his verse paragraphs in the nrst section of "Ash Wednesday" with the word 'because':

> Because I do not hope to turn again
> Because I do not hope
> Because I do not hope to turn...

Eliot, however, is rendering Dante's words in English and is not, therefor, to be credited with the discovery of any technical device as regards expression.
It is interesting to note that the American poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) begins a poem (in the complete edition of her 1775 poems) as: "Because I could not stop for death."

Because we love bare hills and stunted trees
And were the last to choose the settled ground (CP. 385).

Another example may be quoted: 'Because you have found me in the pitch-dark night/With open book you ask me what I do' (p. 327). In this we have the force of a bare statement, relying upon the emotion as its source of strength and its naked rendering. This experiment he made to bring his poetry close to common speech shows that creative power does not depend on a genial soil for its exercise, it can use something as hard and obdurate as rock and bend it to its purpose by its all-conquering nature.

II

There are many beast and animal symbols in Yeats. Their use accords with the practice of many poets in the English tradition. His 'grey gulls' (p. 123) and 'wild swans' (p. 147) have symbolical implications which one can follow. These are post-1914 in origin and possess maturity in the sense that they are introduced in contexts, where they become meaningful. A few are seen in the 1899-volume, which are of an esoteric nature and seem to derive from Irish mythology. They occur in a poem, whose title runs to three lines. I quote them below: 'white deer with no horns' (p. 68), 'hound with one red ear', 'the Boar without bristle'. It would be quite impossible for any one to understand what these stand for without familiarity with their source. In his full maturity he did not indulge in this type of allusions to local beliefs and superstitions as the basis of his symbolical language. Evidently he did not like his Irishness to stand in the way of his poetry being enjoyed by non-Irish readers.

In his poetry Yeats uses many proper names; it is noticeable that there is a connexion between his standard of performance and the type of proper names he uses. In his early work Brahma as well as a few Indian names are mentioned; Cuchulain, Conchubar, and Fergus from Irish mythology also figure and we come across references to Druid vapour, Danaan rhymes, etc. In these poems, the poet does not seem to rise to his full stature.

He is governed by a stock of ideas, which he cannot transcend fully to realize his powers; he is trying to express a view of life with which he may be in accord but which is not his own. As a result a scope for the full play of his imagination is denied and although the poems reach a good standard, they do not rank among his best. It is interesting to note that adjective formations with names of Greek origin synchronize with his most mature work; occasionally other names, not of Irish origin, are also associated with the achievement of the best standard. I give a list of such formations with their references: "Ledaean body' (p. 243), 'Athenian intellect' (p. 245), 'Platonic love' (257), 'Georgian mansion' (263), 'Sibylline frenzy' (268), 'Shakespearean fish' (271), 'Asiatic vague immensities' (375), 'Egyptian thought' (399). To comment on this circumstance is possible only if speculation is permissible in such an account. One thing, however, seems fairly clear, namely evidence regarding the attainment of a measure of objectivity. Yeats seems able to contemplate persons and countries without prepossessions, he could see and judge them at their worth. This would imply not only maturity but also, one of its causes, namely a more extensive knowledge than he had possessed earlier. In his Introduction to "A Vision", written in 1928, Yeats himself is our witness: 'The other day Lady Gregory said to me: "You are a much better educated man than you were ten years ago and much more powerful in argument" (*A Vision*. Macmillan (London), 1962, p. 8). There is, therefore, good reason to think that a closer contact with the Hellenic world and the European culture generally through study of the Arts and Letters, gave him a broader outlook and a sense of belonging to a larger society, which served to liberate his imagination and stimulate his creative powers.

## III

The phrases so far examined have bearing on Yeats's vocabulary and the purpose of the study has been to indicate how the poet proceeded from an adorned to a naked style in achieving maturity in technique and outlook. Until now little has been said about his ideas but these are of the first importance.

For words have always a meaning in poetry and full appreciation is never possible without access to it. Certain phrases used by Yeats present a problem as regards the poet's meaning because their formulation is so idiosyncratic that they cannot be understood without exploration of the mind that shaped them. One such is 'tragic joy' which occurs in "The Gyres" (*Last Poems*, CP. 337). J. Hills Miller in *Six Twentieth Century Writers*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965, p. 121) offers a comment, which I shall quote in full:

' "Tragic joy is "tragic" because it means acceptance of perhaps innumerable lives, as when Leon Bloy somewhere says: "There is but one sadness and that is for us not to be saints". It is "joy" because the willing acceptance of interminable suffering brings about a sudden liberation from the chains of determinism. Man will be free of the bondage of time only when he puts aside all calculating scruples and no longer looks upon the present moment as a means to the end of liberation. The present must be its own end, and man must be willing to sacrifice even his chance of salvation for the sovereign pleasure of the moment. Only an instant of "zig-zag wantonness' (CP, 139) can be cut off from past and future, and therefore an image of eternity. "An aimless joy is a pure joy" (CP, 139), and "only the wasteful virtues earn the sun" (CP, 99)'.

The view offered above calls for a scrutiny of the passage in question, where the phrase occurs:

> Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy;
> We that look on but laugh in tragic joy (CP. 337).

There is another passage in "Lapis Lazuli" which should throw light on the probelm of interpretation. This poem is placed next to "The Gyres" in "Last Poems".

> All perform their tragic play,
> There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,
> That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;
> Yet they, should the last scene be there,
> The great stage curtain about to drop,
> If worthy their prominent part in the play,

Do not break up their lines to weep.
They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
Gaiety transfiguring all that dread (CP. 338).

The second poem obviously refers to stage and actors. The sense is present in a number of expressions like 'perform their tragic play', 'If worthy their prominent part in play', 'The great stage curtain about to drop', etc. The tragic actual situation and its transformation by means of art are suggested by the words 'Gaiety transfiguring all that dread'. The only difficulty remains with the expression: 'They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay'. But this is the attitude of the actors, who contemplate Hamlet and Lear as the substance of the art they practise. 'Tragic joy' in "The Gyres" does not belong to dead Hector, and 'the light in Troy' does not seem to mean anything other than the imagination that has gone to the recreation of the Trojan War in poetry. Yeats's phrase expresses the view that the business of all art, even of the Art of Tragedy, is to provide pleasure. In some ways Hillis Miller may have confounded the poetry with *A Vision* and his interpretation seems, therefore, a forced one. There is room for thinking that Miller is not completely off the track if we consider a passage like the following, which occurs in "Under Ben Bulben", embodying the poet's final statement on art and life:

A brief parting from those dear
Is the worst man has to fear.
Though grave-diggers' toil is long,
Sharp their spades, their muscles strong,
They but thrust their buried men
Back in the human mind again (CP, 398).

But in the above passage, which belongs to the same volume as the other two poems, there is no suggestion of a re-birth but of a continuity of existence in a different sphere—in the mind of man. The dead live on in the minds of those from whom they part. The idea in 'tragic joy" relates to art, while here the clear emphasis is on life. To misunderstand the implication is, therefore, to miss Yeats's attitude to art in one of its major aspects.

## IV

'A poet of the supreme greatness of Shakespeare can hardly influence, he can only be imitated: and the difference between influence and imitation is that influence can fecundate, whereas imitation—especially unconscious imitation—can only sterilize'. T. S. Eliot. *To Criticize the Critic.* Faber. p.18.

Yeats in his poetry does not seem to have followed Shakespeare as his model with a view to imitation. There is an important Shakespearean echo in his famous poem on the death of Robert Gregory:

> But not that my dear friend's dear son,
> Our Sidney and our perfect man,
> Could share in that discourtesy of death
> (CP. 150).

The expression 'discourtesy of death' seems clearly to be indebted to the Shakespearean line 'When that churl Death my bones with dust shall cover' (Sonnet, XXXII). Again, there is a reference to Shakespeare by name to suggest the great Elizabethan's imaginative power and range: Shakespearean fish swam the sea, far away from land' (CP. 271) This brief summary is capable of being enlarged to some extent but its substantial truth is not likely thereby to be altered. Yeats was, however, under the influence of a number of poets including the Pre-Raphaelites. As long as he stayed within their charmed circle, his individuality was hampered and his growth retarded. In letters and conversation Yeats often quoted the words, which he attributed to Aristotle: 'Think like a wise man but express yourself like the common people'. But he did not quite realize the standard before the publication of the 1910-volume. This work may, therefore, be taken as sharply dividing his early poetry from the later. But attainment of simplicity in expression was only one aspect of his twofold goal—the other was the attainment of complexity in vision. This latter maintained its growth to the end of his life. Dorothy Wellesley spoke of three major influences on his old age and of their significance in his attitude: 'Sex, Philosophy, and the Occult preoccupy him. He strangely intermingles the three'. (*Letters on Poetry from W. B.*

*Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*. London, Oxford University Press. 1964, p. 174). Sex symbolism is often seen in his poems but nowhere more significantly than in *Last Poems*, and especially in "The Wild Old Wicked Man." Philosophy in Dorothy Wellesley's statement is better interpreted as a personal view of life than any system of thought, and Occultism was a life-long preoccupation with him as the essay on "Magic" in the volume *Essays and Interpretations* makes evident.

Yet Sex, Philosophy, and the Occult will be a valid summary of the main elements in the poetry of Yeats. It will be good to hear T. S. Eliot on the subject. He quotes Yeats's poem "The Spur" (CP. 359) altering 'dance attention' to the regular form 'dance attendance':

> You think it horrible that just and rage
> Should dance attendance upon my old age;
> They were not such a plague when I was young;
> What else have I to spur me into song?

Eliot then goes on to say: 'These lines are very impressive and not very pleasant, and the sentiment has recently been criticized by an English critic whom I generally respect. But I think he misread them. I do not read them as a personal confession of a man different from other men, but of a man who was essentially the same as most other men; the only difference is in the greater clarity, honesty and vigour. To what honest man, old enough, can these sentiments be entirely alien? They can be subdued and disciplined by religion, but who can say that they are dead? Only those to whom the maxim of La Rochefoucauld applies: 'Quand les vices nous quittent, nous nous flattons de la créance que c'est nous qui les quittons'. The tragedy of Yeats's epigram is all in the last line' (*On Poetry and Poets*. 257-58). Here is excellent discrimination and a perfectly authentic comment based upon an understanding of human nature. As regards the interest in the Occult, Yeats was also not different from many poets. They sought to interpret the fundamental mystery and Yeats tried to explore it by means of a technique, not popular with the educated. The peculiarity about the whole business is that a man refused to be old at an age when he had no reason

to be young. Many were shocked by the anomaly but Yeats was merely exercising the privilege of a man of imagination. He was not only making poetry but re-shaping himself with endless energy:

> Grant me an old man's frenzy,
> Myself must I remake
> Till I am Timon and Lear
> Or that William Blake
> Who beat upon the wall
> Till Truth obeyed his call;
>
> A mind Michael Angelo knew
> That can pierce the clouds,
> Or inspired by frenzy
> Shake the dead in their shrouds;
> Forgotten else by mankind,
> And old man's eagle mind. (*Last Poems*. CP. 347)

By the study of words and phrases we can catch a glimpse of the way in which he moulded and re-moulded his medium. There is no reason to think as Eliot does that he used 'always the same medium and idiom'. His transforming dynamism is an element in his personality and outlook, which cannot be simply identified with the normal process of development. For on such an assumption a point is reached after which there is no further growing. But Yeat's growth did not stop; he never submitted to the power of decay. This is this spiritual history but he felt more than an usual anguish to see the ravages of old age in Maud and also partly in himself. His preoccupation with the Time-theme is connected with his great triumph on one plane and defeat on another, for the body's normal processes are incapable of being controlled in the same manner. It is likely that his interest in magic is not merely eccentric. It is central to his emotional and intellectual life in the sense that he needed power to tamper with Nature, needed it so that Maud's beauty could be preserved. The dream of unity, like all other dreams, is engineered by something within and not outside, and Yeats's nature did not possess any element whose presence could be regarded as inexplicable, as an aberration to which genius is said to be subject from time to time.

I shall examine two poems as a further evidence of the distance Yeats had travelled since his early period of production; the first example is taken from "The Lake Isle of Innisfree' (*The Rose.* 1893) and the second from "The Tower" (1928). "The Lake Isle" builds up a romantic atmosphere in which the poet wishes to live, far removed from the everyday world of reality:

> I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree
> And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made.

As against, his attitude that in "The Tower" shows the poet in full possession of reality:

> What shall I do with this absurdity—
> O heart, O troubled heart—this caricature,
> Decrepit age that has been tied to me
> As to a dog's tail?

What is seen here is not merely a change in attitude, not merely a power of irony and a new sense of objectivity but also a sharp, bitter language, which embodies it. This language is so different from the early style that it could easily be mistaken as work of another hand. What has happened is not a change but a transformation; the poet makes himself anew, his accents, his outlook, and the manner of delivering his sentiments.

Yeats himself saw that the mood and expression in "The Tower" sharply divided the work from all that he had written earlier. To Olivia Shakespeare he conveyed his comments in a letter, written on 25 April 1928 (Allan Wade: *The Letters of W. B. Yeats.* Macmillan. New York, 1955, p. 733); 'Rereading *The Tower* I was astonished at its bitterness, and long to live out of Ireland that I may find some new vintage. Yet that bitterness gave the book its power and it is the best book I have written'.

Yeats refers again at the end of the same year to the success of his "The Tower" in the Introduction to 'A Vision' but explains the cause as his contact with the supernatural. This happened on 'October 24th 1917, four days after my marriage',

and in 1925 he published the first edition of *A Vision* incorporating the strange experience. Yeats wrote :.....'Put *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair* into evidence to show that my poetry has gained in self-possession and power. I owe this change to an incredible experience' (*A Vision*. 1962, p. 8). The bitterness which astonished the poet according to his own statement and which had such overwhelming strength is allied to passion and the heroic view of life, as two quotations that follow will show. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley, dated the 6th of July 1935, Yeals wrote: " "Bitter and gay" that is the heroic mood.....The lasting expression of our time is not this obvious choice but in a sense of something steel-like and cold within the will, something passionate and cold'. Seen in this light the expression 'passionate as the dawn' used in "The Fisherman" (CP. 166) will appear more intelligible. The phrase has been discussed above and its meaning has been suggested to be the attribute of the idealized fisherman himself. In *Explorations* (Macmillan. London. 1962, p. 272) Yeats finds an Indian saying in accord with his attitude: "The passionate minded", says an Indian saying, "love bitter food".

What these scattered words reveal is a coherent pattern inspired by an inwardness of vision. It is remarkable that Yeats knew as a young man what lay at the end of the journey, and although the goal was still far off he could describe it to himself in a letter addressed to Katharine Tynan, written on 6 September 1888 (Allan Wade: *Letters*, *p.* 310): 'The literature and painting of our time, when they come out of a deep life, are labouring to awaken again our interest in the moral and spiritual realities which were once the foundation of the arts; and the theatre, if it would cease to be but the amusement of idleness, must cast off that interest in external and accidental things which has marred all modern arts, and dramatic art more than any'.

The question being discussed is so central to the analysis of the poetry that there is hardly any need to apologize if I go out of my way to explore the poet's boyhood memories recorded by him in his "Reveries over Childhood and Youth" because they form the solid basis on which the outlook of maturity is often built. The poet writes:' it was a Yeats who

spoke the only eulogy that turns my head. "We have ideas and no passions, but by marriage with a Pollexfen we have given tongue to the sea cliffs" '(*Autobiographies*, p. 23). The last poem containing the Poet's epitaph bears the title "Under Ben Bulben" and this indicates the trend of a life-time of pursuit rather than an accidental choice.

How far 'the sea cliffs' enter his poetry may be surmised by a few phrases to which I should like to draw attention. The first example is taken from "The Grey Rock":

> I have kept my faith, though faith was tried,
> To the rock-born rock-wandering foot (CP. 119).

The declaration of his poetic creed brings the idea of 'the sea cliffs' home to us; as a further indication of the fact, there is the expression: 'With the loud host before the sea' which comes only two lines after the verses quoted. 'Old Rocky Face' in "The Gyre" (CP. 337) is stated to have a special affection for 'The workman, noble and saint', the three classes of people on whom Yeats himself places his approval as worthy of notice in his imaginative world.

In the verse written "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" Yeats falls back on the rock metaphor to suggest what he considers most admirable in painting and poetry:

> We dreamed that a great painter had been born
> To cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn,
> To that stern colour and that delicate line
> That are our secret discipline (CP. 150).

In his famous "No Second Troy", the words 'high and solitary and most stern' are meant to describe a beauty 'not natural in an age like this' and a kind of tribute which could only be bestowed, for example, on one like 'the rock-nurtured Aoife'.

How important was the poet's mental association with rock and mountain can be seen from innumerable references. They exercised a shaping influence on his imagination and appear obliquely in such expressions as "arrogant loveliness' (CP. 201),

and more powerfully in the poet's mode of thinking: 'Because we love bare hills and stunted trees/And were the last to choose the settled ground' (CP. 385); or as in 'Because I am mad about women/I am mad about the hills' (CP. 356). Freudian explanations have been found for the last verses quoted above. If these explain the Wild Old Wicked Man, they do not help us to enter the poet's mind whose preoccupations with the Pollexfen strain in his blood carry us back to his childhood days.

It seems that Yeats tried to follow an austere discipline in seeking to translate the quality of the rock into his verses. As he did this, he achieved precision and clarity. The element of sex introduced a complexity in his attitude. Its first notable appearance belongs to the year1919 and the poem "On Woman" in which it occurs expresses an uninhibited manner, new to the poet:

> Count all the praises due
> When Sheba was his lass,
> When she the iron wrought, or
> When from the smithy fire
> It shuddered in the water (CP. 165).

In Yeats, therefore, a variety of forces cooperated in the production of maturity; their fusion continued to the end of the poet's life, producing ever new and more impressive modes. It is not true to declare that he crossed the point of maturity at a certain stage in his life yet it would be quite correct to hold that there is fullness of maturity with the publication of *Responsibilties* (1914). Mr. Rostrevor Hamilton in *The Tell-Tale Article* (London. Wm Heinemann, 1949) arrives at a conclusion which is similar to my own. He holds that an excess of the definite article in a considerable volume of poetry written in nineteen-thirties is a source of its structural weakness. As against this practice, Yeats's "An Acre of Grass" offers an example of strength, part of which comes no doubt from the meagre use of the definite article. Out of its 116 words, the definite article accounts only for five, the percentage being less than 5. Word-counts among modern writers, according to Hamilton's calculation, indicate that the definite article represents

10 per cent of a poem's total number of words. Hamilton's examination shows that Donne has less than 2 per cent of the definite article. "An Acre of Grass" does not represent Yeats's standard usage, which varies considerably from poem to poem. But 'I think it would not be difficult to establish by count that there is a break in practice from about 1914 (*Responsibilties*) and on so that in the *Last Poems* we have a linguistic texture almost as tightly knit as Donne's, although not comparable in tone' (Vivienne Koch. *W. B. Yeats. The Tragic Phase,* Routledge, London, 1951, P. 51).

Hamilton has examined Yeats from a point of view not very different from my own. My study of words also reveals a sharp break in the use of vocabulary seen in the attainment of a bareness of statement and proximity to speech habits as distinct from the literary language. The resort to the "poetic" in the selection of the vocabulary tended to interfere with the full exercise of creative powers. With the discarding of this, finalized somewhere about the year 1914, he could more confidently dedicate himself to 'the wasteful virtues'. From this moment one witnesses an invasion of his language by words which belong to argument and the discursive field rather than to the "poetic" style as, for example, 'exorbitant', 'commingling' (both on page 126), 'damp faggots', 'entire combustible world' (p. 151). Donne made a pair of compasses the means of a highly imaginative statement. Yeats in his maturity directed his creative powers to effect a similar transformation.

## V

In this section I shall examine two words: one of these 'mummy' makes a late appearance—in "The Tower" volume (1928) and disappears after the publication of "A Full Moon in March" (1935); the other 'gay' has a few earlier uses, being seen first in "The Rose" (1893) but its philosophic contrast with 'bitter' belongs to the "Last Poems" (1936-39). What is important to note is the philosophical implication of the term rather than its plain meaning, indicating a pleasurable sensation such as is suggested by the following phrases: 'old and gay' (CP. 43), 'gray exulting gentle race' (50), 'gay bells' (51) 'never

was piping so gay' (CP. 63). From this simple idea of pleasure, the later development seems a far cry. For 'gay' seems to imply an aesthetic reaction, while 'bitter' is the response to the impact of the external world. The two terms thus relate to different things and between them they indicate the poet's approach to art and life. The initial contrast is resolved in a synthesis in which 'bitter' as a heroic attribute becomes a subject of contemplation for the poet, whose gaiety enables him to maintain a proper aesthetic distance as interpreter of life and its visionary exponent. I shall refer to four examples in support of this view: 'poets that are always gay' (CP. 338), 'Hamlet and Lear are gay' (ibid.), 'those that build them again are gay' (339), 'Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay' (ibid.). The reference in all these phrases is to poets, sculptors, actors, or the audience. 'Gay' as a term describing emotion seems on the basis of these examples to be restricted to an aesthetic experience.

The word 'Mummy' offers more difficulty when it is sought to be analysed in relation to the poet's feeling and attitude. Initially, here is something disagreeable to reckon with. The image, if not the idea itself, is repugnant. Coleridge in his "On the Principles of Genial Criticism' (1814) offers useful guidance by his theory that the agreeable and disagreeable have little or nothing to do with our sense of the beautiful. Hazard Adams offers interesting comments on the view which I quote: 'Death is disagreeable, but it is the subject of much meditative verse. Injury and maiming, swearing and even obscenities occur in literary works of the highest merit and are often necessary to the whole.....I can appreciate the feelings of a lady I overheard in the Louvre, who, looking at a picture of John the Baptist's head on a platter ( a favourite subject of painters at one time in history), exclaimed: "I've been all over Europe, and I'm sick and tired of heads being dished up on plates!" Nevertheless, I for one prefer the heads on plates I have seen in the Louvre to the sentimental kittens that stare at me from every supermarket magazine counter' (*The Contexts of Poetry*. University Paperbacks 137, London, 1965, p. 3).

If Coleridge's position is acceptable, and no doubt the distinction made is highly sensible, no objection should be raised to the use of the term 'mummy'. The next question to ask is what

purpose does the poet make the word serve? Symbols for an unattractive exterior concealing great worth within are by no means rare. One of the most notable of these is the herb Moly, used by Homer. The O. E. D. explains the symbol and its history:

> a fabulous herb having a white flower and a black root, endowed with magic properties and said by Homer to have been given by Hermes to Odysseus as a charm aginst the sorceries of Circe.
>
> The Homeric moly is by some modern writers identified with the mandrake, but Theophrastus and Dioscorides apply the name to some species of garlic (Allium).

The black root is the element of repugnance, the white flower symbolizing grace and wisdom. The relationship thus suggested is not very different from that between Yeat's 'bitter' and 'gay'. The image of the mummy seems also to have a similar meaning. I shall proceed to examine the phrases into which the term enters to ascertain if the parallel suggested can reasonably be maintained or not.

The term 'mummy' first appears in a context where awakened memory gives rise to deep mental anguish:

> Yet I, being driven half insane
> Because of some green wing, gathered old mummy wheat
> In the mad abstract dark and ground it grain by grain
> And after baked it slowly in an oven.
> ("On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac," CP. 242).

The idea seems to be that of a raw wound hidden under dead incrustation. The picture of a Black Centaur on which the poem is a comment, brought everything back to him, and he lived over again the past, grain by grain, re-experiencing the anguish he had forgotten. The allusion, apparently, is to the anguish he had suffered through Maud Gonne's rejection of his love. 'Mummy' suggests a dead, dull surface, one, again, remote from all living interests and therefore, devoid of the power to please or attract. The last example which occurs belongs to the year 1935 ("A Full Moon in March"). Although

the phrase is identical in the two examples, the meaning in the following seems closer to the Homeric moly than to that of the example given above:

> If Jupiter and Saturn meet,
> What a crop of mummy wheat! (CP. 333).

This poem in four lines, forming the tenth of a series ("Supernatural Songs") is entitled *Conjunctions*. Although cryptically stated, the meaning seems to be that perennial wisdom with its strength unimpaired flows to us if the fleshly life is wedded to the spiritual. If Jupiter and Saturn are equated with modes of living and thinking, the meaning proposed may not seem arbitrary. Here 'mummy' seems to stand for a kind of wisdom and 'wheat' implies that it is not dead and sterile but is full of an active life. In this respect the expression recalls the Homeric moly.

In "All Souls" Night' (*The Tower*, 1928) the word occurs thrice; once in the sentence 'I have mummy truths to tell' (p. 259) and the other combinations are as follows:

> Can stay
> Wound in mind's pondering
> As mummies in mummy-cloth are wound (p. 256).

and

> I need no other thing,
> Wound in mind's wandering
> As mummies in mummy-cloth are wound (CP. 259).

'Mummy truths' are supernatural truths which include a reference to 'the whole/Immense miraculous house/The Bible promised us,/It seemed a gold-fish swimming in a bowl' (CP. 257); again, 'mummies in mummy-cloth' are likened to mind's pondering or as in the second instance, to mind's wandering. Mummy-cloths are bandages comprising strips of linen for the body, fingers and toes being wrapped separately in these. How can the mind, whether wandering or pondering, have anything

like this cloth to wear? The poet wants a mind which can stay even when the world roars with the noise of cannon as undisturbed as 'mummies in mummy-cloth'. Thus the mind in its self-subsisting wisdom must create a world for itself where it can dwell in peace. The 'mummy-cloth' in "Byzantium" is an evocation of the dead to provide him with an escort for his descent to Hell and Purgatory. The superhuman being will accompany him to the Hades like a Virgil guiding the steps of Dante through the regions of the Dead. In all the examples the reference to 'mummy' suggests elements of wisdom with a repugnant exterior. Seen from this point of view, the idea of the mummy can be linked to the moly-image in Homer.

The two terms 'gay' and 'bitter' seem after this survey highly significant mile-posts in the maturing art of Yeats, and we can see in them not only two opposite poles of experience but also the material and the technique for the achievement of a unity of vision.

## CONCLUSION

After the lengthy survey made above, a few concluding remarks may be useful in rounding off the argument. The individual words and phrases which have been examined bring out certain qualities of thought, sometimes they indicate an attitude of mind. One or two like 'bitter' and 'gay' have even a deeper significance in so far as they provide a glimpse of a central element in the poet's spiritual vision. A few striking expressions in the poems may now be considered as an attempt to discover whether they are in accord with the picture of the poet's maturity and technique already given. The method to be followed will offer a fresh opportunity to test the soundness of the view presented.

The expressions I shall choose represent the poet's characteristic mode of utterance; they reveal a style which is entirely individual and give a sense of the mature work, which fully utilized the resources of the language:

> Because I have come into my strength,
> And words obey my call ("Words", CP. 101).

The above lines are taken from *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910) but what is most admirable in Yeats is usually found in the later volumes. I shall select a few verses from *The Tower* (1928):

> Until imagination, ear and eye,
> Can be content with argument and deal
> In abstract things; or be derided by
> A sort of battered kettle at the heel (CP. 219).

The two concluding lines mark a great bitterness of spirit, and the image of 'battered kettle' is as apposite as the pair of the compasses in Donne's poem. In "A Prayer For My Daughter" (1921), there is something like a first draft for the expression, although its beauty and effectiveness are hardly less admirable:

> 'an old bellows full of angry wind' (CP. 213).

And unpleasant noise is condemned and at the same time elevated in a pattern where to contemplate it is a source of pleasure. The following quotation comes from the *Last Poems*:

> Now that my ladder's gone,
> I must lie down where all the ladders start,
> In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart (CP. 392).

The image of 'the foul rag-and-bone shop' combines Freudian psychology with an intense bitterness of spirit. He has spoken more of the filth and mire of the human world than any other poet of comparable stature yet if the choice is given, he will live in it rather than seek something higher at the soul's bidding:

> I am content to live it all again
> And yet again, if it be life to pitch
> Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
> A blind man battering blind men;
> Or into the most fecund ditch of all,
> The folly that man does

Or must suffer, if he woos
A proud woman not kindred of his soul.
(CP. 267)

Sex, as we have said before plays an important role in the Yeatsian world. In his early poetry, its presence is hardly felt; it is suffocated by a youthful idealization. In the 1914-volume he came out with a declaration that he would shun adornment and eschew all forms of writing which tend to conceal the starkness of reality:

For there's more enterprise
In walking naked (CP. 142).

And starkness cannot go farther than what these verses state:

But love has pitched l is mansion in
The place of excrement;
For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent (CP. 295).

One of the most significant influences on Yeats was the philosophy of Empedocles according to which alternate world cycles give predominance either to Love as a force unifying unlikes or to Strife dividing and joining like to like. This cosmic view explains the meaning of the following verses from "The Gyres", which opens the volume of the *Last Poems*:

Things thought too long can be no longer thought,
For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
And ancient lineaments are blotted out (CP. 337).

The World Cycle in which Strife is supreme unites beauty with beauty, worth with worth but when its power is replaced by that of Love, unlikes will enter into union. Among the 'unlikes' in Yeats Poetry, love and the place of excrement will form a contrasting pair. Their opposition, that between the noble and the ignoble, is resolved as it cannot be resolved by lust, in which case two ignoble elements enter into combination as they may do when Strife is in the ascendant.

The effect of unlikes being unified is bitter, such union is preceded by a period of hostility, by Strife, according to the philosophy of Empedocles. Yeats as exponent of the 'bitter' element is very close to this philosophy, and we can explain with its help at the same time some of the things seen in his love poetry. The union of opposites is fully suggested by the two verses already cited:

> For nothing can be sole or whole
> That has not been rent. *

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* As I had no opportunity to refer to the Yeats concordance, which I understand has been produced by an American scholar, I had to depend on my own reading for ascertaining the use of particular words and phrases by Yeats on a chronological basis. It is likely that on occasions I may have committed inaccuracies as regards the appearances and disappearances of words. But an oversight about such details, I am confident, will not falsify the picture I have endeavoured to present.


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