"High Talk":
A Discussion of W.B. Yeats's Aesthetic Stance as Focused in his *New Poems* and *Last Poems*.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the academic requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

1996

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Colin Gardner, for his shrewd advice, for his warm encouragement and crisp criticism, and for his long-tried patience.

I must also thank the many teachers, friends, colleagues and students whose conversation and advice have helped over the years to form my views on Yeats. These must include Miss Betty Paterson, Mr Francois Hugo, Mr John van Wyngaard, Mr Glenn Lawson and Mr Bill Bizley (University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg); Mr Jim Phelps (University of Zululand); and - to a great degree - Mr Cathal Lagan, Mr Brian Walter and Mr Garth Green (University of Fort Hare). Each sitting of Fort Hare English III students since 1983 has also added its own distinct seasoning to the brew.

My friend Brian Walter also taught me most of what I know about word-processing: anyone who has produced a sizeable academic document will know what that has meant.

I am also grateful for the Frank Connock scholarship that gave me the wherewithal to start my research, and to my wife Gill for her support while I was writing it all up.

A Note on the Edition of Yeats's Poems Used in this Thesis.

For sake of convenience, the Macmillan *Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, second edition (1950),[1] is used for reference in this thesis, even though the advent of the revised (American) edition of 1983, edited by Richard J. Finneran, (U.K. 1991) has set the convention of breaking the so-called *Last Poems* (1936 - 1939) of the 1950 edition - that followed the format of the Macmillan *Last Poems and Plays* of 1940 - into *New Poems* (1938), and *Last Poems* (1938 - 39).

Finneran's break with the 1950 Macmillan format is based upon Curtis Bradford's objection[2] - in "Yeats's *Last Poems* Again", *VIII, Dolmen Press Centenary Papers* (1965) - that

> the heading *Last Poems* can be properly applied only to those poems Yeats wrote or finished in the last year of his life.

Bradford went on to indicate the order of these *Last Poems* as found in Yeats's own manuscript - and as reflected in the 1939 Cuala Press *Last Poems and Two Plays* - and Finneran has followed the Bradford/Cuala Press model. But - as Jeffares

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[1] Timothy Webb speaks of "the appearance of *Collected Poems* in 1949" and later of "The *Collected Poems* of 1949" (see *W.B. Yeats Selected Poetry*, pg xli) but the 1978 Macmillan reprint from which I have most recently worked refers to the "Second Edition, with later poems added 1950" as the basis for this reprint, with no reference to any edition before that of 1950 except the original *Collected Poems* of 1933. It is also to the "2nd ed., with later poems added, 1950" to which Jeffares refers in the first edition of his *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*: see pg ix.

[2] Noted in Jeffares's prefatory remarks to the *Last Poems*, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg 435

points out[3] - this version leaves out three of the poems that Yeats himself included in *On the Boiler*, poems that appear in both the 1940 Macmillan *Last Poems and Plays* and the 1950 Macmillan *Collected Poems*. In the Finneran edition, "Crazy Jane on the Mountain", "Why should not old Men be Mad?" and "The Statesman's Holiday" are simply not reproduced - even though their presence in the 1940 *Last Poems and Plays* reflects a decision made by Yeats's widow and not just by his publishers.[4]

Which constitutes a practical problem for me: as will be seen below, one of these vanished poems gave me the title and something of the focus for one of my chapters; the idiom of another clinches the very last paragraph of the last chapter; and two of the three come in for discussion more than once. I have, therefore, made reference in this thesis to a widely available edition of the *Collected Poems* that actually contains these poems.[5] When I refer below to the *Collected Poems* I therefore mean the Macmillan second edition of 1950 or reprints thereof.[6]

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[3] *Ibid.* pg 453.

[4] See Timothy Webb, *W.B. Yeats Selected Poetry*, pg xli.

[5] The Macmillan *Yeats's Poems*, edited by A. Norman Jeffares, has all three of the poems from *On the Boiler* as a unit in themselves, and follows the Bradford/ Cuala press model in dealing with the arrangement of *New Poems* and *Last Poems*; but it is not an edition I have seen on many shelves.

[6] Though "Why should not old Men be Mad?" can be found in what is printed from "On the Boiler" in *Explorations* (pp 407 - 8) - as can "The Statesman's Holiday" (pp 452 - 53) - "Crazy Jane on the Mountain" does not find its way into this selection at all.

Webb tackles the problem by taking the course of "several of Yeats's most recent editors" in "acknowledging the

And, given this logistical problem, it is less confusing for me also to abide by the divisions and nomenclature found in the Macmillan second edition; so in what follows, *Last Poems* means what it does in this edition, and the term thus covers the *New Poems* and the *Last Poems* of the Bradford/ Finneran/Cuala Press format, with the three missing poems from *On the Boiler* added - though the title of this thesis follows Finneran's nomenclature so that the up-to-date reader may not be misled at the outset as to its scope.

This practice doesn't indicate any objection to the scholarly claims of the Bradord format, it is simply a matter of convenience; and I take heart in my eccentricity from Webb's opening his "Note on the Text" by saying "The order of *Last Poems* is controversial and must remain problematic".[7] If the order is these things, how much more so is the actual content?

The one abbreviation of the title of a book that is used in the text and notes to this thesis is *C.P.* for *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Macmillan, 1950: even where texts are used repeatedly, I feel that the many notes I have had to supply to each chapter are themselves a heavy enough claim on my reader's patience, without also expecting him to remember codes or to refer to an index.

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existence" of the poems from *On the Boiler* as a separate volume (see *W.B Yeats Selected Poetry* pg xli); but even his edition doesn't include "The Statesman's Holiday".

[7] See *ibid.* pg xli.

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to discuss a rather obvious aspect of Yeats's thought from what is - hopefully - a fresh angle.

It will be clear to anyone who knows Yeats's work that a good deal of what he has to say, in verse and in prose, has to do with his view of what art is, and of how art best serves humanity, its inventor - and its invention.

It will also be obvious that Yeats held views in these regards that were at odds with a good deal of contemporary artistic practice. Even from the very beginning of his public utterances, Yeats held views on art and its social functions that were quite clear on one central point: that the most humanly-serviceable art, by its very nature, tends to stand in a special sort of tension to life - to whatever set of assumptions and existential frameworks are generally current among its maker's immediate fellows. As he says, for instance, in "Private Thoughts", from *On the Boiler* - re-stating convictions held since his youth:

> Just when some school of painting has become popular, reproductions in every print-shop window, millionaires outbidding one another, everybody's affection stirred, painters wear out their nerves establishing something else, and this something else must be from the other side of the penny - for Heraclitus was in the right. Opposites are everywhere face to face, dying each other's life, living each other's death.[1]

This comes from the end of the work, from "the big essay" Yeats spoke of in February 1938 as being now "finished";[2] but even the recollections he offers in *Autobiographies* of his earliest thought about how art in recent centuries had fallen into decline as Europe's "mind and heart" had broken "into fragments"[3] record the growing suspicion that he must "reverse the cinematograph" of this process of "abstraction"; and certainly even then he "thought the general movement of literature must be such a reversal".[4]

What this thesis proposes to do then, is not so much to simply state the obvious - though the first chapter will have to make its groundwork of perspectives on Yeats's poetic convictions (what could be called his aesthetic stance) at least workably clear - but to try to examine some of the elements within his experience and his thinking that could be said to have contributed in some vital way to the vision of the function of art that his verse and prose, throughout his literary life, consistently articulate and evolve. Once this poetic or aesthetic stance has been in some measure indicated in the first chapter, the remainder of the thesis will try to suggest at least something of the complex matrix of influences and convictions that could be thought to have shaped or tinctured or at least confirmed the conception of art and its duties that Yeats held-to, at root, all his life.

The success or failure of the undertaking obviously hangs on the coherence of the ensuing discourse; but one basic

assumption that this thesis will consistently make needs to be acknowledged and defended right at the outset.

The assumption to which I refer is that it is possible - with due caution - to talk about Yeats's convictions about a subject so central to his concerns as art and its relationship with life as being a true continuum. The argument of this discussion will have to do many of the sorts of time-warps across Yeats's literary constellation that would cause, I'm sure, grievous problems to a biographical literalist like Keith Sagar, for one.[5] There will be juxtapositions made between utterances in verse or in prose that are sometimes separated by years of actual living.

I believe this to be a valid procedure, however, for a number of reasons. Though Yeats had so lively a sense of history as a chartable progression that he was able to offer an almost exact dating of a newly found Greek sculpture, from a mere photograph;[6] and though it was he who said that "Things thought too long can be no longer thought"[7] - and who spoke of the way in which a "counter-truth" must "fill out its play" in response even to a position that was deeply held[8] - we must remember that he also laboured, from his mid-twenties at least, to "hammer (his) thoughts into unity";[9] and we should remember here too the conviction expressed in *The Trembling of the Veil*, from his fifty-seventh year, that

> I am persuaded that our intellects at twenty contain all the truths we shall ever find, but as yet we do not know truths that belong to us from opinions caught up in casual irritation

or momentary fantasy.[10]

And as he said in a poem, growing older was for him a "wither(ing) into the truth"[11] - a settling into an essential pattern that had lain under all flourishment of earlier experience all along.

There is, in other words, a remarkable unity - a feeling of organic growth linking the phases of Yeats's thought - that is like the cropping of twigs and leaves upon a single bough, for all the great distance the reverie of his life took him in its development.[12]

There could be many instances given of the continuities that underlie Yeats's thought, early and late, in support of my contention; the one that comes most powerfully to my own mind is the almost eerie way in which one of the first of the poems that Yeats published is so startingly implicit still in the very last poem he wrote: and the track connecting the two goes by way of one of the great statements about art and life of the middle of the way, as well. All of these poems - early, middle and late - are discussed in more detail in various places below; but it would be valuable right now to focus briefly on the organic connectedness of central poetic strategy (even of theme) that weaves together "The Song of the Happy Shepherd",[13] "The Fisherman"[14] and "The Black Tower".[15]

These are obviously very different poems in many ways; but if we consider how Yeats responds to his challenges in

each of them, then there are fascinating and important connections at work. In the early poem - once Yeats has explored his quarrel with the "sick(ness)" of a modern world that is lost in the "dreary dancing" of a rationalist and mechanist conception of "Truth" that has marred its imagination and feeling - then he turns from that "world/... of many changing things" in the need to "please/... With mirthful songs" the vanished spirit of the place, now "Buried under the sleepy ground" of rationalist insentience:

> I must be gone: there is a grave
> Where daffodil and lily wave,
> And I would please the hapless faun,
> Buried under the sleepy ground,
> With mirthful songs before the dawn.
> His shouting days with mirth were crowned;
> And still I dream he treads the lawn,
> Walking ghostly in the dew,
> Pierced by my glad singing through,
> My songs of old earth's dreamy youth.[16]

So the dramatic pattern at work in this poem involves an evocation of the human scene within which the young man finds himself set; an analysis of its spiritual ills; and then the constructing of an imaginative embodiment of just those realities that the process that has created these spiritual ills has most damagingly ignored.

If we keep this pattern in mind, and turn to "The Fisherman", written nearly thirty years later, we find Yeats again evoking a distressful human scene - this time, the spiritual anarchy of Dublin, the "blind and ignorant town"[17] that had so often disappointed him.[18] And once the "reality of this scene - its values and its conduct - has been evoked, it

is set in sharp and defining contrast to a figure "who is but a dream"; who is in a world apart from all that Dublin has come to stand for, and who therefore creates a vivid sense of what the town lacks spiritually - just as "the hapless faun" who is buried under the pragmatical forgetfulness of the "sick children" of "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" also sums up in himself what their rationalist "world" so sadly lacks.

So the fisherman is surely an evolved form, in Yeats's imaginative repertoire, of the "hapless faun": something still real somewhere in the reaches of the soul, but generally forgotten amongst the living; and the instinct that makes him set the fisherman over in such dramatic tension against the "reality" of Dublin's present mood is surely a more mature version of the way in which in "The Song" he gives his final focus to the faun as another pole of human reality that is urgently in need of disinterment[19] from the oblivion of what he sees as a modern unimaginativeness and heartlessness.

And if we approach "The Black Tower" with this faun/fisherman motif in mind, we find this last poem of all enriched with echoes of one of the earliest - and of the great announcement of poetic focus and intention that "The Fisherman" crystallises for the mature man, as well. In "The Black Tower", the situation that Yeats addresses is the plight of a group of "oath-bound" men, garrison of a keep being held still in the name of a long-vanished and mysterious king, who has apparently been "forgotten" by all except themselves. The

poem takes the form of their spokesman's challenge to those that come to try "to bribe or threaten" the garrison's loyalty; it expresses both their tenacious faith in their vanished leader's continued existence and their certainty that there is vital human meaning to their resistance to his being just "Buried under ground" in general forgetfulness. Once again, as in the two other poems we are considering, there is a pattern in which values of profound importance to some are seen to have lapsed out of the common mind: values which are then articulated and affirmed as a challenge to this forgetfulness - a forgetfulness of what the persona in each poem considers to be some reality greatly significant to the human spirit - that is seen to rule the day.

But "The Black Tower" has its share in the faun/fisherman pattern, too: at the end, the spokesman for the garrison mentions "The tower's old cook that must climb and clamber/ Catching small birds in the dew of the dawn" to feed the "hale men". The cook "Swears he hears the king's great horn" out there while the others "lie stretched in slumber" - and is dismissed by the soldiers as "a lying hound", while they stick to their posts, and deny any chance that the truth they are committed to defend might be calling to them in a new, unexpected voice from a quarter they never dreamt could bear such significance.[20]

This poem is discussed from this angle more fully below; but we are left with what seems to be a sort of fable about

how truth always embodies itself anew, and about how easy it is to miss its annunciation out of very certainty that one knows what to expect. And, if we take the old cook within the tale - spry and limber about the dewy dawn of the hills - he seems to be the fisherman again in yet another incarnation of the faun;[21] who also is of "the dawn", "Walking ghostly in the dew" as ancestor to the beautifully Zen "old cook" of "The Black Tower".[22] It is a moving thought to realise that the dream Yeats had of writing his fisherman "maybe" even just "one/ Poem" as crisply real as the world that "This wise and simple man" epitomises[23] could be so clear and alive in the last poem that he wrote, just a week from the end. The last try of them all was in a sense written for his fisherman - who carries within his meaning seeds first set by a very young man.[24]

Which is a consideration which certainly adds weight to my feeling that we can - and must - think of Yeats's work in terms of its profound continuities and organic integrities. Even where we find signs of changes in outlook on some issue important to him, there is the same sense of continuities at work within the change[25] - as in his attraction to, and subsequent rejection of, William Morris's Socialism. If we follow the account given of this phase in *The Trembling of the Veil*, the reason Yeats gives for his time of belief - apart from the magnetism of Morris's character in itself - was never a matter of mere "economics", which he says he "did not read", but because "Morris's lectures and pamphlets" appealed to what

he calls

> That old dogma of mine ... That if men and women imagined by the poets were the norm, and if Morris had, in let us say "News from Nowhere" ... described such men and women, living under their natural conditions, or as they would desire to live, then those conditions themselves must be the norm and could we but get rid of certain institutions the world would turn from eccentricity.[26]

In other words, the Socialism that he for a while espoused was simply an extension of a "dogma" about the influence of poetry upon society that was already "old" in his thought at the time; and it was the same "dogma" that endured so as to energise, for example, the call upon Irish artists to set the "norm" of "other days" of a more passionate human quality before modern eyes that emerges as the key theme to "Under Ben Bulben", near the end of his life.[27] And when Yeats then explores "why I gave (Socialism) up", what he can remember of his reasons are epitomised by a certain "young workman" whose

> ideas about religion were pure Karl Marx ... gradually the attitude towards religion of almost everybody but Morris ... got upon my nerves ... They attacked religion ... and yet there must be a change of heart and only religion could make it. [28]

And this is surely an indication of the action of a youthful form of another "dogma" that threads-through Yeats's thought, and that makes up the central pattern of a poem amongst the *Last Poems* like "The Statues", for instance, where Phidias's "norm"-setting images "put down" all the power of the "Asiatic" thought of "vague immensities" in the European mind, and set that mind on a profoundly changed course; and where the imaginative susceptibility that makes possible such change

after the pattern of a newly-revealed spiritual truth is referred to in terms of an inborn belonging to an "ancient sect".[29] Again, "only religion" of a profound sort "could make" "a change of heart" and mind of such an order possible. Yeats was, in other words, led into Socialism by an abiding conviction of his own, and led out of it by another, its close kin; and his being led to where he "gave it up" as a social faith is testimony more to the consistency of his most radical convictions, than to a changeability in himself. Socialism ultimately failed the test of Yeats's abiding vision of things, and he moved on accordingly.

We can see the same pattern of an earlier belief gathering to itself experiences and thoughts from new fields in the account Yeats gives of the engagement he at last made with the London Theosophists, because he had "heard that Madame Blavatsky had arrived from France, or from India, (and he) thought it time to look the matter up".[30] As the formulation implies, he had been aware of the Theosophical Society, as a potential source of confirmation of some central intuitions, for some time: as he says a few lines before this,

> Already in Dublin, I had been attracted to the Theosophists because they had affirmed the real existence of the Jew, or of his like, and ... I saw nothing against his reality[31]

- "the Jew" to whom he here refers being "The Jew" or "Ahasuerus", the great "sage" of the passage from Shelley that Yeats quotes at length in Section XVIII of *The Trembling of the Veil*.[32] As the account continues - after much detail about Madam Blavatsky and about other personages has been

given - Yeats says "Meanwhile I had got no nearer to proving that the sage Ahasuerus 'dwells in a sea cavern 'mid the Demonesi'"[33] - and the sequencing of the narrative at this point quickly leads to the famous experiments he initiated within the Esoteric Section of the Society as a result of which he was asked to resign.[34] Whatever he might have gained from the experience of his engagement with Theosophy, in other words, was a testing and an adding-to a path he was already on when he went to "look the matter up" once the principal figure in the movement was to hand; and the abiding search to find real proof "that the sage Ahasuerus" was no idle poetic fancy is surely one of the elements involved in even the engagement in late old age with Shri Purohit Swami on the translations of the principal Upanishads and *The Aphorisms of Yoga*.[35] Certainly, the account given of the Swami's immersion in the traditional wisdom of his faith in essays like those in *Essays and Introductions* called "An Indian Monk", "The Holy Mountain" and "The Mandukya Upanishad"[36] reflect concerns that bud on the old stem of what the youthful Yeats found in Shelley[37] - a fact indicated again by Yeats's thoughts running on Shelley and his central influence upon himself and his generation just months before he wrote "An Indian Monk".[38]

But, however that may be, the structure of this thesis will then take the form of an initial chapter that attempts to give some grounding to the perspectives I maintain that Yeats held on life and on its service by art; chapters will then follow on what seem to be major threads in the weave of

conditions that pattern this perspective of Yeats's; and a final chapter will address the exact nature of Yeats's idealism - in some ways the implicit theme of the entire discussion - so as to try to redress any imbalances of impression created by the necessities of presenting a selective argument concerning a single (though manifold) aspect of a highly-complex person's engagement with the mysteries of being and of becoming.

Notes To Introduction

1. See *Explorations*, pg 430.

2. See the letter of the 21st February to Edith Shackleton Heald in Allan Wade's *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 905, and Hone's reference on pp 455 - 6 of *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939*.

3. See "Four Years: 1887 - 1891" in *Autobiographies*, pg 237.

4. *See Autobiographies*, pg 239:

> If abstraction had reached, or all but reached its climax, escape might be possible for many, and, if it had not, individual men might still escape. If Chaucer's personages had disengaged themselves from Chaucer's crowd, forgot their common goal and shrine, and after sundry magnifications become each in turn the centre of some Elizabethan play, and had after split into their elements and so given birth to romantic poetry, must I reverse the cinematograph? I thought that the general movement of literature must be such a reversal.

This formulation is part of a conception of the arts that began from a sense that there had been ages

> where poet and artist confined themselves gladly to some inherited subject-matter known to the whole people, for I thought that in man and race alike there is something called "Unity of Being" (*ibid.* pp 235 - 36).

Yeats's attempts to "reverse the cinematograph" of cultural and personal fragmentation were a recognition of special circumstances to modern art that did not perhaps pertain to the same degree to that of an age such as - say - the Homeric. But the general nature of the comments from *On the Boiler* quoted above confirms the sense gained from a poem like "The Statues" (*C.P.* pg 375 - 76) that even a Phidias must quizz his own immediate audience's expectations about art so as to extend and enrich them with new insight. As Yeats acknowledges in "The Gyres" (*C.P.* pg 337),

> Things thought too long can be no longer thought
> For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
> And ancient lineaments are blotted out

and the artist must always serve that need for new embodiments of "beauty" and of "worth" that Yeats is sure is always yeasting within the current imaginative idiom.

5. I have in mind here Sagar's rather idiosyncratic refusal - as an editor - to let Lawrence get away with revising poems for the *Collected Poems* of 1928: see the Introduction to his *D.H. Lawrence Selected Poetry*, pg 12, where he says:

> It seems to me much more important that we should have what the young man actually wrote at twenty-two than what Lawrence at forty-two (a much better poet, but a different man with a different demon) thought he should have written.

Sagar's assumption that Lawrence was so "different (a) man" - twenty years after he wrote his early poems - that he was not to be trusted to revise them with proper respect for the young man's intentions seems to be based on the presumption that the transit of years between composition and revision *must* have been years in which the older man had necessarily become incapable of being in accord with the spirit of what the youngster was trying to say.

But if we look at the bit from Lawrence's introductory note to the *Collected Poems of 1928* to which Sagar refers in justifying this assumption, what we find Lawrence saying is that

> many of the poems ... are a good deal rewritten They were struggling to say something which it takes a man twenty years to be able to say ... A young man is afraid of his demon and puts his hand over the demon's mouth sometimes and speaks for him. And the things the young man says are very rarely poetry. So I have tried to let the demon have his say, and to remove the passages where the young man intruded (*ibid*. See also Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts, eds., *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. 1, pg 28.)

So Lawrence himself felt that his rewriting was an act of piety towards a youngster whose glimpses had laid a basis for what he as a man older by all of the twenty years Sagar cites could at last understand of what "the man at twenty-two" could not then deal with. Any consideration of the sense of the continuities within his own taken path as poet that Lawrence's comment reflects is likely to find that the notion that Sagar has that chronology is the same thing as time is questionable. Blake says in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that "The hours of folly are measured by the clock: but of wisdom, no clock can measure" (see Keynes, *Blake Complete Writings*, pg 151 plate 7, line 12); and what Lawrence is talking about in telling why he has been moved to amend the young man's poems has a good deal to do with the same tension between the levels of being that Blake indicates between what he calls "wisdom" and "folly". The "demon" Lawrence is talking about would amount to being the "wisdom" that "The hours of folly" - or of mechanistic biography - can find no way to "measure".

6. For the anecdote, see Hone, *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939*, pg 332.

7. "The Gyres", *C.P.* pg 337.

8. See "The Circus Animals' Desertion", *C.P.* pg 390.

9. See the essay called "If I were Four-and-Twenty", which begins,

> One day when I was twenty-three or twenty-four this sentence seemed to form in my head, without my willing it, much as sentences form when we are half-asleep: 'Hammer your thoughts into unity'. For days I could think of nothing else, and for years I tested all I did by that sentence

(*Explorations*, pg 263)
- which contains its own image of the sort of tenacity with which certain key notions could take consistent centre stage in Yeats's mind. The view cast back from old age in "What Then?" certainly gives the same sense of an organic unity working within the patterning of Yeats's thought and deeds:

> "The work is done," grown old he thought, '
> "According to my boyish plan;
> Let the fools rage, I swerved in nought,
> Something to perfection brought"
> (*C.P.* pg 348)

- and the mocking voice of the poem's refrain is unchanged from what it had been at every step of the way: it is simply "louder" than ever before, the key habit of mind merely more vividly itself at the end than it was at the start.

We could also recall Yeats's saying how Henley

> never understood how small a fragment of our own nature can be brought to perfect expression, nor that even but with great toil, in a much divided civilisation (*Autobiographies*, pg 364),

which itself captures clearly the sense he had of his work as being a labour to slowly build key elements within himself into something "perfect" - into an organic entity within the divisions of self his "civilisation" imposed upon him. (His criticism of Todhunter - despite "certain excellent verses" - was that "with him every book was a new planting, and not a new bud on an old bough" [*ibid*. pg 144] which by contrast highlights Yeats's own struggle for an organic unity of thought.)

10. See *Autobiographies*, pg 234.

There is also the reflection, at the end of his *Reveries* over his time at the art schools of Kildare Street, that

> I had as many ideas as I have now, only I did not know how to choose from among them those that belonged to my life (*ibid*, pg 102);

and the learning "how to choose" the ideas that really "belonged to (his) life" formed a deliberate and central thread in Yeats's intellectual life - a thread which gives an extraordinary integrity to the thoughts that traced that life's development from youth to old age.

In the mature conviction that he expresses, for instance, that we live our lives backwards after death, towards a childlike innocence once again (see "The Fool by the Roadside", *C.P.pg 247*), there is surely at least an echo of the "fable" that inspired the youthful "long play" he describes himself as writing in Section XVIII of the *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth*:

> A king's daughter loves a god seen in the luminous sky above her garden in childhood, and to be worthy of him and put away mortality, becomes without pity and commits crimes, and at last, having made her way to the throne by murder, awaits his coming among her courtiers. One by one they become chilly and drop dead, for unseen by all but her, her god is in the hall. At last he

is at her throne's foot and she, her mind in the garden once again, dies babbling like a child (*Autobiographies*, pp 91 - 2).

The courtiers who "One by one become chilly and drop dead" like the flowers of the garden of the mortal present give way to "the garden" of childhood once again - which surely has at least the main outlines of Yeats's mature myth of the soul's journey after death, an intuitive sketch the years perhaps filled into full detail. (As Yeats said of the development of another realisation to articulate form, "This thought before it could be knowledge was an instinct": see *Autobiographies*, pg 107.)

11. See "The Coming of Wisdom with Time", *C.P.* pg 105.

12. It's worth recalling Yeats's refutation of Hegel, saying that "When the spring vegetables are over they have not been refuted, nor have they suffered in honour or in reputation" (note to pp 429 - 30, *Explorations*) - which is an attitude that again clearly indicates the notion of time as possessing a sort of evolving unity that characterises his sense of personal history as well. Even the ability to see his earlier selves at times with a touch of the satirical to the view - as when he talks of himself at seventeen as being

> already an old-fashioned brass cannon full of shot, and nothing had kept me from going off but a doubt as to my capacity to shoot straight (*Autobiographies*, pg 143)

- is sign of a humorous owning of those selves in their own validity, an atonement within an integral self of past and present attitudes.

We should also note that part of that "shot" filling the "cannon" was his "dogma" that because

> those imaginary people (of art) are created out of the deepest instinct of man, to be his measure and his norm, whatever I can imagine those mouths speaking may be the nearest I can go to truth (*ibid.*)

- which is a formulation from early youth that looks surely forward to the convictions about imaginative art expressed in old age in a poem like "The Statues" (*C.P.* pg 375) - with its repeated sense of the "measurement" that art applies to life - and in "Under Ben Bulben", in its certainty that "Measurement began our might" (*Section IV*, C.P. pg 399). The youthful notion about "truth" here expressed also goes hand in glove with the conviction that "Man can embody truth, but he cannot know it" that Yeats expressed in fragment of one of the last letters, that Hone notes on pg 476 of *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939* (see also Wade: *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* pg 922.)

Yeats says, in an essay from his thirtieth year on George Russell,

> Nor would A.E. be angry with one who turned away from his ideas, for he himself knows well that all ideas fade or change in passing from one mind to another, and that what we call "truth" is but one of our illusions, as a

> perishing embodiment of a bodiless essence (John P. Frayne, ed., *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, vol. 1, pg 338);

but while "ideas fade or change in passing from one mind to another", they obviously didn't necessarily "fade" in the same way, just because of passing down the years within the polis of Yeats's own mind.

13. *C.P.* pp 7 - 8.

14. See *C.P.* pp 166 - 67.

15. See *C.P.* pp 7 - 8; 166- 67; and 396 - 97 respectively.

16. See *C.P.* pg 8.

17. The epithet comes from "To a Wealthy Man who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it Were Proved the People Wanted Pictures", *C.P.* pp 119 - 20. (There is surely also an echo of the "blind bitter land" Yeats saw himself as struggling to serve in "Words", *C.P.* pp 100 - 101.)

18. Apart from the issue of the hounding-down of Parnell - for which, see poems such as "To a Shade" (*C.P.* pg 123) and "Come Gather round me, Parnellites" (*C.P.* pg 355) - and that of the Hugh Lane controversy - see again "To a Shade", as well as "Paudeen" (*C.P.* pg 122), "September, 1913" (*C.P. 120*), "To a Friend whose Work has come to Nothing" (*C.P.* pg 122) and "To a Wealthy Man..." (*C.P.* pg 119) - there had also been the furore over John Synge's plays to add to the anger: see "On those that hated 'The Playboy of the Wester World',1907" (*C.P.* pg 124), "At the Abbey Theatre" (*C.P.* pg 107) and the lines about his father in "Beautiful Lofty Things" (*C.P.* pg 348).

19. See "The Gyres", *C.P.* pg 337, where those in whom the creative impulse is fully awake shall "disinter" - from the "rich, dark nothing" of things lapsed out of the forefront of the mind - the imaginative materials from which a "greater, more gracious time" than the fragmented present will be made.

20. There is an irony within such a reading of "The Black Tower", in other words, that has a family resemblance to that contained in the "Christian heresy" that Wilde once recounted to Yeats in London, in which

> Christ recovered after the Crucifixion, and escaping from the tomb, lived on for many years, the one man upon earth who knew the falsehood of Christianity. Once St Paul visited his town and he alone in the carpenter's quarter did not go to hear him (*Autobiographies*, pp 168 - 69).

Whatever Wilde himself may have found in the story, the notion of the real truth staying hidden while a Saint innocently preaches a "falsehood" in another quarter of the town has a shape to it tantalisingly like that of the mistaken certainties of the "oath-bound" men of the Black Tower as to

the quarter from which they themselves might expect the truth that *they* serve to finally announce itself.

21. It will be obvious from what I say that I am far from being in accord with F.A.C. Wilson's reading of "The Black Tower" in which he sees the soldiers as men "who have learned to discipline their hopes" (*W.B. Yeats and Tradition*, pg 230). As Wilson has it,

> They remain faithful to their "old black tower", which is of course Plotinus' "old watchtower beaten by storms", the intellectual soul, by which man perceives the infinite (ibid. pg 227);

while the Tower's old cook is dealt with as follows:

> We have only to read Malory's story of Beaumains and Kay to know that the cook was the most servile functionary in a castle, and Yeats makes it (sic) a symbol of all that is grossest in man (*ibid.* pg 229).

Wilson's saying that the black tower of Yeats's last months is "of course" identical with Plotinus' symbol is of a suit with his confidence that a single story out of Malory has set the type of the cook as a literary figure in one mould forever; and his reading of poems in terms of what he takes to be the pre-established meanings of their elements is dangerous practice.

For a start, because the black tower may have elements within its suggestiveness that recall Plotinus' emblem of "the intellectual soul, by which man perceives the infinite" this doesn't mean that this emblem is beyond being used with this exact register in mind to generate irony: what if the garrison see themselves in that light, but Yeats not? For Wilson to assume that "the oath-bound men" are bearers of all the positives in the poem simply because he has chosen to import only positives into his reading of its tower is to read the poem backwards: we get to know what the tower means by studying its garrison - not the other way round. And to assume that there could be only one set of meanings - and only a single complex of attitudes - that Yeats himself could ever attach to such a tower is to think of symbols rather as if they were counters on a board that change locality but that move intact. Like Heraclitus' stream, you can't step into the same symbol twice - as Yeats himself knew when he said in the note he gave to "The Cap and the Bells" (*C.P.* pg 526)

> The poem has always meant a great deal to me, though, as is the way with symbolic poems, it has not always meant quite the same thing.

And the treatment Wilson gives the cook suffers from the same assumptions. Because an authoritative text speaks of the cook "in a castle" as being "the most servile functionary" - would a cook who served with a military garrison automatically have the same status, particularly under seige; is the assumption of a medieval English attitude appropriate to a setting in which the absent king is significantly associated with a pagan burial? - then Wilson is sure Yeats can have only one type in mind, one who must represent "all that is grossest in man". The fact that the imagery of the poem itself

associates the cook with the heights of dawn beyond the gloom of the tower - whose "hale men lie stretched in slumber" as the cook "must climb and clamber" above them - surely sets up its own pattern of suggestions that should take precedence over any expectations imported out of Mallory? Once let come into focus the picture of the old cook up in the bright hills while the soldiers below snore away the dawn in which their "own right king's" horn is sounding, and the notion that the soldiers are really an embodiment of "the intellectual soul, by which man perceives the infinite" - while the cook is "the merely natural man, with whose needs the pure intellect is not concerned" - melts into a mist.

22. The fact that he is provider of sustenance to the "hale men" is rich with its own symbolism: he catches "small birds" in the dawn for the garrison's food - and

> the bird, always and everywhere from Stone-Age man to Stravinsky, has been the image of the inspiration, the unthinkable thought which enters our selves like a bird unsolicited out of the blue (Laurens van der Post, *Jung and the Story of Our Time*, pg 211);

which is a conception that the old Etruscan traditions of divination in terms of the flight of birds would seem to confirm - as well as the fact that the Egyptian hieroglyph for the idea of god is a falcon (Horus) landed to perch: the hawk come to roost taken as an image of revelation having come to mind and being now humanly-available. (Yeats himself uses this association of the bird with the conditions of revelation in the "Wings beating about the room" that accompany the wonderfully-imagined Annunciation in "The Mother of God": see *C.P.* pp 281 - 82; the very fact that angels traditionally have wings - and are messengers of God - obviously has the same significance.)

There is also the tradition repeated by Herodotus that Aesop once - on a journey with companions - elected to carry the food as his share of the backpacking. Beyond the sly wisdom that anyone who has carried a load that lightens daily would appreciate, the symbolism within the tradition of the bearer of food as revealer of truth is obvious.

23. Edward Engelberg finds one of the "associations" to what Yeats means by "passion" to be

> a primordial feeling, surging from the ancestral and ancient soil, the memory of myth and mythology (*The Vast Design Patterns in W.B. Yeats's Aesthetic*, pg 152)

- which certainly reflects at least something of Yeats's wishing to someday bring to this mythic figure of the fisherman - who has sprung so directly from "the ancestral and ancient soil" of Yeats's own rootedness in the full reaches of the Irish sensibility - a poem "as cold/ And passionate as the dawn": it seems this "passion" he wishes to offer the fisherman is what would suit with the man's natural tone of being as a sort of "primordial" element deep within the Irish

soul that "suddenly" came to life before Yeats's eyes - just as Cuchulain perhaps "stalked through the Post Office" when Pearce summoned (him) to his side" in Yeats's recollection of Easter, 1916 in the last stanza of "The Statues" (see *C.P.* pp 375 - 76).

And if Engelberg's "association" is to be granted, then the figure of Yeats's fisherman also climbs in the same dawn as

> That pale, long-visaged company
> That air in immortality
> Completeness of their passions won

as they

> ... ride the wintry dawn
> Where Ben Bulben sets the scene

in the first Section of "Under Ben Bulben" (see *C.P.* pp 397 - 98) - which is itself another proof of the sort of threads of continuity that we are exploring at the moment.

24. This sense that Yeats could say - with Eliot - "In my beginning is my end" gains on us even more when we recall his saying

> when I had finished *The Wanderings of Oisin*, dissatisfied with its yellow and its dull green, with all that over-charged colour inherited from the romantic movement, I deliberately reshaped my style, deliberately sought out an impression as of cold light and tumbling clouds
> (*Autobiographies*, pg 91)

- and not only is this obviously an indicator of how early in his life had begun the dream expressed in "The Fisherman" of a master-poem "maybe as cold/ And passionate as the dawn", this recollection of his early struggles with style is prefaced by his saying

> I had found again the windy light that moved me as a child. I persuaded myself that I had a passion for the dawn, and this passion, though mainly histrionic like a child's play, an ambitious game, had moments of sincerity (*ibid*, pp 90 - 1).

So there is a very real sense in which Yeats, in the last poem of all, was at least tangentially concerned with an awareness of how that "windy light that moved (him) as a child" could still act upon him then as an imaginative register of what was to him a supreme meaning. No matter how the details might have changed, the emotion that signalled the area of significance to which they pointed seems still very much of the same fabric of being.

And something that adds even more to the feeling we have of the continuities of Yeats's thought is his saying, in 1937, that his formulation of his wish to write a poem "cold and passionate as the dawn" was made in a "phrase" copied "from a letter of my father's" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 523): the continuities of his own life finding their ancestral linkages, too.

25. As Grosvenor E. Powell puts it,

> Yeats's ideas do not change significantly throughout his long career. What does change

is his sense of the metaphysical implications of his ideas (*Modern Language Review*, 1981, cited in *The Year's Work in English Studies*, vol. 62, 1981, pg 400).

26. See *Autobiographies*, pg 181.

27. See Sections IV and V, *C.P.* pp 399 - 400.

28. *Autobiographies*, pp 183 - 84.

29. See *C.P.* pp 375 - 76.

30. *Autobiographies*, pg 214.

31. *Ibid.* pp 213 - 14.

32. Yeats talks of how, when he was still a young man, his mind

> gave itself to ... Shelley's dream ... of his old man, master of all human knowledge, hidden from human sight in some shell-strewn cavern on the Mediterranean shore. One passage above all ran perpetually in my ears -
>
> Some feign that he is Enoch: others dream
> He was pre-Adamite, and has survived
> Cycles of generation and of ruin.
> The sage, in truth, by dreadful abstinence,
> And in conquering penance of the mutinous flesh,
> Deep contemplation and unwearied study,
> In years outstretched beyond the date of man,
> May have attained to sovereignty and science
> Over those strong secret things and thoughts
> Which others fear and know not.
> *Mahmud* I would talk
> With this old Jew.
> *Hassan* Thy will is even now
> Made known to him where he dwells in a sea cavern
> 'Mid the Demonesi, less accessible
> Than thou or God! He who would question him
> Must sail alone at sunset where the stream
> Of ocean sleeps around those foamless isles,
> When the young moon is westering as now,
> And evening stars wander upon the wave;
> And, when the pines of that bee-pasturing isle,
> Green Erebinthus, quench the fiery shadow
> Of his gilt prow within the sapphire water,
> Then must the lonely helmsman cry aloud
> "Ahasuerus!" and the caverns round
> Will answer "Ahasuerus!" If his prayer
> Be granted, a faint meteor will arise,
> Lighting him over Marmora; and a wind
> Will rush out of the sighing pine-forest,
> And with the wind a storm of harmony
> Unutterably sweet, and pilot him

Through the soft twilight to the Bosphorus:
Thence, at the hour and place and circumstance
Fit for the matter of their conference,
The Jew appears. Few dare, and few who dare
Win the desired communion.

(*Autobiographies*, pp 212 - 13).

33. *Ibid.* pg 223.

34. *Ibid.* pp 224 - 226. The story of the actual request for Yeats's resignation is left out of *Autobiographies*, but is there in *Memoirs*, pg 24.

35. Martin Jarret-Kerr says "Yeats had his Guru", as the surprisingly brief total comment he makes on Yeats in his essay "Indian Religion in English Literature 1657 - 1967" (see *Essays and Studies 1984*, pg 102): the truth is that at different times in his life Yeats felt the wisdom of more than one Indian sage.

The rather throw-away tone that Jarret-Kerr allows himself here seems to indicate he has a rather poor register of the profundity of Yeats's engagement with Indian philosophy - and of how far Yeats was from being just the Westerner out for Eastern kicks that his formulation seems to suggest: see, for instance, Yeats's summing-up of his sense of debt to Shri Purohit Swami in Section II of "An Indian Monk", where he says "The book lies before me complete; it seems to me something I have waited for since I was seventeen years old" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 428), and then goes on to give a remarkably crisp survey of the path of his religious thought from questioning "the countrypeople about apparitions" (*ibid.*) to "a philosophy that satisfied the intellect" (*ibid.* pg 429). As this passage shows, Yeats discovered in Indian philosophy a coherent intellectual analysis of beliefs and spiritual attitudes he had first found himself amongst his own countrymen - beliefs that he obviously believed underlay all religious experience at a fundamental level.

As to the register that "having a Guru" brings with it of the often rather naive prejudice for things Indian as a panacea for the modern Western religious dilemma, we should recall Yeats saying in concluding another important essay on his own perceptions of Indian philosophy - and speaking of the experience of a venerated Indian sage -

> I think it certain that Europeans, travelling the same way, enduring the same fasts, saying the same prayers, would have received nothing but perhaps a few broken dreams" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 485).

So Yeats knew he could never leave his own roots behind, no matter how many "Gurus" he might meet!

36. See pp 426 - 37, 448 - 473, and 474 - 85 respectively.

37. As George Bornstein says of Shelley's influence upon Yeats,

> For Yeats, as the essay on Berkeley makes clear, an idealist philosophy emphasises mind and the intellectual rather than the "naturalist movement" and "Locke's Mechanical Philosophy",

and that he also

> identified an idealist philosophy in the broadest sense as a main characteristic of romanticism

- of which type of "romanticism" he saw Shelley as a prime exponent (see *Yeats and Shelley*, pg 68), which confirms once again just how thoroughly the convictions that began to form in youth developed without disjunction into the vision of the human mind and its dealings with its experience that underlies even the very last writings of all. As we have seen above, the young man about the London literary and artistic world of the late 1880's felt that Shelley "seemed to sum up all that was metaphysical in English poetry" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 424); and the old man's approval of Berkeley's refutation of Locke and Newton and their anti-metaphysical mechanics grew from exactly the same life-long concern with the history and fate of that tradition.

38. See *Prometheus Unbound*, *Essays and Introductions*, pp 419 - 425, in which Yeats says Shelley had "seemed to sum up" (for the London of his "early twenties") "all that is metaphysical in English poetry", and that when he "looked back" in "middle life", he found that Shelley "had shaped my life" more than had Blake (pg 424). These consistencies of fundamental outlook and conviction throughout the life are in fact one of that life's key features. If Yeats could think, when young, that the European "mind and heart began to break into fragments a little before Shakespeare's birth" (*Autobiographies*, pg 237), leading that "heart and mind" on into deepening "abstraction" and disunity of personal and social being since

> Chaucer's personages had disengaged themselves from Chaucer's crowd, forgot their common goal and shrine, and after sundry magnifications become each in turn the centre of some Elizabethan play (ibid. pg 239),

then a thought he expressed on the last occasion before his death upon which a close circle of friends all gathered with him at his "quiet country hotel on Cap Martin" was very much child to the thought of the young man about London all those years before. Yeats said

> The Greek Drama alone achieved perfection; it has never been done since; it may be thousands of years before we achieve that perfection again. Shakespeare is only a mass of magnificent fragments (*Letters on Poetry to Lady Dorothy Wellesley*, pg 194).

The mind is running in the same bed, only grander and surer and nearer to the sea.

Chapter 1: "The Work".

In his own plan for the patterning of the poems Yeats wrote after he had set *New Poems* up for the press in January, 1938,[1] it would seem that he intended "Under Ben Bulben" to be the first poem of all, a keynote struck to condition all that was to come.[2] But even as things stand in the order first given by the Macmillan *Last Poems and Plays* of 1940, "Under Ben Bulben" has the effect of being a pointed, defining retrospect: an utterance from the far side of the tomb that leaves a last image of Yeats the poet, of his convictions and of his dreams - as well as of his sense of his duties toward his audience.[3]

So it is inevitable that "Under Ben Bulben" should be a sort of gallery to hang some of Yeats's "permanent images":[4] a rhetorical quintessence, in important ways, of the history of his thought - as the original title of the poem would seem to prophesy. This being Yeats, it is equally inevitable that this should also be a poem about art and art's relation to life: the fourth and fifth sections of the poem round-off all that has come before so as to help "set the scene" for the epitaph; and these sections talk exclusively about "Poet and sculptor" and "modish painter", and their "work" in service of "the soul of man".[5]

And, if we look to "Under Ben Bulben" for signs of what Yeats believed art and its "work" to be, we find a valuable

chart for use in exploring the aesthetic stance - the vision of art as a cultural phenomenon - that underlies and impels his concerns in the *Last Poems* and elsewhere. The poem gives us a range of reference-points for locating features of Yeats's conception of art as a social dynamic; and - to serve our immediate purposes here - it also gives us a convenient vantage from which to try to hold the topography of those features in a workable definition. Whatever else could be said about "Under Ben Bulben" as a complex indicator of Yeats's convictions about the nature of art, an element basic to all is the view that the artist best serves his[6] community through an instructive and benignly-corrective leadership, rather than through merely epitomising any current fashion or trend in thought or belief:

> Poet and sculptor, do the work,
> Nor let the modish painter shirk
> What his great forefathers did,
> Bring the soul of man to God,
> Make him fill the cradles right.[7]

The distinction that Yeats is making here is that between what a community already thinks it knows, and what it might be led to know under the influence of the artist Yeats would praise. The most meaningful art, Yeats seems to be saying, isn't just a form of reportage, reflecting what it finds ready-made about the town - as would the imagery of the "modish painter" whom Yeats makes his representative, in these lines, of the sort of "work" in the arts that he rejects.[8] The artwork held up for model in "Under Ben Bulben" is that which acts to construct or discover levels of awareness in its

audience that are much less readily available to everyday thought than those that a mirror held-up to the conscious social surfaces could ever hope to activate - as the tension between the depiction of what is merely "modish" and the "work" to draw "the soul" itself towards its source of meaning that Yeats here elaborates clearly establishes.[9] Such "work" as Yeats would praise is seen by him as being able to draw "the soul" itself into deeper contact with its primal source of significance - unlike the imitations and conventions of the "modish".

In other words, to get down to the artist's working relationship with his community, it would seem that Yeats sees the most humanly-serviceable artwork as assuming a stance that often - at least at its moment of initial reception - places it aside from the mainstream of its audience's current concerns and conceptions: what is in fashion will often deliberately have to be set aside so as to bring to light less obvious possibilities. As this thesis develops, this view will have to be elaborated and explored through its concrete embodiments in Yeats's poems and prose utterances; but the essential point being made here is that "Under Ben Bulben" formulates an aesthetic stance that is central to Yeats's thought about art and about society. This stance centres in the conviction that the artwork must often stand in tension to the accepted notions and values of the people who are its maker's immediate fellows in time and place. The Yeatsian artist must work to reveal and to make socially-available what

(in the words of another of the *Last Poems*) would be "Forgotten else by mankind" [10] - or perhaps otherwise never dreamt of, in the first place. For Yeats, the relationship between art and life is not the simple one of a mirror and the scene it reflects: it often indeed involves the artist in the sort of mirror-breaking that subverts the narcissism of our absorption in what constitutes current conceptions of reality and desirability. The Yeatsian artwork will often have to reach towards some as-yet alien potential of human experience that hasn't yet been generally recognised - or that has perhaps been forgotten or misconceived.[11]

So, for art to act properly as a cultural dynamic it must often take a stand that sets it in tension against life - as life is currently conceived-of by its immediate audience - to Yeats's view, anyway. It will act, at its most useful, not simply to reflect some current set of conceptions about life, but to reconstitute the imaginative vocabulary that the community it aims to serve is in the habit of using to establish its conceptions of the real and of the desirable - and even of the serviceable itself. It is in fact a dynamic intervention in the current dream-patterns of a community of the sort that Yeats dramatises in imagining - for instance - the first Athenian responses to Phidias' unfashionable new imagery:

> Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?
> His numbers, though they moved or seemed to move
> In marble or in bronze, lacked character.
> But boys and girls, pale from the imagined love
> Of solitary beds, knew what they were,
> That passion could bring character enough,

And pressed at midnight in some public place
Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.[12]

These lines create in themselves a masterful image[13] of Yeats's conception of the love-affair between art and life - between the desiring imagination and the images that shape that imagination's action within our behaviour - that is central to Yeats's conception of the true dynamics of the most valuable art.[14] The staring people Yeats imagines - those already formed in a particular set of aesthetic expectations - miss "character" in the new Phidian images. The young - the embodied future - respond in their innocence to the ideal "passion" that Yeats sees as underlying all character[15]: and the midnight tryst between "live lips" and cold stone is, for him, the vindication of the artwork - for all the blank incomprehension of those already moulded within the current public taste.[16] Yeats's strategy in this poem is clear: by imagining the moment when some amongst "the proud stones of Greece"[17] that lie near the foundations of Western thought first jolted the Greek imagination towards a new phase, he is able to depict the perennial first meeting of great art[18] with life, and is thus able to show what he sees as being that meeting's unavoidably uneasy character.[19]

What Yeats is dramatising in this, of course, is his conviction that the most challenging art - newly-minted - is often not generally recognised as being proper imaginative currency. The first audience that Yeats's Phidias had was one that had obviously been nurtured within a sculptural tradition that his own statues were bound to subvert; and part of the

drama Yeats offers in "The Statues" comes from his imagining these "people" as their acquired aesthetic habits get in the way and prevent them from comprehending such images of the "passion" that is Yeats's well-spring of all character[20] for "what they (are)".[21] And in this situation, Phidias stands as the type of the Yeatsian artist, cleansing the doors of perception, rather than purveying perception in all the customary dimmedness of habitual expectations. As the rest of "The Statues" shows us, Yeats sees Phidias as eschewing a settled fashion in artistic conception so that he can reach towards communicating perceptions that probe deeper into the processes of human self-imaging than the current mode in public image-making would seem itself to be capable of doing. Art, in this parable of Yeats's about its intentions, sets out to re-model the imaginative dynamics its audience lives by, rather than to reflect or reinforce those dynamics already consciously and actively in place.

Which is a stance that chimes well with the injunction to the artist in "Under Ben Bulben" to "Bring the soul of man to God": both formulations show the artist as having the responsibility of bringing his community something different from what it has been led by current aesthetic norms to expect; but both also show him as being committed to doing-so only so as to bring his audience clues to awarenesses that transcend any merely "modish" or established - and therefore already limited - conception of life's potentialities. Art, in this view at least, is a dynamic invitation offered by the

artist to his audience's capacity for self-discovery - a spur to its psychic evolution.

So the most serviceable art, for Yeats, doesn't simply mirror life, or merely facilitate its audience's attainment of already-recognised goals. It often disturbs the pools we see our known faces in, so as to give us inklings of things about ourselves that we don't yet know - like the water-rat breaking the image of the face in the well in Seamus Heaney's "Personal Helicon". Art, in Yeats's view, often stands in tension to the current stream of public conceptions, simply because its primary function is to give the community it serves "not what (it) would,/ But the right twigs for an eagle's nest":[22] the right intimations of what could lead the people who create that community into extended riches of selfhood.

The relationship between the artist and his community that we are defining here - one that Yeats found an inescapable part of the truly artistic function - is such, therefore, that it can be rather crudely summed-up as being one in which there is often[23] a wise and necessary tension between the artist's productions and his audience's expectations. This tension is necessary because the Yeatsian artist must initiate (and not merely report) some sort of vital discourse about the possibilities of life; and it must be wise because this discourse is pursued towards the end of best serving what Yeats sees as being the deepest human need: finding ways to "bring the soul of man to God".

We might look at a poem which perfectly embodies this aesthetic stance of Yeats's, one in which we see him having to seem to shun his chosen audience, so as to ultimately serve it better than it knows:

> Although I can see him still,
> The freckled man who goes
> To a grey place on a hill
> In grey Connemara clothes
> At dawn to cast his flies,
> It's long since I began
> To call up to the eyes
> This wise and simple man.
> All day I'd looked in the face
> What I had hoped 'twould be
> To write for my own race
> And the reality;
> The living men that I hate,
> The dead man that I loved,
> The craven man in his seat,
> The insolent unreproved,
> And no knave brought to book
> Who has won a drunken cheer,
> The witty man and his joke
> Aimed at the commonest ear,
> The clever man who cries
> The catch-cries of the clown,
> The beating down of the wise
> And great art beaten down.
>
> Maybe a twelvemonth since
> Suddenly I began,
> In scorn of this audience,
> Imagining a man,
> And his sun-freckled face,
> And grey Connemara cloth,
> Climbing up to a place
> Where stone is dark under froth,
> And the down-turn of his wrist
> When the flies drop in the stream;
> A man who does not exist,
> A man who is but a dream;
> And cried, 'Before I am old
> I shall have written him one
> Poem maybe as cold
> And passionate as the dawn'.[24]

The key to the situation that Yeats presents here is to be found in the lines

> All day I'd looked in the face
> What I had hoped 'twould be

To write for my own race
And the reality

- which show the artist's dream and the facts of life as lying poles apart. When Yeats turns to the "wise and simple man"[25] that he imagines "In scorn of this audience", he seems at first glance to be breaking his ties with the very people he once tried to serve, his "own race"; and the image he dreams-up of the fisherman - of his wisdom and simplicity and deftness - seems far removed from the folly and cowardice, the knavery and philistinism of the social "reality" he has been led to discover within his own community.[26] The fisherman who becomes Yeats's ideal audience "does not exist", he is "but a dream"; yet it is to him that the one perfect poem Yeats dreams of someday writing would be addressed. The tension between artistic dream and social reality seems about as extreme as could be - the tension between the work and the life.[27]

But, as is usual, Yeats is doing more in "The Fisherman" than first meets the eye. Apart from being a stinging and scornful denunciation of "the blind and ignorant town"[28] - and beyond being an expression of the need to ward-off disillusionment through imaginative retaliation - "The Fisherman" establishes an image of a man who is a sort of elemental emanation of Ireland itself, with his "sun-freckled face" and his energetic clambering amongst rock and bubbling water and cold air in the fiery dawn, a bit of true Irish earth himself. He is "but a dream" - yet he is a profound reality of the sort that Phidias sets before his own people in

"The Statues". At the very moment in which Yeats seems to be turning his back upon his audience in scornful rejection, he is in fact challenging that very audience to recognise the validity and significance of the image he is making for them.[29] The fisherman embodies a quality of being and epitomises a relationship with the cosmos that makes him a model of human worth and competence for Yeats to set up "in some public place" as a counter-truth[30] to the real character of conduct he has found within his community. The "scorn" that the poem expresses isn't a sign of the sort of impotent irritation that precedes withdrawal and escape into any merely self-restorative fantasy: it is a sharp rebuke to a community much given to sentimental rhetoric about its own ideal nature[31] - a challenge to this community to recognise the shoddiness and moral disorder that is the truth hidden behind such rhetoric.

So what we see Yeats doing in "The Fisherman" could stand as a model for the sort of "work" he is calling upon poet, sculptor and painter to do in "Under Ben Bulben". The poet's stance in "The Fisherman" is anything but a popular one, and he is as far from simply recording "the reality" he finds about him as he could be - though his quatrains denouncing that reality are as vivid a bit of social criticism as we could wish for. Instead, Yeats - in his own example - shows the poet deliberately stepping beyond what actually exists into the realm of dreams, and engaging in an attempt to give his people a renewed sense of themselves - both as they are,

and as they might become, given a due exercise of integrity and of imagination. "The Fisherman" is one of those artistic dreams that tries to waken its audience to its real responsibilities[32] - and it is, as such, a poem that epitomises Yeats's view that art must act in tension to life, with wisdom and out of the necessity that such wisdom imposes upon the Yeatsian artist's need to truly serve his community.[33] Without this necessary tension between the crafted dream and the social reality that the dream tries to re-orchestrate, Yeats might well have made a complete poem out of lines 9 to 24, and made the whole thing a piece of reportage, with only the anger and scorn and bitterness of the tone to pass comment upon the scene. But "The Fisherman" goes way beyond this, into an attempt to bring a new dream into the reality of Irish public life. Holding a mirror to "the reality" as it stands, for Yeats, wouldn't be enough: the art he is talking about in poems like "Under Ben Bulben" must be far more than just a reflection of any current set of social conditions.[34]

Such an art as Yeats would praise must, in fact, treat the sensible world and the current structure of social agreements as a set of constructs that are always open to enrichment and to correction. As he develops his theme in "The Statues", he sets against the imagined truths of the Phidian artist the counter-pole of the modern Western mind, with that mind's commitment to the objectified view and to the strictly sensible outlook of a realism that rejects what Yeats here

calls "our proper dark" - the spiritual imagination. At the close of the poem, he says

> We Irish, born into that ancient sect
> But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
> And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
> Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
> The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.[35]

These lines - and "The Statues" generally - must be discussed more fully below; but this "filthy modern tide" (with its "formless" lack of all spirit, and its "fury" of merely superficial energies) can help us at this point to define Yeats's sense of the sort of mind that he saw as dominating the world that he was addressing as a poet. This stormy mental tide[36] is an image of the "Confusion (that) fell upon our thought", for Yeats, when art turned away from God towards the world alone:[37]

> Gyres run on;
> When that greater dream had gone
> Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude,
> Prepared a rest for the people of God,
> Palmer's phrase, but after that
> Confusion fell upon our thought.[38]

And in examining this "Confusion" we are considering a criticism of the folly of taking the world of sensible appearances as the only subject that art can have. It is a criticism that is given further definition in an essay in which Yeats offers a glimpse of his sense of the nature of the truest beauty, and then talks of the role that "romance" plays in our knowledge of ourselves and of our differing realms of experience:

> If beauty is not a gateway out of the net we were taken in at birth, it will not long be beauty, and we will find it better to sit at home by the fire and fatten a lazy body or to run hither and thither in some foolish sport than to look at the finest show of light and shadow ever made among green leaves ... May it not even be that death shall unite us to all romance, and that some day we shall fight dragons among blue hills, or come to that whereof all romance is but
>
> Foreshadowings mingled with the images
> Of man's misdeeds in greater days than these
>
> as the old men thought in *The Earthly Paradise* when they were in good spirits?[39]

So Yeats sees the world that can be objectively reported - or that can be mirrored entirely in the senses - as being actually "the net we were taken in at birth"; and the "beauty" he here defines is a release of the confused spirit into a dimension transcending the limits of the sensible: into another, more consciously-psychic topography. In this view, "romance" - the deliberate embodiment of this intimating beauty in art - makes a link between dimensions of human reality that the simple reportage of appearances could never hope to effectuate.

In other words, Yeats would see any art that is not deliberately romantic in intent - romantic in the sense that his Phidias is a purveyor of romance visions - as failing to serve the true freedom of a greater selfhood; a selfhood that the "net" of the sensible can easily imprison.[40] Art, to this view, must free the mind through revealing realities beyond those that form the net's fibres; beyond what is merely

sensibly given.[41] And this objection to the idea of art as mere reportage - of the artwork as mere mirror - stems from early in Yeats's thinking. It is an objection that is, in fact, one of the abiding themes that thread his prose writings, as well as his verse, throughout his life. His objection to the metaphor of the artwork as a mirror has, in fact, a central place in his comments about art, and finds repeated statement therein.

Perhaps the best way, at present, to locate this objection is to point to the contrast Yeats draws in a late essay between Balzac and Stendhal, in talking about the latter as the creator of a distinctly - and exclusively - "modern" art:

> Stendhal created a modern art; the seminary in *Le Rouge et le noir*, unlike that described by Balzac in *Louis Lambert*, is of his own time and judged according to its standards, is wholly reflected in the dawdling mirror that was to empty modern literature; but something compelled Balzac while still at school to travel backward, as did the mind of Louis Lambert, to accept all that lay hidden in his blood and nerves.[42]

The fundamental tension in this depiction of the two writers' differences in conception and in artistic practice is that between Stendhal's vision being "wholly reflected in the dawdling mirror that was to empty modern literature", and Balzac's attempting "to travel backward ... to accept all that lay hidden in his blood and his nerves"; and this tension focuses in the pull between the terms "wholly reflected" and "hidden".[43] For Yeats, the "dawdling mirror" that reflects whatever it happens to pass is actually "empty" of vital and

very real things that the artist's own "time" and "standards" fail to embody in any very obvious way. The Stendhalean artist, in mirroring only some current fashion[44] in human self-conception, must miss awarenesses that Yeats sees Balzac as managing to disinter[45] from where they "lay hidden in his blood and in his nerves." This, as Yeats goes on to say a few sentences later in the same essay, leads to his finding "passages in the *Comedie Humaine* that suddenly startle us with a wisdom deeper than intellect"[46] - deeper than what Stendhal's mirror could hope to reveal or to convey as experience, that is.

We will need to examine the groundwork of ideas involved in this judgement that Yeats passes on Stendhal later, when we come to look in more detail at the matrix of convictions out of which we could say Yeats's aesthetic stance arose; but the emphasis we need to record for now is the fact of this tension that Yeats feels between the "dawdling mirror" and what is "hidden" from its impassive face. We also need to recognise that, for Yeats, what the mirror misses is the substance of the "wisdom" he obviously believed great art must contain - which is a belief that is obviously also implicit in the conception of the "work" of the artist to "Bring the soul of man to God" that we have already noted in "Under Ben Bulben". It is a belief that is also well-dramatised in a poem written about three years after the essay from which I have just quoted:[47]

A statesman is an easy man,
He tells his lies by rote;
A journalist makes up his lies
And takes you by the throat;
So stay at home and drink your beer
And let the neighbours vote,
Said the man in the golden breastplate
Under the old stone Cross.

Because this age and the next age
Engender in the ditch,
No man can tell a happy man
From any passing wretch;
If Folly link with Elegance
No man knows which is which,
Said the man in the golden breastplate
Under the old stone Cross.

But actors lacking music
Do most excite my spleen,
They say it is more human
To shuffle, grunt and groan,
Not knowing what unearthly stuff
Rounds a mighty scene,
Said the man in the golden breastplate
Under the old stone Cross.

Though the dramatic persona that speaks in this poem takes his cut at many features of the contemporary scene - from the opinion-makers that lead it, to the stars that govern its fate - what galls him most is the theatre and its mirror-holding ways.[48] What the "actors lacking music" miss for Yeats - in their quest to represent "the casual comedy"[49] within human experience - is a proper sense of the "unearthly stuff" that both surrounds and shapes the elements of "a mighty scene": which is a formulation that surely echoes the "wisdom deeper than intellect" that Yeats finds in Balzac, and misses in Stendhal.[50] Again, we will need to look more fully at what Yeats means by this "unearthly stuff" later on in this thesis; but it is quite clear already that he finds a vast difference

between the fullest powers of imaginative drama and the enacted reflection of some popular conception of what it is to be "human". What the man in the golden breastplate objects to in the theatre he contemplates is, in fact, its attempts to "photograph" life, in the sense that Yeats uses the term himself in his review of a performance of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's play *Axel* that he saw in 1894:

> Those among the younger generation whose temperament fits them to receive first the new current, the new force, have grown tired of photographing life, and have returned by the path of symbolism to imagination and poetry, the only things which are ever permanent.[51]

In "The Old Stone Cross", the actors lack "music"; in the essay on the French Symbolist drama, what is noticed is a return to "symbolism ... imagination and poetry" and a revulsion away from "photographing life": the terms might differ, but the tension between the musical or poetical image - the imaginative image - and the photograph of life (the passive mirror) that Yeats sees being offered by realistic drama is clearly to be felt in both essay and poem.[52] As we have seen, great art, for Yeats, must probe the hidden depths - and not just reflect the surfaces - of life: must explore the contents of the human psyche as it both represents and helps create[53] what that psyche experiences.

The appeal to what is "more human" that - in their view - justifies the "actors lacking music" in their efforts is, at root, the post-Enlightenment appeal to Nature, as it is

supposedly "objectively" apprehended. That Yeats had little use for such an appeal within the arts is abundantly clear in a poem like "The Old Stone Cross", with its spleen at the unmusical actors' blankness to the power of the drama to touch things in heaven and earth that aren't in your polaroid. The tension involved in this poem between unmusical acting and "mighty" drama epitomises Yeats's demand that art be more than merely a mirror - or a photographic plate - precisely because the experience the Yeatsian artist is striving to bring to his audience is one that, like Balzac, will "suddenly startle us with a wisdom deeper than intellect":[54] "intellect" meaning here the sort of understanding that constructs a rationally-conditioned image of human experience in terms of some current set of assumptions about what constitutes reality, while all other sets of possible assumptions are excluded - usually quite unconsciously and irrationally.

For Yeats, then, the truly serviceable artwork is one that takes its audience beyond the lit stage of the known ego into the "unearthly stuff" of those elements of the self that are left out of any purely-objectified, sense-determined[55] conception of the human scene. As he puts it in another - late - essay:

> The young English poets ... express not what the Upanishads call "that ancient Self" but individual intellect, (thus) they have the right to choose the man in the Tube because of his objective importance.[56]

Again, we'll have to look at the context of such ideas properly later on; but their thrust and direction are quite

obvious. When "individual intellect" is the sole focus of the arts, then what is important is what is "objective"; and the "ancient Self" - which is surely part at least of what Yeats means by that "unearthly stuff (that) Rounds a mighty scene" - is left out of mind, and therefore out of count.[57]

And this implied indication of the need to "express" in art a "Self" that is more inclusive than the limited "individual intellect" is clearly another formulation of the conviction we have been examining all along: that the most valuable artwork stands in vital ways in tension to the everyday, conscious lives of the people who make up its immediate audience. It is a view central to one of the later poems Yeats wrote:

> God guard me from those thoughts men think
> In the mind alone;
> He that sings a lasting song
> Thinks in a marrow-bone;
>
> From all that makes a wise old man
> That can be praised of all;
> O what am I that I should not seem
> For the song's sake a fool?
>
> I pray - for fashion's word is out
> And prayer comes round again -
> That I may seem, though I die old,
> A foolish, passionate man[58]

- where the first stanza clearly expresses its sense of the tension between the "thoughts men think/ In the mind alone" and the "lasting song" that requires someone who "Thinks in a marrow-bone": thinks, once again, in the "blood and nerves" that Yeats saw Balzac as having learned to discover and accept in himself "deeper than intellect" - certainly deeper than "individual intellect". Again, the "song" each type of thought

produces differs widely in "lasting" significance, in durably-acknowledged serviceability. "Song" that roots itself beyond the "individual intellect" and its biography - that takes a tack away from the "real" - ends up being of better human use for Yeats than the most faithful realism or egoism.

And it is also interesting to note that the prayer in this poem includes an acknowledgement of the need for "seem(ing)", for fiction - for the dream that may be held in deliberate tension to "objective" fact. Yeats may "seem" to be "A foolish, passionate man" in his verse, but this might well be just a deliberate stance crafted so as to prompt the finding of a way out of the enclosure of "the mind alone" or of the "individual intellect".[59] Such assumed folly, in other words, may well be a sort of play-acting intended to fabricate a persona that is capable of creatively opposing the poet's actual personal circumstances.[60]

Which is a paradox that reflects convictions central to Yeats's conception of the human self in its full range of being - and that therefore reflects equally convictions central to his view of the art that best serves that self. While the unmusical actor of "The Old Stone Cross" would reflect in his performance simply a shrewd caricature[61] of old age - on the grounds of its being more "human", or more objectively accurate, as this is judged by the standards of physical appearances and of the capacity for purely physical activity - then Yeats, in "A Prayer for Old Age", makes us

aware of the conflict between that objective appearance and a hidden will or spirit that is necessarily in contention with the wreck of body[62] that implicitly underlies the poem's drama.

And it is central to our theme that it is artifice - seeming - that Yeats sees as an essential element within this inward dynamism that a merely surface view of a person would tend to miss. "A Prayer for Old Age" is a poem about both art and life: it reminds us that we must use artifice in the tactics we employ in dealing with life; and it also reminds us that the artifice we naturally use in this contention with circumstance is thoroughly un-natural, a deflection of natural patterns. It is an exercise of imaginative will so as to change the tendency Yeats recognised in "Nature herself" when he said that "(she) has no power except to die and to forget".[63] "A Prayer for Old Age", in talking about the nature of human power, defines the artificiality of that power - its opposition to life's natural tendencies. The question Yeats is all but asking is, could a wholly-objective image of someone really hope to reflect those aspects of that person's nature that are in direct contention with all that is available to the casual camera?

The moment there is artifice, there is obviously a tension between the image the artifice represents, and its ostensible subject or origin. Yeats would say that the artificial enters so thoroughly into all we think and feel

that any art must fail, if it attempts to mirror the human condition without also mirroring the mirrors-on-mirrors-mirrored that he once said "is all the show" the mind can know, anyway.[64] As he put it in another essay:

> When we delight in a spring day there mixes, perhaps, with our personal emotion an emotion Chaucer found in Guillame de Lorris, who had it from the poetry of Provence; we celebrate our draughty May with an enthusiasm made ripe by more meridian suns.[65]

Alongside of the Nature that the realist or mechanist viewpoint proposes as the sole reality - indeed, blent into any such reality, as a determining tincture - is the complex of our cultural or collective human nature: a profoundly historical dynamism which Yeats here sees as mixing emotions beyond "our personal emotions" into our most basic apprehensions of the world we physically inhabit. These are obviously, for Yeats, emotions that exercise an artistry of their own, casting lights that never were on our immediate, sensible landscapes. Even before we think ourselves of exercising deliberate artifice, the artifice of our own nature has exercised us.[66]

And the passage just quoted beautifully expresses the tensions between art and life that Yeats calls upon artists to recognise in "Under Ben Bulben". It presents the distance between the actual "draughty Mays" Chaucer had as raw sensible material, and the dream of the "more meridian suns" that Yeats sees him as having infused into his celebration of the season - a dream given him by art, not by nature. What Yeats

seems to be saying, in fact, is that the English love of nature is more a product of reverie than of observation - art gilding the lily in exactly the sort of interchange between soul and sense that Yeats indicated in a review he wrote of a book about Blake, where he invokes William Laws:

> And imagination, which we are apt erroneously to consider an airy, idle, and impotent faculty of the human mind, dealing in fiction and roving in phantasy or idea without producing any (sic) powerful or permanent, is the magia or power of raising and forming such images or substances, and the greater power in nature.[67]

As Yeats says on the same page, Blake held that "the imagination is the means whereby we communicate with God": the imagination, that acts in terms of seeming and artifice; that steps aside from "the passing modes of mankind" so as to reflect "the face of God",[68] or whatever else we might choose to call "that ancient Self"[69] that whatever mode of being that is socially current can only partially embody.

We have glimpsed, by now, at least something of Yeats's view that the artwork, for many reasons, must deliberately challenge and interfere-with the "natural" - or current - pattern of its audience's everyday experiences and perceptions - if it is to do its proper work. The conviction, on Yeats's part, that this is inescapably so, is almost too obvious in his writings to warrant too much comment, in itself.[70]

What does seem a valuable undertaking, though, is to try to move beyond the mere statement of this conviction, towards some sort of indication of a few of the central factors within

Yeats's overall vision of things that could be said to have contributed towards establishing - or confirming - him in this aesthetic stance. Though there will inevitably be some re-scanning of ground already - briefly - surveyed in this first chapter, as these factors are further discussed, the attempt will be to open the subject out, and to extend on detail and depth of coverage. When Yeats says in an essay that heroic poetry is a "changing of the self, not a teaching it anything", and then goes on to say that it is

> not a criticism of life, but rather a fire in the spirit, burning away what is mean and deepening what is shallow,[71]

he is expressing a view of art's creative designs upon life that is typical of him. What interests me now, is to explore some of the facets of his thought and experience that seem to have helped make this view inevitable for him.

Consequently, the following chapter will try to do some sort of justice to Yeats's sense of his own life and times, so as to suggest something at least of how this aspect of his vision could be said to have influenced his poetic practice.

Notes to Chapter 1.

1. See Hone, *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939*, pg 461.

2. See Jeffares's prefatory remarks to his commentary on the *Last Poems* in *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg 435, which lists the order to these poems found by Curtis Bradford in Yeats's manuscript list - an order actually reflected in the Cuala Press *Last Poems and Two Plays* of 1939.

3. The first draft of "Under Ben Bulben" - sent to Dorothy Wellesley in September, 1938 - was called simply "His Convictions": see *Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, pg 184.

It seems, from Lady Dorothy's narrative, that Yeats changed the title to "Under Ben Bulben" just the evening before "he passed into his last coma", when he gave corrections to this poem to his wife: see *ibid.* pg 195. As Lady Wellesley says, in concluding, Yeats was "murmuring poetry to his last gasp".

4. The term comes from "The Municipal Gallery Revisited", stanza III, *C.P.* pg 368.

5."Under Ben Bulben", *C.P.* pg 399 - 400.

6. I use the conventional gender form for rhetorical convenience, and not out any of blankness to the existence of Correctness.

Joni Mitchell chose to use the term "the Time of Man" in her lyrics to "Woodstock" in 1969; and Elizabeth Cullingford was content to say in 1984

> Science, for Yeats, was essentially political: in describing the order of nature it prescribed for the government of men (*Yeats, Ireland and Fascism, pg 127*)

without cluttering her style by changing "men" to "people"; Tracey Chapman spoke in a song of being "Master of my own emotions" (1988): so it would seem that the conventional rhetorical form hasn't rankled with every intelligent and politically alert woman in living memory, anyway.

7. See *C.P.* Section IV, pg 399.

8. If we take this "modish painter" to represent anything but an art that is quick to parrot what is in fashion, that thing must surely be the work of the sort of image-maker whose sole intent is to create "trends" by synthesising "new looks" out of a sense of the sorts of things that might "catch on", given the current mannerisms of self-imaging: once a style has become set, take an angle that is new relative to the old - if make-up has been "out" a while, bring in deep rouge and sequins - and a "new" fashion is born.

Yeats would probably have seen such a game as catering purely to the human need - when bored - for novelty, and as stitching the mind into a shifting pattern that was nevertheless incapable of giving anything new - where he was interested in real

imaginative freedom, that like Nature never does quite the same thing twice (see *Essays and Introductions,* pg 172) because it is alive "minute by minute" (see "Easter 1916", *C.P.* 202 - 205).

The fashionable image-game would most likely have seemed to him part of the attitude towards time and experience that he typified in Section IV of "A Woman Young and Old" (*C.P.* pg 310) when he spoke of the "casual/ Improvisation or ... settled game" that he called "the dragon's will" that needs to be broken before the mind can be free to "stare astonished at the sea" of life's primal energies as new vision "shrieks at us" like "a miraculous strange bird". Ziggie Stardust never got no-one *that* far out, man.

9. The conviction that art must be more than a mirror is an important one in this dimension of Yeats's thinking, and is discussed as such below.

10."An Acre of Grass", *C.P.* pg 346.

11. We could note here the comment Yeats made to the effect that

> Every generation of men of letters has been called immoral by the pulpit or the newspaper, and it has been precisely when that generation has been illuminating some obscure corner of the conscience that the cry against it has been more confident (*Explorations*, pg 111).

12. "The Statues", C.P. pg 375.

13. The term comes from "The Circus Animals' Desertion", Section III, stanza 1, *C.P.* pg 392.

14. There is a description of a pair of statues in the British Museum, in which Yeats recalls how these "private, half-animal, half-divine figures" came to seem to him

> images of an unpremeditated joyous energy, that neither I nor any other man, racked by doubt and enquiry, can achieve.

But he was convinced, nevertheless, that "if once achieved", the state that these images embodied "might seem to men and women of Connemara or of Galway their very soul" (*Autobiographies*, pp 185 - 86). This formulation gives a very good sense of the power of the Phidian image to move the soul towards self-discovery that "The Statues" is exploring.

15. To call this passion "ideal" is to use the term in a special sense, perhaps, given Yeats's thinking on the subject of passion: "passion would bring character enough" in "The Statues" because that "passion" is an emanation from the Passionate Body of his philosophy, which is the deepest and most abiding reality of the self. This is shown, for instance, when he speaks of his own thought having "to face Berkeley's greatest difficulty: to account for the continuity of perception". As he continues

> That continuity is in the Passionate Body of the permanent self or daimon. Should I

> see the ghost of murderer and victim I should do so because my Spirit has from those other Passionate Bodies fabricated light, as perception (see *Explorations*, pp 331 - 32).

If we add to this the lines from "Supernatural Songs" VIII (*C.P.* pg 332), that run

> Eternity is passion, girl or boy
> Cry at the onset of their sexual joy
> "For ever and for ever"; then awake
> Ignorant what Dramatis Personae spake

then the eternal ground of such passion in "the permanent self or daimon" is again the focus; and Yeats's noting that Aquinas saw eternity as being "the possession of oneself, as in a single moment" (*Explorations*, pg 37) dovetails into the pattern as a confirmation that - for Yeats anyway - the eternal self is encountered in a special sort of passion: a passion from which the deepest in human experience is to be known. The Phidian plumbing of "permanent" depths for images is closer to the real human truth than reflecting existent "character", or what has already become apparent of what the "daimon" has revealed.

We could also recall Yeats saying, in recalling his early attitudes in *The Trembling of the Veil*, that - unlike Henley, who could offer an "unimpassioned description of an hospital ward where his leg had been amputated" - "I wanted the strongest passions, passions that had nothing to do with observation" (*Autobiographies*, pg 154); and his then going on to say that

> an actor of passion will display some one quality of soul, personified again and again ... Irving ... never moved me but in the expression of intellectual pride and ... I am convinced that (Salvani's) genius was a kind of animal nobility (*ibid.* pp 154 -55).

Again, passion is the true sub-conscious self "seen as it were by lightning" - as found, for instance, when Yeats speaks of Henley's having

> built up an image of power and magnanimity till it became, at moments, when seen as it were by lightening, his true self. Half his opinions were the contrivance of a sub-conscious that sought always to bring life to the dramatic crisis and expression to that point of artifice where the true self could find its tongue (*ibid.* pg 155).

16. The very tension between stone and "live lips" is what would, in fact, indicate to Yeats that the artwork is fulfilling its true function as an imaginative energiser.

Should we wish to focus more exactly what Yeats seems to have in mind in this part of "The Statues" - in his holding in tension "character" and the "passion" to which the young so immediately respond - we could recall his saying, while discussing certain of Congreve's ideas about comedy,

> ... you can find but little of what we call character in unspoiled youth, whatever be the sex, for, as (Congreve) shows in another sentence, it grows with time like the ash of a burning stick, and strengthens towards middle life till there is little else at seventy years (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 241).

The image of the ash growing on a stick could stand as a gloss on the "living fire" of the "passion" that gradually gets overlaid by "character" as "the uncontrollable mystery" that came to lie at birth "on the bestial floor" (see "The Magi", *C.P.* pg 141) wends its way deeper into life and experience. The Phidias of "The Statues" - who is the Yeatsian artist in a convenient mask - works to set glimpses of that "mystery" walking the streets as models of future being, rather than to reflect the lives already being finished into mere "character" that he finds all about him as accomplished social facts. (As my friend Hillary Graham, the painter, once said, "Why paint what you can just see? It's already out there.")

17. See "The Tower", Section III, *C.P.* pg 223.

18. The term is Yeats's own, from "The Fisherman", *C.P.* pg 167: "The beating down of the wise/ And great art beaten down".
The distinction here drawn is central to the argument of this thesis: that Yeats had no qualms about judging the quality of artistic productions in terms of a definite aesthetic standard of the sort indicated by "The Statues": the extent to which they served the human need for the fullest integrity.

19. It might be of interest to note here the reflections on the problems of novelty in aesthetic experience of one of the first people to attempt a description of the Grand Canyon, in 1882:

> The Grand Canyon of the Colorado is a great innovation in modern ideas of scenery, and our conceptions of the grandeur, beauty, and power of nature. As with all great innovations it is not to be comprehended in a day or a week, nor even in a month. It must be dwelt upon and studied, and the study must comprise the slow acquisition of the meaning and spirit of that marvellous scenery which characterises the Plateau Country ... The study and slow mastery of the influences of that class of scenery and its full appreciation is a special culture, requiring time, patience, and long familiarity for its consummation. The lover of nature, whose perceptions have been trained in the Alps, in Italy, Germany, or New England, in the Appalachians or Cordelleras, in Scotland or Colorado, would enter this strange region with a shock, and dwell here for a time with a sense of oppression, and perhaps with horror. Whatsoever things he had learned to regard as beautiful and noble he would seldom or never see, and whatsoever he might see would appear to him as anything but beautiful and noble ... Great innovations, whether in art or literature, in science or in nature, seldom take the world by storm. They must be understood before they can be estimated, and must be cultivated before they can be understood.
> (Clarence Dutton, "Tertiary History of the Grand

Canyon District", in Frank Bergon [ed], *The Wilderness Reader*, pp 172 -73.)

One feels the same acutely practical sense of the processes of aesthetic assimilation at work in Yeats's depiction of the Greek imagination's first Phidian encounters.

20. It is interesting - in thinking about what the term "passion" means within Yeats's vocabulary, and in considering how central a human reality the term signifies - to look at Chapter VI of B.L. Reid's *William Butler Yeats The Lyric of Tragedy* (pp 140 - 70), which has for its sub-headings "The Genus Passion", "Passion as Defence", "Passion as Joy", "Passion as Innocence" and "Passion as Apocalypse" - and these being used to focus the concerns of an overall chapter-title as ambitious as "Late Theory": Reid is genuinely able to unify so much under one manifold conception.

We could also recall Engelberg's comment - noted above in the Introduction - on how wide and central a term he too finds "passion" to be in Yeats's thinking: see *The Vast Design*, pg 152.

21. See stanza 1, the response of the "boys and girls" who "knew what they were".

22. "To a Wealthy Man ...", *C.P.* pg 119.

23. We should note that Yeats saw that there were times in which the arts stood in a relation of leadership to their audience that did not issue in a disjunction of initial incomprehension or of hostility - the image he gives of such times in "At Galway Races" being a good case in point: the vision there is one of the "Hearers and hearteners of the work", who once were made "all of the one mind" by the "Delight" that verse could bring them: see *C.P.* pg 108.

24. "The Fisherman", *C.P.* pg 167.

25. The echoes of Thoreau in *Walden* don't seem to have been noticed: if any two words carry the central thread of *Walden*, they are these two, repeated again and again as Thoreau develops his thoughts. (Jeffares has noted Yeats's mention of his reading of *Walden* as a backdrop to the writing of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree": see *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg. 34, referring to *Autobiographies*, pp 71 - 2.)

Having noted which, it is worth stressing however just how much Yeats made these terms, possibly first borrowed from Thoreau, his own. There is the haunting passage from *The Celtic Twilight* that concludes Yeats's statement of his conviction, at times, "that all nature is full of invisible people":

> I say to myself ... that they are surely
> there, the divine people, for only we who
> have neither simplicity nor wisdom have
> denied them, and the simple of all times
> and the wise men of ancient times have seen
> them and even spoken to them. (*Mythologies*, pg 64.)

The fisherman is surely one of "the simple of all times" who - like "the wise men of ancient times" - have familiar dealings

with "divine people": with energies deep in the human psychic trove. (It would be worth exploring the connections Yeats's fisherman has with the Fisher King, as a symbol of a power in which is vested a potential for renewal of some current wasteland, too.)

26. As Brendan Kenneley says, one of the things that makes Yeats "Ireland's greatest poet" is that

> he learned to confront the challenging complexities
> of Irish life,

part of which complexity being that

> Ireland is always capable of treachery and squalor
> (*The Penguin Book of Irish Verse*, pg 37).

27. See the poem in which Yeats reflects this tension in these words: "The intellect of man is forced to choose/ Perfection of the life, or of the work", "The Choice", *C.P.* pg 278.

28. See "To a Wealthy Man ...", *C.P.* pg 119.

29. As Hone says, Yeats "never grew cynical or despairing of Ireland as a nation" (see *W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 435).

30. See "The Circus Animals' Desertion", *C.P.* pg 391, for Yeats's use of this term.

31. See the recollection of Yeats's father on the Abbey stage in "Beautiful Lofty Things", *C.P.* pg 348: the immediate, knee-jerk "applause" from the "raging crowd" that follows the conventional bit of national self-flattery that the "mischievous" old man offers - before its irony appears - helps to define the sort of attitude I mean.

32. See the focusing lines to *Responsibilities, C.P.* pg. 112.

33. See Yeats's depiction of "the passionate serving sort" - of which he was himself one - in "To a Shade", *C.P.* pg 123, as well as his typification of the sort of pride he himself possessed in common with

> The people of Burke and of Grattan
> That gave, though free to refuse -
> Pride, like that of the morn,
> When the headlong light is loose,
> Or that of the fabulous horn,
> Or that of the sudden shower
> When all streams are dry (*ibid.* pg 223).

34. The attention that Yeats - in this depiction of "the reality" of Dublin's political and intellectual life - pays to the "knave" who gains his influence through the "drunken cheer" of the mob; to the "witty man" who aims "at the commonest ear"; and to the "clever man who cries/ The catch-cries of the clown", reminds us that public life is really shaped by various sorts of rhetoric - as does even "The beating down of the wise/ And great art beaten down" so as to clear the field of all moral impediments to the power-mongers' public ascendency. For Yeats to leave the

field to such "rogue(s) of the world" (as he calls them in "High Talk", *C.P.* pp 285 - 86) would be to leave the public mind without recourse to anything but the self-seeking propaganda of people who had proved to him were suspect in their motives.

35. *See C.P.* pg 376.

36. In a revealing passage from *The Celtic Twilight*, Yeats says:

> I am certain that the water, the water of the seas and of lakes and of mist and rain, has all but made the Irish after its image. Images form themselves in our minds perpetually as if they were reflected in some pool. We gave ourselves up in old times to mythology, and saw the gods everywhere ... We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us that they may see, it may be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer life because of our quiet. (*Mythologies*, pg 80.)

The important thing to note here is the still waters that reflect supersensual images (and even supernatural "beings") that the mental flotsam of the agitated tide of mechanist realism - of reflections in the purely sensual mirror - would drive away. And there is also the important passage from the essay of 1916 called "Certain Noble Plays of Japan", in which Yeats covers almost exactly the same ground as he does later in "The Statues" by saying

> All imaginative art remains at a distance and this distance, once chosen, must be firmly held against a pushing world ... Our unimaginative arts are content to set a piece of the world as we know it in a place by itself, to put their photographs as it were in a plush or a plain frame, but the arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation. As a deep of the mind can only be approached through what is most human, most delicate, we should distrust bodily distance, mechanism, and loud noise ... In half-Asiatic Greece Callimachus could still return to a stylistic management of the falling folds of drapery, after the naturalistic drapery of Phidias, and in Egypt the same age that saw the village Head-man carved in wood, for burial in some tomb, with so complete a naturalism saw set up in public places statues full of an august formality that implies traditional measurements, a philosophic defence ... the painting of Japan, not having our European moon to churn the wits, has understood that no styles that ever delighted noble imaginations have lost their importance, and chooses the style according to the subject (*Essays and Introductions*, pp 224 - 25).

Though the "public places" in which "statues" exhibiting "traditional measurements" are "set up" in this passage are in Egypt, and not in Greece - and though Yeats in "The Statues" remakes the "deep of the mind" (into which "imaginative art" can allow us to "pass for a few moments") into the "proper dark" to which "We Irish" must "Climb" so as to suit the Irish instinct towards pilgrimage to high places such as Croagh Patrick - the terms from the essay certainly help greatly. What "our European moon" churns - as the image suggests - is the sea of "the wits", which churning water surely prefigures the "spawning fury" of "the filthy modern tide" of "The Statues"; so the sense we have gained of this "tide" as representing a state of mental confusion is clearly reinforced.

It is interesting that Yeats's quarrel with "our unimaginative arts" in this passage isn't actually with their naturalism as such but with their *exclusive* naturalism: "the painting of Japan" shows its freedom from the churned wits of Europe primarily in its leaving itself free to "choose() the style according to the subject" - just as the old Egyptians were wise enough to use both "complete ... naturalism" and "august formality" depending for its effect upon "traditional measurements" where each best suited imaginative needs. As Yeats makes clear, his own Phidias - creator of "masterful images" (see "The Circus Animals' Desertion", Section III, ll 1 - 2, *C.P.* pg 392) that certainly were able to lead the thought of Greece into its own "deep of the mind" - made use of "naturalistic drapery" as a tactic within the greater idiom he crafted to "delight noble imaginations": "the filthy modern tide" is churned in its wits primarily in its being unable to conceive of *any* subject except in naturalistic terms. Yeats had learned from Shelley that

> We have "a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper paradise which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap" and we labour to see this soul in many mirrors, that we may possess it the more abundantly (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 69),

so the sole and blank mirror of the modern naturalistic fixation would obviously condemn its viewer to the least meaningful glimpse he could have of that "soul within our soul" - that is our immediate eternity - and to no other: Yeats would wish for the "many mirrors" that a truly imaginative art of the sort he typifies in his reference to "the painting of Japan" would set before its audience in order that it may "possess ... the more abundantly" a "proper" access to its deepest strength and truth. (Could Yeats have had this "proper paradise" of the magic circle about the "soul within our soul" in mind somewhere when he thought years later in "The Statues" of the "proper dark" of the Irish spiritual intellect?)

37. The view that art and philosophy shape even the popular mind, ultimately, is central to Yeats's thought - as can be seen from a poem like "The Statues", or in "Fragments", (*C.P.* pg 240), in which Locke's dream of a purely sensible universe is seen to have caused the death of the more true sense of things that preceded it. (There are also the comments Yeats makes on the effects on the popular imagination of this denial of "the subjectivity of

space", in his discussion of Poincare cited in Chapters 4 and 5 below.)

38. "Under Ben Bulben", *C.P.* pg 400.("That greater dream" refers to the thread of artistic intentions Yeats traces in this poem from classical Greek to Quattrocento art.)

39. *Mythologies*, pp 63 - 64.

40. We should note that, for Yeats, the senses themselves, when not circumscribed, lead on to supersensual awareness: Yeats talks of the feeling of "beauty" that he here typifies as arising from things such as "the finest show that light and shadow ever made among green leaves"; and the sensual sight becomes "a gateway out of the net" of things sensual: there is no absolute revulsion against the senses, they simply must be known to be what they are, seen in their proper place within the greater patterning he sees as acting within human consciousness.

We could, however, recall as counter-truth "Tom the Lunatic" (*C.P.* pg 305), in which some "change" in Tom himself has turned "Nature's pure unchanging light" into a "smoking wick": for all that old Tom's faith in "God's unchanging eye" remains unshaken, the dimming of his own eye is a reminder of just how much at the mercy of the net of our senses we really are.

41. It should be apparent that Yeats sees the imagination as a faculty that, through its action, realises super-sensible human actualities. (The common ground there between what we've been seeing of Yeats's thought, and Keats's perception of beauty and truth in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" - and his typification of the "Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance" in "When I have Fears" - are interesting to note.)

42. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 446.

We could also recall Yeats's recollection of how - when he was still a young man - there was a "change (he) had seen coming bit by bit" in manner and in choice of subject in painting, a change away from what was "romantic" and what reflected "poetic tradition" - as represented for him in his 'teens by Rossetti and Blake - "and its defence (being) elaborated by young men fresh from the Paris art-schools":

> "We must paint what is in front of us", or "A man must be of his own time", they would say, and if I spoke of Blake or of Rossetti they would point out his bad drawing and tell me to admire Carolus Duran and Bastien-Lepage. Then, too, they were very ignorant men; they read nothing, for nothing mattered but "knowing how to paint", being in reaction against a generation that seemed to have wasted its time upon so many things. I thought myself alone in hating these young men, their contempt for the past, their monopoly of the future, but in a few months I was to discover others of my own age, who thought as I did (see *Autobiographies*, pp 141 - 42).

This is again a reminder of how early in life Yeats formed the groundwork of the convictions about imaginative and traditional art - as opposed to realism - that are expressed in "Under Ben Bulben"; it is also a reminder of how consistent he was in the essential patterning of his convictions, throughout his life.

This isn't to say, obviously, that there was anything inflexible or closed to evolving experience about Yeats's thought: he talks in the same account of how the Rossetti painting that when he was a youth had "blotted all other pictures away" with "its colour, its people, its romantic architecture" is "today not very pleasing to me", because of the more mature awareness that the picture in question - "Dante's *Dream*" - had been "painted when Rossetti had lost his dramatic power" (*ibid.* pg 141). But what has happened here is a deepened sense of standard of execution - not any change of values regarding manner and source of inspiration.

43. Yeats speaks elsewhere about how

> the mechanical philosophy of the Eighteenth Century, which has, as Coleridge said, turned the human mind into the quicksilver at the back of a mirror, though it still permits a work of art to seem "a mirror dawdling along a road" (*Autobiographies*, pg 439)

- which shows how thoroughly he felt Stendhal's dawdling mirror to be the voice itself of rationalist mechanism, that had long encouraged a disastrous illusion of the human mind's passivity before the action of a so-called objective reality. As he says also in his essay on Berkeley,

> The romantic movement seems related to the idealist philosophy; the naturalistic movement, Stendhal's mirror dawdling down a lane, to Locke's mechanical philosophy ... The romantic movement with its turbulent heroism, its self-assertion, is over, superseded by a new naturalism that leaves man helpless before the contents of his own mind (*Essays and Introductions*, pp 404 - 405);

and again, the dawdling mirror has played its key role in reinforcing a set of attitudes towards self and world that have issued in passivity, in man being "helpless before the contents of his own mind", seeming victim to a mechanical and inhuman order: and all because a reductionist and irrational doctrine had been disseminated, at least in part, by artists of the Stendhalean school - by the followers of "naturalism" and realism. As Yeats put it in a diary in 1930,

> The fading of these three (Freedom, God, Immortality) before "Bacon, Newton, Locke" has made literature decadent. Because Freedom is gone we have Stendhal's "mirror dawdling down a lane" (*Explorations*, pp 332 - 33),

which shifts the focus rather, so as to see Stendhal as a symptom of a more general mood; but the fact of Stendhal's responsibility as an artist within the development of this process whereby literature has been "made ... decadent" is brought firmly to the fore again in the Introduction to *Fighting the Waves*, where Yeats says

> When Stendhal described a masterpiece as a "mirror dawdling down a lane" he expressed the mechanical philosophy of the French eighteenth century. Gradually literature conformed to his ideal; Balzac became old -fashioned; romanticism grew theatrical in its strain to hold the public; till, by the end of the nineteenth century, the principal characters in the most famous books were the passive analysts of events, or had been brutalised into the likeness of mechanical objects (*ibid.* pg 373).

So, once again, it is the dawdling mirror that had made modern tastes and conceptions "conform() to (its) ideal"; and the resultant types of "famous" fictional "principal characters" were again passive or actually brutally mechanical; and all such decadence springs from "the mechanical philosophy" that sees the mind as a mirror and the "masterpiece" as just a better mirror than usual.

44. I use the word in the sense Yeats gives it in "A Prayer for Old Age", *C.P.* pg 326:

> I pray - for fashion's word is out
> And prayer comes round again -
> That I may seem, though I die old,
> A foolish, passionate man.

45. See "The Gyres", *C.P.* pg 337: "Those that Rocky Face holds dear/... shall,/... disinter/ The workman, noble and saint."

46. *Essays and Introductions*, pg 446.

47. "The Old Stone Cross", *C.P.* pg 365. (All dating of poems in this thesis is taken from A. Norman Jeffares's A *Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats.*)

48. Yeats's insistence upon dramatic delivery that was fully-alive to the poetic values of its speech was no new thing, though: back in the days of his youthful stay in Bedford Park, when Yeats persuaded Todhunter to write and stage *The Sicilian Idyll*, the performances of Florence Farr and Heron Allen - both of whom "read poetry for their pleasure" - led him to "a discovery that was to influence my life". As he recalls in *The Trembling of the Veil*,

> Their speech was music, the poetry acquired a nobility, a passionate austerity that made it akin for certain moments to the great poetry of the world

- and this, even though the play was one that Yeats had "never rated very high as poetry". By contrast,

> When they closed their mouths, and some other player opened his, breaking up the verse to make it conversational, jerking his body or his arms that he might seem no mere austere poetical image but very man, I listened in raging hatred . (*Autobiographies*, pp 147 - 49).

calling the old, lapsed dream of heroic passion back into "modern" being (see *C.P.* pg 375).

50. Again, this "unearthly stuff" seems another echo of that romance, that might become our actual dimension of being beyond the tomb, and that Yeats (in the extract from *Mythologies* discussed above) sees as being revealed in high art.

51. See J.P. Frayne, *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, vol. 1, pg 3.

52. In the essay in question, Yeats also speaks about "the scientific movement" which has

> entered the English theatres in the shape of realism and Ibsenism, and is now playing ducks and drakes with the old theatrical conventions (*ibid.* pg 322.)

The entire review is illuminating as a gloss on "The Old Stone Cross" - and also acts as a reminder of the unity of Yeats's thought, review and poem being separated by about forty years of experience and of reflection.

53. See the poems "Death" (*C.P.* pg 264) and "A Prayer for My Daughter" (*C.P.* pg 211), for instance, for reflections of Yeats's sense that human experience is self-created - with the last section of "The Tower" (*C.P.* pp 222 - 25) added for final authority.

54. As he said in one of the essays on the Irish Dramatic Movement reproduced in *Explorations*,

> An art is always at its greatest when it is most human. Greek acting was great because it did all but everything with the voice, and modern acting may be great when it does everything with voice and movement. But an art which smothers these things with bad painting, with innumerable garish colours, with continual restless mimicries of the surface of life, is an art of fading humanity, a decaying art (pg 110).

And there is the recollection in *Memoirs* of the effect of the symbols he encountered in "a form of meditation" in which he says he

> allowed my mind to drift from image to image, and these images began to effect my writing, making it more sensuous and vivid (pp 27 - 8).

So the realist actor's method actually buries for Yeats what is really human in the drama under "continual restless mimicries of the surface of life" - thereby missing the hidden structure of the apparent scene - and does all this in the name of creating a "more human" and more real dramatic impression; yet what Yeats says about his "meditation" makes it clear that he found his own way towards making words create the impression of vivid sensuous reality through the exercise of reverie, not through the observations and faithful imitations of realism. In other words, the degree to which the impression of reality is to be gained *via* an artistic medium depends upon the artist's mastery of that

medium: the artifice involved has to be unnaturally competent to seem realistic, and must be schooled not just in imitation, but in the coaxing of the communicative substance itself into an expressive plasticity that it doesn't possess in an unpractised state. (The notion of a strictly realist art is actually a contradiction in terms.)

55. See Yeats's comment on Locke in *Essays and Introductions*, pg 414:

> Locke based himself upon the formula, "Nothing in mind that has not come from sense" - sense as the seventeenth century understood it - and Leibnitz commented, "Nothing except mind"... But what if Henry More was right when he contended that men and animals drew not only universals but particulars from a supersensual source?

56. *Essays and Introductions*, pg 525.

This is a late comment, coming from 1937, and taking the latest attitude in the realist position as its theme; but the assumptions underlying this attitude were still the same as those to which Yeats objected amongst the painters we have just seen he found himself "hating" back in the late 1880's for their belief that they must paint what was before them and must be of their own times.

And in a very illuminating and valuable account of the sort of attitude towards the "subject matter" of poetry that Yeats is typifying in the passage just quoted, Louis Macneice says of his generation - which was "suspicious" of Yeats because "all his life" he was "a professed enemy of facts":

> It was a generation that had rediscovered the importance of subject matter: a poem must be *about* something. Further, a poem must be about something *real*, and "real" was often taken to mean contemporary. By these standards, much of Yeats's poetry was vicious (see *The Poetry of W.B. Yeats*, pg 18).

Macneice himself goes on to show how many of the "realists" that Yeats is talking about here made the "mistake" of taking "subject matter" as "the sole, or even the chief, criterion of poetry" (*ibid.*); but this still leaves out of count the key issue that the question about "subject matter" is really that of what we agree to call a "fact", and what we agree to call "real". Yeats's main objection to realist art - as we have seen, and as we shall see further evidence of later - was that it chose to call a real fact only what could be represented in a photograph or in the equivalent of a photograph in another medium. It reduced all that it would admit as being true and important to Stendhal's loitering mirror and what it could reflect of its own immediate surroundings in space and in time. As such, it refused any real meaning or value to anything but what fitted easily within the mechanical conceptions that governed its assumptions: in particular, it refused any real meaning to anything metaphysical, and therefore - in the name of a barren and outmoded Newtonian outlook - imprisoned the mind in a purely material universe.

57. It is difficult not to think of Descartes, putting the sole test of human identity on the activities of the "individual intellect".

58. "A Prayer for Old Age", *C.P.* pg 326.

59. This point is developed more fully at the end of Chapter 5 below.

60. Yeats says in "A General Introduction for my Work":

> When modern Irish literature began, O'Grady's influence predominated. He could delight us with an extravagance we were too critical to share (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 512),

which - as Jeffares has noted (see *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg 460) - "mentions ... O'Grady ... in ways which are complementary to" Yeats's evocation of him in "Beautiful Lofty Things":

> Standish O'Grady supporting himself between the tables
> Speaking to a drunken audience high nonsensical words;
> (*C.P.* pg 348)

- and the sense that we gain of the "delight" that Yeats could take in O'Grady's "extravagance" and "high nonsense()" helps define the sense of the creative possibilities sometimes inherent in an extravagant fancifulness - particularly when that fancifulness is able to illumine a more "critical" outlook - that Yeats himself perhaps has somewhere in mind in praying for seeming folly in old age.

The memory of O'Grady is even more apt, in this context, when we remember that it was he to whom

> Yeats gave credit for reintroducing to Modern Ireland the Old Gaelic epics in which Cuchulain is the dominant figure (see Reg Skene, *The Cuchulain Plays of W.B. Yeats*, pg 16):

having had his prime figure of tragic gaiety mediated to him by a man who was himself capable of such heroically nonsensical extravagance perhaps would have seemed a fitting reminder to Yeats that the heroic needs both tragic and comic forms: let the old man seem a fool, as long as his folly is heroic in its passion.

61. See "The Tower", *C.P.* 218:

> 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?

62. See again "The Tower", *C.P.* pg 224, the last stanza.

63. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 172.

64. See "The Statues", *C.P.* pg 375, ll 20 - 22.

65. *Essays and Introductions*, pg 352.

66. Section VI of Yeats's essay "If I were Four and Twenty" also casts an interesting light on the extent to which he sees art as moulding life, and not just reflecting what is already in being. In a paragraph that looks ahead from 1919 towards things he developed in "The Statues", Yeats says

> If ... the family is the unit of social life, and the origin of civilisation which but exists to preserve it, and almost the sole cause of progress, it seems natural ... that its ecstatic moment, the sexual choice of man and woman, should be the greater part of all poetry. A single wrong choice may destroy a family, dissipating its tradition or its biological force, and the great sculptors, painters, and poets are there that instinct may find its lamp. When a young man imagines the woman of his hope, shaped for all the uses of life, mother and mistress and yet fitted to carry a bow in the wilderness, how much has come from chisel and brush. Educationalists and statesmen, servants of the logical process, do their worst, but they are not the matchmakers who bring together the fathers and mothers of the generations nor shall the type they plan survive (see *Explorations*, pg 274).

So for Yeats the very "type(s)" of people that we are have in a profound sense "come from chisel and brush" - not just the seasoned moods in which we greet "draughty May" and its like, but our very bodies and the textures of our "biological force". To such a view, even the realist artist inevitably imprints a "type" on the human clay, the "real" becoming a dream to be lived; so the main difference between the realist and the "romantic" of Yeats's sort (see the closing stanza to "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931", *C.P.* pg 276) is that Yeats knew what he was doing, and decided to try to bring the clay grace and mettle, rather than condemning it to "shuffle, grunt and groan" by making its image of itself "more human" than need be.

67. John P. Frayne, *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, vol. 1, pg 400.

In the "images or substances" to which Laws refers, the term "image" has the sense shown when he says "man is said to be the Image of God". The meaning of "a substance" can be seen when Laws speaks of

> a spiritual substance, a birth or effect of a will, wrought in and by a spiritual being or power.

This "spiritual substance" surely has a good deal to do with what Yeats sees as bringing "more meridian suns" to play upon the facts of "draughty May": an originating energy within the knower that radically qualifies the known.

68. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 207. The passage from which these terms come runs

> ... certainly if you take from art its martyrdom, you will take from it its glory. It might still reflect the passing modes of mankind, but it would

cease to reflect the face of God.

The comment upon such art that can "reflect" only "the passing modes of mankind" picks up Stendhal's mirror in passing in its idiom, and also makes a good gloss on "the modish painter" Yeats wants kept true to his trade in Section IV of "Under Ben Bulben" (*C.P.* pg 399); while the notion that art needs "martyrdom" - the suffering of misunderstanding due to being established beyond the grasp of most of its immediate contemporaries - certainly cocks an eye at the distinct unpopularity of the poetic agenda Yeats enjoins upon his literary heirs in that Section, too.

69. The "Self", that is, that the "young English poets" in Yeats's formulation about the supposed "objective importance" of "the man in the Tube" choose not to "express".

70. We could note again the thought from *On the Boiler* that we looked at early in the Introduction:

> Just when some school of painting has become popular, reproductions in every print-shop window, millionaires out-bidding one another, everybody's affections stirred, painters wear out their nerves establishing something else, and this something else must be the other side of the penny - for Heraclitus was in the right. Opposites are everywhere face to face, dying each other's life, living each other's death *(Explorations, pg 430)*.

71. See John P. Frayne, *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, vol. 1, pg 84.

Chapter 2: "This Age and the Next Age".

Whilst formulating once again his conception of the creative, interventive nature of great art as he wrote "The Statues", Yeats also presented an image of his own times that epitomised the challenges that he felt himself to be facing - felt the arts generally to be facing - in offering proper poetic service to a "modern" audience.

The world he contemplates in this poem, as the condition in which such "modern" individuals and peoples must establish their selfhood,[1] is depicted as a chaotic sea of thoughts and things in which the Irish sensibility - his focusing concern in this poem - has already been "wrecked":

> When Pearce summoned Cuchulain to his side,
> What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,
> What calculation, number, measurement, replied?
> We Irish, born into that ancient sect
> But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
> And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
> Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
> The lineaments of a plummet-measured face. [2]

And these lines give point to what has gone before - a discussion of the dynamics of Phidias' art - that locates the theme finally within a specifically-Irish context.

But this very Irish focus shouldn't obscure from us the fact that "this filthy modern tide" - in which the "ancient sect" of Irish spirituality has been "wrecked" in a "formless spawning fury" of mind - still also reflects a broader current of thought from beyond Irish shores.[3] This "tide" is an image of a spiritual outlook that seems to Yeats to be a general

malaise of the portion of the European mind that had direct bearing on Ireland - as our discussion will indicate. In its being a "formless spawning fury", this "tide" of thought in which Ireland has foundered like a ship in a storm suggests exactly the wild mechanical energy - ungoverned by the sort of forming "spiritual intellect"[4] that shows in a Phidias' vision - of a "modern" world that was itself "born" for Yeats in the confusion that fell upon our thought[5] when Locke dreamed-up a strictly material and mechanical reality.[6] It is a "tide" that - as Yeats saw things in an earlier essay - had reduced the modern mind to "nothing but sense",[7] in denial of all supersensual knowledge.

So this "tide" and its wrecking "fury" represent for Yeats a vital element within the spiritual tenor of the times that he saw himself facing as a person; and it constitutes, as such, a central factor within the complex of challenges that he felt himself to be facing as a poet. At the end of "The Statues", we look, through Yeats's eyes, at a contemporary Europe[8] that seems - for all its surface energy - to be really assailed by an unrecognised spiritual confusion. And, in absorbing this image, we are obviously also standing before something of vital importance to our attempts to understand why Yeats wrote this poem as he did. If we're looking for reasons for Yeats's insistence - in "Under Ben Bulben", and elsewhere - that the artist must often strive to reveal an order of values and of verities not currently in fashion,[9] then one of the immediate reasons we can see for this

insistence is that he so obviously felt that his own times stood especially in need of an imaginative and spiritual art that could help deal with the hard times that he felt had fallen on the spirit of Europe generally.

And though this view that Yeats offers in "The Statues" of the "modern tide" - of his own immediate times, and of their particular spiritual quality - is a perspective offered towards the end of a long and thoughtful life, it is a view of these times which has its roots in convictions that are actually being examined, at least in prototype, in even the earliest of his poems. Part of the authority that sounds in "The Statues" comes from its judgements having the deliberations of a lifetime behind them; which means that we could - in fact, should - range through an entire backdrop of formulations, going right back to the young man's notions, in trying to see what the elder poet's image of "this filthy modern tide" has to say about the world that Yeats is addressing in his work as a whole.[10]

If we look, for instance, at one of the earliest poems of all, then we find a view of the "modern tide" of the spirit that is clearly father to the vision of "The Statues":

> The woods of Arcady are dead,
> And over is their antique joy;
> Of old the world on dreaming fed;
> Grey truth is now her painted toy;
> Yet still she turns her restless head:
> But O, sick children of the world,
> Of all the many changing things
> In dreary dancing past us whirled,
> To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,
> Words alone are certain good.[11]

For though "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" and "The Statues" are obviously very different poems, written at opposite ends of a long and well-examined life, one of their many links is that in both poems, Yeats is addressing what he in each case believes to be the central malaise of recent European history. And, in both poems, that central malaise, at root, is seen to be a serious neglect of the imagination as a vital human faculty. If "The Statues" is a poem about the creative imagination, and its role as the prime shaper of people and of peoples, then "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", in its basics, addresses the same subject. In the early poem, "The woods of Arcady" stand as an image of any time in which the poetic imagination not only strongly colours and directs people's thinking, but is generally acknowledged by them to do so. Such an outlook stands, as such, in defining contrast to the modern fixation with "Grey Truth" that the younger Yeats sees as besetting his times: the preoccupation with "Grey Truth" being the exercise of a narrowed rationalism that becomes for him a sickness of the mind.[12]

As the Song develops its thought, the "dreary dancing" of the "changing things" that form the exclusive focus of the purely rational mind-set is seen as being a whirl of images, a chaos, a "restless" and spiritually-empty flux of shifting impressions that distract the "children of the world" from the more abiding truths of the "heart". This "dreary" dance of ideas is seen as being the product of an attitude towards

experience that takes its rhythm from "Chronos" - from time conceived as a mechanical, objective process, in denial of lived time and of the time of "dreaming" and of awarenesses that lie beyond any rational conceptions of cause and effect.[13]

And it is significant that what patterns modern thought - to the thought of this poem, anyway - is a "cracked tune", one lacking proper music: which seems an image of lives lacking exactly the sort of imaginative vision that Yeats sees at work upon people in the dreams of a Phidias; seems exactly the sort of vision that he sees the "modern tide" of mind in "The Statues" to be lacking, too. Though the insights expressed in the later poem are obviously far more complex and experienced, "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" can still help us significantly in grasping more of the full resonance of the strictures upon the mentality of his own times that Yeats is expressing there at the other end of life. The young man's image of the world as a sort of nursery of ideas[14] might seem, at first glance, far from the wild and wrecking tide of the matured vision; but when the young poet imagines the "dreary dancing" of the modern mind's "sick" entrapment in the spin of supposedly exterior things, he is surely offering an image of a rhythm of thought that is as innately destructive of all but its own narrowed perspectives as is that which is to be found in the image of "the filthy modern tide" of unimaginativeness - comprehended in "all its spawning fury" - of "The Statues"?

For the truth is that part of what Yeats is objecting to in "The Statues" is a feature of modern times, as he saw them, that he had in fact quarrelled-with throughout his life as poet and as thinker. He saw even as a young man that the influence of the Rationalist Enlightenment had blighted the European mind by reducing its conception of even its own action to a mechanical and strictly mental process. As he says in the parody of the Genesis story already referred-to in passing above:

> Locke sank into a swoon;
> The garden died;
> God took the spinning-jenny
> Out of his side.[15]

And this is Yeats's own myth about the birth of the modern world, Locke becoming the Anti-Adam, whose slumber is the death of the tangibly-spiritual world of the fully-awakened imagination,[16] and whose dream-bride is a rational mechanism, the twirling spindle of the mechanist gyre beginning its ascendency within Western thought.[17]

So we are clearly on the same ground here as in his youthful rejection of "Grey Truth" as the exclusive province of human awareness; and we are also right at the first swell of the "modern tide" that he sees as having "wrecked" Ireland's spirituality in "The Statues", too.[18] In "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", Yeats sets the truths of the "heart" and of the "woods of Arcady" - which is an earlier incarnation of the "garden" of the imagination that died in Locke's "swoon" - as counters to Locke's mechanism. And in "The

Statues", there is the "proper dark" that the dreaming, Phidian artist brings to light, to serve the same function as do the Arcadian woods and their "hapless faun" of offering a counterpoise to the limitedly "modern" mind-set.

So in both poems, the negatives defined and the positives affirmed have Locke's dead garden - the Eden from which the "modern" mind has been expelled by the mechanist's hypostatization of rational knowledge - implicit within their imaginative matrix in Yeats's mind. His noting of Liebniz's comment that Locke was talking about a world in which all human experience had been reduced to "Nothing except mind" possibly echoed for him with Blake's refutation of the mechanist position, in which he challenges the prejudice that what "our senses five" can reveal to us is all there is to know about the world - or about ourselves.[19] As "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" shows,[20] Yeats saw quite clearly that Locke's sort of thinking, and its reduction of everything to "sense", was an imprisoning of the mind not only within itself but also within the conception of a greater universe that was purely mechanical.

Which is an imprisonment that is also reflected in the image of the sea that is "filthy" with flotsam - and that wrecks the spirit by throwing it into a flux of chaotic mechanisms - in "The Statues". The "many changing things" that "Chronos" - who is time conceived as pure mechanism - keeps drearily jigging through the mind, and the wrecking "modern"

tide, are both at bottom images of the mind trapped amongst objects that seem entirely external to itself, and that seem to be in no way influenced by the mood of their perceivers.[21]

So what Yeats is specifically at odds with, in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" as well as in "The Statues", is essentially the sort of imprisonment that he sees the modern mind as suffering under the philosophical legacy of the Enlightenment - as this is epitomised for him by Locke's mechanism. And this conviction that the modern Western mind is beset by such a reductionist self-image is also what is at the core of the aesthetic stance that is declared in "Under Ben Bulben", in its call upon the Irish arts to renounce all realism and to "Bring the soul of man to God"[22] - to a more spiritual or imaginative vision than the realism that he sees growing from mechanist philosophy can ever acknowledge. In this rejection of artistic realism, Yeats is shunning what he sees as being a wasteland in which Locke's sort of thinking locks out of mind anything but itself and its own egoisms.[23]

If there is any doubt about this view being dynamically operative within the aesthetic imperatives underlying the stance just typified, we need only to look at a poem like "The Realists" of Yeats's middle years:

> Hope that you may understand!
> What can books of men that wive
> In a dragon-guarded land,
> Paintings of the dolphin-drawn
> Sea-nymphs in their pearly wagons
> Do, but wake a hope to live
> That had gone
> With the dragons?[24]

- because what we see in these lines is a poetic indictment of the damage done by such philosophy as Locke's. The elusiveness as ideas of the dragons of this poem is part of Yeats's meaning; as is the professed uncertainty as to whether his audience will be able to understand a poem that works so markedly by imaginative suggestion, rather than by direct statement. As one possible reading of their function within the "land" of the poem would seem to define them, these dragons become fellow-travellers with the "priests in black gowns" of Blake's "Garden of Love":[25] turnkeys of the outlook that has produced the "mind-forged manacles"of his "London",[26] whose role is to deprive their prisoners of any access to the sorts of supersensual awarenesses that are brought to mind by the highly-symbolic paintings that Yeats evokes as contrast to what seems to be the mind-set that these dragons symbolise. Such dragons, left to their own ministry, seem to exist to reduce life to their own terms of conception only. As such, within the reading of the poem we are following, they seem to be symbols of an antagonism towards the imaginative and spiritual aspects of life[27]: a limitation of human awareness to only what the sense-bound - the Lockean - mind is able to recognise.[28]

Which would make these dragons clear agents of the state of mind that the "dreary dancing" of "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" and that the "filthy modern tide" of "The Statues" both typify.[29] Again, "Grey Truth" - a narrow and institutionalised rationalism - dominates the human scene

through these dragons, at the expense of other modes of awareness - whether of the heart, or of the "Word", that in the early "Song" echoes with the super-human energies of Creation, as it did in the Genesis garden, that died in the "modern" Western mind that twirled out of Locke's dream to be born.

So, if we consider the perspectives offered by the poems we have been examining, it seems that at least one of the threads in the overall pattern of Yeats's purposes[30] as a writer was spun out of a need he felt to challenge and counter certain assumptions - arising from a mechanistic philosophy and expressing themselves in realism in the arts - that he saw as forming a disastrously limiting conception of the nature of human consciousness and of its materials. He obviously saw the mechanist conception as one that held general dominion over his contemporaries, much to their detriment;[31] and he also obviously felt that these reductionist assumptions influenced for the worse the most fundamental notions that his fellows generally held about the worlds they inhabited - both within and without themselves. In writing a poem like "The Realists", Yeats was in a sense addressing a problem of aesthetics, offering his criticism of realism as a manner in the arts; but - as he sees that the realists' curtailment of human self-awareness actually causes people to lose "a hope to live" - it is clear that such aesthetic considerations were, first and foremost, matters of the greatest psychic significance for him.

After all, as "The Statues" reminds us, Yeats believed we live life as we imagine it to be; so his rejection of the realist manner and choice of subject isn't just a shunning of a particular taste in poems or in pictures or in plays. Or - rather - it *is* exactly "just" that, given the very special sense that Yeats had of what a specific taste in art does within the facts of everyday living. Phidias, in changing the taste of Greece, changed her sense of self and of destiny, to Yeats's eyes, anyway.[32]

Which is why we find him so consistently condemning the realistic drama from which his own plays so radically differed. In the *Last Poems*, for instance, we have "The Old Stone Cross" - already glanced at in Chapter 1 above - in which the persona Yeats uses (viewing the productions of time, as he does, from the vantage of eternity) finds the modern theatre the worst thing in a generally sorry scene:

> But actors lacking music
> Do most excite my spleen,
> They say it is more human
> To shuffle, grunt and groan,
> Not knowing what unearthly stuff
> Rounds a mighty scene
> *Said the man in the golden breastplate*
> *Under the old stone Cross.* [33]

The objection here is to the idea of what it is to be "human" that underlies the image that the realist actor presents to his audience. Such a standard of reality and of significance as this, for Yeats, reduces the audience's vision of human reality to nothing but its absurdity. Though the reference to the "unearthly stuff" also registers unseen or

supernatural dimensions to human experience - dimensions that will be examined, as factors influencing Yeats's aesthetic convictions, later in this discussion - the formulation also reflects a might to the everyday human scene itself that Yeats would see the realist actor as "Not knowing" about. The truths that are hidden by the tattered mortal dress of the paltry scarecrow[34] - which is all that the objectifying eye can glimpse of the subject at the heart of the apparent existential absurdity - have a grandeur, for Yeats, that demands its own recognition. These "actors lacking music" that Yeats's persona in "Under the Old Stone Cross" scorns so fluently significantly echo the "cracked tune that Chronos sings" back in the youthful "Song" that we have just looked at: they lack poetry, the voice of the imagination,[35] and they deliberately narrow the circle of the mind's footlights, "Not knowing" of the "unearthly stuff" that imaginative drama can make its sensible materials evoke - "stuff" like humanity's "mighty" contest with its mortal destiny. Such "actors lacking music" are really of the party of the dragons of the first of our readings of "The Realists": helping to keep the human vision of self and of circumstance trapped within an outlook that Yeats would see as being seriously de-humanised, an actual spiritual deformity.

To fill out the picture further, we can see an earlier perspective on the old warrior's problem with realist drama being developed in an essay written about the theatre in May, 1899 in which Yeats addresses the imaginative failings that he

finds within the modern theatre, and in which he gives a further touch of insight into the groundwork of these objections to artistic realism that we are noting. At one point in the essay, Yeats says:

> I find it easier to believe that audiences, who have learned, as I think, from the life of crowded cities to live upon the surface of life, and actors and managers, who study to please them, have changed, than that imagination, which is the voice of what is eternal in man, has changed.[36]

Leaving aside the insight that this passage gives us into Yeats's sense of the urbanisation of modern life as an element within the "filthy modern tide" of the human dilemma that he saw himself facing as an artist, this statement takes us a good way in commentary on the "spleen" of the ancient onlooker in "The Old Stone Cross". Realism, as a fashion of the stage, is for Yeats the reflection of a stunted awareness, limited by pressures of a new sort of urban experience, to just "the surface of life".

But it is worth noting that this life upon the mere "surface" of things that Yeats sees as having come with modern "crowded cities" would be for him really only a social and environmental reinforcement of a state of mind that had already been shallowed and distracted by the legacy of Locke's sort of mechanist thinking. Prior to the blur of impressions bred by "the life of crowded cities" would lie

> ...all the many changing things
> In dreary dancing past us whirled,
> To the cracked tune that Chronos sings

of "The Song of the Happy Shepherd". In this "Song" and in the prose extract quoted above, what has most disastrously been

lost for Yeats in this "confusion that fell upon our thought"[37] is "imagination, which is the voice of what is eternal in man". The "actors and managers, who study to please" such a distracted audience - without equally studying how to heal that audience's proper sense of self - take as their method the mirroring of a doubly-lost public sensibility, and - in Yeats's terms - become therefore part of the spiritual chaos and not of its cure. He would see such actors as working like "the modish painter" of "Under Ben Bulben"[38] to reflect a view of things that fails to be real, because it obscures "what is eternal in man", and mirrors only "the surface".

For it would seem - from the essay on the Theatre, and from the depiction in "Under Ben Bulben" of "the modish painter", in particular - that the root of Yeats's objection to realist art lies in his sense of its being a fashion that (for all its reflecting a view of human life that might largely be current amongst its concurring audience) is nevertheless a mirror that is being held to only a reduced part of a greater human totality; is a limiting of its audience's everyday awareness of greater human potentialities than its mechanist terms of conception will allow it to admit. For Yeats, what is actually reflected in the realist mirror omits those parts of the human range that are out of view at the moment: parts that lack our proper attention only because of the damage that has already been done - by specific "modern" pressures of physical circumstance and of

intellectual climate - to the current sense of selfhood. What the realist mirror reflects, in this view, is limited to the little that can be recognised by a materialist and unimaginative age that has generally lost any "proper" sense of what is "eternal" within human experience.[39]

In other words, to Yeats's view artists "lacking music" (or "imagination, the voice of what is eternal in man") can actually only reinforce a modern reductionist mind-set within which their audience already suffers imprisonment - whether it consciously knows it or not.[40]

And - to compound the folly Yeats sees as acting within a strictly realist aesthetic - he also obviously saw this realism as being only an ephemeral deviation from the mainstream of the artistic practices that he judged to have prevailed in the drama before "Locke fell into (his) dream" and pulled the arts after him.[41] For Yeats, the narrowly "human" programme of the realist actor fails to recognise that its intentions are governed by dramatic necessities that are only - at best - part of a passing phase of practical contingencies: are just means to an end, and not an end in themselves. As he puts it in the early essay on the French symbolist theatre already referred to above:

> The scientific movement which has swept away so many religious and philosophical misunderstandings of ancient truth has entered the English theatres in the shape of realism and Ibsenism, and is now playing ducks and drakes with the old theatrical conventions. We no longer believe that the world was made five thousand years ago, and are beginning to suspect that Eve's apple was not the kind of apple you buy at the greengrocer's

> for a penny, but we still have a little faith in the virtuous hero and the wicked villain of the theatre, and in the world of tricks and puppets which is all that remains of the old romance in its decadence. Outside the theatre science, having done its work, is beginning to vanish into the obscurity of the schools, but inside there is still so much to do that many forget how impermanent must be its influence, and how purely destructive its mission there, and write and talk as if the imaginative method of the great dramatists, of Kaladasa, of Sophocles, of Shakespeare and of Goethe was to let its house on a lease forever to the impassioned realisms of M. Zola and of Dr Ibsen in his later style, or to the would-be realisms of Mr Pinero or Mr Jones.[42]

What is said here shows quite clearly that Yeats's objection to realism was no mere "romantic" prejudice. As he is quite sure here, science has had its "mission" to serve, and has rightly "swept away ... religious and philosophical misunderstandings of ancient truth".[43] But what he says here also shows his belief that realism in the arts has substituted a scientific criticism of life for "the imaginative method" of "great dramatists" ranging in their historical contexts from Greek and Indian classical through English Renaissance to European Romantic. Against this abiding pattern of "method" and focus that Yeats here discovers, he sets the "impermanent" preoccupations of what he sees as being a "purely destructive" and entirely transient phase in thought and art. At best, such scientific or realist perspectives have been a broom to clear the way for a more confident return to that "imaginative method" they seem to think they have permanently replaced.[44] As the essay continues

> In France, they had their Independent Theatre before we had ours, and the movement which must follow the destructive movement has come, it seems, to them already. Those among the younger

> generation whose temperament fits them to receive first the new current, the new force, have grown tired of the photographing of life, and have returned by the path of symbolism to imagination and poetry, the only things that are ever permanent.[45]

It is once again "imagination and poetry, the only things that are ever permanent" that ground Yeats's thought here; and the limited realist concern with what is sensibly-given[46] that he here identifies is seen as being just a "photographing of life"; as being a depiction of experience that leaves entirely out of sight the psychic creativity of the experiencing person.[47]

There is a faith in this essay that "the movement which must follow the destructive movement" - or dramatic realism - had already begun, and was growing as a "new force"; was showing itself already as the start of a return to "permanent" awarenesses transcending those of the mirror-work of purely realist reflection. The "spleen" of the old warrior of "The Old Stone Cross" against the unmusical actors shows this faith to have been premature; but what Yeats has to say about the symbolist drama here in his thirtieth year still gives us a helpful set of bearings to follow in thinking about his own "path" as poet and as champion of imaginative art within the ethos of his own times.

He obviously, for instance, felt himself to be amongst those able "to receive first the new current, the new force" of a return to symbolism and to an art of deliberate

imaginativeness. We can easily see how this "path" would involve him in the attempt to embody what he saw as being "permanent" features of human awareness and experience - rather than imitating those ephemeral details of the realist photograph that obscure for him what is lasting.

So this essay gives us, in other words, a clear intimation of Yeats's sense of his own "mission" within the unwinding of the endings of the Enlightenment's "destructive" task.[48] His own work - and the work of the arts in the "new current" that he feels running in the drama - is to follow "the path of symbolism to imagination and poetry"; which is a path clearly leading steeply away from the photographic realism of the objectifying and ultimately mechanist stance of the dramatic mode he still finds current in the English theatre.[49] As his argument in the essay has it, now that the limited programme of such a theatre's scientific "mission" is already really done, dramatic realism is actually already *passe*, in the land that gave us its godfather Descartes, anyway; and its survival as a "method" in the arts is to be explained simply as the clinging of an un-sloughed convention, the lingering of an outmoded but familiar conceptual habit.[50]

And the distinction implied in all this - that between being truly contemporary (in the sense of being an agent of the "new forces" and the "new currents" running in one's times) and being merely in fashion, like the "modish painter" who comes under Yeats's correction in "Under Ben Bulben" - is

important to our assessment of the conviction expressed in that poem that the arts must choose themes that deliberately move away from the trends of the "modern tide"[51] of European thought, if they are really to be of the greatest service to humanity. That "modern tide", for Yeats, is actually not modern at all: it is the flotsam of outworn intellectual debris that has been left floating in the contemporary mind by the conceptual confusions of an age that is itself already intrinsically gone, but that lingers on in popular habit. To such a view, added to the original wrongheadedness of Locke's "swoon"[52] as a conception of human reality is the fact that the assumptions underlying realism in the arts have already become history, and are no longer really a part of that "current" of mind that Yeats felt taking a "new" direction in "Those among the younger generation whose temperament fits them to receive (it) first".[53]

So when Yeats calls on modern Irish artists to "Cast your minds on other days/ That we in coming days may be" nearer to the sorts of truths that he sees the "modern tide" as having washed away,[54] he is certainly not talking about any simple reconstitution of provenly archaic forms of being. The whole thrust of his thought, from early in his work, indicates that a call such as this grounds in a sense of the need to "disinter"[55] capacities that, in the "modern" mind, have been largely hidden under the inherited rubble of an earlier age's philosophical misconceptions.[56] What he is calling for, in other words, isn't any escapist regression into some romantic

fiction about the historical past, but an imaginative and therefore spiritual progression away from what he sees as being the shadows of a dangerous set of notions about essential human things - a set of notions that has its own specific history - towards something less limiting.[57] "Other days" are to be recalled only so that "coming days" - the problematical future that is the Phidian artist's special area of responsibility - may be properly served by being properly prefigured.

So for Yeats the realist incursion into the arts had narrowed and limited the range of the powers that the arts had shown themselves capable of exercising before the mechanist fallacy took hold in Europe - which is a view that is there again in the weave of what he says when he speaks about the problems of an "age" of mere "criticism" having displaced "emotion" and even "revelation" within the range of European attention:

> I cannot get it out of my mind that this age of criticism is about to pass, and an age of emotion, of moods, of revelation, is about to come in its place; for certainly belief in a supersensual world is at hand again; and when the notion that we are "phantoms of the earth and water" has gone down the wind we will trust our own being and all it desires to invent; and when the external world is no longer the standard of reality, we will learn again that the great passions are angels of God, and that to embody them "uncurbed in their eternal glory", even in their labour for the ending of man's peace and prosperity, is more than to comment, however wisely, upon the tendencies of our time, or even "to sum up" our time, as the phrase is; for art is revelation, and not a criticism, and the life of the artist is in the old saying, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but cans't not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit".[58]

Apart from the sense we get from this passage, too, that Yeats still feels a "new current" of thought and feeling about to make itself generally known amongst his fellows, this piece of his thinking also helps us a good deal on our way in exploring his aesthetic stance and its underpinning convictions. The fundamental tensions acting within the ideas here expressed should be familiar from the writings we have already considered: the current age - bent upon "criticism" and "summing up" and "commenting upon" itself - is sketched in strong contrast to the sort of times that Yeats feels to be coming: "an age of emotion, of moods, of revelation" - an age, in other words, that admits all the things that such "criticism" tends to overlook.[59] But where this particular essay takes us a good bit further is in the vision it offers us of Yeats's conception of the mind itself, and of the mind's contents.

For here the art that is "criticism" and not "revelation" is seen to base itself upon the mistaken rationalist - and therefore materialist - assumption that "we are phantoms of the earth and water": an assumption which automatically makes "the external world ... the standard of reality". Following the lines of Yeats's thought here, this reduced image of the self makes the mind seem sense-bound, a merely passive mirror in which the sensible world irresistibly and mechanically reflects itself. The processes of consciousness then become - as we have already seen Yeats putting it - a mere "photographing of life", with the knower playing no part in

actively composing what is to be known.

But, as is clear from the passage just quoted, this notion that the mind is simply a sort of sensible mirror fails - as a notion - to mirror those realities that are not to be found in "the external world": realities which the language of this essay suggests are mysteries to the reason, that are able to be indicated to the mind only through terms unlike those of purely rational discourse. Though we must consider in a later chapter the issues raised for our theme by Yeats's own "belief in a supersensual world",[60] what concerns us at the present moment is the image he gives us in this essay of a greater mind being ignored by what he sees as comprising the current mind-set of a narrow rationalism; and this greater mind is expressly concerned with exactly the sorts of activities and energies that are known not through the observations of "criticism", but through sensitivities that include even a capacity for actual "revelation" - for the furthest thing imaginable from exclusive ratiocination.

In other words, the mind itself for Yeats is a complex and mysterious meeting-ground of realities that include but greatly transcend those of "the external world" upon which alone the realist artist imagines himself to be focusing.[61] When Yeats calls upon poet, sculptor and painter to "Bring the soul of man to God",[62] the call is essentially an injunction to the arts to bring back into the "modern" mind an awareness of the "supersensual world" that is "the external world's"

sleeping partner; and the call is, as such, for a fuller integration of the elements constituting human consciousness than the rationalist - and realist - view is capable of contemplating, let alone of effecting.[63] The artistic "programme" that Yeats offers in "Under Ben Bulben", seen from this angle, then becomes an attempt to redeem the "modern" audience that is defined here and in poems like "The Statues" and "The Old Stone Cross" from exactly the sort of fragmented partialness of outlook that he sees the realist programme as actually seeking to reinforce.[64] As in the essay we have just glanced at, "Under Ben Bulben" enunciates Yeats's sense of the need for the establishment of an image of human selfhood that can do proper justice to that selfhood's actual complexity and range of being: a complexity and a range which he sees as lying beyond the reach of what is for him the realist artist's exclusive concern with "the external world" and its immediate mental ramifications - beyond all such clutter left over in the modern mind from the fading mechanisms of the seventeenth century.

We have already looked at a passage from the important essay which speaks of Stendhal's having "created a modern art" of a sort that Yeats found disturbing.[65] The same passage - considered from another slant of emphasis - also helps give direction to what we are exploring at the moment, which warrants quoting it in full again:

> Stendhal created a modern art; the seminary in *Le Rouge et le noir*, unlike that described by Balzac in *Louis Lambert*, is of his own time and judged according to its standards, is wholly reflected

> in the dawdling mirror that was to empty modern literature; but something compelled Balzac while still at school to travel backwards, as did the mind of Louis Lambert, to accept all that lay hidden in his blood and nerves.[66]

So Yeats sees Stendhal as helping to "empty" the "modern" mind of everything but the impressions it has "of (its) own time", and as rejecting anything "that lay hidden in (its) blood and nerves", out of sight of the realist mirror and its reductive concern with what is purely contemporary and what is strictly sensible.[67] Though the language in this later statement is more sinuously incarnate than that of the essay on Father Christian Rosencrux from which we have quoted above, this statement of the "hidden" dimensions of self that Yeats sees Stendhal as neglecting - and Balzac as deliberately seeking-out - recalls nevertheless what he has to say in thinking about Rosencrux. In that essay, he is concerned with "the great passions" that "are angels of God", and with the "emotions ... moods ... revelation(s)" that escape the notice of mere "criticism" and "comment" and summary: that evade, in other words, any simply rationalist critique that may be offered of any particular set of events. And what Yeats has to say about the things Balzac found "hidden in the blood and nerves" are surely grown on the same stem of thought. The "supersensual world" of the essay on Rosencrux and Balzac's mysteries of the "blood" and "nerves" - sources deeper than the senses - both indicate profound dimensions of human experience, of the mind's contents, that are hidden from the realist mirror entirely. The human mind itself, in other

words, is not actually susceptible to purely realist interpretation.[68]

As we have already heard Yeats saying in another context,[69] Stendhal's "dawdling" mirror reduces the image we have of the imagination to the passive "quicksilver at the back of a looking-glass".[70] So not only does the realist mirror, for Yeats, give an inadequate image of what actually is in the mind; it also gives a false impression of what the mind is, in itself and in its mode of operation. The image Yeats sees Stendhal as offering would suggest that the mind is in itself entirely blank, and in no way active or creative in its dealings with "reality".[71] It is a view that sees the mind as not only a slave to the impressions made upon it by "the external world" - we might recall Locke's "Nothing in the mind but sense" - but that also conceives of that mind as a sort of zombie, as something entirely mechanical in its registering of the features of this "external" world.[72]

Perhaps, to catch the full basis of Yeats's differences with Stendhal - and with his sort of realism, when this is taken as having been a determinant in forming the "modern" mind that is under scrutiny in a poem like "Under Ben Bulben" - we need to consider the rather gleeful irony with which he presents Berkeley's refutation of the realist conceptions of mind and of world in a poem from the later years, in which he speaks of

> God-appointed Berkeley (who) proved all things a dream,
> That this pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world, its

farrow that so solid seem,
Must vanish upon the instant if the mind but change its theme.[73]

Yeats says of the researches that he and Augusta Gregory undertook into the folk-lore of the Irish peasantry:

> As that ancient system of belief unfolded before us, with unforseen probabilities and plausibilities, it was as though we had begun to live like a dream[74]

- which closely parallels what the lines from "Blood and the Moon" see Berkeley as having recalled into the philosophical discourse of his own day.[75] Berkeley's point, for Yeats, would be that the "mind-as-mirror" notion fails to recognise the central role that the knower plays in constituting the known - both what is known, and the ways in which it is known. Mind and world are far more dynamically related, for Yeats, than the realist position could acknowledge; and this is simply because human awareness, for him, is in itself a passionate and creative process - and never a polaroid passively and helplessly impressed with purely "objective" sensations.[76]

For, one of the great commonplaces of experience that Yeats maintains against any merely mechanist conception of the mind is the fact of that mind's active engagement with - and disposition of - the materials it encounters as consciousness. One of his central and enduring certainties is that meaning or truth is available to us only in human terms,[77] and that the focus and mood of the knower's attention radically determine both the substance and the quality of what is actually known.[78] For Yeats, everything depends on "the mind" and its "theme" of the moment - as his lines on Berkeley affirm.

All this is clearly shown in the superb *Last Poem* called "Politics", in which it is the direction and tenor of the "attention" that determines the human meaning even of such pressing and apparently-objective facts as "war and war's alarms":

> How can I, that girl standing there,
> My attention fix
> On Roman, or on Russian
> Or on Spanish politics?
> Yet here's a travelled man that knows
> What he talks about,
> And there's a politician
> That has read and thought,
> And maybe what they say is true
> Of war and war's alarms,
> But O that I were young again
> And held her in my arms![79]

For all that can be said about the great interest and pressure of the sorts of politics the persona talks about - politics that ultimately range into war itself - the real "attention" of this person has its "theme" set in another tragedy and in another, more inward struggle than that looming over the span of Europe.[80]

But this poem doesn't offer only a reminder of the tension that commonly exists between the public and the personal perspectives: it also shows that it is where the old man's desires focus that the meanings that he finds in his circumstances are concentrated; where his own "attention" is "fix(ed)", by factors that have little to do with any "exterior" or public scale of priorities. Despite all the talk and all the "alarms", the theme that has seized the old man's mind makes his own most urgent realities very different things from those absorbing the "attention" of the other people who

are acting and perceiving about him.[81] Whatever can be said to be in the exterior world, Yeats is suggesting, takes its true human form from the inner "theme" of the mind in which the total drama of the present is being enacted. The "pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world" conceived of by the rationalism that the dawdling realist mirror then reflects - matter at its muddiest - is in actual experience, then, under the shaping pressure of necessities that originate far more within the experiencing awareness than in any so-called "exterior reality".[82]

This conviction that the mind's own themes creatively engage with - and even dispose - the given details of experience is there again in another suggestive little poem; one which significantly takes its place, in both date of composition and in setting within the book of poems in which it appeared, very near "The Realists":

> What's riches to him
> That has made a great peacock
> With the pride of his eye?
> The wind-beaten, stone-grey,
> And desolate Three Rock
> Would nourish his whim,
> Live he or die
> Amid wet rock and heather
> His ghost will be gay
> Adding feather to feather
> For the pride of his eye.[83]

As for Berkeley, even "wet rocks and heather" are - in the end - intimate details within the drama of someone's awareness; details that take their deepest human - and therefore humanly-available - meanings from promptings that

arise from what, in the essay on Father Rosencrux, Yeats called "our own being and all it cares to invent", rather than from any given, static and immutable "exterior" structure of the sort proposed, for Yeats, by Locke's mechanism and Stendhal's budding realism.[84]

So, even leaving aside, for now, the realities that our encounters with the "supersensual world" of the essay on Rosencrux bring into the human mind,[85] Yeats and the realist would obviously hold very different views of the nature of our engagements even with the sensual world itself. Even "exterior reality", for Yeats, is actively met by the mind, and is re-made in the meeting, as happens in "The Peacock": such "reality" is no passively and mechanically registered thing that is internalised like the impressions on a photographic plate. Both in thought and in action, the individual human experience of circumstance or existential environment is determined in quality - and therefore in meaning - from within the self, rather than being dictated from without. Human awareness, in other words, is for Yeats a creative process: an *ad-libbing* on any "given" script that the materialist might imagine to exist beyond the mind's current "theme".[86] The mind mixes-in with events to give them their true timbre.[87]

And this is a point that Yeats makes even more forcefully in another poem, written in late 1927:

> Nor dread nor hope attend
> A dying animal;
> A man awaits his end
> Dreading and hoping all;

Many times he died,
Many times rose again.
A great man in his pride
Confronting murderous men
Casts scorn upon
Supersession of breath;
He knows death to the bone -
Man has created death.[88]

Beyond what this poem has to say about the ways in which the consciousness that confronts any immediate experience is underpinned, for Yeats, by personal experience that is gathered from beyond the bounds of the life actually in process,[89] the faith here expressed arises from the conviction that the quality of even so seemingly "exterior" an event as someone's victimisation by "murderous" enemies really depends, for its meaning, upon an inward stance bred of the tenor of that person's understanding and imagination and attitude towards self and towards circumstance. Every death ever suffered was made what it really was, for Yeats, by the mood of its sufferer;[90] and human awareness creates meanings that re-make even what seems, at the outset, to be determined purely by exterior chance.[91]

Given this belief that human awareness entails a creative encounter with experience - and not just its reflection in a passive mirror - Yeats's call in "Under Ben Bulben" for imaginative, symbol-susceptible art is all the more easily understandable. His objection to the dull and idle mirror that the "actors lacking music" offer their audience, for instance, probably had at least some of its grounding in a sense of the true cultural needs of beings who actually constitute realities by the mere act of their being conscious. If we make

up the world we experience as completely as what we've seen of Yeats's thinking shows he believed us to, then the art we need must itself be overtly creative: must offer depictions of human experience that themselves clearly reflect the dynamic role that the knower plays in structuring what is known. Anything else would establish a false image of selfhood, that could lead those who succumb to it only into the sort of illusions about the self and its true potentials that "The Realists" - as we have seen in one of our readings of it, at least - symbolises as being "dragon-guarded" and as thwarted by notions that actually take away the "hope to live" - a hope that the poem suggests it is the special concern of imaginative art to "awake" in its audience.

The point being made is that Yeats obviously believed that imaginative art establishes for its audience a more profound intuition of selfhood than any realism could offer - a point made well in a poem like "The Statues". Part of the objection, amongst the *Last Poems*, to unmusical actor and "modish painter", is an objection to what such realist image-makers fail to reveal to their audiences: the true facts of the nature of human awareness. "The garden died" when Locke fell into his dream that we are "phantoms of the earth and water", subject to "the exterior world" as our only "standard of reality", and with our only active engagement with that "exterior" world being *via* the mediation of mechanism - "the spinning jenny" that "God took from (Locke's) side" in Yeats's fable. What Yeats seems to have wanted the arts to work to

restore was a proper sense that the mind itself is mysteriously but directly engaged in a manipulation of "exterior" events that is far more profound and radical than the merely quantitative re-organisations of material effects that are represented by the jenny: "this pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world ... / Must vanish on the instant if the mind but change its theme"; and the call in "Under Ben Bulben" to the Irish arts is precisely a call to help in making that "preposterous" notion of the world - Locke's notion - finally "vanish", by helping the modern mind to "change its theme" and slip the realist dragon, at last, for good. What Yeats says of himself in another context could, in fact, be adapted to apply to the "modern tide" of self-awareness - as he saw it - itself: "fastened to a dying animal/ It knows not what it is".[92] Fastened to a reductionist idea of itself, the "modern tide" of human conceptions that Yeats typifies in "The Statues" needs, for him, to be called back to its senses - to be re-awakened to a proper sense of what human consciousness actually is.[93]

What has been said so far in this chapter has dwelt on that aspect to Yeats's challenge to "The filthy modern tide" of "The Statues" that focuses in the purely aesthetic considerations aroused by the poem. One of the challenges of the world that Yeats saw himself to be confronting as a poet was that of a "Confusion"[94] in the European sense of selfhood - a confusion that the arts must urgently address. Though it is obvious that he believed every era of human

experience to need imaginative art, that could keep in mind "a supersensual world" of spiritual and imaginative realities,[95] Yeats obviously saw his own immediate times as needing such art even more than is usual - precisely because its need had been dogmatically denied, and had been almost forgotten[96] by those who had suffered under the denial. The "filthy modern tide" was the disaster that, for him, had followed; and the "climb to (the) proper dark" of "that ancient sect" that - in "The Statues"[97] - can keep in mind the "lineaments" of a greater spiritual selfhood was precisely what he saw the arts as needing to undertake, so as to help their audiences to know this "dark" as a vital imaginative reality once again.[98]

But there are also other facets to this image of the modern tide of things that Yeats offers that we could well think about, in considering those features to his own times that seem to have confirmed him in the demands he made of art as a cultural implement. He had a poet's quarrel with those times for reasons other than their being under the conceptual sway of a "preposterous" and reductive rationalism.

Because the image of the turbulent, wrecking sea of "The Statues" also calls to mind imagery Yeats uses elsewhere to capture the tenor of the events of his own phase of the history of human thought. Beyond the ways in which the legacy of Locke and his sort expressed itself in Yeats's own times, there was also the social turbulence and the generally-chaotic quality of human conduct that Yeats saw growing about him; and

the images that he found to express this burgeoning confusion and violence of mind about him are often of a texture with the "fury" of the sea in "The Statues".

There are, for instance, the famous lines from "The Second Coming":

> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.[99]

This image of "Mere anarchy" ("loosed upon the world" as a "blood-dimmed tide" that "everywhere" drowns "the ceremony of innocence") is a bizarre and chaotic[100] inversion of Noah's Flood - coming this time not to purge sin but to destroy innocence. The frightening sense of cosmic disorder - created by this dark parody of the conventional notions of Divine Justice - registers the near-apocalyptic uncertainty that Yeats recognises within contemporary events. This new Flood is "The blood-dimmed tide" of spiritual pollution, not of lustration; and it is once again - like the "filthy modern tide" of "The Statues" - obviously very much a tide in the affairs of men, an image of a psychological phenomenon. In its being "blood-dimmed", this "tide" suggests quite clearly the clouding of the sea of mind by the blood - by the sort of dangerous emotionalism indicated by "the worst" being "full of passionate intensity".[101]

This passion of the "blood-dimmed tide" in "The Second Coming" seems, in fact, one that clouds the mind, taints it

with what tends towards the brutal and the perverse - a perversity reflected in the "anarchy" that is "loosed upon the world",[102] in which the formalised ritual of achieved social freedoms (the dance-like patterning of mutual courtesies that Yeats seems to have in mind in talking of "the ceremony of innocence"[103]) has largely been washed away. It is exactly this "ceremony of innocence" - this celebratory courtesy towards self and towards others - that is the state of self-awareness that he sees as being washed under by the modern flood.[104]

And this "blood-dimmed tide" he saw running in the real affairs of modern life was obviously also something Yeats had to contend with as an artist:[105] it was another feature of his own times that had its say in dictating the sort of art he believed his fellows best needed - given the conviction that art was meant to mend,[106] and not to just reflect - or "sum up" - its times.

But to say something about what this "tide" of "blood" means in Yeats's thinking - and consequently to try to see how the vision of it may have acted as a spur to his aesthetic programme - we need to think about the opening of "The Second Coming" in some detail.

The falcon and the falconer reflect a highly complex set of psychological and historical circumstances. Written in 1919, in close cluster with poems like "Nineteen Hundred and

Nineteen"[107] and "A Prayer for my Daughter",[108] "The Second Coming" is the most prophetic of these utterances of Yeats's sense of the violence and turbulence of the winds of change blowing about him.[109] It is a poem in which we see a vision of what seems a collapse of civilised human values - a collapse epitomised for Yeats in the Great War, and in the world he felt its aftermath to be shaping.[110] We must look behind the flood of anarchic passion in "The Second Coming" to moments in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" and in "A Prayer for my Daughter", to fill out the suggestions of this first stanza of the poem, and to better understand both falcon and falconer as images.

"Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", for instance, gives a remarkably thorough picture of what Yeats had seen to be happening when Europe went to war, and let itself slip back into barbarism.[111] The poem charts what this sudden descent meant for Yeats and for his contemporaries, in terms of all they had once held true about their own civilisation. After recalling the lesson of Athenian history that tells that even the most treasured beliefs and institutions are easy prey to the sword,[112] Yeats presents an image of the attitudes and assumptions and beloved certainties of his own times, before "the foul storm" of the War began. In doing this, he also gives an image of how thoroughly those certainties had sunk into "nightmare":

> We too had many pretty toys when young:
> A law indifferent to blame or praise,
> To bribe or threat; habits that made old wrong

Melt down, as it were wax in the sun's rays;
Public opinion ripening for so long
We thought it would outlive all future days.
O what fine thought we had because we thought
That the worst rogues and rascals had died out.

All teeth where drawn, all ancient tricks unlearned,
And a great army but a showy thing;
What matter that no cannon had been turned
Into a ploughshare? Parliament and king
Thought that unless a little powder burned
The trumpeters might burst with trumpeting
And yet it lack all glory; and perchance
The guardsman's drowsy charger would not prance.

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.[113]

The "fine thought" of the first two of these stanzas grew from the pre-War conviction that human society had really bred its "rogues" and "rascals" out of type through the "ripening for so long" of "Public opinion" in a golden summer of enlightened and humane times. Even war had come to seem just a bit of public heraldry, a mere stylised atavism, necessary to give the ritual of political majesty the touch of substance it needed to ring true. It is in all one of the most self-aware and compelling evocations of the Victorian dream of Progress on record.[114]

But, in the first section of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", this dream is presented in all its fragility - bracketed as it is by memories of the frail glories of Greece, that work so vividly to establish the "fine thought" of the

faith expressed as just one of those views of a moment of sunny calm on a long summer's afternoon in a fortunate people's history.[115]

And - as the poem suggests - this "fine thought", this dream of humane progress, was the result of a long accumulation, of a slow process of dreaming and of "piecing our thoughts into philosophy"; of warding-off the "terror" of the barbaric past in the hope that it actually *is* possible to "bring the world under a rule". It was, as an impulse of the European spirit, the maturing expression of an attitude towards self and society that had bred a Humanist Optimism that could hope for an actually humane world.

But this "fine thought" founders in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" on the realisation that is embodied in Yeats's acknowledgment that we are at last "but weasels fighting in a hole" - which is a realisation that contains within it both tragic realisation and a kind of awe. That "we" have proved ourselves to be everything we dreamt had "died out", has in it both the shock of fully seeing the human part, after all, in Nature's being "red in tooth and claw",[116] and a tinge of wonder at the grandeur of what such "weasels" could have "planned". It is an image, in other words, of the Janus-like quality there is to human civilisation - the "weasel's tooth" from which the impulse towards justice and charity is in creative flight. And it is this involved contrariety at the heart of the flight of the dream of European civilisation, as

Yeats contemplates it, that is central to the tensions that act themselves out in "The Second Coming".

Because the face that stares from the "vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*"[117] that Yeats sees in this poem is brutal, "the head of a man" on "A shape with lion body", its "gaze blank and pitiless as the sun". The face that presided over the structures of feeling and thought that sought to achieve "the ceremony of innocence" through the "twenty centuries" of history at the back of the European civilisation that Yeats now sees falling apart - the face of Justice and Charity, that was established largely by the traditions of the European plastic and verbal arts in their depictions of Christ - seems about to be supplanted by an icon that speaks rather to the brute in human nature than to the saint or the Humanist.[118] That face, with eyes "blank and pitiless as the sun", shows the weasel-aspect of the sun: the destroyer - not the benign bringer of ripeness of the image that Yeats uses, in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", to capture the Victorian dream of "Public opinion" ripening in the warm rays of a humane civilisation. What that "rough beast" at the end of "The Second Coming" seems to embody is an image of the reversal[119] of all that went before; of all that lay behind the dream recalled at the end of the third section of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen":

> O but we dreamed to mend
> Whatever mischief seemed
> To afflict mankind, but now
> That winds of winter blow
> Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed.[120]

And the prompter that lay behind this dream - the best motive of European civilisation - was that of its own mythic "falconer", the voice of the Humanist, essentially Christian vision that "the falcon" can no longer hear when "The Second Coming" opens. "Bethlehem" becomes in this poem the symbol of the crack in time and place out of which emerges the dominant icon of each era of the human spirit. "Twenty centuries" on the wing have led an impulse in the European spirit, that was guided in its track by the calling of a humane dream, to a point where "the centre cannot hold", and the falcon of that spirit is left without a voice to give direction to its flight.

And what Yeats seems to be seeing in all this isn't only that modern humanity is facing the "mere anarchy" and "nightmare" of a phase in which no great and unifying humane dream exists in full vigour as a social dynamism. When he glimpses the "blank and pitiless" mask of our weasel aspect, Yeats seems to be acknowledging a prophetic fear that the next falconer of the European spirit will call that spirit onto a very different gyre to that modelled by the voice of the dream that has led it so far.[121]

In other words, the process that Yeats is analyzing in "The Second Coming" seems to be one of change towards the anti-type of the dream that hoped for humane conduct; a change towards a darker, more brutally violent model of being and of behaviour. As Yeats puts it in the bitterly-distilled irony of

Section IV of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen",

> We, who seven years ago
> Talked of honour and of truth,
> Shriek with pleasure if we show
> The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth.[122]

And what seems to be running here as the "modern tide" in the affairs of men is part of what is caught by Yeats in the opening to "A Prayer for My Daughter", when he talks about "the great gloom that is in my mind":

> Once more the storm is howling, and half-hid
> Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
> My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
> But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
> Whereby the haystack-and roof-levelling wind,
> Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
> And for an hour I have walked and prayed
> Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.
>
> I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour
> And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
> And under the arches of the bridge, and scream
> In the elms above the flooded stream;
> Imagining in excited reverie
> That the future years had come,
> Dancing to a frenzied drum,
> Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.[123]

This literal storm becomes, in Yeats's "excited reverie" and "great gloom", the embodiment of what he fears for "the future years" - focused quite naturally in the father's concern for his child and for the sort of world she seems likely to inherit. The poem becomes a moving meditation on the qualities that she - or anyone else - would need to have, to "be happy still", though "every windy quarter howl".[124] And this "haystack-and roof-levelling wind/ Bred on the Atlantic" brings its gloom and excites its prayer exactly because it is so much an image for Yeats of the storm being bred "Out of the

murderous innocence of the sea" of human affairs generally. The "scream" of the wind - searching out the familiar features of Yeats's world of tower, bridge, elm and flooded stream[125] without let or hindrance - is just all too much a reminder of the voice of the new falconer, the "rough beast ... (Slouching) towards Bethlehem to be born"; and the rhythm of the new dance Yeats feels beginning to pluck at people's feet is that of "a frenzied drum" - an image which recalls moments in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", like that of the second section, with its thought of "the Platonic Year" that seems to be busy replacing the optimistic, Humanist dream with its barbaric antitype:

> When Loie Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound
> A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,
> It seemed that a dragon of air
> Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round
> Or hurried them off on its own furious path;
> So the Platonic Year
> Whirls out new right and wrong,
> Whirls in the old instead;
> All men are dancers and their tread
> Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.[126]

Here, a memory of a moment upon the London stage creates the sense of a sudden force having "fallen among dancers" - when "All men are dancers" - and having violently imposed its own rhythm and direction upon the modern mind. And this "furious path" leads back to "the old" sense of "right and wrong" as the "new" is spun off the human stage. It is a regression: the human ear becoming deaf to something like what Yeats elsewhere calls the voice "set upon a golden bough to sing .../ Of what is past, or passing, or to come"[127] - which is a formulation which seems, in its setting, an image of the

power of harmonising art at its peak of social significance[128]. What the modern ear, for Yeats, seems now attuning itself to is a "barbarous clangour": a sound which is, to Yeats, an alarm or indicator of grave danger. It seems to be the same "dragon of air" - blowing-in an atavistic and frightening "innocence", the innocence of a blank and primitive unawareness - that Yeats, in "A Prayer for My Daughter", hears screaming about his tower, his symbol of mind elevated by exercise of the spiritual intellect.[129] This "dragon of air", with its "furious" will, hurrying people towards a collapse of the humane awarenesses that gave rise to the "pretty toys" of "laws" and "habits" Yeats speaks about in Section I of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen",[130] seems to have been "bred" in the same quarter as was "the labyrinth of the wind" that we find in the apocalyptic last section of this poem:

> 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 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;
> And should some crazy hand dare touch a daughter
> All turn with amorous cries, or with angry cries,
> According to the wind, for all are blind.[131]

In this startling image of the "Confusion (that) fell upon our thought"[132] once the dragon "Had fallen among dancers", this "sudden blast of angry wind" - of which "Herodias' daughters" are the enactors - catches the essence of what is happening in the tumult of the scene as the

particular "evil" that Yeats is analyzing "gathers head". It is a wind that symbolises a state of mind in which "all are blind" and in which people are tempted to do "crazy" things - things which are then judged in meaning entirely "According to the wind", all other measures of conduct having blown away. And what this "wind" represents in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" - as an image of the utter confusion of values and perspectives that Yeats finds abroad in the contemporary scene - is surely something very close to the "Mere anarchy" that "is loosed upon the world" (in all its "blood-dimmed" violence and destructiveness) in "The Second Coming".[133] This "sudden blast of dusty wind" - that pitches its head-hunting[134] dancers into the middle of the human measure - calls a "frenzied" tune that reduces thought to a mere "tumult of images" whose "purpose" and meaning are hidden in "the labyrinth of the wind" - in pure confusion itself.[135]

And this sort of loss of perspective and measure and humane awareness is surely also part of what lurks in the image Yeats gives us of "the murderous innocence of the sea" in "A Prayer for My Daughter": of a new sort of mindlessness and lack of human responsibility that is neo-barbaric and brutal in the way that the "rough beast" and the Robert Artisson of the close to "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen"[136] are these things;[137] and in the way in which "the Coming Emptiness" of the heart, described in Section III of "Meditations in Time of Civil War", is also brutal:

The cloud-pale unicorns, the eyes of aquamarine,
The quivering half-closed eyelids, the rags of cloud or of lace,
Or eyes that rage has brightened, arms it has made lean,
Give place to an indifferent multitude, give place
To brazen hawks. Nor self-delighting reverie,
Nor hate of what's to come, nor pity for what's gone,
Nothing but grip of claw, and the eye's complacency,
The innumerable clanging wings that have put out the moon.[138]

This comes something like four years on in contemplation of "all the tragic scene"[139] from the situation evoked in "A Prayer for My Daughter"; but this thought about "what's gone" and about "what's to come" still focuses in the differing forms of brutalised human awareness that Yeats sees growing about him - whether it is the torpor and imaginative savagery of the "indifferent multitude" or the "grip of claw, and ... eye's complacency" of the "brazen hawks": the new forms of humanity, with that "Gaze blank and pitiless as the sun" and those "great eyes without thought" of the sphinx in "The Second Coming" and of Robert Artisson in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" brought to grisly perfection. "The innumerable clanging wings that have put out the moon" of imaginative selfhood and its capacity for "reverie" and for "pity" - and even for "rage" or for "hate" - are like dragon wings, too: wings that perhaps offer their own image of an extreme of what the mind can become in "a dragon-guarded land" of mere abstract externalities.

So, "the murderous innocence of the sea" of human awarenesses out of which Yeats sees "the future years" coming in "A Prayer for My Daughter" seems to be an image of a

general personal and social disorder that - as an image - might help us to further understand "the filthy modern tide" in "its formless spawning fury" of "The Statues". When Yeats wrote as he did in his *Last Poems*, nearly twenty years after "A Prayer for My Daughter" took shape, the sea of modern thought that he saw as having "wrecked" Ireland and Europe generally was thus agitated for him - at least in part[140] - by the tide begun by a lapse of European civilisation towards a new dark age of the spirit: towards an age seemingly confused and "innocent" of the sort of humane and pious dreaming that had raised at least the hope of the kind of "sweetness" and "gentleness"[141] of vision that issued in the "fine thought" and "pretty toys" that we have already seen being recalled with such sharp and fond irony in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen". The audience that Yeats, in "Under Ben Bulben", called Irish artists to lead back to what "The Statues" calls their "proper dark" of spiritual and imaginative deftness, had been "wrecked" - at least in part - by the chaos into which Yeats saw the modern world as having blundered when it assumed that it had bred the weasel out of its nature, and then let that weasel drag humanity into the "hole" of the Great War. The imagery we have been examining from "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", "A Prayer for my Daughter", and "The Second Coming" catalogues the great flood of human disaster that Yeats saw as following upon this catastrophe - and the image of humanity generally as a ship in a wrecking sea given in "The Statues" epitomises the tenor of this catalogue very well.[142]

So Yeats, at least from the time that the meanings of the Great War as a human catastrophe began to become clearly apparent to him, obviously found a part of the urgency of his own share in "The spiritual intellect's great work"[143] to lie in the need to try to start to help "bring the soul of man" out of a gathering dark age of fading dreams and blunting spiritual faculties. "All men are dancers";[144] and a poem like "Under Ben Bulben" makes it clear that Yeats was trying - as one who "dreamed to mend/ Whatever seemed to afflict mankind" [145] - to help change for the better the tune to which he saw most of his fellow-dancers' feet were going.

And just how abiding was this sense of having to try to cope as an artist with what Yeats saw as being the ruins of a civilisation that he had known "when young"[146] in the strength of its hopes, is shown in others of the *Last Poems*, too. In "The Gyres", for instance - for all the new perspectives that nearly twenty years further acquaintance with the realisations recorded in poems like "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" have brought him - the groundwork of Yeats's thought still centres in perspectives that echo and re-examine those of "The Second Coming" and its attendant cluster of poems:

> The Gyres! the Gyres! Old Rocky Face, look forth;
> Things thought too long can be no longer thought,
> For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
> And ancient lineaments are blotted out.
> Irrational streams of blood are staining earth;
> Empedocles has thrown all things about;
> Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy;
> We that look on but laugh in tragic joy.

What matter though numb nightmare ride on top,
And blood and mire the sensitive body stain?
What matter? Heave no sigh, let no tear drop,
A greater, a more gracious time has gone;
For painted forms or boxes of make-up
In ancient tombs I sighed, but not again;
What matter? Out of cavern comes a voice,
And all it knows is that one word 'Rejoice!'

Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul,
What matter? Those that Rocky Face holds dear,
Lovers of horses and of women, shall,
From marble of a broken sepulchre,
Or dark betwixt the polecat and the owl,
Or any rich, dark nothing disinter
The workman, noble and saint, and all things run
On that unfashionable gyre again.[147]

But, though we might find in this poem something of the poems of 1919 re-visited, we also find clear indications of the creative ways in which Yeats, in the intervening years, has been able to respond to the realisations that those poems explored. "The Gyres" recognises the death of "beauty" and of "worth", the vanishing of "ancient lineaments", the coarsening of "conduct and work" and of "the soul" itself. We find "the blood-dimmed tide" of "The Second Coming" running again in the "Irrational streams of blood (that) are staining earth"; and the "nightmare" that rode "upon sleep" in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" still "ride(s) on top", and is "numb" - the "dreaming" upon which the world of old once fed, in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd",[148] now become paralysed by terror and tumult.[149] The "sensitive body", that had climbed the stair of a spiritualising civilisation out of its brute beginnings, has become stained with "blood and mire"; has become earthy and narrowly physical again. As Yeats sums things up, "A greater, a more gracious time has gone"; and the moment in history that

he is here depicting finds its truest parallel for him in the moment when Troy's champion lay dead, and the first flame of the sack was flickering.[150] We are obviously on familiar ground, coming as we just have from poems like those of 1919.

But what is so strikingly different about the entire thrust of thought in "The Gyres" is the conviction that fuels the dominant mood of the poem - the mood uttered in the reiterated "What matter?", which acts as a sort of choric comment on every other perspective that the poem generates.

This conviction comes from a faith in the impulse or spirit within humanity that built up the fallen "more gracious time" in the first place. Yeats has gone beyond the pain of watching the "ingenious lovely things"[151] of his own civilisation vanishing: their very proven frailty and impermanence now seem to make all the more clear to him the human energy and imaginativeness that dream-up and effectuate the vanishing things that people think "sheer miracle":

> For painted forms or boxes of make-up
> In ancient tombs I sighed, but not again

- simply because these preserved relics of the "greater, more gracious time" that has vanished have become - to the "old man's eagle mind"[152] - important not so much in themselves as in their being signs or embodiments of the essential creative energy of the human spirit: of an energy that will some day remake "that unfashionable gyre" of an ascent towards nobility of work, conduct and soul out of the "rich, dark nothing" of its own inspiration.[153]

And in expressing this faith in the future of human civilisation - the faith that some day another Falconer will call another "more gracious gyre" of the spirit into being - Yeats is also expressing his view of the role of the artist within an age of "numb nightmare" of the human spirit such as the one he feels himself to be contemplating. The "unfashionable gyre" of a new spiritualising civilisation will arise, for him, from the work of cultural craftsmen who seek to "disinter" imaginative possibilities that lie hidden under the ruins of the present "decline and fall".[154] Their work, for Yeats, must be to help set images of human excellence back in the human mind again:[155] back in the contemporary mind from which "The blood-dimmed tide" has washed such icons for a while.[156]

When we see this conviction expressed in "The Gyres", we are obviously again very close to the sort of function for the arts that Yeats urges in "Under Ben Bulben":

> Irish poets, learn your trade,
> Sing whatever is well made,
> Scorn the sort now growing up
> All out of shape from toe to top,
> Their unremembering hearts and heads
> Base-born products of base beds.
> Sing the peasantry, and then
> Hard-riding country gentlemen,
> The holiness of monks, and after
> Porter-drinkers' randy laughter;
> Sing the lords and ladies gay
> That were beaten into the clay
> Through seven heroic centuries;
> Cast your mind on other days
> That we in coming days may be
> Still the indomitable Irishry.[157]

For beyond the specifics of the programme that Yeats is defining, what concerns us most directly here is the fact that

what he is calling for is a subversion of the social facts and tendencies "now growing up": which is an intent that recalls the conviction implied in "The Gyres" that the work of the arts - especially in times such as those that are under the rough beast's shadow - must be to unwind the fashionable and re-start the "unfashionable gyre again".[158] Yeats's rejection of "the sort now growing up",

> All out of shape from toe to top,
> Their unremembering hearts and heads
> Base-born products of base beds,

as what he elsewhere calls "a fit subject for poetry"[159] - or for the other arts - is at least in part a rejection of what he sees as being the purely fashionable nature of the subject-matter chosen by modern realist art. The fact that these "base-born" ones are seen as being "products of base beds" must be seen in the context of meaning established by this phase within the development of the thought of "Under Ben Bulben": which is a context that is indicated by the conviction Yeats holds that the most serviceable artist's prime aim is to "Bring the soul of man to God" by "fill(ing) the cradles right"[160] - and to do this by establishing erotic ideals that, like the Phidias of "The Statues", can "give women dreams and dreams their looking-glass":[161] a "looking-glass" in which is mirrored the very "profane perfection of mankind" that Yeats sees as being the key "purpose set/ Before the secret working mind".[162]

What, for Yeats, makes for the baseness of the beds in which "the sort now growing up" are conceived is, in fact, the

deformity he finds to the dreams that have peopled those beds.[163] The misshapenness of the human types that Yeats rejects as subjects for art - that he rejects as images with which artists may be able to store and enrich the human mind[164] - is in fact, for him, a portion of the "numb nightmare" of "The Gyres", that "ride(s) on top" of the modern mind: a "nightmare" that blanks out of that mind the shaping dreams of grace that - before things fell apart - played moons to the human tides. The image he offers of the "unremembering hearts and heads" of the people who are entirely of "the modern tide" reflects not only Yeats's sense of the collapse in contemporary awareness of an adequate popular sense of "other days" - of a real folk history - but also the loss of the influence of any dream of conduct or of being of the sort that Yeats saw Phidias as having bequeathed to Europe.

And Yeats's response to these "unremembering hearts and heads" shows exactly the struggle he undertook to help his own audience on a climb back towards the "proper dark" of the "ancient sect" that is, in "The Statues", another name for the sort of "grammar school"[165] of the spirit that a vital culture was for him.[166]

It is almost certainly in such a light that the making of a poem like "The Three Bushes",[167] for instance, should be seen: as the provision of an image of what Yeats called in an earlier poem "the old high way of love".[168] The story this poem tells of "other days" - in its deliberately remote

medievalism - seems to be a challenge to the "modern" view of life, and a move towards the "coming days" for which Yeats calls Irish artists to lay the foundations in "Under Ben Bulben": "days" in which an "indomitable" spirit - based on a properly cultivated imaginativeness of range and depth of spirit - will have replaced the shallow and anarchic momentariness of mind that Yeats sees "now growing up" about him as a continuing threat to the civilised qualities of awareness that he sought to propagate amongst his fellows once more.[169]

It would, in fact, be worth looking briefly at the main features of "The Three Bushes".

The cycle of poems that carry the tale that this one initiates in the *Last Poems* is a clear antidote offered to "the sort now growing up" in their forgetfulness and momentariness of thought. Even the chambermaid, who is the persona within this cycle who has the least personal volition of the three who help the narrator tell his tale,[170] has songs that are full of wonder at the strange paradoxes of things. Even she - the earthiest of the characters in this rare love triangle - is profoundly touched by a sense of the Lover's strange "spirit that has fled/ Blind as a worm" into "God's love (that) has hidden him".[171] Even the most entirely physical clay in the sequence is indelibly stamped with the impress of the immaterial things that the people of "the modern tide", for Yeats, have all but forgotten.

And both Lady and Lover are even more decidedly counter-types to "the sort now growing up". Both exhibit to a marked degree personalities that shape their lives to patterns of awarenesses and of dreams that elevate and discipline their thoughts and deeds into a special sort of responsibility. Action for them is under the sway of the moon of the imaginative and spiritual self[172] - not just of the random tide of "casual"[173] accidents and mechanical impulses that Yeats saw as having flowed from the collapse of the higher registers of European civilisation that we have been examining in the poems of 1919.[174] One of the levels of meaning to "The Three Bushes" and its cycle focuses in the example that Yeats is here giving of the sort of human awareness that cannot but hear the falconer of some ideal or spiritually-grounded consciousness, in spite of the most urgent temptations to ignore its voice.

While the Lover, in his one song, embodies this ideality of mind more in the tendency of his thought alone - in the remarkable integrity of consciousness that shapes his awareness of the oneness with all mortal aspirations that the fulfilment of his physical desire has brought him[175] - the Lady enacts it in thought and in deed with a completeness that makes her a great heroine in brief. Consider the tensions she struggles to harmonise:

> I turn round
> Like a dumb beast in a show,
> Neither know what I am
> Nor where I go,
> My language beaten
> Into one name;

I am in love
And that is my shame.
What hurts the soul
My soul adores,
No better than a beast
Upon all fours.[176]

Her dilemma is a very real one: the dilemma at the heart of what Yeats elsewhere calls "That sweet extremity of pride/ That's called Platonic love".[177] "What hurts the soul/ My soul adores" - and the ballad sequence shows how the Lady struggles to serve what in her second Song she calls "love's two divisions" in such a way as to keep both her lover's and her own "substance whole".[178] Her entire set of stratagems spring, in fact, from her attempts to realise and to sensitively accommodate painfully conflicting personal needs; and it is of the essence that her dilemma is self-created, is a response to a vision of who she is and of what her deepest nature demands of her: a response that is, moreover, both fully alive to the legitimacy of each claim in the conflict, and totally unable to allow herself to compromise in meeting the challenge that each claim institutes.[179]

So part of Yeats's achievement in "The Three Bushes" and its cycle is to make understandable - and sympathetically available - the notion of a feminine chastity that is rooted in an ardent and sweet-natured, albeit proud, idealism.[180] And the intention behind the attempt seems in close accord with the need expressed in "Under Ben Bulben" to help a "modern" audience, caught in the tide of a lapsing culture, to "cast (its) mind on other days" so as to discover a more complex and

ideally-informed set of human motives and aspirations than those that generally reign in its own actual days.[181] The Lady's story is one of a profound responsibility being maintained in the face of all temptations and obstacles, and despite all the complexities and pains that this responsibility to the problem of herself and of others brings with it.

And, on this level, the cycle is a sort of parable about the human capacity for being responsible to a dream[182] - a capacity that Yeats has shown in "The Statues" to be what he considers to be the central impulse empowering the progress of a high civilisation. Pythagoras's planning, Phidias's embodying, the measuring and plummet-guided thinking of this poem, all reveal Yeats's sense of the vital influence of the "proper dark" of the spiritual imagination upon actual human life; and Yeats also makes clear that the agency of such imagination is felt through just the sort of "dreams" to which the Lady of "The Three Bushes" cycle keeps true: "Phidias/ Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass"; and European civilisation, for Yeats, began to focus itself and its own new path out of the Asian cultural matrix, in response. In "The Three Bushes" and its cycle, Yeats's fable answers exactly his own prescription for the arts of a spiritually-ailing age, as given in "Under Ben Bulben". The Lady - seen from this angle - is a Phidian image: one designed to draw the "modern" mind by example towards a sense of all-but forgotten spiritual possibilities - as well as spiritual

responsibilities.

And this provision of images that reflect the dream-responsible dimensions of the mind - that part of the human reality most affected, if we follow "The Statues", by the wreck of "modern" times[183] - also seems to be at least part of the motive at work in others of the *Last Poems* as well: perhaps particularly the two that follow "The Three Bushes" and its cycle in the arrangement to be found in the 1950 Macmillan *Collected Poems,* "An Acre of Grass" and "What Then?".

Take "An Acre of Grass", for instance, from this perspective - its demonstration of a responsibility towards dreams, towards the aspirations of "the spiritual intellect" that - if we follow his avowals in poems like "The Statues" and "Under Ben Bulben" - Yeats wished to re-awaken within the modern mind :

> Picture and book remain,
> An acre of green grass
> For air and exercise,
> Now strength of body goes;
> Midnight, an old house
> Where nothing stirs but a mouse.
>
> My temptation is quiet.
> Here at life's end
> Neither loose imagination,
> Nor the mill of the mind
> Consuming its rag and bone,
> Can make the truth known.
>
> 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 like Michael Angelo knew
That can pierce the clouds,
Or inspired by frenzy
Shake the dead in their shrouds;
Forgotten else by mankind,
An old man's eagle mind.[184]

Though this poem can - and should - obviously be discussed from many angles, from the perspective that our immediate discussion has established the inner drama that Yeats here records stands as yet another example of a mood that is calculated to call its beholder's mind up out of the shifting sea of mere senses that is part of what can make that mind, for him, something like "the filthy modern tide" of "The Statues".

"An Acre of Grass" begins, "Now strength of body goes", with what is by now the familiar[185] dilemma of the waning of natural energy in the aging man: the waning of the Nature that Yeats once said "in herself has no power except to die and to forget".[186] And, taken from this angle, the waning of what could be called Nature in Yeats's own mind - "strength of body", and its own contribution towards the "temptation" of the intellect towards "the truth" - bears an interesting relation to the human anarchy of the post-Great War era that we have been trying both to glimpse through Yeats's eyes, and to evaluate as a dynamic acting upon his aesthetic convictions.[187]

Because what afflicts those "now growing up/ All out of shape from toe to top", with "Their unremembering hearts and heads" is, for Yeats, what could be called an excess of mere

Nature in its un-"inspired" aspect.[188] The deformity of mind that these people exhibit, to Yeats's thinking at least, comes from their being too much part of mere "unremembering" Nature to properly feel the call of what "Sailing to Byzantium" calls "unaging intellect": the part of the human totality that struggles against the siren-song of the "sensual music" which always threatens to deafen the Odysseus aspect of the self as it tries to gain Byzantium, the pure mind's Ithaca.[189] As poems like "The Second Coming" and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" have shown, Yeats saw the European mind as having suffered a loss of proper self-awareness, as "things (fell) apart" in the complex structures of its culture, and as "confusion fell upon (its) thought" while "the blood-dimmed tide" of a more barbaric register of the human range "wrecked" the slowly-tuned ideal and spiritual sensibilities as "the soul" grew "coarse"[190] under pressure of - and as an active element within - the social collapse. In a way, that coarsening of the human mind is a sort of descent into what is "natural", at the expense of the spirit; an impounding of the soul within "the exterior world".[191]

So in one sense of Yeats's meaning in "An Acre of Grass", the condition he describes in its first two stanzas gives an image of the emptiness that threatens him now that "at life's end" the energies of Nature are reaching ebb in him, and his natural "temptation ... is quiet" - a condition which leaves his mind without that particular power amongst its falconers or gyre-wards to help keep it meaningfully in flight. The

silenced voice of Yeats's own natural vigour, and the too-natural quiet now the voice of the Phidian and Humanist dream can no longer be heard by "the sort now growing up", are in important ways images of each other: what the great dream of the "greater, more gracious time (that) has gone" was to European society generally, Yeats's own "temptation" was to him: a dynamic playing its part amongst others in transfiguring the natural faculties of "loose imagination" and "the mill of the mind" into instruments that could "make the truth known".[192] Without the energy of his natural "temptation", Yeats is left naturally at the mercy of mere age and obscurity - like the times themselves, in his estimation, were left condemned to be moved by nothing beyond what could be mirrored by the failing energies of Nature unaided by "the spiritual intellect".[193]

So, in the latter half of the poem, Yeats must become his own falconer. The "old man's eagle mind", that he prays to be able to call up and set on the wing, will have to be self-begotten, willed into being against the blowing of all merely natural tendencies.

And Yeats is aware, at the end of the poem, that the very idea of such a mind - that can command "Truth" and that can "shake the dead in their shrouds" into wakened communion with living human thought, all against the natural tide - has all but vanished from the popular awareness of the times. His prayer for "an old man's frenzy" to fuel his quest reflects

his search both for a personal redemption from the decline of energy within himself - a decline that would condemn him to a purely natural limitation - and for an artistic image that can stand as a sort of social redemption for his audience; that can stand as an embodiment of a possibility for spiritual freedom that would, but for his efforts, perhaps be "Forgotten else by mankind", given the cultural amnesia of the times he sees his art as having to address.

So the thought of "An Acre of Grass" enacts in personal terms very much the same pattern of imaginative transfiguration that Yeats is urging upon the artist as a sacred social duty in "Under Ben Bulben". In "An Acre of Grass", Yeats's own natural self has become a potential mirror of the social circumstances that the poems of 1919 set themselves to assay. "Now strength of body goes", Yeats implicitly stands in danger of being himself caught up in a very similar sort of brutalization to that which he sees as having overtaken the European mind at large. As the imagery of the poem has it, all that is left to him is "An acre of green grass/ For air and exercise" - as if he were an old horse out to grass in a paddock; and in the "Midnight" of the "old house" of this last phase of life, the last traces of natural energy stirring within him are sensed as being like "a mouse". The prospect that threatens is enclosure within the "loose imagination" and the merely mechanical sort of outlook that he recognises as arising out of a certain brute awareness:[194] a level at which what Yeats means in this poem by "the truth" -

a state of spiritual energy "That can pierce the clouds" that (as the waters of the air) are another symbolic form of the waters of "the ephemeral foam of life"[195] that represent the senses uninformed by imaginative vision - is in eclipse within the mind. The decline Yeats is confronting within himself is, in other words, a personal analogue to the conditions of public mind that he would have the arts "re-make" in "Under Ben Bulben". His struggle to transcend a collapse, impending within himself, into merely natural awarenesses - bereft of "the truth" of "the spiritual intellect" - is itself an image, taken from his own inner life, that epitomises the artistic struggle with the lack of spiritual awareness that he finds within the general public mind that demands, for him, such efforts at "re-mak(ing)".

Which makes his response to the conditions of his own "life's end" in this poem in effect an example offered to his audience. The rejection of any settling into natural circumscription is a rejection in the name of an inner need to keep the "pure mind"[196] alive and able to "make the truth known". Like the choice of the Lady in "The Three Bushes" and its cycle, Yeats's choice in "An Acre of Grass" is a response to the call of a spiritual ideal. The course of life that Yeats adopts here is a struggle to keep his mind responsive to the dream that "truth" seems to be to the failing brute senses. The prayer in the latter half of the poem - a prayer in old age that typically echoes the spirit of his "Prayer for Old Age"[197] - is a petition for the energy to "remake" himself

in extension of an essential capacity (that now stands in danger of diminishing) for encountering "the truth". What we see in "An Acre of Grass" - as in "The Three Bushes" - is someone being compelled by inner vision to live out an impulse that flies in the face of Nature, as we have defined it, in response to an ideal discipline and in embodiment of a vision of reality that sets the "body"[198] and its ways of awareness in tension to some centre-holding truth that transcends all that is merely sensible and limitedly "natural".

So Yeats seems in "An Acre of Grass" to be publicly enacting a self-discipline that echoes in his own personal sphere the action of the model of the workings of the great dream - the "falconer" - that he sees as being the dynamic acting at the centre of any vital culture.

Which makes "An Acre of Grass" a poem that itself obeys the aesthetic injunctions of "Under Ben Bulben": it reaches out from being a vehicle of personal transformation towards becoming a general social implement. The example Yeats here implicitly offers the "formless"[199] modern mind is that of a life fully given form by the struggle to keep certain vital - though "unfashionable" - truths embodied to human knowledge and thus available as prompts to human action. In it, Yeats deliberately pushes the image he holds of himself further and further away from the merely natural, further and further towards the artificial, the fictional. His programme of self-conquest - of remaking - goes by way of the internalisation of

dramatic icons - "Timon and Lear" - and on into a landscape that is as vividly allegorical as is the opening of *Piers Plowman*, with the historical William Blake transformed into a being who beats upon the wall of the Tower of Truth for entry.[200] Now "strength of body goes", Yeats's evocation of what he elsewhere called "the artifice of eternity"[201] - that is offered as a counter-poise of creative action to challenge natural decline - is intensified ; and it is this same "artifice of eternity" that - as "The Gyres" suggests - is the falconer that keeps intact "the ceremony of innocence" that is the grail in which, for Yeats, the spirit of some "greater, more gracious" culture than that of the "modern" scene may be kept incarnate.[202] In "An Acre of Grass", the old man's prayer that he may be formed after the "eagle mind" that keeps gyring towards the sun in resistance, as a symbol, to all that is meant by "dull decrepitude", is in itself a piercing of the very "clouds" that Yeats sees as obscuring from modern eyes the more "masterful" shape to human thought that "other days"[203] of greater grace had generally recognised. As he put it in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", "Some moralist or mythological poet" had discovered an image that could do some sort of justice to the highest possible intimations of the human soul that are available to us, but this image had itself become one of the "Many ingenious lovely things "[204] that had been blown away in the "foul storm"[205] and "tumult of images"[206] of the times since things fell apart:

> Some moralist or mythological poet
> Compares the solitary soul to a swan;
> I am satisfied with that,
> Satisfied if a troubled mirror show it,

Before that brief gleam of its life be gone,
An image of its state;
The wings half spread for flight,
The breast thrust out in pride
Whether to play, or to ride
Those winds that clamour of approaching night.

.....

The swan has leapt into the desolate heaven:
That image can bring wildness, can bring a rage
To end all things, to end
What my laborious life imagined, even
The half-imagined, the half-written page;
O but we dreamed to mend
Whatever mischief seemed
To afflict mankind, but now
That winds of winter blow
Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed.[207]

So the "image" that the soul had been given "of its state" - of its pride and grace and "indomitable" freedom - was a "gleam" for Yeats in the "troubled mirror" of the human mind; and its leap "into the desolate heaven" seems to capture the tragic lapse of even this glimmer of true self-awareness out of that mind: a lapse that seems the key loss that has been suffered in the wreck of the modern mind's spirituality that Yeats records in "The Statues"; a lapse that he was confronting in its first manifestations in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen". The image given in "An Acre of Grass" of the "old man's eagle mind" that can "pierce the clouds" is the proud swan of the soul - the vision of the "moralist or mythological poet" - now re-made to meet new needs. And this image from the later poem is also a "gleam" of light flashed by Yeats at the "troubled mirror" of "the sort (of mind) now growing up", unshaped by any adequate "image of its state" beyond the "numb nightmare" of the present spiritual

blankness. The impulse towards remaking the self in obedience to the sort of "Truth" defined in this poem is a voice calling upon the human mind to become more fully itself. As such, the recording of this impulse constitutes one of Yeats's own contributions towards the Phidian task he bequeaths to Irish artists in "Under Ben Bulben" - that of "bring(ing) the soul of man to God".

And we can also see such a making of his own inner drama into a public example of this sort at work once again, in one of the readings invited by the poem that follows "An Acre of Grass", the one called "What Then?":

> His chosen comrades thought at school
> He must grow a famous man;
> He thought the same, and lived by rule,
> All his twenties crammed with toil;
> *'What then?' sang Plato's ghost. 'What then?'*
>
> Everything he wrote was read,
> After certain years he won
> Sufficient money for his need,
> Friends that have been friends indeed;
> *'What then?' sang Plato's ghost. 'What then?'*
>
> All his happier dreams came true -
> A small house, wife, daughter, son,
> Grounds where plum and cabbage grew,
> Poets and Wits about him drew;
> *'What then?' sang Plato's ghost. 'What then?'*
>
> 'The work is done,' grown old he thought,
> 'According to my boyish plan;
> Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,
> Something to perfection brought';
> *But louder sang that ghost, 'What then?'* [208]

Again, given the slant that our argument lends this poem, one of the clear features that it has is the common ground there is between the qualities of mind that Yeats himself here exhibits, and those that inspire the Lady of "The Three

Bushes". The thought that the Yeats of "What Then?' has - that he has lived and worked unswervingly to a "plan" first laid in boyhood, and has thereby brought "to perfection" something that would otherwise have remained just a dream - is strong with exactly the same sort of persistent fealty to a passionate ideal that weds the Lady's days each to each in her own painful course of integrity. That "boyish plan" that has structured the entire life's effort - with its "toil" and its responsibility towards talents that were recognised by "chosen comrades" and himself alike - has been a personal falconer to Yeats, calling time to the gyre of his labours: has acted as a dream or ideal disposing and shaping the energies of each phase of the way.[209]

And the song that "Plato's ghost" sings in this poem is itself the epitome of a restless, ironic, spiritual idealism. As each phase of the "plan" Yeats talks about in "What Then?" unfolds, the constant is the untiring question that gives the poem its title. If the voice that comes out of the oracular cavern in "The Gyres" knows only "one word 'Rejoice!'" - and thereby expresses what Yeats elsewhere calls "The abounding glittering jet" of "life's own self-delight"[210] - then all that the particular aspect of human awareness that "Plato's ghost" represents most centrally knows is the endless, self-mocking questioning that makes each arrival just a new beginning. When the old man of this poem ends his tally of a noble life's work, all the "perfection" that he has achieved does is to give the Plato in him an even "louder" voice.

Within the state of integrated spiritual idealism that "What Then?" so ably demonstrates, the falconer's voice becomes the more clear and urgent the further the falcon flies. The poem leaves us, in effect, with an image of a personal capacity for flight onwards into further, evolving meaning: a capacity that is very different from the tendency of the "unremembering" way of thinking that Yeats identifies, in "Under Ben Bulben", as the most urgent challenge facing the arts of his day. If things have fallen apart, generally, in the modern mind's capacity for response to any sort of supersensual dream - as Yeats obviously believes they have - then the slow crafting of "something" to its own "perfection" that "What Then?" records is really a sort of Phidian image - as is also that of the "old man's eagle mind" of "An Acre of Grass", and as is the entire deportment of the Lady of "The Three Bushes" and its cycle.

If we were to keep on looking, the examples we would find of Yeats's offering implicit or explicit depictions of unfallen, dream-sanctified thought and behaviour would multiply; but perhaps the point has been well enough made already: the point that it seems that Yeats was himself trying to help "disinter"[211] a more adequate sense of things imaginative and ideal from that ruin of the spiritual intellect that typified, for him, the key quality of the "modern" mind. As we have seen, that mind had been left, in Yeats's view, like a wreck in the materialist storm - without anything like the sort of proper "image of its state" that

Yeats saw the "moralist or mythological poet" as having once made available - long before "the desolate heaven" of the modern storm opened in the catastrophe detailed in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen".

As he put it in "The Old Stone Cross", the modern times that the ancient warrior castigates take their tone from the fact that "this age and the next age/ Engender in the ditch".[212] What is meant by this seems to be a thought that is at least partly generated by the ways in which this "ditch" resonates with the "blind man's ditch" of "A Dialogue of Self and Soul":[213] a "ditch" that itself suggests the murk and narrow materiality of a mind that is unalleviated by spiritual intellect.[214] And it is this lack of any spiritual moon to govern the mental tides that Yeats sees as being the principle ill of the age he addresses as a poet in poems like "The Statues" and "Under Ben Bulben".

And the fact that the old warrior who speaks of "this age and the next age" in such terms finds that what "most excite(s his) spleen" is the realism of the drama that serves this age - shuffling, unmusical actors imitating the very misshapenness that "the ditch" of the modern world has imposed upon the soul's sense of itself - takes us straight back to the question of the ways in which the spiritual and intellectual conditions of his times influenced Yeats's sense of his own artistic mission amongst his contemporaries. If Europe had really fallen into "the ditch" that the old warrior

defines, it was up to the arts to get it back onto a more spiritually-alert footing once again; and making the spiritual deformity of the times into fashionable forms would be for Yeats simply to mistake this "ditch" for the whole human universe. If - as Yeats saw things - life had become a matter of only the "poor shows" of the "piebald ponies, led bears, (and) caged lions" that are all that he saw as being left of the "processions" of human thought, once the "high stilts" that signify imaginative verse have been debased into practical rhetoric - into verbal mirror-making - and once the Phidian aspect of the mind is forgotten, then the only thing left for Yeats to do is to "take chisel and plane" and remake his stilts, so as to meet the need that people still feel for "Daddy-long-legs upon his timber toes", despite the blinding ditch in which modern thought is being engendered. As in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", the "pavements grey" of the modern outlook immediately demand of Yeats an art that moves clear beyond their reach, into "the terrible novelty of light" that "catches the eye" up to realities to which "Processions that lack high stilts" are dead.[215] Art must offer life - as the "modern" mind that Yeats typifies in poems like "The Statues" and "Under Ben Bulben" conceives of it - a more really human perspective on things; "more human",[216] given that the awarenesses and aspirations that Yeats explores in poems like "An Acre of Grass" and "What Then?" and "The Three Bushes" and its cycle are equally shown within these poems to be themselves natural parts of the total human register.

Notes to Chapter 2.

1. We should recall how much of the history of this century has involved various peoples' struggles to emerge from colonial situations and to establish some sort of viable national identity within the modern world. As R.M. Kain has said, Ireland's

> role as the first country to achieve independence in this century was pointed out by President Kennedy in his speech at Dublin (*W.B. Yeats Centenary Essays*, pg 54),

which should remind us that Yeats was a pioneer engaging with one of the great problems of our age, and that his "filthy modern tide" - viewed from one angle, at least - was one that had "wrecked" many peoples in many parts of the world, as the tide of European empire-building spread (and even as Stalin carried-on the pattern). When Yeats was discussing the philosophy of Shelley's poetry, he noted (with the high approval that "The speaker of these things might almost be Blake") that Shelley saw the effects of "the mechanist" and of "the political economist" - whose neglect of all but "the calculating faculty" within the mind led them to "speculations" that lacked "correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination" - as being "to exasperate at once the extremes of luxury and of want", as they in fact had already done "in modern England":

> The rich have become richer, the poor have become poorer, ... such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty (*Essays and Introductions*, pp 67 - 8).

So Yeats approved Shelley's analysis of the extent to which the modern tide of exploitative materialism - what Yeats himself called "money's rant" (see "The Curse of Cromwell", *stanza 2, C.P. pg 350*) - has grown out of a failure of the imaginative dimension within modern thinking; out of a failure of that dimension within human thought which alone can establish "correspondence with first principles". The "effects which flow" from such a failure would include the colonialist drive: it was "the woods of Arcady (being) dead" in the modern European mind that led to the wreck of so much of what Achebe in *Hopes and Impediments* (pg 60) calls "the great festival of the world's cultures" - its wreck in the "filthy modern tide" that Shelley saw must ever flow from the institutionalised unimaginativeness of the "mechanists".

2. *C.P.* pg 375.

For Yeats's mentioning of this poem at the time of its composition, see the letter to Edith Shackleton Heald of the 28th June 1938: Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 911.

3. This point is picked up in Chapter 5 below so as to develop its counter-truth; but we could perhaps recall here Yeats saying that the Irish

> must care for things Gaelic and Irish, not because we hold them better than things Saxon and English, but because they belong to us, and because our lives are to be spent among them, whether they be good or evil (*Uncollected Prose*, Vol.1, pg 250).

This warning against false nationalism should remind us how far his concern with Irish culture was a matter of immediate focus, and not of exclusion of the wider scene - should such a reminder be necessary.

There is also the comment in *Essays and Introductions* - at the close to the "General introduction to My Work" of 1937 - to the effect that

> I am no Nationalist, except in Ireland for passing reasons: State and Nation are the work of intellect, and when you consider what becomes before and after them they are, as Victor Hugo said of something or other, not worth the blade of grass God gives for the nest of the linnet; see pg 526.)

4. See "The Man and the Echo", *C.P.* pg 394: "That were to shirk/ The spiritual intellect's great work".

The recollection of Pearce calling on Cuchulain under British shell-fire gives a clear sense of the sort of dynamic awareness of unseen realities that constitutes that "sect" of a properly imaginative alertness to realities of the spirit that Yeats has in mind at the close to the quoted lines. The specific focusing of this awareness in an Irish, "racial" continuity of meaning doesn't alter the fact that this is a commonly human capacity for spiritual awareness that is being evoked: as Yeats was convinced, Synge had "found the race in the depths of the mind where the saints had found God": see *Essays and Introductions*, pg 341. Pearse's invocation of Cuchulain actually set the hero "stalk[ing] through the Post Office", unseen but as real for Yeats as the statues Phidias set "In marble or in bronze" in his own "public place[s]". The Phidian image is an enactment of the spirit within the everyday world - and the "filthy modern tide" with "its spawning fury" of surface awarenesses constitutes an image of the mind that has become shallowed and agitated out of any real sense of its deeper currents of being. As Yeats saw things, "the created world is a stream of images in the human mind" (*Essays and Introductions* pg 419), so the state of that mind's streaming radically tinctures what seems present within our experience.

As an image, this "spawning fury" of the "modern tide" of thought surely has its roots in the "mackerel-crowded seas" and their "sensual music" in which "Monuments of unaging intellect" go unnoticed in "Sailing to Byzantium" (see *C.P.* pg 217): there is the same sense of a proliferation of things sensible swamping the realities known to "unaging intellect" - to mind as it transcends the conceptual fashions of the day. We could also recall here what Yeats says in Book III of *A Vision* about Valery's use of the sea as a symbol:

> The sea breaks into the ephemeral foam of life ...
> The *Spirit* is not those changing images - sometimes in ancient thought as in the *Cimitiere Marin* symbolised by the sea - but the light,

where his note says of "the light": "In my symbolism solar light, intellectual light; not the lunar light, perception" (*ibid.* pp 219 - 20).

So the sea - as it "breaks" from its deeper swell - becomes "the ephemeral foam of life", the realm of "changing images" that

are not "the *Spirit*" that is known by "intellectual light", but that are the objects of "perception", the objects of "the lunar light" of "ephemeral" awarenesses only. Again, the sense of the "spawning fury" of the wild "modern tide" as an image of an excess of sense and a dearth of intellect or spirit, seems clear.

5. See "Under Ben Bulben", Section IV, *C.P.* pp 399 - 400: once the "greater dream" of the Quattrocento "had gone",

> Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude,
> Prepared a rest for the children of God,
> Palmer's phrase, but after that
> Confusion fell upon our thought

as the full swell of the "modern tide" began to run with the paling of the romantic vision.

6. See the first of the poems called "Fragments", *C.P.* pg 240, which is discussed further below.

See also the links Yeats draws between Locke's "mechanical philosophy" and Stendhal's realist "mirror dawdling down a lane" that are indicated in Chapter 1 above.

7. The term comes, as we have seen in Chapter 1, from Yeats's noting of Locke's reductionism:

> Locke based himself on the formula, "Nothing in the mind but sense" - sense as the seventeenth century understood it - and Liebnitz commented, "Nothing except mind": see *Essays and Introductions* pg 414.

8. At the end of the second stanza of the poem, his focus broadens from Greece to Europe, opening the prospect towards "modern" concerns generally.

9. We may recall that "the modish painter" is singled out for correction in this poem.

10. As we have already argued in the Introduction, we can talk about Yeats's view of the spiritual and intellectual climate of his own times as a fundamentally coherent perspective spanning his thought from boyhood to old age - for all the many changes and developments within those times that he himself catalogued and explored in poems like "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" (*C.P.* pg 232), "The Second Coming" (*C.P.* pg 210) and "The Gyres" and "Lapis Lazuli" (*C.P.* pp 337 - 9). Beneath all such developments - which will be examined in more detail below - lay for Yeats the ground-swell of the legacy for modern thinking of Locke's dream; as a comment such as that Yeats made late in life about the effects of the materialist conception of space upon the modern notion of the soul shows:

> No educated man to-day accepts the objective matter and space of popular science, and yet deductions made by those who believed in both dominate the world, make possible the stimulation and condonation of revolutionary massacre and the multiplication of murderous weapons by substituting for the old humanity with its unique irreplaceable individuals something that can be chopped and measured like a piece of cheese; compel denial of

the immortality of the soul by hiding from the mass of the people that the grave-diggers have no place to bury us but in the human mind (*Explorations*, pp 435 - 36).

11. See "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", *C.P.* pp 7 - 8.

12. We have already noted above how much Yeats's sense that the root of modern ills lies in a mechanist denial of the imagination is in accord with Shelley's philosophy, too.

13. To use more modern terms than were available to Yeats himself, the notion of the mystery of time's potentials that is developed in Jung's essay "Synchronicity: an Acausal Connecting Principle" (see *both The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, pp 419 - 519, and the text of the lecture from which the essay derives, "On Synchronicity", *ibid.* pp 520 - 31) would certainly be excluded by "Grey Truth" and the "dreary" dance of "Chronos" that is really all of time that mechanist philosophy can acknowledge to exist.

14. See the lines which speak of the "sick children of the world" with their "painted toy" of mechanistic "Grey Truth".

15. See "Fragments" *C.P.* pg 240.

16. As Engelberg puts it,

> For Yeats the loss of (the) ability to celebrate the very details that sense and imagination once apprehended signalled the end of an age; what followed were the symptoms of our present ills, an emphasis on abstraction, a loss of feeling. Considerably earlier than Eliot, Yeats had diagnosed a "dissociation of sensibility" (see *The Vast Design*, pg 15)

- which offers perhaps as good a gloss on Yeats's sense of the death of "the garden" in the modern "age" of mechanist thought as we need.

And it is worth reflecting - as a rebuff to those who assume that Yeats's early verse is intellectually flaccid - that when Engelberg says Yeats "diagnosed a 'dissociation of sensibility'" long before Eliot did, we could add to the acknowledgement of Yeats's acuteness that fuels the compliment a sense of his precociousness: an analysis of this "dissociation of sensibility" is clearly there in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" - along with a prescription for an antidote; and the "conviction" that Yeats recalls himself as having formed in his early twenties (see Sections XXII - XXIII of "Four Years: 1887 - 1891" in *Autobiographies*, pp 234 - 40) regarding the fact that "both mind and heart began to break into fragments a little before Shakespeare's birth" (*ibid. pg 237)* is strikingly shrewd for one so young: which is why this conviction was able to stand as foundation for a good deal of what was still to come.

17. We have already seen Yeats saying that

> Locke based himself on (a) formula that reduced all we can know to "Nothing except mind" (*Essays and*

Introductions pg 414),
and this clearly indicates the reduction of the mind's sense of its own boundaries down to what Yeats calls in "A Prayer for Old Age" (*C.P.* pg 326) "the mind alone" - a reduction that must limit awareness to what Yeats cited Shelley as calling an "unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 68) arising from a "mechanist" outlook (*ibid.* pg 67).

18. So far, we have been considering the term "modern" as representing times since the change from the age of Aquinas towards that of Descartes and Locke and Hobbes - much as the term is used in current classifications of the history of Western philosophy, in its placing them as "early moderns" succeeding the Scholastics. We should also remember, however, that Yeats in a number of instances spoke of a "modern" world standing in contrast to the perfection of Classical Greece.

In other words, whatever disintegration of the European mind had taken place for Yeats since "just before the birth of Shakespeare" (see "Four Years: 1887 - 1891" sections xxii and xxiii, *Autobiographies* pp 234 - 40), the "modern tide" - in its tendency towards a fragmentation of self and of society - had for him begun to run its gyre with the demise of the Grecian moment of Unity and of perfection. Even for the very young man, the standard against which the present sickness of mind that he sees acting among his contemporaries is that of "The woods of Arcady"; and, near his death, Yeats spoke of "the thousands of years" it might take for the world to rebuild the "perfection" that "the Greek Drama alone (had) achieved", and of how "Shakespeare is only a mass of magnificent fragments" (*Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, pg 194). "The Statues" - which generates the vision of the "filthy modern tide" - certainly uses this broader sweep of history as its yardstick.

19. See the text to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plates 6 -7, the closing "sentence" of which - written by a "mighty Devil" with "corroding fires" - reads:

> How do you know but evr'y Bird that cuts the airy way,
> Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?

(see Keynes, *Blake Complete Writings*, pg 150).
In Plate 4 (*ibid.* pg 149), "the five Senses (are) the chief inlets of Soul in this age": "this age" ushered-in by the sort of mechanical philosophy that Yeats himself traced back to Locke; an "age" which - in its preoccupation with the behaviour of "material" bodies - had forgotten that what is "call'd Body" or Matter "is a portion of Soul discerned by the five Senses" (*ibid.*). If "Body" is just what we can see and hear and smell and taste and touch of a greater mystery that cannot be defined in material terms, then the "Grey Truth" that obscures from Yeats's "sick children of the (modern) world" all that "the woods of Arcady" and the "hapless faun" signify about that greater mystery shows all the more clearly as a deadness of understanding that the young Yeats is challenging in his audience.

20. We shouldn't miss the specificity of

> all the many changing things
> In dreary dancing past us whirled,
> To the cracked tune that Chronos sings:

it is their being thought of as "things", as well as their being in continual flux, that is at issue: their being supposedly just material objects, in the seventeenth century sense of the notion, that have come to seem to some all there is that the mind can legitimately concern itself with.

21. We have seen in Chapter 1 how Yeats speaks of how naturalism - which, as a refinement of realism, is for him mechanism as it works as a method within the arts - acts to make "man helpless before the contents of his own mind" (see *Essays and Introductions*, pg 404).

22. See Section IV, *C.P.* pg 399, and the discussion initiated in Chapter 1 above.

23. We could recall here the rejection of "the realists" that Yeats expresses in "A General Introduction for My Work" (1937), while discussing the work "to keep the 'Irishry' living" in the future:

> If Irish literature goes on as my generation planned it, it may do something to keep the "Irishry" living, nor will the work of the realists hinder, nor the figures they imagine, nor those described in memoirs of the revolution (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 517).

It is also hereabouts in this "Introduction" that it becomes apparent where Yeats gathered the seeds of the term "the indomitable Irishry", as it is used in Section V of "Under Ben Bulben" (*C.P.* pg 400): it comes from Toynbee's *The Study of History*, in which Yeats notes that Toynbee

> describes the birth and decay of what he calls the Far Western Christian culture; it lost at the Synod of Whitby its chance of mastering Europe, suffered final ecclesiastical defeat in the twelfth century with "the thoroughgoing incorporation of the Irish Christendom into the Roman Church. In the political and literary spheres" it lasted unbroken till the seventeenth century. He then insists that if "Jewish Zionism and Irish Nationalism succeed in achieving their aims, then Jewry and Irishry will each fit into its own tiny niche ... among sixty or seventy national communities", find life somewhat easier, but cease to be "the relic of an independent society ... the romance of Ancient Ireland has at last come to an end ... Modern Ireland has made up her mind, in our generation, to find her level as a willing inmate in our workaday Western world" (*op.cit.*).

If we keep this passage in mind, the call upon Irish artists in Section V of "Under Ben Bulben" to keep "the romance of Ancient Ireland" living in the thought of the "Modern Ireland" that Toynbee sees as having swung into such profound and questionable changes in aim and outlook in the space of a single generation, becomes much more understandable. The "sort now growing up" in

Ireland with "unremembering hearts and heads" have catastrophically forgotten an "Ancient" quality of awareness that had its roots in a sacred tradition reaching back before even Patrick's creed of faith. As Yeats says earlier in the same "Introduction",

> Behind all Irish history hangs a great tapestry, even Christianity had to accept it and be itself pictured there. Nobody looking at its dim folds can say where Christianity begins and Druidism ends; "There is one perfect among the birds, one perfect among the fish, and one among men that is perfect". I can only explain by that suggestion of recent scholars - Professor Burkitt of Cambridge commended it to my attention - that St. Patrick came to Ireland not in the fifth century but towards the end of the second. The great controversies had not begun; Easter was still the first full moon after the Equinox. Upon that day the world had been created, the Ark rested upon Ararat, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt; the umbilical cord which united Christianity to the ancient world had not yet been cut, Christ was still the half-brother of Dionysus. A man just tonsured by the Druids could learn from the nearest Christian neighbour to sign himself with the Cross without sense of incongruity, nor would his children acquire that sense. The organised clans weakened the Church organisation, they could accept the monk but not the bishop (*ibid*. pp 513 - 14).

So this sort of Christianity "pictured" in the "great tapestry" of the unbroken faith of "the ancient world" is what Yeats himself sees in what he finds Toynbee calling "the Far Western Christian culture" that forms the backdrop to "'the romance of Ancient Ireland'", just being lost at last under the ground-swell of a "Modern Ireland" that is wilfully bent upon forgetting such roots in the beginnings of a sacred lore that once underlay the faiths of humanity from Ireland to India. (Yeats makes it clear that he thought the fragments of "ancient" lore that he and Lady Gregory recorded in Ireland linked naturally with the work he did with Shri Purohit Swami on the translation of the Upanishads: see *ibid*. pp 517 - 18.)

So at least part of what Yeats means by "that ancient sect" that he invokes in "The Statues" is what continued from "the ancient world" into "the Far Western Christian culture" that was wrecked "ecclesiastically" by "controversies" and synods, and that was wrecked in "the political and literary spheres" by what Yeats calls "Cromwell's murderous crew" (see *C.P.* pp 350 - 51) and by what - in the "Introduction" that we have been examining - he calls

> wars which, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, became wars of extermination (*Essays and Introductions*, pp 518 - 19).

All of which gives us at least something of the sort of historical analysis which Yeats brought to bear in formulating his vision of the "formless spawning fury" of the "filthy modern tide" into which "We Irish" had been "thrown" in "The Statues".

24. *C.P.* pg 135.

25. See Keynes, *Blake Complete Writings*, pg 215.

26. See *ibid.* pg 216.

27. This ascription of these terms to the antagonism Yeats here dramatises seems justified by the way in which he draws the elements within the poem into their lines of tension: with the paintings being so much in the language of the spiritual imagination, the forces that seem bent upon jamming their sort of discourse would be likely to be rationalist and therefore mechanist in tendency. (The title of the poem obviously sets the whole tack of interpretation, from the outset, as well.)

28. In another possible reading of "The Realists", the dragons could be seen as being themselves symbolic of the imaginative energies that typify the "land" of romance that is evoked by such "books" and "Paintings" as are made by "men that wive" - that find their creative inspiration - in such a "land" of mythic and archetypal entities. Such artworks then help "wake a hope to live/ That had gone" from the everyday mind when these "dragons" - or key signs of the region of the mind that acts in primal images rather than in "sophisticated" rational formulae - were dismissed as idle and worthless illusions by what Yeats in 1935 called "the intellectual pride of the eighteenth century" ("The Holy Mountain" Section IX, *Essays and Introductions* pg 466) that had grown from such seventeenth century beginnings as the thought of Descartes and of Locke.

But this reading simply leads us - by a slightly different route through this "dragon-guarded land" - back to the same sense that our first reading gave us of "The Realists" being both a punishing critique of the intellectual legacy still active in Yeats's own times of the European Enlightenment, and a clear statement of the typically Yeatsian conviction that where "a hope to live" *can* be propagated by the arts, this "hope" is always born out of the influence of the sort of imaginative, creative thought that he called "romance", and not out of the reduced sensibilities that he saw as being apotheosized within the realist programme.

For further justification of our reading of the dragons as representing a limiting mental framework that has been offered in the main text above, see the use to which Yeats puts the traditional Perseus/ Saint George/ Andromeda motif in the first stanza of "Michael Robartes and the Dancer", in which an "altar-piece" becomes an example of "the knight" who fought to slay "The half-dead dragon (that) was (his lady's) thought,"

> That every morning rose again
> And dug its claws and shrieked and fought.
> Could the impossible come to pass
> She would have time to turn her eyes,
> Her lover thought, upon the glass
> And on the instant would grow wise (*C.P.* pg 197)

- where this explication of the emblem is offered as a gloss on the conviction that "Opinion is not worth a rush"; and where the sort of "opinion" that is meant seems very much the sort of possessive demon of a fixed and hysterical idea of self and of world that is involved in our prime reading of "The Realists".

The symbol, as such, seems to refer to just the sort of enclosure within an opinionated or abstract habit of thinking that is seen in Section IV of "A Woman Young and Old", when the woman speaks of "the dragon's will" that she did - before her knight "stood among the dragon rings" "And broke the chain and set my ankles free/ Saint George or else a pagan Perseus"; and where that "dragon's will" is epitomised by her having thought, while under sway of that "will",

> ... love a casual
> Improvisation, or a settled game
> That followed if I let the kerchief fall:
> Those deeds were best that gave the minute wings
> And heavenly music that gave it wit (*C.P.* pg 310).

Such a mechanical set of expectations and their barely-veiled *ennui* is surely yet another image of the state of mind Yeats first typified in the "sick children of the world", who are caught in the "dreary dancing" of the meaningless "changing things" that "Grey Truth" - the rationalist dragon - has made of that world.

29. This is if we adhere to the primary reading of the dragons' meaning that is offered above.

30. There are sufficient indications that Yeats saw himself as having worked with intent towards definite ends to make any notion of the so-called intentional fallacy notion evaporate: apart from the entire thrust of a poem like "What Then?" (*C.P.* pg 347) and of the call upon the Irish arts in Section IV of "Under Ben Bulben" (*C.P.* pg 399), we need only look at lines such as those from the last stanza of "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" (*C.P.* pg 276) for such signs of conscious intent: "We were the last romantics - chose for theme/... whatever most can bless/ The mind of man".

31. We could recall here his comments about the disastrous effects upon the climate of his times caused by "deductions made by those who believed" in "the objective matter and space of popular science": (see *Explorations*, pg 436).

32. See "The Statues", stanza 2, *C.P.* pg 375:

> ... the men
> That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these
> Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down
> All Asiatic vague immensities,
> And not the banks of oars that swam upon
> The many-headed foam at Salamis.
> Europe put off that foam when Phidias
> Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.

We might be reminded - in this evocation of the Greek defeat of "All Asiatic immensities" and the discovery of a measured, intellectual ideal of selfhood - of Yeats's noting in *A Vision* that

> Hegel identifies Asia with Nature; he sees the whole process of civilisation as an escape from Nature; partly achieved by Greece, fully achieved by Christianity. Oedipus - Greece - solved the

> riddle of the Sphinx - Nature - compelled her to plunge from the precipice, though man himself remained ignorant and blundering. I accept his definition. (See pp 202 - 3.)

It is tempting to entertain the notion that we could see Phidias' statues as having subdued Hegel's "Asia" - or "Nature" - to a supernatural dream: this view helps focus "The Statues" within the stream of our argument about Yeats's own contest with mechanist realism or naturalism: a contest with something in his own world very like a resurgence of mere "Nature" in the human mind.

33. See *C.P.* pg 365.

34. See "Sailing to Byzantium", *C.P.* pg 217: "An aged man is but a paltry thing,/ A tattered coat upon a stick".

35. See the passage from the essay quoted in the main text just below, for an indication of Yeats's belief that the imagination "is the voice of what is eternal in man". (This aspect to Yeats's thinking is also more fully covered in Chapter 4 below.)

36. See *Essays and Introductions* pp 166 - 67.

The conviction here expressed is that - beneath the changes that occur "upon the surface of life", there is an abiding human nature: which is, of course central to Yeats's thinking - against the modern, Hegelian tide. As he says in *A Vision*,

> I ... never thought with Hegel that the two ends of the see-saw are one another's negation, nor that the spring vegetables were refuted when over (pp 72 - 3)

- a thought which echoes in the note to the first paragraph of "Private Thoughts" (*Explorations*, pp 429 - 30):

> Hegel's historical dialectic is, I am persuaded, false, and its falsehood has led to the rancid ill-temper of the typical Communist and his incitements or condonations of murder. When the spring vegetables are over they have not been refuted, nor have they suffered in honour or in reputation. Hegel in his more popular writings seems to misrepresent his own thought. Mind cannot be the ultimate reality, seeing that in his *Logic* both mind and matter have their ground in spirit. To Hegel, as to the ancient Indian Sages, spirit is that which has value in itself.

Further than this, the conviction that there is a "self behind the momentary self" (*Essays and Introductions* pg 102) is to be found as a central theme in Yeats's thinking. Poetry, for instance, is

> the creation of actions according to the unchangeable process of human nature as existing in the mind of the creator (*ibid.* pg 67),

which is part of the belief that "men do not change much in their deepest thought" (*ibid.* pg 69) and that

> all the machineries of poetry are parts of the convictions of antiquity, and readily become again convictions in minds that brood over them with visionary intensity (*ibid.* pg 74).

Or there is the view that

> Those things that are permanent in the soul of the world, the great passions that trouble all ... have but a brief recurring life of flower and seed in any man (*ibid.* pg 286).

For an interesting update on Hegel from the perspectives being established by Sociobiology, see Michael Levine's essay called "The Return of Human Nature" in *The World and I* for November, 1987 (pp 617 - 27), in which he indicates how - though "Hegel undoubtedly caught something his predecessors missed" - evolutionary biology has come to instigate what he calls "the rediscovery of human nature" as a scientific fact. (Levine also points out that Hegel fell into the logical error of inferring

> from the existence of *great differences* between people of different historical periods that they are similar in no way at all: *ibid.* pg 618.)

37. See "Under Ben Bulben", Section IV, particularly the last line (*C.P.* pg 400).

38. See Section IV, *C.P.* pg 399.

39. This is taking "eternal" - as Yeats uses the term in the essay on Father Rosencrux - to mean what is beyond "the mind alone" (see "A Prayer for Old Age", *C.P.* pg 326) within the complex of human reality; while the register I have in mind for "proper" is from Yeats's speaking of the "proper dark" of the Irish in the last stanza of "The Statues", *C.P.* pg 376.

40. If we take the youthful perspective upon the state of the modern mind we have noted in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", the fact that the "children" of "the world" that was born from the mechanist fallacy are "sick" and "dreary" would indicate for Yeats that they have an awareness of their malaise that acts at least as an actual pain, if not as a conscious understanding.

41. This is, of course, Yeats's using Locke as the imaginative symbol of all things Cartesian and Newtonian that he needs as a quick and ready counter for use in passionate verse; but Locke does seem to Yeats to have the most directly denied the existence and significance of the imaginative and instinctive and archetypal dimensions to human experience that played so essential a part in Yeats's own sense of the shape of things: see, for instance, his speaking of his cage-birds as focusing for him "the problem Locke waved aside" in building his model of human thought: the problem of the "knowledge or power" that comes into the mind of someone who "writes any work of genius, or invents some creative action" from "beyond his mind" (*Autobiographies*, pp 335 - 37). Locke seems to have been for Yeats most directly his own anti-type, and so he set him up as his own special antagonist in the drama he made of all that he knew .

42. See "The Symbolical Drama in Paris", an essay from April, 1894, in John. P. Frayne, *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, vol. 1, pg 322.

43. It is here worth remembering that Yeats was asked to resign from the Esoteric Section of the Theosophist Society in London because he insisted on experimenting with the occult phenomena of which the Theosophist doctrine spoke: his objection was that

> By teaching an abstract system without experiment or evidence you are making your pupils dogmatic and you are taking them out of life (see *Memoirs*, pg 24).

44. Yeats's conception of "the scientific movement" generally as having arisen primarily so as to sweep away "so many religious and philosophical misunderstandings of ancient truth" is yet another instance of his shrewd insight into the tendencies of the times: when one thinks of how modern physics has worked in conjunction with the best in modern psychology in the years since Yeats wrote these words so as to make the limits of human understanding and the mystery of the sensible world into solid science, it sometimes seems as if the Age of Reason - without ever dreaming it - was really just the first step towards setting a good deal of the mood of "ancient truth" on grounds that might make that mood less likely ever again to be vulnerable to opinions about the nature of ultimate things as primitive as those that ushered in the Age of Reason. (The notion of the Enlightenment being unwitting servant to all that it dismissed as Superstition involves an irony Yeats would have relished.)

45. See J.P. Frayne, *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, pp 322 - 23.

46. Taking the "senses" in the seventeenth century definition of them to which Yeats refers in noting Leibnitz' comment on Locke's mechanism to which we have referred above, that is.

47. This aspect of the problem of consciousness is dealt with in more detail below.

48. He was, in other words, already in essence possessed of the sense of the artist's role as gyre-ward or agent of creative evolution that is expressed near the end of the life in "The Gyres": see stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 337.

49. We might recall Yeats saying in the opening to his essay in *Samhain* called "The Reform of the Theatre"

> I think the theatre must be reformed in its plays, its speaking, its acting, and its scenery. That is to say, I think there is nothing good about it at present

and then continuing:

> We have to write or find plays that will make the theatre a place of intellectual excitement - a place where the mind goes to be liberated as it was liberated in the theatres of Greece and England and France at certain great moments of their history

(see *Explorations*, pg 107).
Samhain has a number of references to the English stage, the general tone of which is perhaps adequately epitomised when Yeats says,

> We should, of course, play every kind of good play about Ireland that we can get, but romantic and historical plays, and plays about the life of artisans and countrypeople, are the best worth getting. In time, I think, we can make the poetical play a living dramatic form again, and the training our actors will get from plays of country life, with its unchanging outline, its abundant speech, its extravagance of thought, will help to establish a school of imaginative acting. The play of society, on the other hand, could but train up realistic actors who would do badly, for the most part, what English actors do well ... (*Explorations*, pg 96).

(We could note how well the tension between "imaginative" and "realistic" acting that Yeats draws here suits with the general direction of our argument.)

50. This is one of the instances in Yeats's thinking that clearly shows how often he found English letters rather provincial - a fact that will be reverted to in Chapter 5.

51. When Yeats talks in "Under Ben Bulben" of

> the sort now growing up
> All out of shape from toe to top,
> Their unremembering hearts and heads
> Base-born products of base beds,

and then calls upon "Irish poets" to "scorn" such a "sort" as a subject for poetry (*C.P.* pg 400), he is surely fleshing-out part of what he means by "the filthy modern tide" and "its formless spawning fury" in "The Statues": "hearts and heads" awash without spiritual continuity - without memory - in a sea of shapeless momentariness that is without the impress of anything abiding.
Incidentally, should one feel uneasy with the dismissal of this "sort", one should remember perhaps Yeats's saying in *Samhain* that

> Plays about drawing-rooms are written for the middle classes of great cities, for the classes who live in drawing-rooms; but if you would ennoble the man of the roads you must write about the roads, or about the people of romance, or about great historical people (*Explorations*, pg 96).

It isn't, then, any simple social snobbishness that underlies the epithet "Base-born", but a sense of the mode of a spiritual quality: the "man of the roads" to which Yeats addresses himself may be blank to "Plays about drawing-rooms", but he is fully open to the more universal themes of "romance" or of "great historical people": sure sign, if we need any, that there is no assumption of imaginative inferiority going with humble birth - which is an attitude reflected beautifully in his approving recollection of Lady Gregory's saying of a simple countryman they had just passed, "That old man may know the secret of the ages" (see *Explorations*, pg 30.)

52. In his "swoon", Locke sank down onto a ground that had never been in mind before: Man's second Fall into Matter.

53. The fact that what determines alertness to some new "current" of the times is for Yeats "temperament" looks clearly forward to the formulation at life's end that "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it" (see Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 922): what we know is what our total construct of being permits to us.

54. See "Under Ben Bulben", *C.P.* pg 400.

55. I use the word in the sense that Yeats gives it in "The Gyres", *C.P.* pg 337, where he speaks of "Those that Rocky Face holds dear/... (who) shall,/ ... disinter/ The workman, noble and saint ..."

56. There is, of course, a sense in which the death of both "the woods of Arcady" and of the "hapless faun" in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" symbolises their disappearance from the conscious levels of the modern mind; indicates the loss to "unremembering" modern "hearts and heads" of what these images represent within the greater human psyche - considering that what has been forgotten does not automatically cease to exist, as Jung's work on the archetypes of the collective unconscious shows.

57. In considering Yeats's assessment of the "pure reason" of the Enlightenment, we should recall his saying that

> pure reason has notoriously made but light of
> practical reason, and has been made light of in
> its turn from that morning when Descartes
> discovered that he could think better in bed
> than out of it (*Autobiographies*, pp 237 -38).

To such a view, the Enlightenment that underpins the assumptions of realism as an artistic method shows its true colours in the reductionism and arrogance that is implicit in the fact of such "reason" having inevitably degenerated into reducing even itself to a mockery: to having engineered the reduction of even its own thought down to a reduction.

58. See "The Body of Father Christian Rosencrux" (1895): *Essays and Introductions*, pg 197.

59. Yeats fully knew that such "criticism of life" was central to human experience, though - as witness "Meru", *C.P.* pg 333: - man's life is thought

> And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
> Ravening through century after century,
> ... that he may come
> Into the desolation of reality.

But, in the same poem, he equally acknowledges that

> Civilisation is hooped together, brought
> Under a rule, by manifold illusion,

where this "illusion" (set as it is against "the desolation of reality") seems to reflect the world of values and activities

within which the Phidian imagination constructs its fictions so as to complement the thrust of the analytical intellect.

It is interesting to note here de Chardin's view of the final effect of "criticism" - or "analysis" - carried to its conclusion:

> ... *analysis*, that marvellous instrument of scientific research to which we owe all our advances but which, breaking down synthesis after synthesis, allows one soul after another to escape, leaving us confronted with a pile of dismantled machinery, and evanescent particles: (see *The Phenomenon of Man*, pg 281).

Wordsworth's famous "We murder to dissect", from "The Tables Turned", has something of the same bearing - though neither de Chardin nor Wordsworth hold quite the same interwoven complexity of perspective as Yeats does of the ambivalence of "thought" in "Meru".

60. See Chapter 4 below.

61. In the essay noted above, in which Yeats talks about "the impassioned realisms" of Zola and of Ibsen, and the "would-be realisms" of Pinero and Jones, the implicit reminder is that even the avowed realist dreams up his "realisms" out of passion - or else produces them from the imaginative miasma of conventional imitation!

62. See "Under Ben Bulben", *Section IV, C.P.* pg 399.

63. We could recall Yeats saying in an essay that

> We only believe in those thoughts which have been conceived not in the brain but in the whole body (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 235),

which of course closely parallels what he says about thinking in "A Prayer for Old Age", *C.P.* pg 326.

64. Yeats's focus in "Under Ben Bulben" on the key element within the malaise of "the sort now growing up" as being that they have "unremembering hearts and heads" (*Section V, C.P.* pg 400) could perhaps be seen in the light of the comment made on page 136 of *A Vision*, that "If image were linked with image, the soul would awake from its immovable trance": the sort of memory that links the soul's sense of itself into coherence is part of the action of the imagination that Yeats seeks to bring back into the centre of modern art. (The paradox is, that "the formless, spawning fury" of the "modern tide" of mind - when viewed from the vantage of the wakened soul - constitutes an "immovable trance" of "the soul" from which it must "awake" to be itself - a paradox which serves to remind one of the mystery of the sort of "truth" Yeats thought worth following.)

65. See the discussion offered in Chapter 1 above.

66. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 446.

67. See *Explorations*, pp 332 - 33:

> I would found literature on the three things which Kant thought we must postulate to make life liveable - Freedom, God, Immortality. The fading of these three before "Bacon, Newton, Locke" has made literature decadent. Because Freedom is gone we have Stendhal's "mirror dawdling down a lane"; because God has gone we have realism, the accidental, because Immortality is gone we can no longer write those tragedies which have always seemed to me alone legitimate - those that are a joy to the man who dies.

The identification of "realism" with "the accidental" helps make, once again, Yeats's point that "the filthy modern tide" is the drowning of meaning in the opinion that all is meaningless. (As recently as 1986, Laurens van der Post - in commenting on what is really the continuation of this "tide" in the opinions of modern people - was prompted to speak of "arid intellectualists", whom he saw as "dominat(ing)" our "educational institutions", as thinking of "religion (as) superstitious and a delinquent state of mind": see *A Walk with a White Bushman*, pg 109).

68. We could recall Yeats's commenting that

> Reason can only discover completely the use of those obvious actions which everybody admires (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 103)

soon after his having said

> behind the momentary self, which acts and lives in the world, and is subject to the judgement of the world, there is that which cannot be called before any mortal judgement seat (*ibid*. pg 102).

69. See *Autobiographies*, pg 439, where Yeats talks of

> that mechanical philosophy of the Eighteenth Century, which has, as Coleridge said, turned the human mind into the quicksilver at the back of a mirror, though it still permits a work of art to seem "a mirror dawdling along a road".

70. The association of objectively "photographic" art with an inhuman mirror also has a ring of Ruskin to it that Yeats - who quarrelled deeply with his father about Ruskin, as witness *Memoirs*, pg 20 - might well have been aware of: as Christopher Wood notes, when Ruskin commented on John Brett's painting *The Vall d'Aosta* after the Royal Academy exhibition of 1859,

> although acknowledging that it was a true "historical landscape", recording the facts with total honesty, he complained that it was "Mirror's work, not Man's ": see *The Pre-Raphaelites*, pg 90.

We could also recall, perhaps, Yeats himself - speaking of "Shakespeare's people" in "The Tragic Generation" - saying that they

> make all things serve their passion, and that passion is for the moment the whole energy of

> their beings - birds, beasts, men, women, landscape, society, are but symbols and metaphors, nothing is studied in itself, the mind is a dark well, no surface, depth only,

whereas in the modern mind "all is the anxious study and slight deflection of external force" (*Autobiographies*, pp 359 - 60). The tension between the "dark well" and the modern mirror's "slight deflection" of what is thought-of as being "external" to the "energy of (one's) being" captures a great deal of what we are looking-for in defining Yeats's use of the mirror as an image of what has no depth, surface only.

We could also recall here the opening to Section XI of the Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, where Yeats begins by admitting that

> When my generation denounced scientific humanitarian pre-occupation, psychological curiosity, rhetoric, we had not found what ailed Victorian literature,

and goes on to say that

> The mischief began at the end of the seventeenth century when man became passive before mechanised nature ... Or I may dismiss all that ancient history and say it began when Stendhal described a masterpiece as a "mirror dawdling down a lane". There are only two long poems in Victorian literature that caught public attention; *The Ring and the Book* where great intellect analyses the suffering of one passive soul, weighs the persecutor's guilt, and *The Idylls of the King* where a poetry in itself an exquisite passivity is built about an allegory where a characterless king represents the soul. I read few modern novels, but I think I am right in saying that in every novel that has created an intellectual fashion from Huysman's *La Cathedrale* to Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms*, the chief character is a mirror. (pp xxvi - vii).

And, in talking of his evaluation of Dorothy Wellesley's verse, in the same Introduction, he says that, in her,

> The swing from Stendhal has passed (W.J.) Turner; the individual soul, the betrayal of the unconceived at birth, are among her principal themes, it must go further still; that soul must become its own betrayer, its own deliverer, the one activity, the mirror turn lamp (*ibid.* pg xxxiii)

- so again, Stendhal's "mirror (must) turn lamp", and shine, not just reflect. (Even in the famous rejection of "certain poems written in the midst of the great war" because of the conviction that "passive suffering is not a theme for poetry" that is to be found in the same Introduction [see pg xxxiv], the root of the objection Yeats is making still comes down to the conviction - made core to "Lapis Lazuli" - that

> In all the great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies; in Greece the tragic chorus danced. When a man has withdrawn into the quicksilver at the back of the mirror no event becomes luminous in his mind [*ibid.*]

- which itself mirrors his saying to Dorothy Wellesley that

> Some few of us ... have in the very core of our

being the certainty that man's soul is active. I find this dialogue in the *Upanishad*: "I want to think." "You cannot think without faith." "How can I get faith?" "You cannot get faith without action." "How learn to act?" "Be happy" [*Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, pg 56].)

The "certainty that Man's soul is active" and not a passive mirror is obviously germane to our discussion.

71. Yeats recalled of Symons that

> he saw nothing in literature but a series of impressions ... but I knew that the greatest kind of literature is passion ... He thought to spend his life, in so far as it was an artistic life, in making the silver mirror without speck, and I thought to see it fused and glowing (*Memoirs* pg 36).

Yeats's memory in "The Trembling of the Veil" that Lionel Johnson

> was gradually losing, too, the faculty of experience, and in his prose and verse repeated the old ideas and emotions, but faintly, as though with fading interest, (*Autobiographies*, pg 393),

shows how fully he acknowledged the importance of "impressions" and of "the faculty of experience" to a life lived with "(un)fading interest" and to literature that could embody such life. But it was the imaginative "passion" that set "the silver mirror ... fused and glowing" - that could make "the greatest kind of literature" - that he called upon Irish artists to practice in his valediction to them. The "silver mirror without speck" is Stendhal's mirror, with not a breath of innermost meaning to mist its objective, receptive sheen - and that was not what Yeats wanted for Ireland or for anyone.

72. As Yeats said in "A General Introduction for My Work" in 1937,

> I knew, but now and then as young men know things, that I must turn from that modern literature Jonathan Swift compared to the web a spider draws out of its bowels; I hated and still hate with ever growing hatred the literature of the point of view (*Essays and Introductions* pp 510 - 11).

The "literature of the point of view" to which Yeats here refers is the literature of egoism - the chronicles of Descartes' "I", or of that thought which "A Prayer for Old Age" speaks of as taking place "in the mind alone".

73. See "Blood and the Moon", Section II, *C.P.* pg 268.

74. See *Explorations*, pg 30.

75. There is also the interesting passage from *Explorations*, in which Yeats says of Berkeley's *Commonplace Book* that

> Descartes, Locke and Newton took away the world and gave us its excrement instead. Berkeley restored

> the world ... Berkeley has brought back to us the world that only exists because it shines and sounds. A child, smothering its laughter because the elders are standing round, has opened once more the great box of toys (pg 325).

The final image of the child and the toy-box recalls the "sick children of the world" and "Grey Truth ... their painted toy" in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" (*C.P.* pg 7), and reinforces our sense of just how linked Yeats's thoughts were: the same theme apparently calling-up a kindred focusing metaphor, even though the comments on the *Commonplace Book* come from 1930, and the image from the "Song" from 1885.

76. We could recall here Yeats's saying that

> The created world is a stream of images in the human mind (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 419),

and that

> If I think of the table on which I am writing, my mental image is as much Matter as the table itself, though of a subtler kind (*ibid.* pg 448),

both of which stand worlds away from the view he saw Descartes and "the science of his day" holding, that could "consider matter as independent of mind" (*ibid.*, pg 439).

Though the formulations to which we have just referred are from the later years, we could also recall earlier notions, such as when Yeats speaks of the differences in outlook between himself and Symons that are referred to above.

77. See the certainty in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" that "human truth" is no matter of abstract scientific "optic" objectivity: "... there is no truth/ Saving in thine own heart" (C.P. pg 8). See also the conviction in "A Prayer for Old Age" (C.P. pg 326) that "He that sings a lasting song/ Thinks in a marrow-bone" - thinks, that is, in the human "blood and nerves". The view is rounded in Yeats's saying that "wisdom is the property of the dead,/ A something incompatible with life" ("Blood and the Moon", Section IV, *C.P.* pg 269) and that "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it" (Allan Wade, *Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 922). (It's worth noting, though, how different Yeats's meaning to the word "human" is - in the extract referred-to above from the "Song" - from the meaning it has for the "actors lacking music" of "The Old Stone Cross": see *C.P.* pg 365 - 66. Even if truth is available to us, as mortals, only in human terms, those terms are not at all seen by Yeats himself in the reduced forms of the realist conception.)

78. Part of the complex of knowing is, of course, the effects of the tinctures of memory operating at any moment - tinctures that are collective and cultural, as well as personal. (A good way of tracing something of these elements to the human moment, as Yeats knew them, is to look, for instance, at the episode of "the Great Memory" of stanza nine of "The Tower", [*C.P.*pg 221]; at what is said about Chaucer celebrating the "windy Mays" of England with a feeling warmed by "more meridian springs," in the extract quoted in Chapter 1 above; and at the wonderful poem called "Memory", [*C.P.* pg 168].)

79. *C.P.* pg 392. (I have not quoted the extract from Thomas Mann with which Yeats prefaces the poem.)

80. When Yeats wrote this poem, of course, the "Roman" and "Russian" and "Spanish politics" he speaks about were the stuff of headlines: Fascist Italy, Stalin, and the Spanish Civil War.

81. For all the triumph of "that girl" over "travelled man" and "politician" in the drama of this poem, it is important to see that the persona obviously has paid close (and critical) "attention" to "what they say ... /Of war and war's alarms" - at least at some stage in the discussion, before the girl's spell began its work. He knows, quite certainly, that the one "knows what he talks about" and that the other has "read and thought". Both judgements imply the speaker's having listened-to and evaluated diverse contributions to a wide-ranging view of the "politics" the poem has in background; and this recognition adds to our sense of the power of the pull on his attention that the persona feels from the apparently quiet and undemonstrative girl, who is simply "standing there", doing nothing obvious to draw his attention beyond being "that girl": doing nothing beyond simply being exactly who she is.

The exact dramatic positioning of the various people - the precisely-located girl; the travelled man "here" at hand; the politician "there" at a little remove - helps to create a sense of their tangible presence and concrete reality as persons, which intensifies the impression that the poem gives of its persona being alone with his own drama even amidst a real social grouping: an impression which prompts a conception that itself underscores the angle to the poem's meaning that we are engaged with right now.

82. To say this is not to suggest that Yeats was guilty of any sort of dangerous solipsism: for him, the individual mind - "the mind alone", as he called it in "Prayer for Old Age", (*C.P.* pg 326) - is always, even in its solitary moments, under pressure of worlds other than either just itself or of some supposedly "exterior reality": there is also the "supersensual world" of the essay on Father Rosencrux that is referred to above.

And we should also remember, in this regard, Yeats's approval of Liebnitz's criticism that Locke's formula "Nothing in the mind but sense" meant "Nothing but mind". Locke's rationalism is being rejected here as being a form of enclosure within the narrowed self of the empirical ego - which recalls Yeats's noting in another context that Locke's stance on consciousness "waved aside" the "adventures" that come from instinct in the animals, and that it ignored also the "signs of knowledge from beyond her own mind" that Yeats himself saw in his "not yet three years old" daughter. Locke's formula also denied the certainty Yeats felt of "some knowledge or power (that) has come into his mind from beyond his mind" when "a man writes any work of genius, or invents some creative action". As Yeats's own formulation then continues, "our images must be given to us, we cannot choose them deliberately": which indicates that he would have seen Locke's formula - and all such empiricism - as being in itself

solipsistic (see Section VIII of "The Trembling of the Veil", *Autobiographies* pp 335 - 37.)

Also, at the beginning of the next Section of these reflections, Yeats continues by saying

> I know now that revelation is from the self, but from that age-long memoried self, that shapes the elaborate shell of the mollusc and the child in the womb, that teaches the birds to make their nest; and that genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind, *ibid*. pg 337).

So Yeats's rejection as fit subjects for poetry of "the sort now growing up/ All out of shape from toe to top" - with "Their unremembering hearts and heads" (section V of "Under Ben Bulben", *C.P.* pg 400) - is, at root, a judgement on the "modern" tendency towards a loss of awareness of "that long-memoried self that shapes" all forms of being and of behaviour, even "in the womb". It is essentially an objection on Yeats's part to the tendency towards a total immersion in the "trivial daily mind" of the empirical, personal self that he so consistently examines as a "modern" ill - from "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" and its sickening "Grey Truth" onwards.

For the "hapless faun,/ Buried under the sleepy ground" to whom the youthful Yeats wishes in this poem to bring his own "mirthful songs" of "antique joy" is actually what Jung would probably have called "a personification" (see *inter alia* *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* pp 183, 187 and 337) of "that buried self" that is entirely ignored by the "trivial daily mind" which is all that Yeats sees empiricism as having admitted of "truth" in its forming the "painted toy" that it had made of modern human reality. As a sketch of "human truth", the mechanist model is "Grey" for Yeats precisely because it shades-out the other colours of experience that go beyond that of the encapsulated ego - of "the mind alone" amidst the materials of its own purely personal history.

As a matter of interest, Jung would probably have found many points of contact with Yeats's outlook on the "modern" world, as is shown - for instance - by his retrospect in the late 1950's to the effect that

> Our age has shifted all its emphasis to the here and now, and thus brought about a daemonisation of man and his world. The phenomenon of dictators and all the misery they have wrought springs from the fact that man has been robbed of transcendence by the shortsightedness of the super-intellectuals. Like them he has fallen a victim to unconsciousness (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pg 326).

The "unconsciousness" to which "the super-intellectuals" have "fallen a victim" - along with those that they have "robbed" of vision - is the rationalist unconsciousness of the existence of the unconscious which Jung makes clear is, for himself, a synonym in scientific terms for what in mythic terms he "might equally well speak of" as "'God' or 'Daimon'" (*ibid*. pp 336 - 37). Yeats would certainly have found this close companion to much of his own thought: consider for instance Jung's notion of modern people as having been robbed of a vital sense of "transcendence" by

"super-intellectuals" - by people such as the Locke that Yeats himself blamed for exactly such modern "unconsciousness" of the numinous. And we might feel all the more certainty of this agreement when we think of the prophesy of the "dictators and all the misery they have wrought" that Yeats himself seems to have offered in his vision of "That insolent fiend Robert Artisson" being summoned onto the modern scene by the descent upon human consciousness of radical confusion that is sketched in section VI of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" (*C.P.* pp 236 - 37).

83. *"The Peacock", C.P.* pg 135. ("The Realists" is on the same page, and the poems appeared in print only about eighteen months apart - "The Realists" in December 1912, and "The Peacock" in May 1914. See Jeffares's *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B Yeats*, pp 140 - 141.)

84. "Proposed" being the operative term: as the lines about Berkeley from "Blood and the Moon" insist, whatever notion we have of the ultimate nature of the substance from which our "world" is made is just a "theme": just a more-or less self-consistent construct that is possible in terms of our current outlook and that is accepted for a while for the convenience it brings of having something on which to hang our ideas about what we're doing.

85. This aspect of things is dealt with to some extent in Chapter 4 below.

86. An imagining on the part of the materialist that reminds one just how entirely the materialist position is one bred of the most naive and uncritical idealism.

87. I have been using the term "mind" as Yeats himself uses it in the lines on Berkeley from "Blood and the Moon" - and in the sense implied in "Meru", when he says "man's life is thought" (*C.P.* pg 333). I am very aware of how clearly Yeats saw the limits of "the mind alone" from which "lasting" thought has to escape, into "the blood and nerves" and the "marrow" of wider awarenesses.

88. "Death", *C.P.* pg 264.

It is interesting to note the suggestions contained in Yeats's use of the word "attend" in the first line of the poem. Beyond any merely poetic mannerism to the word, we should recall the conviction expressed in the essay on Shelley that is referred to above that "the great passions are angels of God": the patterns of emotion available to us aren't just personal, but are tides that arise in us from out of a deeply common ground-swell, way beyond personality. The notion of "dread" and "hope" as things that "attend" upon us, like entities with their own volition, seems more than just a conceit, given views such as those expressed in the essay in question - and given the thought of the early poem called "To Some I Have Talked With by the Fire", (*C.P.* pg 56) which talks of "the dark folk who live in the souls/ Of passionate men, like bats in the dead trees". There is also a similar formulation in "The Wild Swans at Coole", (*C.P.* pg 147)

which talks of how - for all the years Yeats has known these birds - "Passion or conquest ... /Attend upon them still." The point is, once again, that the real springs of human action lie for Yeats far beyond the range of Stendhal's dawdling mirror's reflections - lie in impersonal, "supersensual" forces of which Locke's sort of "mind" must remain forever in ignorance.

89. For Yeats's beliefs concerning reincarnation, see "Mohini Chatterjee" (*C.P.* pg 279), "Under Ben Bulben", Section II, (*C.P.* pg 398), and the discussion of the subject in Chapter 4 below. For his sense of the possibility that the shadows of the fated life's destiny could fall on the soul long before that destiny actually began to unfold in time, see "A Bronze Head", *C.P.* pp 382 - 83:

> But even at the starting-post, all sleek and new,
> I saw the wildness in her and thought
> A vision of the terror that it must live through
> Had shattered her soul.

90. This scarcely needs a gloss; but John Prebble gives a soberly-researched account of the executions of the "rebels" of Culloden, in which he incidentally shows two men each making very different things of the same scaffold and the same axe - but each of them very definitely making of them something their enemies never planned for them:

> Kilmarnock and Balmerino were beheaded ...
> Kilmarnock died with great courage, considering his fear, and Belmarino as if he had no fear at all. He walked about the scaffold, examining it with interest. Once more he fingered the axe, weighing it in his hands, and all this so upset the executioner that he had to strike three blows before he could cut off the valiant old fellow's head (see *Culloden*, pg 276).

91. It might be interesting here to recall the distinction that Yeats made between inner and outer dynamics in *A Vision*, in which Fate and Necessity represent that which comes to us from without, while Destiny is that which comes from within (pg 86). In these terms, the death of the "great man in his pride" shows the conquest of Fate and Necessity by Destiny - by characteristic temper of response.

92. "Sailing to Byzantium", *C.P.* pg 218.

93. We could recall Yeats saying

> I am convinced that in two or three generations it will become generally known that the mechanical theory has no reality, that the natural and the supernatural are knit together (*Essays and Introductions* pg 518).

The "reality", in other words, is that the apparently objective world - "exterior things" - is woven of a substance that is nearer to Prospero's dream than it is to seventeenth century stone, and - as Yeats said elsewhere - "No mind is more valuable than the images it contains" (*ibid* pg 286): I am, not because I

think, but because I am receiver of what is more than I can think - or can merely observe. Jung speaks of one of the results of "Critical rationalism" as being that

> nowadays most people identify themselves almost exclusively with their consciousness, and imagine that they are only what they know about themselves (see *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pg 300);

and such a diagnosis from someone who had as much experience as a practical physician as Jung did of the ill effects of such "rationalist" imaginings about the range and nature of the self offers its own significant endorsement of Yeats's own analysis of the key problem of the modern world.

94. I take the term once again from Yeats's own survey of the track that he saw the "modern" imagination as having followed, once the "rest" that "Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude" had brought to "the people of God" had itself faded from that imagination - once "Confusion fell upon our thought" when these last practitioners of an art that deliberately worked to "Bring the soul of man to God" had vanished: see "Under Ben Bulben", Section IV, *C.P.* pp 399 - 400.

95. If we need any reminder that this was a perennial condition of the truly serviceable arts, for Yeats, then we need only look again at "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", or at the passage from the essay on the French symbolist theatre cited above that talks about "the great imaginative method" that realist drama has temporarily replaced. Or we could recall his saying that

> The imaginative writer shows us the world as a painter does his picture, reversed in a looking glass, that we may see it, not as it seems to eyes habit has made dull, but as we were Adam and this the first morning (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 339).

Or there is his agreement with Blake that

> all art is a labour to bring again the Golden Age, and all culture is certainly a labour to bring again the simplicity of the first ages, with the knowledge of good and evil added to it (*ibid.* pg 167).

96. Yeats had an acute sense of how entire aspects of the range of human potential might slip out of mind in times when they were forgotten by those who framed the outlook of their people: an awareness that lends its edge to his duty to realise for his fellows the "old man's frenzy" that "can pierce the clouds" so as to "Shake the dead in their shrouds" - and that could still well be "Forgotten else by mankind", in an age in which the "more human", less aquiline view of realist art holds the stage: see "An Acre of Grass", *C.P.* pg 346. (He even felt that so apparently perennial a thing as "the normal active man" had become a "forgotten thing" that he was being forced to once again "express" as poet: see the 87th entry to the Journal reproduced in *Memoirs*, pg 181.)

97. See *C.P.* pp 375 - 76 for these terms.

98. The sense we get of this "dark" as an image of the hidden but potent beginnings of things that we are given in "The Statues" is reinforced within the *Last Poems* themselves by the "rich, dark nothing" out of which the new, "more gracious" gyre will be "disinter(ed)" in "The Gyres" (*C.P.* pg 337), and by "the moonless midnight of the trees" and "that most sensuous silence of the night" that give visionary power in "To Dorothy Wellesley" (*C.P.* pg 349).

There is also a fascinating glimpse in *A Vision*, in which Yeats makes an identification between the "unconsciousness" and the "incarnate *Daimon*" (pg 234), after he has spoken of "the incarnate *Daimon*" as "the centre of the wheel" of "the twenty eight incarnations" from which the *Husk* starts "its journey" (*ibid.* pg 197) - the *Husk* being "perception" which "may be considered as a circle of light encircling each man" (*Explorations* pg 332). So "perception" itself begins from the "unconsciousness": from the *Daimon* which Yeats also calls "the permanent self" (*ibid.* pg 331). He says, too, that

> all spirits inhabit our unconsciousness or, as Swedenborg said, are the Dramatis Personae of our dreams (*A Vision* pg 227),

and that in

> the *Spirit* (the *Daimon*) knows all other *Daimons* as the Divine Ideas in their unity (*ibid.* pg 189):

so the human "unconsciousness" - the "proper dark" that Phidias plumbed for images of human excellence - is the permanent source of our experience, beyond any particular experience or embodiment of selfhood. We could also recall Yeats saying - in talking of what he found in helping Augusta Gregory collect the stories in her *Visions and Beliefs*:

> I felt that we had got down, as it were, into some fibrous darkness, into some matrix out of which everything has come (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 429.)

99. *C.P.* pg 210.

100. Taking chaos in the sense of the Elizabethan inversion of order.

101. An intensity that is far from the cool passion of the master-poem Yeats hoped one day to write for his Fisherman: see *C.P. pg 166 - 67.*

102. It is "Mere anarchy", an emblematic lake breaching its banks and flooding its surrounds.

103. For a fuller understanding of the formulation, see "A Prayer for My Daughter", *C.P. pp 211 - 14.*

104. That courtesy is the key to all else in "A Prayer for My Daughter" is obvious: see "stanza 5:

> In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
> Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned
> By those that are not entirely beautiful (*C.P.* pg 212).

105. That is, as an artist of the sort defined in "Under Ben Bulben".

106. See the lines from "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", that speak of the dream

> ... to mend
> Whatever mischief seemed
> To afflict mankind (*C.P.* pg 235).

107. *C.P.* pp 232 - 37.

108. *C.P.* pp 211 - 14.

109. In both "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" and "A Prayer for my Daughter", imagery of storm and wind is used to suggest the chaos Yeats feels building about him.

110. See especially "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", *C.P.* pp 232 - 37.

111. For Yeats's conviction that the Great War had unleashed an actual barbarism, see the second section of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", *C.P.* pg 234.

112. For Yeats's unfailing subsequent awareness of this perennial frailty of cultures, see, for instance, "Meru", *C.P.* pg 333, and "The Gyres", *C.P.* 337.

113. *C.P.* pg 233.

114. For an illumination from a slightly different slant, see de Chardin:

> The nineteenth century had lived in sight of a promised land. It thought that we were on the threshold of a Golden Age, lit up and organised by science, warmed by fraternity. Instead of that, we find ourselves slipped back into a world of spreading and ever more tragic dissension (see *The Phenomenon of Man*, pg 279).

de Chardin obviously had been led to his own vision of humanity - that once dreamed of "fraternity" - as really being more like "weasels fighting in a hole".

115. The opening of this poem is one of the master-stokes of Yeats's ability to detect and convey tragic irony.

116. The formulation is, of course, Tennyson's - from *In Memoriam*, LV.

117. The Spiritus Mundi is Hokmah,"Wisdom, the Word, Logos" - the "second emanation from Kether" (who is the first of the Sephira of the Sephirotic Scheme or Kabbalistic Tree, the one in which the divine name is Ehyeh, or the "I am" of Coleridge's definition of the primary imagination in Book XIII of the *Biographia Literaria*). With Binah ("Mother") being the second emanation from Kether, Hokmah - Spiritus Mundi - is the Son who completes the

triad that constitutes the Intelligible or Intellectual World: the World which itself produces the World Soul which is the Moral or Sensuous World (see J.F.C. Fuller, *The Secret Wisdom of the Qabalah*, pp 59 - 62, and note 154 to Chapter 5 below, that reproduces Fuller's diagram of the Kabbalistic Tree).

This makes Hokmah or the Spiritus Mundi have a place within the Sephirotic Scheme very near the well-head from which all things humanly thinkable emerge into their first inklings of availability to human knowing - which in Yeats's eyes would indicate that the vision he has of the sphinx issues from a depth of significance of the most profound authority.

118. It is worth recalling Yeats's acceptance of Hegel's typification of the Sphinx as the "Nature" that Greece managed " partly" - and Christanity "fully" - to "escape" (*A Vision* pp 202 - 3): in one of its aspects, the sphinx of "The Second Coming" represents the swing of the gyre back to Nature - to the weasel - away from the extended humanity of the dream "to bring the world under a rule" of ideal harmony.

119. See "Parnell's Funeral", *C.P.* 319: "An age is the reversal of an age".

120. See *C.P.* pp 234 - 35.

121. The advent of the "rough beast" in "The Second Coming" is closely echoed at the end of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", in the coming into vision of "that insolent fiend Robert Artison", to exercise his sway over "the love-lorn Lady Kyteller" - image of the soul when it has fallen under the enchantment of a dark force, and of the inversion of ideal order: see *C.P.* Section VI, pp 236 - 37.

122. See *C.P.* pg 235.

123. See *C.P.* pg 211.

124. Should anyone feel that Yeats is being rather paternalistic and prescriptive - indeed, is being unconsciously patronising - in what he prays his daughter may be given in this poem, they should allow the realism that underlies its symbolism its full weight.

Whatever levels of more universal meaning the poem may also manage to include, (Stallworthy says Yeats "had written a prayer ... for the world"; see *Between the Lines*, pg 45), it is actually a real prayer wrung out of "the great gloom" that all that a father can see of the world that is growing up about him out of the wreck of the Great War sets lowering "in (his) mind". Just allow the simple reality of the poem's context to do its work; and the father watching his child - the dearest and most immediate embodiment for him of the future - as the storm in all its range of meanings howls about his ears, and the prayer that she may be given the best that his own thought and experience have revealed to him about the grounds upon which the strength may be built whereby she may "be happy still", whatever blows her way out of the desperately gloomy and uncertain future, seems the

simple utterance of nature itself: if Yeats had *not* tried to invoke such a blessing at such a moment, it would actually have been monstrous.

Having myself had a child still in the cradle in June, 1976 taught me how well Yeats has embodied one of the archetypal crises of parenthood in this poem; and if he is being paternal and presumptuous in praying for what *he* thinks is best for his daughter, then being a parent in this lamentably imperfect and woefully incorrect world will often exact exactly such folly from us.

125. Which recalls inevitably the flood of "The Second Coming".

126. See *C.P.* pg 234.

It is interesting to see Geoffrey Barraclough - in his attempt to provide *An Introduction to Contemporary* History - saying just fifty years after the outbreak of the Great War:

> When we consider the extent of the upheaval of the last half-century and the magnitude of the adjustments to be made, it would be unrealistic to expect the rapid emergence of a new unifying culture ... The diffusion of a new cultural pattern requires a period of stability such as we have not experienced since 1914, but which may now be beginning. Even then, there is the question, whether the old liberal synthesis, which was the mark of the nineteenth century, will be succeeded by anything comparable in scope and influence (see pg 235).

So - even in the cautious terms of the historian with nearly fifty years more perspective behind his view than was available to Yeats in 1919 - the "cultural pattern' of "the old liberal synthesis" shows itself as a force in European culture that might well not "be succeeded by anything comparable in scope and influence". Yeats was certainly justified in feeling - as he looked on "All the tragic scene" ("Lapis Lazuli", stanza 5, *C.P.* pg 339) of the moment he evokes in "The Gyres" (*C.P.* pg 337) - that "A greater, a more gracious time has gone".

127. See "Sailing to Byzantium", *C.P.* pg 218.

128. This is, after all, Yeats's dream of his own state of being, "Once out of nature" and free to be just whatever he wishes.

129. For this sense of the tower symbol, see "The Phases of the Moon", where Robartes talks in his first speech about seeing

> the candle-light
> From the far tower where Milton's Platonist
> Sat late, or Shelley's visionary prince
> (*C.P.* pg 184),

as well as the recollection recorded in "The Trembling of the Veil" that

> In later years my mind gave itself up to gregarious Shelley's dream of a young man, his hair blanched with sorrow, studying philosophy in some lonely tower (*Autobiographies*, pg 212).

And F.A.C. Wilson - in talking about "The Black Tower" - calls our attention to Plotinus' use of the idea of "the old watchtower beaten by storms" as a symbol of

> The intellectual soul, by which man perceives the infinite (*W.B. Yeats and Tradition*, pg 227),

and adds a reminder too of

> the ruined tower of Shelley's *Laon and Cythna* where the old hermit pursues his subjective philosophy in oblivion of the world (*ibid.*).

For the anxious father and "gregarious" poet, friend and lover of "A Prayer for My Daughter", though, his tower is too "beaten by storms" for such calm "oblivion": see what he has to say about the impossibility of drawing any "comfort" from a retreat into an eremitic "ghostly solitude", in the tension that develops between the two closing stanzas of Section I of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", (*C.P.* pg 234).

130. See *C.P.* pg 233.

131. See *C.P.* pg 236.

132. See "Under Ben Bulben", *C.P.* pg 400.

133. We remember, too, the "haystack-and roof-levelling wind" of "A Prayer for My Daughter".

134. Though Jeffares notes the connection Yeats knew between "Herodias' daughters" and the winds in which the Sidhe travelled (see *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg 279) the reference in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" is to forces that seem more unambiguously sinister than what Yeats generally seems to feel about the Sidhe - whom he calls "the children of Pan" in *The Celtic Twilight* (*Mythologies*, pg 44), and who thus represent primal energies within the unconscious which would be neutral in themselves, and would don the masks - sinister or beneficent - that the disposition of the conscious mind has ready for them.

The notion of dancers who cost men their heads, both literally and figuratively, seems more appropriate to Yeats's exploration of blind confusion at the end of the poem. See also the lines Jeffares quotes from Symons's "The Dance of the Daughters of Herodias", in which Herodias' daughters cause great wisdom and beauty and "Dreams which are nearer eternity" to "droop and die" (*Commentary*, pp 279 - 280). This register seems more nearly to reflect the collapse of the modern mind's higher awarenesses - what Yeats is at least in part contemplating at this point in the poem - than any recollection of the Sidhe does.

135. The "purpose" of things being "hidden in the labyrinth of the wind" also picks up the sense of the absolute uncertainty Yeats feels as to what is coming upon them all, and as to where it is coming from or going to. (This labyrinth obviously stands in strong contrast to the labyrinths in which people lose themselves as they build their vision "of art or politics" in Section III, stanza 3, of the poem).

136. See Section VI, *C.P.* pp 236 - 7.

137. Richard Fallis says of Artisson that he is

> a compelling image of the spirit of our times:
> humanoid but inhuman,

and rounds off with the assertion that

> He could be Hitler, Stalin, or our own worst
> selves (*The Irish Renaissance*, pg 243)

- which helps confirm how far Yeats managed to go in being able to see the shape of "the future years" he knew were coming

> Dancing to a frenzied drum,
> Out of the murderous innocence of the sea

of the neo-barbaric "modern tide" at the close to the second stanza of "A Prayer for My Daughter", (*C.P.* pg 212).

138. See *C.P.*pg 232.

It's interesting to note that here, the falcon of "The Second Coming" has become a multitude of brazen hawks, who have "put out the moon" of the supersensual mind, and know nothing but "the eye's complacency" - the realist's self-encapsulation within the merely sensible.

For added insight into the putting out of the moon, see Book IV of "The Trembling of the Veil", written in the same year as the lines just quoted:

> The bright part of the moon's disk, to adopt the
> symbolism of a certain poem, is subjective mind,
> and the dark, objective mind

- where "objective mind" is typified by a progress away from "the full moon", to which the "mid-renaissance could but approximate", towards habits of mind that are "more reasonable, more orderly, less turbulent"; see *Autobiographies*, pp 360 - 61.

139. The phrase comes, of course, from "Lapis Lazuli", *C.P.* pg 339.

140. This is taking the term "modern" in the more limited sense of the immediate and the contemporary, rather than as set against either the Classical or the Scholastic backdrops.

141. For the register I intend to these terms, see the first of the *Meditations in Time of Civil War* ("Ancestral Houses"), stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 225:

> Some violent bitter man, some powerful man
> Called architect and artist in, that they,
> Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone
> The sweetness that all longed for night and day,
> The gentleness none there had ever known(.)

142. This is, of course, to leave the specifically Irish register to the image - a register discussed more fully in Chapter 5 - in abeyance.

143. See the Man's second speech in "The Man and the Echo", *C.P.* pg 394.

144. See "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", Section II, *C.P.* pg 234.

145. See "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", Section III, stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 235.

146. See "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", *C.P.* pg 233:

We too had many pretty toys when young:
A law indifferent to blame or praise,
To bribe or threat; habits that made old wrong
Melt down, as it were wax in the sun's rays.

The whole of this second stanza of the poem has bearing on our theme.

147. *C.P.* pg 337.

148. See *C.P.* pg 7.

149. As J.R. Mulryne says,

> the "numb nightmare" of verse two (of "The Gyres") calls up the nightmare that rides on sleep in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" (see "The 'Last Poems'", *An Honoured Guest*, pg 125).

150. Though this "light in Troy" is also, of course, the heroic beacon at the start of the long tale of European literature in the *Illiad* - which is an irony that lies close to the centre of what Yeats is exploring in this poem. (I owe the kernel of this insight to Francois Hugo, who offered it in an English Honours seminar on Yeats at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, during 1972.)

151. See "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", line 1, *C.P.* pg 232.

152. See "An Acre of Grass", *CP.* pp 346 - 47, the last stanza in particular.

153. The role played in this inspiration by the mysterious "Rocky Face" of this poem will be discussed more fully below.

Bloom says of this "rich, dark nothing" that

> "the nature of the dark is insignificant, whether it be the Resurrection, or the area between predatory polecat and owl of wisdom (delightfully arbitrary one supposes, but why the polecat?) (*Yeats*, pg 436);

and his finding the exact "nature" of this very important symbol to be something that Yeats would consider to be "insignificant" - "any ol' dark'll do!" - is very closely tied up with the fact that he "supposes" that Yeats is simply trying to be whimsically and "delightfully arbitrary": one seldom finds meaning where one has already chosen to suppose there is only whimsy.

But the owl isn't only an emblem of "wisdom": where that association comes from in the first place is the suggestiveness of its ability to see in the dark that dumbfounds most other creatures; and that ability comes because it is also - like the polecat Yeats knew, *Mustela putorius*, of the same family as the ferret - a deft "predator", which is the guise in which it makes

its appearance in "The Man and the Echo" (*C.P.* pp 393 - 95). And having two hunters out in the "dark" from which new things begin seems far from "arbitrary" - considering the quest for those new beginnings that the artists' work to "disinter" them actually comprises.

And the idea of the "dark" being given its outer parameters by owl and polecat is also a wonderful dramatization of a situation in which the everyday vision must be replaced by registers and sensitivities more suited to the "dark" in which the future lies waiting to be recognised and brought home for use: in the dark, you know the owl by his voice and the polecat by his smell; so the "dark betwixt the polecat and the owl" is a place in which certain senses or perspectives or potentials of attitude or of outlook are brought into a vividness they wouldn't have in the common light of day when the eyes - the habitual and reflex mode of conceptual influx - are in command. (The touch of irreverence to Yeats's using the stink of the polecat as part of a metaphor describing an aspect of what is, to him, a sacred quest shows a glimpse of the quality that prompted G.S. Frazer to find in him

> the only poet in (the English romantic tradition), except Byron, with a genuine sense of humour and gift of wit [*W.B. Yeats*, pg 30].)

154. See "A Bronze Head", *C.P.* pg 382:

> ... a sterner eye looked through her eye
> On this foul world in its decline and fall(.)

Though the words are a reading of Maud Gonne's view of the modern world, we have seen enough to recognise the extent to which Yeats himself would have agreed with at least the broad outlines of the perspective ascribed to her in these lines.

155. See "Under Ben Bulben" II:

> Though grave-diggers' toil is long,
> Sharp their spades, their muscles strong,
> They but thrust their buried men
> Back in the human mind again (*C.P.* pg 398).

156. What Yeats seems to be saying about the true function of the arts here seems, in fact, very close to what Jung said in a lecture in 1922 (published in translation as "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry" in *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*) about what he called "the secret of great art, and of its effect upon us", which lies in

> its unconscious activation of an archetypal image ... By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life. Therein lies the social significance of art: it is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking. The unsatisfied yearning of the artist reaches back to the primordial image in the unconscious which is best fitted to compensate the inadequacy and one-sidedness

of the present. The artist seizes on this image, and in raising it from deepest unconsciousness he brings it back into relation with conscious values, thereby transforming it until it can be accepted by the minds of his contemporaries according to their powers (see pp 82 - 3; and see also *Memories, Dreams, Reflections, pg 282*:

Myths which day has forgotten continue to be told by night, and powerful figures which consciousness has reduced to banality and ridiculous triviality are recognised again by poets and prophetically revived; therefore they can also be recognised "in changed form" by the thoughtful person).

This work to "conjure up the forms in which the age is most lacking" so as "to compensate the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the present", so that "it is possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life", could well stand as a gloss on Yeats's own aesthetic convictions generally - with the particular focus for us, at this moment in our discussion, of "The blood-dimmed tide" as constituting the special circumstances of "the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the present" that Yeats found himself addressing after the Great War.

157. *C.P.* pg 400.

158. We might note that Yeats sees the pattern of the effort towards making a new time of expansive grace as being an effort cast in the same form as those efforts that have made such "greater" times in the past. Though the specific details of some such new phase of human fulfilment will differ from those of the past - as the lines in "The Gyres" about the "painted forms or boxes of make-up/ In ancient tombs" no longer being sighed for show - Yeats sees the structure of the effort as being a recurring human phenomenon.

159. This comes from his rejection of the poets of the Great War, in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (Introduction, pg xxxiv), because of their depiction of "passive suffering". The convictions underlying the belief that such suffering is "not a fit subject for poetry" obviously themselves help focus our theme: such a "passive" response would be, for Yeats, a failure of the artist's need to assist his audience in the heroic and necessary struggle with adversity that constitutes the Yeatsian life.

It is interesting that C.K. Stead should say of Yeats that he stands alone among English-speaking poets of this century in his ability to assimilate a complex political event into the framework of a poem without distortion of the event or loss of human character in abstraction. It will be worth keeping "Easter 1916" in mind when we come to consider the English poets of the First World War. Of them, the patriots are absurdly partisan, abstract and rhetorical; while the soldier poets - though more admirable than the patriots because their poems come from honest feeling and particular experience - are

too closely involved in the destruction to be capable of transforming these things, as Yeats transforms them, into a universal image (see *The New Poetic*, pg 41).

If we accept Stead's perspective, Yeats's criticism of "the English poets of the First World War" comes with the authority of one who knew better how to manage the themes they attempted than they did themselves; and the inability to "transform" - that key word in "Easter 1916" - their material so as to gain the sort of mastery over it that Stead sees Yeats himself as managing to achieve would perhaps be an element within what Yeats means by talking of their "passive suffering": that poem which fails to achieve assimilation and transformation of "a complex ... event into (its) framework ... without distortion of the events or loss of its human character in abstraction" will have failed, moreover, to assist its audience towards being itself party to such a cathartic assimilation and transformation.

160. See *C.P.* pg 399.

161. See *C.P.* pg 375.

162. See "Under Ben Bulben", *C.P.* pg 399.
This "secret working mind" seems to be one of Yeats's names for the imagination, which - as we have seen above - he says is "the voice in (us) of what is eternal". This "mind" obviously also takes us somewhere near to the meaning of the "Rocky Face" of "The Gyres".

163. The "sort" Yeats rejects as models for art - those "All out of shape from toe to top" - actually reflect in this lack of "shape" a more developed form of a condition that Yeats from his early twenties saw as having begun in the civilisation he had inherited long before his own birth: a fragmentation of the European psyche away from a wholeness of identity it had possessed, to his eyes at least, at an earlier phase of its history.

There are, for instance, the seminal closing sections of Book 1 of *The Trembling of the Veil* (*Autobiographies*, pp 234 - 42) in which we find Yeats recording a key "conviction" that centred his ideas about art and society then - and that evolved and continued to work within those ideas to the end.

This conviction was "that the world was now but a bundle of fragments"; and it was a conviction that "possessed me without ceasing" (*ibid.* pg 234). What gave this fragmentation that he discovered its sting - he recalls lecturing a Literary Society on "the falling asunder of the human mind" (*ibid.* pp 245 -46) - was the even more central conviction of the possibility of what he had already come to call "Unity of Being", a term mediated for him out of Dante by his father. As Yeats puts it,

> I delighted in every age where poet and artist confined themselves gladly to some inherited subject-matter known to the whole people, for I thought that in man and race alike there is something called "Unity of Being", using that term as Dante used it when he compared beauty

> in the *Convito* to a perfectly proportioned human body. My father, from whom I had learned the term, preferred a comparison to a musical instrument so strung that if we touch a string all the others murmur faintly (*ibid.* pp 235 - 36).

This "Unity of Being" that is "in man and race alike" had begun to "fall apart" in the European experience at a specific moment, and for definite reasons:

> Had not Europe shared one mind and heart until both mind and heart began to break into fragments a little before Shakespeare's birth? Music and verse began to fall apart when Chaucer robbed verse of its speed that he might give it greater meditation ... painting parted from religion in the later Renaissance that it might study effects of tangibility undisturbed; while, that it might characterise, where it had once personified, it renounced, in our own age, all that inherited subject-matter which we have named poetry (*ibid.* pg 237).

So those "now growing up/ All out of shape from toe to top" that Yeats wishes to remove from the idiom of modern poetry - the repertoire of the realist method, in fact - are themselves images for him of the fragmentedness of the world since the human mind had fallen apart: they are "out of shape", lacking the proportion of Dante's image of human integrity, individual and collective. Such shapelessness - as we follow Yeats through these recollections - is the result of the key enemy of "Unity of Being", which is "abstraction": "meaning by abstraction not the distinction but the isolation of occupation, or class or faculty" (*ibid.* pg 236).

And it was this "abstraction" that was for Yeats the central malaise of the age: the "isolation" of the "elements" that make up both "man and race" into fragments that have nothing of the harmonic murmur between strings of J.B. Yeats's re-working of Dante's comparison. And when Yeats turns to outlining the response that arose in him to the problem of this disproportioning "abstraction", he says:

> If abstraction had reached, or all but reached its climax, escape might be possible for many, and if it had not, individual men might still escape. If Chaucer's personages had disengaged themselves from Chaucer's crowd, forgot their common goal and shrine, and after sundry magnifications became each in turn the centre of some Elizabethan play, and had after split into their elements and so given birth to romantic poetry, must I reverse the cinematograph? I thought that the general movement of literature must be such a reversal ... a nation or an individual with great emotional intensity might follow the pilgrims as it were to some unknown shrine, and give to all that abstract love and melancholy, a symbolical, a mythological coherence (*Autobiographies*, pg 239).

And here, in the desire for the reversal of the "cinematograph" - for escape from the isolated fragments of the "elements" into

a formed Unity of their proportioned harmony - we have the core of the later rejection of "the sort now growing up" - of the "bundle of fragments" - that we find in "Under Ben Bulben"; just as we have also the roots of the conviction expressed near the end of *A Vision* that Newton's "objective world intelligible to intellect" - the world apparently isolated in the light of "the mind alone" of "A Prayer for Old Age (*C.P.* pg 326) - is giving way to a sense of "the world as an object of contemplation": giving way under pressure of the "ever-hidden thing that makes us fold our hands" and acknowledge the totality of the human presence as acting within the greater ambit of a reality that is more than intelligible - though it is still single, as Yeats's calling it a "thing" indicates (*A Vision*, pg 300). What Yeats foresees here is, in effect, the signs of a general "escape" from the "abstraction" of modern times towards the Unity of Being that "the sort" he rejects in "Under Ben Bulben" so lack.

164. It is important to realise that to dismiss someone or something as a "fit subject for poetry" isn't the same thing as dismissing that person or thing from ordinary human consideration or sympathy: in poetry - as in most things - some materials work better than others in achieving particular ends; and if you choose, like Yeats, to try to "bring the soul of man to God" - rather than to amuse that soul with anecdotes of the everyday world - then certain sorts of subjects and personages suit the attempt far better than others. (The artist's choice of exact materials within any particular medium is absolutely fundamental; Yeats just made a point of talking about the choice a bit more publicly and rather more consistently than most.)

165. The term comes from Yeats's memories - expressed in ll 14 - 19 of "To a Wealthy Man Who Promised ..." (*C.P.* pg 120) - of the Urbino that inspired - and was inspired by - Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*.

166. This pilgrimage of an "ancient sect" towards a re-discovery of its spiritual roots reflects once again the intuition of the "nation or individual with great emotional intensity" that might find again "some unknown shrine" and discover in life "a symbolical, a mythological coherence" of which Yeats speaks in the passage from *Autobiographies* pg 239 we have just discussed.

167. *C.P.* pp 341 - 43.

168. See the last stanza of "Adam's Curse", *C.P.* pg 90.

169. "Will have replaced", that is, if the Yeatsian artist has done proper work, as agent of "Old Rocky Face" - of the creative impulse in human endeavour, as this is defined in "The Gyres".

170. Though Yeats might well have felt her role was one that expressed Dante's highest freedom: to "will what happens". There is an interesting parallel to this virtue that is to be found in the account that Jung gives in chapter X of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* of the effects on him of his heart attack early in 1944:

Something else, too, came to me from my illness. I might formulate it as an affirmation of things as they are: an unconditional "yes" to that which is, without subjective protests - acceptance of the conditions of existence as I see them, and understand them, acceptance of my own nature as I happen to be (pg 297)

- which is a reflection that might help deal with the prejudice that assumes that all acceptance of "the conditions of existence" must arise from dulness or cowardice, or that the Maid must necessarily have been exploited silly long before the Lady began to involve her in her drama.

171. See her two songs, *C.P.* pp 345 - 346.

172. We must remember that the imagination, for Yeats as for Blake, embodies "the real and eternal world of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow" (John P. Frayne, *Uncollected Prose* Vol. 1, pg 401), and equally that it was "the first emanation of divinity,'the body of God'" (*Essays and Introductions,* pg 112). And there is also the identification that he found between "Blake's 'Imagination' and what the Upanishads have named 'Self'" (*ibid.* pg 518).

173. The register here is from Yeats's use of the term, in "Easter, 1916", to signify the order of more-or less accidental, unwilled events that constitute "the casual comedy" - as opposed to the "terrible beauty" of willed and ideal heroic action: see *C.P.* pg 202.

174. The image Yeats gives of an aspect of his sense of the modern predicament in "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" is telling:

A spot whereon the founders lived and died
Seemed once more dear than life; ancestral trees,
Or gardens rich in memory glorified
Marriages, alliances and families
And every bride's ambition satisfied.
Where fashion or mere fantasy decrees
We shift about - all that glory spent -
Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent
(*C.P.* pg 276).

As things that all bear signs of the sacrament with every detail of one's situation that a high culture (such as that which led Wang Wei to name and cherish in verse every turn of path and stream for miles about his home) aims to breed, it is obvious that the houses and gardens of the image look inward to the souls of those who lived these scenes.

175. It is an integrity like Chaucer's in the first eighteen lines of "The General Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales*: a view that is quite naturally ready to sit the highest aspirations of the human spirit and the randy sleeplessness of the sparrows in the hedges on the same great bough.

176. *C.P.* pg 343.

177. See "All Soul's Night", stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 257.

178. It is necessary to keep in mind here the Lady's real sexual temptation, her clear sense of the natural wholesomeness of sexual love, her lack of any "idealist" frigidity, and the very human tinge of pain at the Chambermaid's "daytime" tiredness, the closest thing she allows herself to jealousy. She is no prude - nor is she without deep feeling or a strain of passion that is all her own.

179. For all this sense of selfhood, though, the Lady has no egotistical pride: consider the humility of her saying to the Chambermaid: "What matter, we are but women." *C.P.* pg 344.

180. What makes the achievement all the greater, is that this notion is being persuasively offered to an audience that had known the Roaring Twenties. (As the "Crazy Jane" poems show, Yeats was no prude, either.)

181. Even if one were to choose to object to the exact ideal that leads the Lady through her drama, he would have to be perverse to deny the nobility of spirit and the capacity for holding true to a difficult dream that her conduct embodies; and even if one could only admire the capacity without endorsing the ideal programme itself, Yeats's "work" would still be done: he would have managed to arouse sympathy with a complex and rare passion - which is possibly all that he wished for, anyway.

182. See the prefatory quotations to *Responsibilities*, *C.P.* pg 112: "In dreams begins responsibility."

183. In his essay on the philosophy of Shelley's poetry, Yeats quotes Shelly so as to indicate his belief that it is the denial of imagination that lies at the root of the "modern" world's problems:

> while the mechanist abridges and the political economist combines labour, let them be sure that their speculations, for want of correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination, do not tend, as they have in modern England, to exasperate at once the extremes of luxury and of want ... The rich have become richer, the poor have become poorer, ... such are the effects that must always flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty (*Essays and Introductions*, pp 67 - 8).

Though Shelley seems to be using the term "mechanist" here in the particular sense of the inventor of labour-saving machines, its larger sense of one who sees the realities and relations of the world as working to a mechanical model - the assumption that gave base to what we have seen Yeats typify as Locke's "swoon"- is equally one that fails to keep "correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination": what Shelley calls "the calculating faculty" that has come to be applied to economics "unmitigated" by "the imagination" is the mechanism applied to human life that Yeats himself symbolises by "the

spinning-jenny" that God takes from Locke's side in his parody of the Genesis myth: the practical English genius that immediately had to embody the theoretical mechanist model in a system of economic production and of social relations.

This belief is of course mirrored in the thought of his own "Song of the Happy Shepherd": the formulation achieved in "The Statues" in old age descends directly from some of the earliest conceptions the youthful poet had of the world that he had inherited.

184. *C.P.* pp 346 - 47.

185. For the tussle with old age that makes up such an important strand in Yeats's verse, see poems such as "The Wild Swans at Coole" (*C.P.* pg 147); "Sailing to Byzantium" (*C.P.* pg 217); "The Tower" (*C.P.* pg 218); "Among School Children" (*C.P.* pg 242); "Quarrel in Old Age" (*C.P.* pg 286); "An Acre of Grass" (*C.P.* pg 346); "Why should not Old Men be Mad?" (*C.P.* pg 387); "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (*C.P.* pg 391); "Politics" (*C.P.* pg 392); and "The Man and the Echo" (*C.P.* pg 393).

186. See *Essays and Introductions* pg 172:

> Progress is miracle, and it is sudden, because miracles are the work of an all-powerful energy, and Nature in herself has no power except to die and forget.

187. What is "natural" within Yeats's "temptation" towards "mak(ing) the truth known" is giving way, leaving him with only the equally natural tendency towards the "dull decrepitude" that he foresaw at the end of "The Tower" (*C.P.* pg 224).

It is typical of Yeats's sense of the paradoxical nature of things that Nature herself should be one of those forces that can help to tempt us towards the sort of supernatural "progress [which] is miracle": a fact that reminds us that the Yeatsian artist's apparent contention with Nature is really an acting in fealty to the function that - as both the myth embodied at the end of "The Gyres" and Yeats's calling "man's procreant mind" (following Shelley) "the spirit of the Earth" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 92) show - he saw human nature as serving within the greater pattern of the Natural whole.

188. This is keeping in mind the super-natural "frenzy" that Yeats sees as having "inspired" "A mind like Michael Angelo knew".

189. See "Sailing to Byzantium", *C.P.* pg 217. The term "pure mind" comes from "The Circus Animals' Desertion", *C.P.* pg 391: "Those masterful images because complete/ Grew in pure mind".

As to the linking of a lack of memory with a loss of eternal awarenesses, we might note Yeats's saying through his persona Aherne that "Plato symbolised by the word 'memory' a relation to the timeless" (*A Vision*, pg 54), and that

> Memory is a series of judgements and such judgements imply a reference to something that is.not memory; that something is the *Daimon*, which contains within

> it, co-existing in its eternal moment, all the events of our life, all that we have known of other lives, or that it can discover within itself of other *Daimons* (*ibid.* pg 192).

The "unremembering hearts and heads" lose track, therefore, not only of "the events of (their) own li(ves)", but also of what is "contain(ed) within ... (the) eternal moment" of the *Daimon* - which Yeats also describes as

> The stage-manager, (who) offers his actor (the person engaged in "an individual life") an inherited scenario, the *Body of Fate* , and a *Mask* or role as unlike as possible to his natural ego or *Will*, and leaves him to improvise through his *Creative Mind* the dialogue and details of the plot (*ibid.* pg 84).

So, without "memory", that gives the "natural ego" its "inherited scenario" to live out in terms of a "role" designed to complete that ego's potentials of being, the "individual life" must end up, in Yeats's instructors' terms, anyway, a failure: which helps to explain his rejection of the "unremembering" sort as a focus for the art which he insists must help to "Bring the soul of man to God" - which would be a process worked-out through exactly the dynamics he describes the *Daimon* as stage-managing within the "individual life".

190. See "The Gyres", *C.P.* pg 337: "Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul".

191. This refers of course to the essay on Father Rosencrux noted above, in which Yeats speaks of the "exterior world no longer being the standard of reality".

192. It is worth remembering the sort of register Yeats gave to the idea of "the truth" in "The Leaders of the Crowd", *C.P.* pg 207: "Truth flourishes where the student's lamp has shone,/ And there alone". And as we have seen him saying in one of the very last letters: "Man can embody truth, but he cannot know it", (Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 922; Hone refers to only one letter later than this: see *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939*, pg 477.) "The truth", for him, was obviously something that had always to be "disinterred" by labour of a special sort. It was not to be found reflected in any casual mirror-image of any human situation, but to be created by the tensions generated by the quest itself.

In the lines from "An Acre of Grass" to which we have just referred, "loose imagination" and "the mill of the mind" are both images of faculties lacking direction and discipline - lacking the focusing inspiration of something greater than themselves, that is - and what is lacked is what Yeats in this poem calls "the truth".

193. To offset this "natural" energy or "temptation" as a dynamic of awareness, there is the "old man's frenzy" that is bred of energies that are, in the sense Yeats uses the word in "Under Ben Bulben", section I (*C.P.* pg 397) "supernatural". It is exactly this "supernatural" dimension to human thought and experience that would - without intervention by the Yeatsian artist - "be

forgot" in times such as the ones we have been examining through Yeats's eyes.

194. We have noted in Chapter 1 that Yeats saw a clear link between mechanisms of thought and a tendency towards the brutal, when he spoke of how the realist idea that developed from "mechanical philosophy" led to where, "by the end of the nineteenth century",

> the principal characters in the most famous books were the passive analysts of events, or had been brutalised into the likeness of mechanical objects (*Explorations*, pg 373).

Yeats would probably have said that such a brutal state grows from a lack of inspiration by the spiritual imagination: the force that - in the desperation of the moment - he supplicates in "An Acre of Grass" under the name of "frenzy".

195. See the extract from *A Vision* (pp 219 - 20) to which we have referred above, in which Yeats develops the notion of the "foam of the sea" as symbolising the surface flux of mental images.

196. The term comes from "The Circus Animals' Desertion", Section III, where Yeats says of his poetic thought and themes "Those masterful images because complete/ Grew in pure mind": see *C.P.* pg 392.

197. See *C.P.* pg 326.

198. See the Lady's use of the word in her third Song: *C.P.* pg 345.

199. See "The Statues", *C.P.* pg 375:

> We Irish, born into that ancient sect
> But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
> And by its formless spawning fury wrecked.

200. In Langland, the dreamer sees a tower - the "toure of treuthe" - set on a hill above "the felde ful of folke" that is the world of human conduct; and this "toure" - gathering into itself notions of the safe keep of the early feudal lord, set on its height above the ground about as a reminder of power and a symbol of a place armoured against mischance - becomes a presence that always stands above the action of the poem as a point of reference and a goal: as an image, finally, of heaven itself. As J.P. Oakden says of the vision at work in *Piers Plowman*,

> ... man, sharing the humanity of Jesus Christ may set out on the eternal quest for truth (*Alliterative Poetry in the Middle Ages*, pg 58);

which reflects well the thoroughly embodied questing after transcendent values that typifies Langland's vision.

See also the use to which George Russel put such a symbolic sense of a "toure of treuthe" in his lines "To Osborn Bergin":

> ... In one age
> Men turn to the world about them and forget
> Their old descent from heaven. In another
> They storm the heavens with supplication. Some

Have found the glittering gates to open. I
Beat many times upon the gates, but was not
Like those who kept them mightily apart
Until they entered.

These lines - from *The House of the Titans and Other Poems*, pp 1 - 2, published in 1934 - not only develop a view of the Blake-like visionary Yeats knew A.E. to be as having "Beat many times upon the gates" of "the heavens", but also reflect on how, from age to age, "Men ... forget" even such things as "Their old descent from heaven": could Yeats's own lines - from 1936, if we follow Jeffares (*A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg 456) - have had these thoughts in mind, when he drew a Blake "Who beat upon the wall/ Till truth obeyed his call", and when he tried to embody for modern minds the "old man's eagle mind" that might be "Forgotten else by mankind"?

201. See "Sailing to Byzantium", stanza III: *C.P.* pg 218.

202. See "A Prayer for My Daughter" stanzas nine and ten: *C.P.* pp 213 - 14.

203. See "Under Ben Bulben", and the injunction to "Irish poets" to

Cast your mind on other days
That we in coming days may be
Still the indomitable Irishry
(*C.P.* pg 400).

204. See section I of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", *C.P.* pp 232 - 3.

205. See section V, last stanza, of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", *C.P.* pg 236.

206. See "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", section VI: *C.P.* pg 237.

207. *C.P.* pp 234 - 5.

208. *C.P.* pg 347.

209. It is worth recalling here Yeats's attempt, from his twenty-fourth year onwards, to "hammer (his) thoughts into unity" (see *Explorations*, pg 263).

210. See stanza 2 of "Ancestral Houses" from the "Meditations in Time of Civil War", *C.P* pg 225.

211. See "The Gyres", stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 337.
Yeats, in other words, is himself acting in response to the promptings of "Old Rocky Face", in poems such as those we have been examining.

212. See *C.P.* pg 365.

213. See Section II, stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 265.

214. In "A Dialogue of Self and Soul", the "blind man's ditch" has a very different timbre of precise connotations, though, to the "ditch" of "The Old Stone Cross". In the "Dialogue", Yeats makes this a "fecund ditch" of beloved mortal treasures - the other side of the coin to the Soul's sense of "life" as mere spiritual limitation. But this ditch still has all the ambivalence that the "mackerel-crowded seas" of "Sailing to Byzantium" have: it might stand as image of the life Yeats chooses over the Soul's dream of deliverance from mortal limitation, but that doesn't invalidate that dream in the least. The "fecund ditch" of mortal life and its inescapable "folly" still hides from view the "darkness" of "the hidden pole" that the Soul seeks - just as the "seas" and their "sensual music" cause "the young" to "neglect" Byzantium and its "unaging intellect" (*C.P.* pg 217).

215. See "High Talk", *C.P.* pg 385.
It is worth noting here that the image that Yeats gives of himself - as the type of the poet who must probe into the reality of the forming moment on a shore upon which "great sea-horses bare their teeth and laugh at the dawn" in mythic splendour - perhaps recalls his summing-up, in *Reveries over Youth and Childhood*, of the meaning of all the "many stories" he heard

> from sailors along the wharf, or round the fo'castle fire of the little steamer that ran between Sligo and Rosses, or from boys out fishing

- stories that made it so "that the world seemed full of monsters and marvels" - by saying

> I have walked on Sinbad's yellow shore and never shall another's hit my fancy *(Autobiographies*, pp 63 - 4).

The shore on which the stilt-walker poet plays Daddy-long-legs, in other words, seems to symbolise the frontier of romance within his own imagination - using the term here as Yeats uses it to indicate what may be the ultimate reaches of human truth, when he says, in *The Celtic Twilight*,

> May it not even be that death shall unite us to all romance, and that some day we shall fight dragons among blue hills, or come to that whereof all romance is but
>
> "Foreshadowings mingled with the images
> Of man's misdeeds in greater times than these",
>
> as the old men thought in *The Earthly Paradise* when they were in good spirits? (*Mythologies*, pp 63 - 4).

Certainly, in the reflections upon the stories that influenced his early thoughts that form a thread in Yeats's theme in this part of the *Reveries*, he notes that even Andersen "never gave me the knights and dragons and beautiful ladies that I longed for" (*Autobiographies* pp 57 - 8): by implication, "Sinbad's yellow shore" and its "monsters and marvels" *did* bring him intimations of such "romance" and of its intuitions of the human past and future - "Foreshadowings", and "images ... of greater times" arising out of "the Great Memory" that is evoked in "The Tower", (*C.P.* pg 221). So - in a sense - his stilt-walker self gazing into "the terrible novelty of light" as "Those great sea-horses ... laugh at the dawn" is still stalking the first strands of his boyhood.

216. See "The Old Stone Cross", where the realist actors think their method "more human" than a musical, poetic method of presentation could be: stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 366.

Chapter 3: "No Better Can Be Had".

The last chapter tried to examine some of the pressures of Yeats's own immediate times that could be said to have helped make for an aesthetic stance - for a conception of the relationship between art and life, between artist and audience - such as the one we have been discussing. The argument of that chapter ran on the general lines that many of the circumstances of Irish and of European history, as they focused in Yeats's own thought, demanded of him an art that was imaginative and spiritual, and that was often deliberately in tension with the given social and intellectual attitudes and assumptions of the people to whom he spoke as a living poet.

But there were also features to the broader reality of the human condition affecting those people, as Yeats saw it, that went beyond these immediate issues, and that equally confirmed him in the conviction that the most serviceable art must often set itself against the given tendency of things: must set itself in special ways to creatively challenge some of the actual details of the lives that he and his fellows lived. This dimension to Yeats's conception of the artist's function within his society could perhaps best be indicated, as a motive towards the sort of aesthetic stance he approved, by looking at the poem called "Why Should Not Old Men be Mad?":

> Why should not old men be mad?
> Some have known a likely lad
> That had a sound fly-fisher's wrist

Turn to a drunken journalist;
A girl that knew all Dante once
Live to bear children to a dunce;
A Helen of social welfare dream,
Climb upon a wagonette to scream.
Some think it a matter of course that chance
Should starve good men and bad advance,
That if their neighbours figured plain,
As though upon a lighted screen,
No single story would they find
Of an unbroken happy mind,
A finish worthy of the start.
Young men know nothing of this sort,
Observant old men know it well;
And when they know what old books tell,
And that no better can be had,
Know why an old man should be mad.[1]

The question that this poem poses and answers embodies an important aspect of Yeats's vision: his alertness to the inevitable suffering that is the keynote to all human life, whatever the specific social and political circumstances of the age in which people might be living. In essence, for Yeats, if we view the facts of human experience as we know them in our own and in our neighbours lives, we find the same truth that "old books tell";

No single story would (we) find
Of an unbroken happy mind,
A finish worthy of the start

- and both "old books" and observation of the present concur for him in showing this fundamentally tragic pattern as an enduring rhythm to human life. The whole weight of history tells "that no better can be had" - adding to the story of inevitable human suffering the sour leaven of our knowing that all that the struggle to understand the problem can bring is a more certain knowledge of life's tragic cast. What wisdom brings "Observant old men" is an even more pointed awareness of the mechanical

injustice of "chance" in its cancellings of human will and its wrecking even of the hopes we have for others - let alone for ourselves.

Though the details of these workings of "chance" - and of our flawed choices and the disasters they can bring - each take us into a specific groundwork that helps to make the poem's overall point, and thus warrant in themselves close attention,[2] it is this overall point that mostly concerns us at present. For Yeats, human life - in any age, under any social circumstances - is a tragic thing, once we begin to look close and see it "figured plain,/ As though upon a lighted screen" in the light of a properly imaginative insight.

And this knowledge is one that underlies Yeats's fundamental awareness of the "neighbours" to whom he speaks as poet, too: underlies his sense of what they need from the arts, as this need is dictated by the abiding realities of the human condition. The previous chapter has argued that Yeats's belief that the arts had to re-make life - rather than simply hold a mirror to its deformities - was profoundly reinforced by the particular historical circumstances of the Ireland and of the Europe he inhabited. But this belief in the re-creative duty of the arts seems equally to have been moulded by his clear realisation that these specific features of the contemporary human tragedy were local currents within a more intrinsic stream of suffering from

which humanity can never escape, even in the luckiest of times. As his "Wild Old Wicked Man" puts it:

> All men live in suffering,
> I know it as few can know,
> Whether they take the upper road
> Or stay content on the low,
> Rower bent in his row-boat
> Or weaver bent at his loom,
> Horseman erect upon horseback
> Or child hid in the womb.[3]

Merely to be incarnate is to be immersed in this "suffering", as in some existential medium - even for the "child hid in the womb", before any further experience of life than simply becoming flesh can accrue.[4] It is the same view that is implicit in "Politics", which leaves us aware that the old man who speaks in this poem has "found something worse/ To meditate on"[5] than "war and war's alarms":[6] the tragic limitation of his own being and powers by old age - a limitation that focuses in his hopeless desire for a young girl who has entirely enchanted his "attention". Even if the people the persona in "Politics" finds about him had been discussing the most joyous - instead of the most ominous - news, the old man of the poem would still be left with the impossible yearning and the rage against circumstance that mark its closing lines. One of the truths that "Politics" dramatises is the tragedy inherent in one's simply being mortal - whatever else that the fate of each life might super-add to this core of suffering.

And Yeats - as one of those who wished "to mend/ Whatever mischief seemed/ To afflict mankind"[7] - was obviously deeply

aware of this tragic dimension he felt to be implicit within even the happiest of human circumstances. He was thus also deeply aware of the duty this painful fact of life brought him as a poet. Given that life for Yeats is suffering from the womb onwards, the sort of artistic intention he tells us he had, for instance, in the poem he called "Vacillation" is typical of him: here, the "Test" of "every work of intellect or faith" has to be whether it is "suited for such men as come/ Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb".[8] Given his view of human destiny as one containing its own intrinsic programme of suffering, no art could be able to meet real human needs unless it could help people face and deal with life's ingrained adversity. As he put it in "Meditations in Time of Civil War", even his choice of house was made in order that

> My bodily heirs may find,
> To exalt a lonely mind,
> Befitting emblems of adversity[9]

- and the aim in much of Yeats's verse seems equally to be to leave us, his other "heirs", with works that can "exalt" the loneliness he saw as being inevitable to the individual mind[10] - caught as it is in the labyrinth of its unhappy fate - with "Befitting emblems of adversity" creatively met.

And it is this aspect of Yeats's conception of the human condition that speaks in his tireless exploration of the theme of heroic resistance to the tragic patterns of human destiny - a theme perhaps most centrally contained in his work by the image

of Cuchulain's fight with "the ungovernable sea",[11] where the sea represents the inevitable victory of chance or exterior fate,[12] that the human spirit must nevertheless defy in order to win meaning. The "great man in his pride", scornfully "Confronting murderous men", who "Casts derision upon supersession of breath" in the poem called "Death",[13] is himself cast in the Cuchulain mould; as is the old scarecrow of "Sailing to Byzantium", singing "louder ... for every tatter in his mortal dress", in defiance of the paltriness old age would otherwise inflict on him.[14]

In fact, the poems amongst Yeats's work that rage against old age are all essentially "Cuchulain" poems, in their dealing with the encroachment of "bodily decrepitude".[15] What is typical of all these poems is something that is beautifully presented in the opening lines of "The Circus Animals' Desertion":

> I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,
> I sought it daily for six weeks or so.
> Maybe at last, being but a broken man,
> I must be satisfied with my heart, although
> Winter and summer since old age began
> My circus animals were all on show ...[16]

There is a facing of a situation and of himself together here - and an implicit resistance offered to both situation and self - which are caught most exactly in the structure of the fourth line, which begins its refusal of even the appearance of capitulation to old age at the very moment that the thought of

being perforce "satisfied" with a narrowed energy is even admitted. The rhythmic counter-current begun by the positioning of the word "although" at the end of the fourth line - rather than at the beginning of the fifth - is a kick away from the "broken" self into a sort of self-remonstrance that becomes an affirmation of personal power, even if only of past power.[17] And this refusal to be just a "broken man" becomes, of course, the centre of the whole poem. After making his "enumerat(ion) of old themes" into a startling poem about the ambiguous mastery that great art exercises over life - and after making his own poetic dumbness the theme of one of the most articulate poems of the century - the final stance of "The Circus Animals' Desertion" is the sly image of the old man making his bed in the middle of the desert of the heart that he's used all his art to turn into imagery: like a Jacob, he lies down to wait for the first signs of the next new "ladder" into "pure mind" that might start to shape. Facing what is perhaps the greatest adversity he could find as a poet - to lose his song and thereby lose his "ladders" out of "the desolation of reality"[18] - Yeats turns the encounter into an image of his own undefeated resilience, and makes his response to being "broken" by time into yet another "Befitting emblem of adversity": an image of a stance that far transcends being merely a realistic reminder of inevitable human frailty.

It is the same stance that we find in the straight-talking confrontation with "this caricature,/ Decrepit age" that develops

in "The Tower":

> 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?
> Never had I more
> Excited, passionate, fantastical
> Imagination, nor an ear and eye
> That more expected the impossible -
> No, not in boyhood when with rod and fly,
> Or the humbler worm, I climbed Ben Bulben's back
> And had the livelong summer day to spend.
> It seems that I must bid the Muse go pack,
> Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend
> 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.[19]

The feeling expressed in these lines vividly reflects the essential human dilemma that Yeats is facing: the painful awareness of old age that comes to him like an absurd "caricature" as the body becomes "A sort of battered kettle" to mock the spirit's pride. The "troubled heart" sees in these intimations the beginnings of what can only get worse, and must bring ultimately

> ...wreck of body,
> Slow decay of blood,
> Testy delirium
> Or dull decrepitude.[20]

It is an account that well defines a facet of the inevitable suffering that life brings with it; an account that also enforces a clear recognition of the general subjection to inescapable forces that characterises so much of human experience. In images like this of the "battered kettle" of the aging body, and in that of the aged scarecrow in his tattered "mortal dress" that we find

in "Sailing to Byzantium", Yeats is providing starkly real pictures of part at least of what Hopkins calls "the blight that man was born for"[21] - pictures that "figure plain,/ As though upon a lighted screen" and that reveal bedrock truths about human destiny. There is a typical imaginative and emotional and intellectual clarity to these imaginings of the meanings involved in the human encounter with old age, with the injuries to everything from physical and mental competence to spiritual dignity that must be suffered and that are being unflinchingly examined. As such, these images are important glimpses of central truths about the human condition; and their immediacy as images could vie with any of the productions of the realist actors of "Under the Old Stone Cross" for authentic grasp of human suffering.

But Yeats also typically goes beyond just suffering and recording that suffering. Mixed-in with the pain and anger of the encounter with old age that "The Tower" documents is the pride and heroic resilience that are the very terms upon which this encounter is accepted. The opening lines of the poem, quoted above, are far from being merely rhetorical in their questioning; and the response that "The Tower" as a whole offers to the dilemma they formulate is entirely practical, and issues in a programme of disciplined creative action. The lamenting of the circumstances of the dilemma that forms a necessary part of the poem is, in fact, never allowed to be an end in itself, but is

made into a pointed statement of the interior realities of the human problems that these circumstances present to their subject. If - as has been noted above[22] - Yeats rejected "passive suffering" as "a fit subject for poetry" in the work of other writers, then his own suffering of "Decrepit age" is certainly not passive. The immediate concern that he has in confronting old age in "The Tower" is to ask "What shall I do?"; and the recollection of lost energies that forms part of the poem's pattern is offered so as to define a problem to which a solution, however grim, must be found - not just to state or accept that problem as a given thing.

And this feature of "The Tower" - the immediate drive towards finding what he "must ... do" about his affliction by time - in itself makes the whole poem a "Befitting emblem of adversity" being forced by creative will to concede human meanings that allow Yeats to defend at least his pride from the shame of becoming a mere victim to necessity. Like in "The Circus Animals' Desertion", Yeats sets out in "The Tower" to do what he can and what he must to survive; and (particularly given that he wins through in "The Tower" to being able to "mock" and reject the thought of the "abstract" philosophy he at first feared he might have to make his "friend" - a rejection that is an affirmation of the dignity of man as the prime creative participant in the making of both "Death and life" what they are,[23] just as it is also an affirmation of the abiding validity

of human desire and of imaginative energy) this contest for meaningful survival makes the poem a demonstration of what seems to be meant in "Sailing to Byzantium", when Yeats talks of the soul's need to transfigure the adversity it must suffer:

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
> A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> For every tatter in its mortal dress,
> Nor is their singing-school but studying
> Monuments of its own magnificence;
> And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
> To the holy city of Byzantium.[24]

So for every injury that life brings, all the soul can do - if it wishes to avoid being broken into paltriness and meaninglessness - is to fight the harder and to more forcibly affirm its own will and integrity with every intensification of the attrition of fate.[25]

And poems like "Sailing to Byzantium" and "The Tower" and "The Circus Animals' Desertion" are themselves exactly the sorts of cultural implements that Yeats seems to have in mind, when he talks of those "Monuments of (the soul's) own magnificence", that can constitute a "singing school" in which humanity can learn how to survive the inevitable adversities of life. Art for Yeats, in other words, is meant to help give extra spiritual sinew, to deliberately counter what the contest with tragic necessity naturally costs us. When he prays at the end of section III of "Sailing to Byzantium" for the Byzantine "sages" to "gather (him)/ Into the artifice of eternity",[26] the irony of the desire thus expressed is, of course, that this redemption "out of

nature" into "artifice" - a redemption that has become a painful necessity, given the "dying animal" to which Yeats's "sick" and confused heart is "fastened"[27] - is a leap towards a self-created dimension of our common human nature: towards an heroic myth, in which natural necessity is challenged and transfigured and - within bounds - transcended in victory. As Yeats says in ultimately mocking Plato and Plotinus' "abstract things" at the end of "The Tower",

> Death and life were not
> Till man made up the whole,
> Made lock, stock and barrel
> Out of his bitter soul,
> Aye, sun and moon and star, all [28]

- and this "faith" he here pronounces is a faith in the central role that the creative, resilient human spirit plays in establishing not only the meaning but also the very existence-to-mind of "all" there is for human beings to experience.[29] The image that Yeats is giving us here in these lines is most directly an image of the soul's "own magnificence", the deepest self showing itself to act and to exist beyond the apparent deformity and powerlessness of the old scarecrow that Time tries to make of it.[30]

It is worth remembering, too, that these lines from the close to "The Tower" are Yeats's poetic "will", the bequeathing of a vision of final and lasting significance to his spiritual heirs:

> It is time that I made my will;
> I choose upstanding men

That climb the streams until
The fountain leap, and at dawn
Drop their cast at the side
Of dripping stone; I declare
They shall inherit my pride[31]

And what he apparently wanted most to hand-on to those he had tried to serve as a poet included the example of his own heroic, creative dealings with the same "adversity" that he seems to have hoped even his simple choice of house would help his actual "bodily heirs" to meet without being "broken":

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.[32]

What Yeats called this central capacity or energy of spirit - an energy of which he wished to bequeath an enriched awareness to his readers - was his "pride": a quality that he defines explicitly at the close of "The Tower", and implicitly in the firmness with which - as the lines just quoted prove - he knows he must discipline his soul into an integrity that can withstand the worst evils that necessity can inflict on him. The spiritual heirs he names by type in this "will" are of the sort

that he embodied in his imaginary Fisherman when he chose him as his ideal audience;[33] but the Yeats who speaks in these lines at the close of "The Tower" is himself echoing Cuchulain, fighting "the invulnerable tide" of fate in a contest he must objectively lose, but in which the meaning of his doom is subdued into a form that his spirit, in its "pride" or creative freedom, can tolerate.

And an element within the value of the image of his own contest with fate that forms part of Yeats's bequest in "The Tower" lies in the service it renders as an inspiration to deeper competence in the struggle with suffering and mortality that - in poems like "Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad" and "Sailing to Byzantium" and "The Tower" and "The Wild Old Wicked Man" - he saw human life essentially to be . What is offered in "The Tower" is a reminder that the heroic formula that is dramatised in Cuchulain's story isn't just an expression of bravado, but an expression of the central human need "to ride/ Those winds that clamour of approaching night" - the calamities of exterior fate[34] - rather than be merely ridden by them at their own destructive will.

For - as the close to "The Tower" reminds us - Yeats never lost sight of the great fact he stated in "A Prayer for My Daughter":

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
Or every bellows burst, be happy still.[35]

So, for Yeats, whatever comes - even Apocalypse itself - once the soul knows itself and its own powers in "mak(ing) up the whole" of what it experiences, it can "be happy still": a happiness that is to be gained through a complex discipline that rejects "hatred", the response to adversity of the mere victim.

So the poems we've just glanced at examine the abiding human problem of our unavoidable subjection to mortal necessity and to the tragic quality of the facts of our existence.

But - beyond their real grip on the dark side of things - part of what makes these poems so significant is that they also provide us with such searching dramatisations of Yeats's own creative response to this abiding tincture to human experience. Without falsifying to the slightest the inescapably tragic pattern he sees as governing human life, he counters this darker pattern with what amount to being reminders of the powers that the human spirit is capable of exercising in its engagement in this tragic entanglement. And the celebration of this heroic refusal of victimisation or of absurdity in poems such as these becomes in itself the provision of "an image of (our) state" that is like in kind to that of the swan given by the "moralist or

mythological poet" that Yeats introduces in the extract from "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" that is examined above. It is an "image" of qualities and capacities within the self that allow for a creative transfiguration of the circumstances to which it is objectively subject. In "A Prayer for My Daughter", the all-too likely chance of situations in which "every face" and "every windy quarter" of fate may be set against someone is clearly acknowledged; but what Yeats then sets against these circumstances in turn is a difficult discipline that can nevertheless "recover radical innocence" within the self: an "innocence" issuing in a strength and a poise with which the troubles of such suffering may be challenged, and whereby integrity - or happiness - may be created and maintained. The abiding problem of life's tragic pattern is stated not as an end in itself, but so as to help Yeats define the responsive human strengths that he sees as naturally being in contest with exterior adversity.

So the art that we see Yeats calling for in a poem like "Under Ben Bulben" must take as a first principle the need to help its audience to respond to the given tendencies of the human condition in ways that are creative: to respond in ways that might transform the meaning of those circumstances, even if they cannot actually deflect their objective courses. When he quotes "Palmer's phrase" in "Under Ben Bulben" - in its conviction that the most significant artists work always to "Prepare() a rest for

the people of God"[36] - that "rest" seems very close to the "radical innocence" of "A Prayer for My Daughter": seems a dynamic poise that dictates the mood of the circumstances a person is in, rather than itself being dictated by them - a poise very like that of the swan of the "mythological poet's" vision.

And this poise is a capacity that obviously grows for Yeats from the same root as the transfiguring "pride" in the face of unstoppable exterior events that irradiates the ending of "the great man ... / Confronting murderous men" that is taken as exemplar in "Death".[37] And, as the test we have already seen Yeats making of "every work of intellect or faith" shows,[38] the prime aim he saw to art was its attempt to help make people able to face - with pride and in radical freedom - even that extreme of the problem of exterior fate that is indicated by murder. Art, for Yeats, has to be able to help inspire and encourage us in the doing of supremely difficult things, against the grain of given tendencies: which means that it must be a challenge to life, not just a record or analysis of circumstances that does nothing to generate new and creative meaning. The very fact that Yeats - in so important a poem as "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" - saw "the mirror" of the self's awarenesses as being always a "troubled" one,[39] in any time or place, makes the need he obviously felt for the artist to give humanity vivid knowledge of its self-generated capacity for happiness, despite all that might happen, all the more urgent. The sorrow that is part of life's

existential quality demands the sort of access to what "Sailing to Byzantium" calls "the artifice of eternity": an access that the Yeatsian artist must facilitate - simply so as to make the problem of meaningful human survival that bit less of a problem.

And this awareness that human suffering is a central and abiding feature of the human condition shows itself in Yeats's thought from a remarkably young age - for all his saying, in "Why Should Not Old Men be Mad?" that "Young men know nothing of this sort". In fact, just as the awareness of the blight of the Rationalist legacy is present as a theme and as an artistic challenge right from the earliest public utterances,[40] he seems equally to have had an exceptionally youthful awakening to the sorrow of the human condition as it is to be found under any set of social or political circumstances - a fact well indicated by Yeats's recalling, in the third paragraph of his "Reveries Over Childhood and Youth", that he remembers feeling grateful for a great-uncle's sensitivity to "the troubles of children" because

> I know that I am very unhappy and have often said to myself, "When you grow up, never talk as grown-up people do of the happiness of childhood".[41]

Amongst the earliest of the poems Yeats wrote, there are those - from his twentieth year - that take sorrow as their theme in such a way as to establish it as a fit and necessary subject for poetry: as a subject to which he has chosen to address himself. In "The Sad Shepherd", for instance, the person who is

the subject of this poem is one afflicted by a sorrow that he tries to assuage by singing to a shell

> But the sad dweller by the sea-ways lone
> Changed all he sang to inarticulate moan
> Among her wildering whirls, forgetting him[42]

- which seems close to an early dramatisation of the knowledge, expressed among the *Last Poems* by "The Wild Old Wicked Man", that all incarnate existence is suffering. All that happens to the speaker's own sorrow here is that it becomes lost in the pre-existent labyrinth of the sorrow of the shell.

And added to the sense this gives that sorrow is a universal and eternal condition of all earthly existence, is the way in which Yeats introduces sorrow into "The Sad Shepherd" as not just a localised human emotion with specific causes, but as a sort of mythic persona - as a mood of all life:

> There was a man whom Sorrow named his friend,
> And he, of his high comrade dreaming,
> Went walking with slow steps along the gleaming
> And humming sands, where windy surges wend.

We might perhaps be tempted to dismiss this as merely a bit of boyish high talk:[43] an elevation of manner a bit in the worst of the Pre-Raphaelite mode, and tending towards the allegoric more as a matter of fashion than as a reflection of meaning in itself. But if we take the manner seriously, we are doing no more than allowing the possibility that Yeats has already come to see human awareness in something like the terms he used in a poem written not much later than this:

> While I wrought out these fitful Danaan rhymes,
> My heart would brim with dreams about the times
> When we bent down above the fading coals
> And talked of the dark folk who live in souls
> Of passionate men, like bats in the dead trees [44]

where the individual soul is haunted by entities and personages and dreams that are not of its own inception. This seeming personification of "Sorrow" as a "high comrade", who has "named (as) friend" a person, seems then to indicate more than an accidental elegance added to the song - particularly as the effect achieved (that of establishing this Sorrow as a reality acting from beyond the responses of any individual human awarenesses[45]) is in chime with the belief we have already noted in "The Sad Shepherd" that sorrow pervades all incarnate existence. The effect of this personification is, in fact, to establish the mood or emotion of sorrow as something that has a sort of formal existence of its own, beyond any encounter that any particular person might have with it at any particular time. It is, as it were, part of the fabric of all creation: even a sea-shell echoes with its own sorrow.

So the awareness - expressed in poems like "Why Should Not Old Men be Mad?" and "The Wild Old Wicked Man" - that sorrow or suffering are essential parts of the abiding nature of all human experience seems already deeply entrenched in Yeats's thought, even this early in its evolution.

And what is more, this awareness goes way beyond anything

merely conventional or derived: even amongst the earliest of Yeats's poems to appear in print, the fact of sorrow as a force acting within the human condition is recognised at vivid first hand, in lines that have the feel of quick eyes and even quicker human sympathies to them: poems like "The Ballad of Moll Magee",[46] or like "The Meditation of the Old Fisherman", written in Yeats's twenty-first year:

> You waves, though you dance by my feet like children at play,
> Though you glow and you glance, though you purr and you dart;
> In the Junes that were warmer than these are, the waves were more gay,
> *When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart* .
>
> The herring are not in the tides as they were of old;
> My sorrow! for many a creak gave the creel in the cart
> That carried the catch to Sligo town to be sold,
> *When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.*
>
> And ah, you proud maiden, you are not so fair when his oar
> Is heard on the water, as they were, the proud and apart,
> Who paced in the eve by the nets on the pebbly shore,
> *When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.* [47]

This poem - like the later "The Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water"[48] of *In the Seven Woods* - is remarkable not only for its sympathy with a sorrow known as yet only imaginatively, but for its understanding of how human experience inevitably leads the "boy with never a crack in (his) heart" to the double sadness of cold "Junes" and of unfading memories that make them all the colder. It isn't only the fact of bodily old age that Yeats has so clear in mind, but also the tragedy that the lengthening vista of life brings with it. As the mind grows in

its knowledge, it grows in its capacity for suffering too.

And so, in poems like these - and in, for instance, "The Song of the Old Mother"[49] and "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner"[50] - we have an announcement of Yeats's life-long awareness of the inherently tragic nature of human experience that is later so clearly expressed by "The Wild Old Wicked Man". It is a conviction that "sorrow" - what we have already seen him calling in "Ancestral Houses" by the more inclusive name of "adversity" - is a great and abiding central feature of all human experience; and this conviction brings from Yeats, also in his twentieth year, his typical response:

> "What do you make so fair and bright?"
>
> "I make the cloak of Sorrow:
> O lovely to see in all men's sight
> Shall be the cloak of Sorrow,
> In all men's sight."
>
> "What do you build with sails for flight?"
>
> "I build a boat for Sorrow:
> O swift on the seas all day and night
> Saileth the rover Sorrow,
> All day and night."
>
> "What do you weave with wool so white?"
>
> "I weave the shoes of Sorrow:
> Soundless shall be the footfall light
> In all men's ears of Sorrow,
> Sudden and light."[51]

This is a more youthful version of the truth found in "High Talk", with its image of Yeats at work there with "chisel and plane" to make what people's experience of life makes them

"demand" that the artist should give them:[52] the young poet setting about doing what he can to help make the inescapable "rover Sorrow" less of a brigand among the emotions. What might seem, to a casual and unsympathetic glance, a rather odd and decadent idealisation of sorrow as a sensation to be enjoyed for its own sake, is in fact a highly practical undertaking by a poet of precocious insight and compassion.[53] The re-fitting of "the rover Sorrow" is an image of Yeats's own poetic plan: if - as he sees - human suffering is "swift on the seas all day and night", it cannot be evaded or cancelled; but it can be made "lovely" and "light" by the special intercession of art.[54]

For what we see of the young Yeats, stitching and joining and weaving in this poem,[55] is an image of work such as that he spoke of later as being the sort that Phidias did to increase "our might".[56] It is an early image of the artist making "the artifice of eternity"[57] out of the painfully raw materials of everyday life, and thereby providing the possibility of the sort of catharsis that comes through our being enabled into experiencing ennobled versions of the griefs our life is heir to; through our being given imaginative versions of these griefs that have been transfigured into the "Befitting emblems of adversity" of "Meditations in Time of Civil War". "Sorrow" or "adversity" can never be escaped - as "Why Should Not Old Men be Mad?" so clearly affirms - but the spell of the Yeatsian artwork can sweeten and strengthen the sufferer's mind by imbuing this sorrow

with a beauty of its own, discovered by art even in that dark corner of human fate.[58]

And it is this labour to make the footfall of Sorrow "light/ In all men's ears" that is also clearly to be seen in poems like "Sailing to Byzantium" or "The Tower" or "The Circus Animals' Desertion" or "An Acre of Grass".[59] In poems like these, we see Yeats himself confronting adversity; but in his dramatisation of these encounters - his showing of what he wins at such cost, and of how impermanent his victories are; of how hard the fight is and against what temptations - he is meeting the same duty that underpins "The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes": the artist's need to help make the inescapable facts of adversity and suffering come easier to hand, by showing the harsh triumph it is possible to gain in the struggle of creative resistance, and by affirming the integral selfhood it is possible to maintain - and even extend - against the inevitable tattering of "the mortal dress".[60] The Yeats of these later poems obviously sees his task in a more grimly experienced way than he did in "The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes"; but the inhering of the aging man's poetic programme in the young man's intent shows how consistently this aspect of Yeats's vision of the abiding circumstances of the human condition helped direct his aims - and therefore his artistic theory - as a poet.

With all this in mind, the theme that comes to focus early

in the *Last Poems* in the notion of "tragic joy"[61] takes on a special significance within the scheme of intentions that can be said to be functioning in this closing phase of Yeats's work. If we take "The Gyres" to be a sort of revisiting of some of the poems of 1919 - a meditation, from a further vantage, upon the catastrophe of a phase of collapse within a long-developed culture and upon the tragic meanings of this phase [62] - then one of the most striking things about the poem is the new tone that gives timbre to the scene it evokes: is the surprising nonchalence that disciplines the awareness of tragedy that is to be found in lines like

> What matter though numb nightmare ride on top,
> And blood and mire the sensitive body stain?
> What matter? Heave no sigh, let no tear drop,
> A greater, a more gracious time has gone;
> For painted forms or boxes of make-up
> In ancient tombs I sighed, but not again;
> What matter? Out of cavern comes a voice,
> And all it knows is that one word 'Rejoice!'[63]

Bearing in mind just how much it always *had* mattered to Yeats that "the sensitive body" be set free from the "blood and mire" of any base materiality of awareness - and how much it mattered that the dreaming self be fully responsive, and not numbed by nightmare - then this carelessness is all the more striking; particularly when we realise that a special sort of carelessness is in fact the central theme of the poem. Even the pyre of Troy is merely "a light", and "We that look on but laugh in tragic joy": yet this pyre is that of Yeats's own world, seen in the light cast by an archetype of social disaster.[64] To make

the situation even more remarkable, Yeats is obviously setting up deliberate tensions within "The Gyres": is evoking vivid scenes of social and of individual chaos, and then quite purposely overturning the response we would expect from him.

And an explanation of this strategy lies in the last two lines quoted above: for all the disaster that has come, the force that Yeats calls "Old Rocky Face" - the power that is revealed at the changing of the gyres, and that lies behind the impulse that builds human excellence and social grace; what a theologian might be tempted to call God - has at all times only one imperative: "Rejoice".

What Yeats seems to be presenting here is his vision of the essence of the energy of life. As such, the formulation is, perhaps, a re-focusing of the faith he had in "Meditations in Time of Civil War", that "out of life's own delight had sprung/ The abounding glittering jet"[65] of the deepest freedom and self-responsibility. As he seems to be saying here in "The Gyres", no matter how much "nightmare" has come to afflict modern mankind, the one great commandment that the Great Prompter has for humanity is the discovery of the joy that not even tragic suffering can entirely eradicate.[66] As "The Gyres" goes on from where we just left it in quotation, it develops a faith in the re-emergence, some day, of another "greater, more gracious time" than the fallen present[67] - and this faith is presented as a

light to illumine the dark scene the poem has for base, and is as such an important avowal. But even this avowal is really only incidental, perhaps, to the conviction this poem embodies that life, seen with properly cleansed eyes, is "self-delighting" even in the worst of times. Old Rocky Face's commandment seems to be the voice of some bedrock within the self that is, in a very real sense, innocent and unconditioned by circumstances - no matter how grievous those circumstances might be.

In other words, when Yeats talks here of the final oracular cleft of the mind - the one he also stands in, perhaps,in another mood, in "The Man and the Echo"[68] - then the energy that there utters itself, as the primary imperative to human action, is a will that recalls the Cuchulain image of other moments in Yeats's thought.[69] As "The Gyres" presents things, whatever sets of circumstance come into being, the primal life-energy still bubbles-up within the human spirit as an unending joy. And, in giving us this sense of a "tragic joy" that is part of the stuff of life itself - like the "light" there even in a falling Troy - Yeats seems to be dramatically extending the range of images he has already given of the heroic contest with adversity that we are suggesting his verse deliberately enjoins. In poems like "Sailing to Byzantium" and "The Tower", he has shown the human will winning dignity and meaning out of the tragic pressure of its circumstances. In "Death", he has shown conscious pride and courage transfiguring victimisation into a very real sort of

triumph. But in "The Gyres" Yeats takes the focus even deeper. It isn't just the splendour of the heroic and purposive self that he here shows to survive its immersion in the essentially tragic context of all human action: in "The Gyres", he takes us right "to where stone is dark under froth",[70] and affirms that the most remotely primal and least-deliberate source of human conduct is itself a causeless and conditionless joy.[71] In presenting this faith, Yeats is returning to something like the mood we know he sees as being possible within the "radical innocence" of the sweetly-disciplined heart of "A Prayer for My Daughter". It is a sort of grace, a given strength, and not just the product of individual effort.[72] As such, its discovery and celebration in verse becomes a great practical service to humanity.[73] As he said in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley from July, 1935,

> To me the supreme aim is an act of faith and reason to make one rejoice in the midst of tragedy, An impossible aim; yet I think it true that nothing can injure us.[74]

Hardy speaks in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* of

> the two forces ... at work here as everywhere, the inherent will to enjoy, and the circumstantial will against enjoyment.[75]

And if what has been argued can be admitted, part of Yeats's poetic intention, from as early as when he wrote "The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes", was to help give our "inherent will to enjoy" greater sinew for use in its contest with "the circumstantial will against enjoyment". And, in "The Gyres", Yeats extends the significance of this undertaking by affirming

his conviction that "Old Rocky Face" - the source out of which human grace, worth and beauty arise - is itself "the inherent will to enjoy"; or rather, that this "will" is the echo in the human ear of the one great Word that sounds at the beginning of all growth within us.[76]

So, the announcement of "tragic joy" as a human reality in the *Last Poems* can be seen as another of those roundings-off of things begun earlier that these poems so often achieve. The poetic intention that was announced in poems from *Crossways* - and that was refined in the mature duty epitomised in Yeats's need in "Vacillation" to help people "come open-eyed and laughing to the tomb" - is being given its valedictory treatment in the *Last Poems*: a last walk around the edifice, as it were, to add final touches of detail. If he has been led - in poems like "Meru",[77] for instance - to face perhaps even more clearly than he has before the tragedy attendant upon all human wishes, then in the *Last Poems* Yeats seems set on clearly presenting the equally-deepened insight he has gained into the fundamentally "heroic" nature of the human spirit in itself - with its one final commandment to "Rejoice!" - despite the attrition of circumstance.

If we take "Lapis Lazuli" as an instance of this feature to these poems, we can see quite clearly this light that Yeats brings into the human picture, as a balance to what he sees so

clearly of its tragic gloom:

I have heard that hysterical women say
They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow,
Of poets that are always gay,
For everybody knows or else should know
That if nothing drastic is done
Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out,
Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in
Until the town lie beaten flat.

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.
All men have aimed at, found and lost;
Black out; Heaven blazing into the head:
Tragedy wrought to its uttermost.
Though Hamlet rambles and Lear rages,
And all the drop-scenes drop at once
Upon a hundred thousand stages,
It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce.

On their own feet they came, or on shipboard,
Camel-back, horse-back, ass-back, mule-back,
Old civilisations put to the sword.
Then they and their wisdom went to rack:
No handiwork of Callimachus,
Who handled marble as if it were bronze,
Made draperies that seemed to rise
When sea-wind swept the corner, stands;
His long lamp-chimney shaped like the stem
Of a slender palm, stood but a day;
All things fall and are built again,
And those that build them again are gay.

Two Chinamen, behind them a third,
Are carved in lapis lazuli,
Over them flies a long-legged bird,
A symbol of longevity;
The third, doubtless a serving-man,
Carries a musical instrument.

Every discolouration of the stone,
Every accidental crack or dent,
Seems a water-course or an avalanche,
Or lofty slope where it still snows

Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch
Sweetens the little half-way house
Those Chinamen climb towards, and I
Delight to imagine them seated there;
There, on the mountain and the sky,
On all the tragic scene they stare.
One asks for mournful melodies;
Accomplished fingers begin to play.
Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
Their ancient glittering eyes, are gay.[78]

There can be few poems that evoke "all the tragic scene" of human experience more vividly. The fears of the present - the rising shadow of the Blitzkrieg - are set within the greater pattern of the tragic doom of all persons and all peoples: "All perform their tragic play" and must face the inevitable "great stage curtain" and "sword" that will end them. And within this greater pattern of the mortality of man and the frailty of his civilisations, even the "handiwork" that is set in stone to outlast time must "fall". We are on ground very near to that of the first section of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen".[79]

But Yeats's prime focus here isn't upon "all that dread" of disaster that attends the scene: these tragic conditions that he insists we recognise as being inescapable become, in fact, a sort of essential backdrop to the themes at centre stage - to the gaiety that nevertheless transfigures the dread of our imaginings, and to the role that art plays in assisting in this process.

The image that closes the poem sums-up these concerns well:

the old men, the lingering winter of the "lofty slope(s)", the "many wrinkles" of the faces, are all so much in themselves expressions of the tragic circumstances of mortal life. But the response of the old Chinamen to these conditions carries with it the counter-truth of the poem, too. Set in tension to "the tragic scene" upon which "they stare", the eyes themselves glitter with the ancient gaiety that rings in Old Rocky Face's commandment at the close of "The Gyres". If "the tragic scene" of winter mountains and snows lingering into the glimmerings of spring represents the tragic conditions that the human spirit must of necessity always suffer, then the "ancient glittering eyes" embody the mood in which Yeats feels that the "worthy" ones must submit to this encounter: a mood that "transfigur(es) all ... dread" and that retains competence and purpose and dignified integrity in the process. The facts of mortal life may well be inescapably dark and tragic; but, for Yeats, the facts of the being that must suffer this darkness - as those facts arise from that being's "ancient" and radical nature - still glitter with a light and with an energy that can remake the meaning of any given fate, and that can subdue that fate as we have seen Yeats's "great man in his pride" being able to do with the "murderous men" who assail him - even if he cannot in the least change their practical ascendancy.

So, taking the formula offered in "Ancestral Houses" as our bearing once again, Yeats's depiction of these old Chinamen and

of their mood constitutes for us yet another "Befitting emblem of adversity", in which the adversity is acknowledged in all its power, but is yet also placed within a pattern of meaning that gives proper due to the "ancient, glittering" spirit of life that Yeats obviously sees as being the deepest fountain of selfhood.[80] Given this perspective, the "eyes amid many wrinkles" - core of the central meanings of "Lapis Lazuli" - sum up in themselves exactly the sort of perspective on the self as it is enmeshed in circumstance that Yeats is establishing in this poem: the wrinkles that have been inflicted by "the tragic scene" without and the wrinkles exfoliated by the spirit's inhering gaiety are indistinguishable, showing will and fate in a vital equipoise.

And if Yeats is here giving us another image of the mood in which the self possessed of "radical innocence" can encounter the tragedy of life, then he is also quite clear about the ways in which art can work to serve and strengthen this mood. When those Chinamen go to view "the tragic scene", they take with them an "accomplished" musician, whose "mournful melodies" - like the "plum or cherry-branch" - sweeten "the little half-way house" in which they sit, in its vantage over the given situation of things.[81] Set against "all the tragic scene", in other words, are the melodies that structure actual tragedy towards artifice; and the choice of such music at such a moment perhaps recalls the youthful song Yeats himself wrote to sweeten Sorrow.

So what is being presented at this moment in the poem seems to be one of the most pointed - though implicit - agreements that Yeats makes with Aristotle's recognition in the *Poetics* that art can enable us to contemplate things that would be too painful or too disgusting to face in real life; which is an acknowledgement of the power that artifice has to steady both heart and head. Art, in other words, serves for Yeats the "ancient glittering" spirit of joy within us - the primal mood of the creative self - by initiating and by assisting in that "transfiguring of ... dread" that "Lapis Lazuli" is most centrally talking about.

And this service of life by art is again made quite clear to us in "Lapis Lazuli", in Yeats's depiction - in the second stanza - of the "tragic play" we each of us must willy-nilly perform: a "play" in which those who are "worthy (of) their part" in the common human tragedy are seen as acting in the specific scenes of their own lives under spell of an understanding gained from their encounters with art - in this case, from the drama that has taught Yeats that "Hamlet and Lear are gay", even with "all (the) dread" of their doom upon them.[82] As Yeats seems to suggest, the person who strives for competence in living - and in dying - can find exemplars of that competence in art, and can find there the revelation of facts of the human spirit that the immediate pressures of their circumstances might otherwise easily conspire to make them forget. The temper of spirit that those "hysterical women" of the poem's opening would seem to need to discover, in

order to face with some sort of equanimity the terrible threats of their times, is to be gained for Yeats - ironically enough - from the very temper of the painter, poet and musician that these women "are sick of" in their anxiety. The hysteria that rejects the essential gaiety of tragic art - Yeats seems to be saying - is a sign of a mind that has become victimised by its circumstances, and that has fallen entirely under the whim of whatever "windy quarter" that might "howl".[83] The mood of the "hysterical women" who give "Lapis Lazuli" its opening focus stands, in fact, in direct contrast to a sort of "radical innocence" that is at work within the spirit of the old Chinamen, and in their mode of response to "the tragic scene" that they so obviously know life to be.

And in furthering this perspective on the poem's range of suggestions, we need also to take clear cognisance of Yeats's active presence within "Lapis Lazuli": turning the old carving in his hand, seeing its features, responding to its suggestions, fitting the created artefact into the necessities and tendencies of his own immediate patterns of thinking. His "delight" in imagining the Chinamen's mood and deeds is itself an image of art of the sort he would praise at work: the carver has apparently been able to subdue "Every discolouration of the stone,/ Every accidental crack or dent" into the suggestions of his design - taking the flaws of circumstance, and transfiguring them into features that contribute to the overall generation of his

meaning.[84] The carving that Yeats has taken as the clinching element within his poem, in other words, is itself - even technically - a triumphant and explicit exercise of imagination and will over stony fact; is itself like Callimachus' handling "marble as if it were bronze". This being so, the carving itself echoes the poem's theme, and picks up the greater theme of Yeats's work at large that we have been examining: the human capacity for meeting given circumstance with willed and creative intention; for meeting adversity with heroic resilience. And the related theme of the role of art as helper in the strengthening of this creative resilience - helper by way of providing illuminating and befitting images of this resilience in action: images that can become part of the "secret discipline"[85] of our spirit - is also clearly apparent.

This taking of a special sort of joy as theme extends beyond its obvious statement in "The Gyres" and "Lapis Lazuli" among the *Last Poems,* too. A poem like "Imitated from the Japanese",[86] for instance, is a dramatisation of a sudden, causeless joy that sets an old man dancing for the first time in his life. Or, in "The Man and the Echo", we find that the thought that brings Yeats up short - when the "great night" of death looms in his mind - is

> O Rocky Voice,
> Shall we in that great night rejoice?
> What do we know but that we face
> One another in this place?[87]

So even in this extremity, when Yeats is "old and ill", troubled and sleepless and facing the mystery of death, what seems to

remain for him as the most immediate question of all is whether or not human joy will survive the change "that great night" is bringing. In a poem that admits that life has brought him close to despair, when the death-cry of the rabbit "distracts" Yeats's "thought", he sums-up the entire "theme" of this thought as having run on "joy or night": if "night" becomes an image of death in this poem, the name Yeats almost instinctively gives to life is "joy". Amongst the many things "The Man and the Echo" does as a poem is to establish again just how absolutely central to human experience joy is for Yeats - central to the degree that joy and life become virtually synonymous for him, which makes this poem take its place in fellowship with "The Gyres" and "Lapis Lazuli" as reminders of the gaiety and sweetness that Yeats sees as being potentially blent into even the most extreme tragedy.

The point being made in all this, is that the various signs that we find in the *Last Poems* of the theme of joy comprise a part of Yeats's response as poet to the problem of inescapable human suffering that is stated early in a poem like "The Meditation of the Old Fisherman" and late in "Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad?". When Yeats takes an image from the Japanese of a sudden joy bubbling-up for no apparent reason in an old man's heart, this image surely serves as a counter-truth to this inevitable suffering. If - to borrow Hardy's terms again - Yeats must truthfully acknowledge "the circumstantial will against

enjoyment" that is always at work in the nature of things, he must also acknowledge and define the true quality and power of "the will to enjoy" as *it* too operates within human experience. As an artist of the Phidian sort, he must not only acknowledge and define joy as an existential determinant; he must also celebrate it - so as to make its action more apparent and available to his audience, and so as to himself serve its strategy in helping people deal creatively with life's tragic shadow. When he opens "Lapis Lazuli" with a cameo of the "hysterical women" who are out of all patience with the gaiety of artists even under the shadow of the sword, he does so not in mockery or in dismissal of them: there is a very important sense in which "Lapis Lazuli" is actually designed to help heal the sort of spiritual myopia that Yeats sees as causing such fear. As he develops his image of all civilisations coming to "the sword", and as he explores "all the tragic scene" of human experience, the aim isn't merely to establish a picture of doom. The tragic inevitability of personal and communal fate that are brought to focus in this poem becomes the backdrop against which Yeats can then develop an affirmation of the transfiguring power of the human spirit, in its dealings with such inevitable "dread". What he says in this poem offers the fearful ones of the opening lines the only comfort he can honestly give them: a faith in the true powers of spiritual resilience that he sees as acting at the core of human experience. The picturings of joy to be found in the *Last Poems* together constitute a great image that Yeats is

offering his audience in service of its need to survive the terrors of life with a "worthy" courage.

One could say, in fact, that part of what Yeats is doing in these poems is to clearly establish the "usefulness" of joy. He might have said, as we have seen above, that "an aimless joy is a pure joy"; but he had his eye on another facet of the truth at that particular moment. In "Lapis Lazuli" and in "The Gyres", the "gaiety" that Yeats is analysing as a primal characteristic of human awareness, "ancient (and) glittering", is presented largely in terms of the meaning that this fact of our lives has in the struggle to win meaning and dignity from the endless entanglement with fate and chance that he sees as characterising all human life. Though this gaiety may well be "aimless" - in the sense of its being a sort of grace, a something that takes its own way with us, and that isn't merely an attribute of the conscious will - it is of vital significance, for Yeats, in our battle for integral survival.

Which is a thought close to the centre of the eerie poem called "The Apparitions", too:

> Because there is safety in derision
> I talked about an apparition,
> I took no trouble to convince,
> Or seem plausible to a man of sense,
> Distrustful of that popular eye
> Whether it be bold or sly.
> *Fifteen apparitions have I seen;*
> *The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.*

I have found nothing half so good
As my long-planned half solitude,
Where I can sit up half the night
With some friend that has the wit
Not to allow his looks to tell
When I am grown unintelligible.
Fifteen apparitions have I seen;
The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.

When a man grows old his joy
Grows more deep day after day,
His empty heart is full at length,
But he has need of all that strength
Because of the increasing Night
That opens her mystery and fright.
Fifteen apparitions have I seen;
The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.[88]

For all its being a grateful record of the riches of this time of his life - he has "found nothing half so good", and "his joy/ Grows more deep day after day,/ His empty heart is full at length" - this poem obviously also has its strong kinship with "The Man and the Echo" and its awareness of the "great night" of death's mysteries. If "joy" strengthens by the day, the "mystery and fright" of "the increasing Night" yawns the wider too: opening a fearful strangeness about which merely trying to be "a man of sense" - in the "popular" and reasonable manner of dealing with the unknown - could be no answer. How can one make "sense" of the disproportionate "fright" that the sight of a mere "coat upon a coat-hanger" - the "worst" glimpse into the dark Yeats has had - can engender? These "apparitions" and the order of things to which they belong obviously work in terms of an entirely different set of laws of meaning to those understood by reason and by "sense".[89]

So one of the things that "The Apparitions" does is to heighten our awareness of what it is like to have the "mystery" of the things beyond death looming nearer, as the faculties that constitute the "popular" understanding of things become more and more useless as helpers. But another thing the poem does - which sets it with "Lapis Lazuli" and "The Gyres" and their company - is that it equally heightens our sense of the "strength" this old age brings with it to challenge the "fright": a "strength" which Yeats sees as being synonymous with "joy".

Which makes "The Apparitions" yet another of those poems that seem - in at least one aspect of their intentions - to be meant to help add sinew to the human contest with mortal suffering: the contest that Yeats saw as being one of the abiding features of human experience in which the arts were designed to creatively intervene, if life is not to become just "a paltry thing,/ A tattered coat upon a stick" in the winds of fate and chance. We should perhaps recall here that what Yeats wanted of Irish artists - if we follow the valedictory injunctions we have already examined in "Under Ben Bulben" - was that their "work" should help to make their audience "indomitable";[90] and we can see that the poems Yeats wrote that locate the root of the human spirit's indomitableness in a transfiguring gaiety (a gaiety that is - for him - a primary quality of that spirit's being and awareness) fit his own prescription. If we follow the lines of Yeats's thinking, one of the great truth's that an age like his

own - one that had carried its regular daily share of the eternal lot of human suffering to compound the chaos of its also being a time when a civilisation was falling apart - could easily be forgotten,[91] without the sort of "work" that Yeats enjoins upon himself and upon other artists. An adequate knowledge of the nature of the apparently "aimless" and careless joy, that bubbles up counter to Hardy's "circumstantial will against enjoyment", could bring exactly the strength that people need to face an otherwise dark and inescapable uncertainty. In poems like "The Apparitions", Yeats is in fact sweetening the heroic austerity of the Cuchulain side to human experience.

For the subjective transfiguration of objective doom that is symbolised by Cuchulain's fight with the sea obviously takes a good deal of its motive in Yeats's own thought from the sort of pride we have seen him examining in a poem like "Death", or that we see at work in a poem like "Human Dignity", from the sequence he called "A Man Young and Old":

> Like the moon her kindness is,
> If kindness I may call
> What has no comprehension in't,
> But is the same for all
> As though my sorrow were a scene
> Upon a painted wall.
>
> So like a bit of stone I lie
> Under a broken tree.
> I could recover if I shrieked
> My heart's agony
> To passing bird, but I am dumb
> From human dignity.[92]

But this poem also suggests that this strengthening pride or "human dignity" - left untempered by other psychic forces - "can make a stone of the heart"[93] and thwart its recovery from its woundings. So Yeats's location among the *Last Poems* of a transfiguring joy as an essential human strength - as a strength that seems to exist to help us out-face adversity - becomes a vital codicil to the "pride" and the "faith" that we have seen him wishing, at the close of "The Tower", to bequeath to his heirs - to his audience - as weapons against that adversity. An heroic pride, on its own, inflicts its own desolation - as "Human Dignity" shows. But sweetened by the sort of "joy" that in "The Apparitions" "Grows more deep day after day", in time of its greatest need - and that gives its gaiety to "all the tragic scene" that "Lapis Lazuli" evokes - Yeats's old friend "sorrow" loses a good deal of its cling.

And it is again a sort of sweetening of tragic "dignity" into something stronger than a simply bitter resistance that is the nerve of another poem that attempts a solution to the problem of inescapable human suffering, "From 'Oedipus at Colonus'":[94]

> Endure what life God gives you and ask no longer span;
> Cease to remember the delights of youth, travel-wearied aged man;
> Delight becomes death-longing if all longing else be vain.
>
> Even from that delight memory treasures so,
> Death, despair, division of families, all entanglements of mankind grow,
> As that old wandering beggar and these God-hated children know.

In the long echoing street the laughing dancers throng,
The bride is carried to the bridegroom's chamber through
torchlight and tumultuous song;
I celebrate the silent kiss that ends short life or long.

Never to have lived is best, ancient writers say;
Never to have drawn the breath of life, never to have looked
into the eye of day;
The second best's a gay goodnight and quickly turn away.

What we have here is the choice that Yeats sees as facing the "travel-wearied aged man" as the end of life approaches. It seems a choice between the deliberate cultivation of a contempt for all delight in living, or running the risk of despair, now "all longing else (is) vain".[95] But what Yeats chooses - with an unexpectedness typical of him - is an overlooked third course; one that involves neither contempt nor despair, but a deliberate celebration of the very "delight that memory treasures so" that seemed the greatest threat to happiness there could be. What is chosen is a love-tryst with life that makes its ending a "silent kiss" of farewell, not the last in a long line of acts of rejection; and the tragic "entanglements of mankind" are seen to be best met in a mood that is tempered in its courage by being "gay".

In other words, the choice made in this reflection on Sophocles is one that implicitly acknowledges an armour against mortal despair that is more human than that of a withdrawal into unassailed desirelessness: the ironically-termed "second best" way that is chosen is that of courage and heroic poise - the sort

of mood that "Lapis Lazuli", as we have seen, shows to be active in those who "Do not break up their lines to weep" when "The great stage curtain (is) about to drop" and end "the play" of life; and in "From 'Oedipus at Colonus'" too this heroic poise is given its final brilliance as a human strategy by its gaiety.

And the self-control of the "gay goodnight" that is Yeats's only possible answer to death obviously also keeps time with the old Chinamen of "Lapis Lazuli" and with their mode of dealing with the "tragic scene" about them. As it is for them, the gaiety of this "goodnight" and its last "silent kiss" of love is a pose maintained in the face of the inevitable attrition of fate - a stance held against the tide, Cuchulain-like. Even the climb the old Chinamen make up to the half-way house that allows their "ancient, glittering eyes" full vantage over "all the tragic scene" of mortal existence has something to it of the "gay goodnight" - that refuses to be tragical over tragedy - of the lines from "Oedipus at Colonus". The old Chinamen climb up to hear "mournful melodies" played by someone brought along expressly to help sweeten "the little half-way house". It is as if, in poems such as these, Yeats is setting up a sort of gallery of images in which pride sweetened by a profound gaiety can be seen at work - acting as just the sort of defence against tragic circumstance that he has himself found such gaiety to be. As Blake taught Yeats as a young man, "Art is an impassioned labour to keep men from doubt and despondency", and there is a very real

sense in which such "an impassioned labour" formed a life-long basis to his own poetic programme.[96]

And in these images, we also see clearly once again the labour of which we have spoken in formulating Yeats's conception of the interventive and re-creative duty of art as an agent of human well-being. He is following, in effect, his own injunction to the arts to "do the work"[97] of making the human scene a dimension more imbued with meaning and with existential competence than - without the sorts of understandings that the artworks that he valued brought with them - it could naturally be.[98]

There were, of course, yet other features to the abiding human condition - as Yeats saw it - that could be said to have made their claims upon the view of the nature and value of art that he held: less tragic features, but ones that equally led him to feel the need to give people "dreams and dreams their looking-glass",[99] rather than offering mirrors in which Yeats's "man of sense" might happily see himself.

And the main amongst these features could be called the sense Yeats had of human consciousness itself as being an enduring dialectic;[100] as being a perpetual discovering and following of dreams: a reaching always beyond the known towards what is - as yet - only intimated. If tragic necessity made

heroic art a simple necessity - so as to adequately reflect and properly inspire the struggle for undiminished being that Yeats saw the attrition of adversity as naturally initiating in the human spirit in all times and places - then the "minute by minute",[101] purposive changingness that Yeats saw as constituting the very basis of the mind's nature equally demanded of him an art that was a special sort of dream, and not just a photographic image of what the man of sense would assume to be already-existent actualities.

We have already glanced at Yeats's convictions as to the fundamentally creative nature of human awareness, as an element within the overall matrix of ideas that helped fashion his aesthetic conceptions and his poetic practices.[102] What we have to look at further, though, is what arises from a slight - but important - shift in perspective on the issue: not so much a focus upon the fact that the mind is not a mirror, as upon it's forever aspiring beyond the limits of whatever vision of things that it has already constructed - or that have already been constructed for it by the mirror of its given cultural complex. When Yeats speaks of the Arcadian "dreaming" that "fed" the mind before the advent of what was - for him - the Rationalist or materialist delusion (Locke's withering dream)[103] then part of the criticism we have seen him offering there of the "Grey Truth (that) is now (the modern mind's) painted toy" seems to be aimed at the mechanical fixity such thinking inflicts upon its victim.

The imagery Yeats employs is of a "dreary" dance of "many changing things" that - paradoxically - trap the mind itself in an unchanging state of discord, with thought totally unable to "change its theme".[104] As we have seen, the opening to "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" reads:

> The woods of Arcady are dead,
> And over is their antique joy;
> Of old the world on dreaming fed;
> Grey Truth is now her painted toy;
> Yet still she turns her restless head:
> But O, sick children of the world,
> Of all the many changing things
> In dreary dancing past us whirled,
> To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,
> Words alone are certain good

- and the statement beginning from the fifth line carries with it two perceptions or convictions that both move clearly in the direction our attention is following now: the certainty that the modern mind is "sick" and "restless" within the confines of the Rationalist monotone (a sickness which - merely by making itself felt, even if not understood, by its sufferers - itself signals the greater human aspirations of thought that the current fashion has barred out); and the faith that "Words alone are certain good" - that the only certainly wholesome fare for the mind, in any phase of human history, is language as this poem defines it: the language of poetry and of "dream, for this is also truth".[105] As Yeats disposes things in this precocious piece, the mechanist "learning" - that of

> ...the starry men
> Who follow with the optic glass
> The whirling ways of stars that pass

- is "the cold star-bane" that

Has cloven and rent their hearts in twain,
And dead is all their human truth.[106]

And that "human truth" that Yeats sees Newtonian modes of thinking as having killed isn't only the truth of the denied heart; it is also the flexible aspiration of the mind - its capacity for "dream" - that he shows as being left unsatisfied and stifled by all the essential fixity of conception that is imaged in "the cracked tune that Chronos sings": in the notion of Time as a simplistic, rationalist metronome, external to human volition and the disposer of the measurable events that are alone the sum of acceptable reality.[107] When we look for signs of Yeats's aims in writing "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", it is clear that his hope is to set the modern mind "dreaming" again; to free it for action within a fuller spectrum of meaning and of experience than the mechanist monochrome - "Grey Truth" - allows it to experience.

But perhaps the most important point to keep in mind - given the tack of our discussion - is Yeats's implied wish in this poem that he might be able to help replace this restlessness of mind (that he sees as arising from a fixation within a single mode of awareness) with a freer, more plastic experience of self and of circumstance. The "antique joy" of the garden that died in Locke's mechanist nightmare is, for Yeats, something for which the modern mind still unconsciously hungers. This "joy" - if we follow the logic of "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" - arose from

a free exercise of imagination and mind that "fed" on the very super-rational faculties that Locke's mechanisms chose to ignore; and Yeats's faith that this antique hunger for imaginative freedom and for supersensual experience is still alive, beneath the constructs of modern thought, is itself a recognition of a condition of human reality that his art must meet. The call Yeats makes upon Locke's "sick children" - his own immediate audience - to find in themselves once again the truths of the human heart and of human dreams, is also obviously the announcement, at the outset of the life's work, of an artistic intention that prefigures that to be so explicitly formulated near the end in "Under Ben Bulben": the desire to bring to that audience vital perspectives upon itself that it lacks due to its present circumstances; to bring, in this instance, a more adequate sense of the mind's innate creativity and growingness, in times when "reality" has been deemed by social consensus to be given entirely from without the self in terms of fixed "physical" laws.

And we can see Yeats throughout his writing at work reminding us of this youthful intention of bringing the human mind to a more adequate, less fashionably-circumscribed vision of itself. The image he gives of the meaning of true wisdom in the later poem we have already glanced at called "Tom O'Roughley" is, for example, very much on the same tack of theme as what we have seen in the focus in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" upon the

problem of a false general conception of what constitutes the most valuable exercise of the capacity for thinking:

> "Though logic-choppers rule the town,
> And every man and maid and boy
> Has marked a distant object down,
> An aimless joy is a pure joy,"
> Or so did Tom O'Roughley say
> That saw the surges running by,
> "And wisdom is a butterfly
> And not a gloomy bird of prey".[108]

So, for all the chop-logic rationalism that sets "every man and maid and boy" measuring their lives in terms of sensible ambitions and abstract propositional structures,[109] true wisdom is an expression of "aimless joy" - with the most "pure" thought having to it the dreaming self-responsibility of the butterfly on its breeze of whim, rather than the hawk-lunge and narrow objectiveness that makes a "prey" of the whole world and a gloom of the intrinsically "aimless" spirit.[110]

And in this image of wisdom as a joyous butterfly we also have Yeats's paradoxical acknowledgement of the supreme usefulness of this freedom to dream and to aspire and to slip-by settled ideas. In the second stanza of this poem come the lines

> "How but in zig-zag wantonness
> Could trumpeter Michael be so brave?"

- which seems to suggest that even the leader of the host of heaven gains his bravery - his splendour and heraldic competence, as well as his intellectual confidence - from this "zig-zag wantonness"; from this obedience to the apparent whims of a self-delighting changeability of aim and of focus of desire.[111] As

Yeats puts it in his meditation upon the spiritual damages that are caused by a fixed outlook in "Easter, 1916"

> Hearts with one purpose alone
> Through summer and winter seem
> Enchanted to a stone
> To trouble the living stream[112]

and this "stone of the heart" - of fixed thoughts and feelings - is surely close cousin to the condition of the "sick children" of the rationalist modern world of "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", and of the "logic-choppers" that "rule the town" in "Tom O'Roughley".

What seems to underlie all these formulations is the thought that was given its complete expression near the end of Yeats's work in "The Gyres": "Things thought too long can be no longer thought,/ For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth".[113] So, no matter how worthy and beautiful and beloved our ideas may be, we can only contemplate them for just so long before the mind itself must "change its theme" as a matter of internal necessity, and must move on to new embodiments of truth: which is a truth that is itself clearly embodied in the poem that closes the "Supernatural Songs" at the end of *A Full Moon in March*:

> Civilisation is hooped together, brought
> Under a rule, under the semblance of peace
> By manifold illusion; but man's life is thought,
> And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
> Ravening through century after century,
> Ravening, raging, and uprooting that he may come
> Into the desolation of reality:
> Egypt and Greece, good-bye, and good-bye Rome![114]

So against the impulse towards order and peace, which are built

up out of "manifold illusion" - out of human dreaming - goes the tragic counter-truth expressed in the recognition "but man's life is thought": and the thrust of the entire poem makes the words "life" and "thought" virtual synonyms for the idea of a questing and irresistible changingness being the deepest rhythm of human awareness.

And this is a thought that is obviously also germane to poems like "Lapis Lazuli" and "The Gyres": the thought that the human soul is so far from being the mere plaything of chance that even when things do fall apart, they do so primarily because that soul is itself off on another gyre, moving on another quest for new meaning, in which the only final determinant is that expressed by the mocking "What then?" of Plato's ghost[115]: the restless impulse that ensures that the human mind "cannot cease/ Ravening ... that (it) may come/ Into the desolation of reality".

Which is a thought that reflects another of the great and abiding realities of human experience that Yeats, from first to last, took into account in shaping his ideas about the nature of truly serviceable art. As he put it in the poem called "The Magi",[116]

> Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye,
> In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones
> Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky
> With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,
> And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,
> And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,
> Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,
> The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.

So even those who have journeyed far in the enshrinement of the greatest of ideas are left eternally "unsatisfied" - even by the very image that at last rounds that idea into its final statement. They are left longing for "The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor" - paradoxical and beyond clear comprehension - that was the origin of the truth that the "Calvary" of fulfilment finally completed and revealed in humanly-graspable terms. In other words, it is the "mystery" that begins the gyre that human thought hungers for, finally, and not the achieved structure in which that gyre ends - which is an idea that Yeats of course takes up and elaborates in "The Gyres", too, where we see him no longer sighing "For painted forms or boxes of make-up/ In ancient tombs", because "Rocky Face" - the great controlling mystery at the heart of all human aspiration and awareness - is what has come to matter to him now, more than any of the crafted things in which this mystery has been historically embodied.[117]

So at least part of what we are seeing at work in "The Magi" is Yeats's sense of the inherent, flowing unfinishedness of the truest human thought. Those magi, with "their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones" seem to represent more than just the personages of a particular drama - their being "at all times" in Yeats's "mind's eye" suggests a greater universality than this - and seem to stand for some eternal aspect of human aspiration and experience: for the forever "unsatisfied" search for meaning, in

fact. And the truth Yeats seems to be recognising in this poem also has its obvious corollary in the impact which such a recognition would have upon his thought about the art that can best serve such an eternally "unsatisfied" human spirit. Such a fact about human awareness - its inability to ever achieve more than temporarily-satisfying embodiments of its most significant and urgent meanings - would demand that the most serviceable art should act towards inspiring a radical freedom in its recipients' minds: should act towards encouraging the reflexive avoidance of any fixity of conception.[118] What such an art would aim at, in fact, would tend to be to foster a frame of mind very like that Yeats prayed his daughter might enjoy:

> May she become a flourishing hidden tree
> That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,
> And have no business but dispensing round
> Their magnanimities of sound,
> Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
> Nor but in merriment a quarrel.[119]

Such "business" of the mind - that might seem to some a mere privileged irresponsibility - is actually, for Yeats, an expression of a mood in which the most basic quality of the human mind itself is properly understood and embodied in action: the "merriment" Yeats sees as ideally beginning every embracement or revulsion of thought being a recognition of our need to play with all ideas, lest ideas become "stone(s)/ To trouble the living stream" of energies to which human thought can only transiently give form.[120]

And so this capacity for change of mind, for thought that is always in flow, in response to the flow of being Yeats typifies in "Easter, 1916", is something he himself takes as his theme in many poems.

The one called "Paudeen", for instance, begins by dramatising a misty indignation that had trapped Yeats's mind till he "stumbled blind/ Among the stones and thorn-trees, under morning light". But the poem then shows an almost-miraculous change of mind that burns-off this mist under the light of the vision that comes to Yeats of the soul's intrinsic worth, beyond all error and public contention, "on that lonely height where all are in God's eye".[121] Impressive as is the vision itself, what is also striking about the poem is the "zig-zag" openness of heart and mind to new and radical insight that it dramatises: an openness that allows Yeats to achieve a vital atonement with those who are immediate enemies to his dreams for his country; and an openness that delivers him from the blindness of his own bitter understanding of the source of one of Ireland's pressing troubles, the contentious obtuseness and philistinism he had found amongst her own people.[122]

And from this slant on the poem's meaning, what "Paudeen" shows us is a flash of revelation, that brings with it a type of redemption - a delivery from an all-too experienced bitterness into a newly-innocent faith and charity. Even more concretely, we

are given an image of a mind that is obviously both passionately intense in its judgements and remarkably able to let even its most persistently vivid attitudes "vanish on the instant if the mind but change its theme".[123]

So, what we find in "Paudeen" is a good example of what Tom O'Roughley means in defining wisdom as being the "zig-zag" susceptibility of the butterfly to new impulses of meaning. In his blind indignation at the Paudeens who have scotched his dreams for Ireland's spirit,[124] Yeats has become momentarily like a "gloomy bird of prey": trapped into a fixity of mind by the very energy of his own current insight. In this view, the wisdom embodied in "Paudeen" doesn't lie so much in the humility and charity of the "sweet crystalline" vision - the vision that melts Yeats's antipathy as the poem unfolds - as in his capacity for taking the curlew's cry for what it is: a signal from some greater imaginative awareness that stands ready to transfigure the mind's settled landscape into a new and liberating "radical innocence" of outlook.[125] It is the same sort of wisdom that is there in the way a glorious winter sunset can so authoritatively command a specific imaginative mood in Yeats, in "At Algeciras, a Meditation upon Death":

> Greater glory in the sun,
> An evening chill upon the air,
> Bid imagination run
> Much on the Great Questioner;
> What He can question, what if questioned I
> Can with a fitting confidence reply.[126]

As with the sensitivity he shows to the crying of the curlews in "Paudeen", the openness Yeats here exhibits to the suggestiveness of the evening - his alertness to the imaginative promptings its mood inflicts on him - allows the chill glory of the moment to become a complex intimation of some of the last things of all human experience, as they focus in the questions raised by what waits beyond death. One of the things that is exciting about the poem is the gap it bridges between the materials with which it begins, and the region of insight to which it progresses. The very imaginativeness of the poem, in other words, is a part of its range of meanings; and this imaginativeness is itself a quickness to respond to new impulses of meaning rapidly developing within a given situation - which is a sign in Yeats of Tom O'Roughley's sort of "wisdom", too.

And it is again exactly this sort of "zig-zag" responsiveness to the emergent meanings embodied in each new moment that seems near the centre of the enigmatic last poem of all, "The Black Tower",[127] in which the garrison of the tower seem to have fallen into a mental trap by having become as fixed as they are in the ways in which they enact their loyalty to their shadowy, vanished "king". They are "oath-bound men", who stand in firm and gloomy fealty to their "own right king" - who becomes, at least in part, an image of a vital human truth that some new fashion in thinking has denied.[128] But these men are themselves quick to scorn "The Tower's old cook" whose limber

skill feeds them, when he "swears that he hears the king's great horn" up in the hills at dawn, while the rest of the garrison still "lie stretched in slumber", certain that only their sustained service, maintained in the old form, could someday reveal once again the king of their beloved truth.

For all the sympathy with which Yeats treats these men in their firmness of faith, the figure of the spry old cook moves behind their spokesman's words as a reminder that these waiting soldiers are caught in the web of a faded truth, and are trapped in the unconscious idolatry of mistaking the revealed form for the essence from which that form first arose. Without going too much into a dimension of Yeats's thought that will require fuller treatment later,[129] these "oath-bound men" are themselves sighing "for painted forms or boxes of make-up/ In ancient tombs";[130] and their gloomy fixity of thought actually prevents their hearing the trumpet in the dawn that symbolises the annunciation of the newly-embodied form of the very meaning that they are trying to serve. As they affirm their loyalty to their "king", in the second stanza of the poem, the refrain that picks-up the suggestions of this stanza shows "faint moonlight" beginning to illumine the "Old bones" that haunt the mountain tomb up above the windy shore. But when the old cook's announcement of "the king's great horn" is scorned, in the final stanza, its refrain shows that "the tomb grows blacker": as if the glimmer of their imaginative understanding is fading, as the

garrison turn away from the new form of truth - striding as it does the morning mountain-tops, and acting outside the dark tower of their settled expectations.

Like those we have heard Tom O'Roughley name, who have all "marked a distant object down", and have each become like "a gloomy bird of prey", "the men of the old black tower" have missed one of "the surges passing by" that Tom's wisdom lets him see: a "surge" of new meaning, taking its typically unexpected shape to the eyes of men.

Which is a perspective on human truth that reminds us that every insight is, for Yeats, a temporary and provisional construct, the very aptness and immediate validity of which ensures its necessary demise as a conceptual implement - which is a recognition that, as we have seen, forms one of the poles of energy in "The Gyres". It is a perspective that centres in the notion of the essential hiddenness of truth;[131] in the view that every formulation of truth can be always only an incomplete image, a mere glimpse of something that remains beyond clear vision.[132] In these terms, truth is like that "gleam in a troubled mirror" that is what we have seen Yeats calling the vision of the soul in "its state" that is achieved when "Some moralist or mythological poet/ Compares the solitary soul to a swan".[133]

This is a thought we also see developed in "The Leaders of the Crowd":

> They must to keep their certainty accuse
> All that is different of a base intent;
> Pull down established honour; hawk for news
> Whatever their loose fantasy invent
> And murmur it with bated breath, as though
> The abounding gutter had been Helicon
> Or calumny a song. How can they know
> Truth flourishes where the student's lamp has shone,
> And there alone, that have no solitude?
> So the crowd come they care not what may come.
> So they have loud music, hope every day renewed
> And heartier loves; that lamp is from the tomb.[134]

Against the would-be brash and self-seeking edifice that he sees the demagogue hawking as truth, Yeats sets the sort of "Truth" that grows only in the light of curious[135] labour. What these leaders of a certain level of public opinion represent in Yeats's thinking[136] is the illusion that truth or reality is a commodity readily available to cursory consumption - as this illusion is exploited by those who want followers, whatever the cost. Near the end of his work, in the choric image given in "Long Legged Fly", Yeats implicitly returned to this tension between what *he* could call "Truth" and the confusions that stir about its peripheries. In this poem, Yeats shows how - in moments of great discovery - "the mind moves upon silence" and mystery, and meaning arises out of what at first sight might seem just blankness and vacancy:

> That girls at puberty may find
> The first Adam in their thought,
> Shut the door to the Pope's chapel,
> Keep those children out.
> There on that scaffolding reclines
> Michael Angelo.

With no more sound than the mice make
His hand moves to and fro.
Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
His mind moves upon silence.[137]

This is a fact that is also recognised in the little poem called "A Meditation in Time of War", from Yeats's forty-fifth year:

For one throb of the artery,
While on that old grey stone I sat
Under the old wind-broken tree,
I knew that One is animate,
Mankind inanimate fantasy.[138]

A truth of profound significance is known with full immediacy for just one heart-beat, and is then flown and gone, leaving only a memory behind: which seems to be the central insight contained in Tom O'Roughley's butterfly of wisdom, as an image of the nature of human truth. What else but an alert and quickly changeable impulsiveness of mind could alight on a "throb of the artery" of truth, and be able to know so clearly both that truth's form and the eternal brevity of all revelation? The mind reflected in "A Meditation in Time of War" is highly competent at kissing the truth as it flies, without falling into the Hell in heaven's despite of what happens when Tom O'Roughley's "gloomy bird of prey" takes some perceived actuality as a final and enduring fact to be kept in mind as an immutable image. As we have seen, even an intuition as true and profound as the "moralist or mythological" perception of the solitary soul as a swan was, for Yeats, just a "brief gleam" in the mind's "troubled mirror". How much more so are the more ordinary flickers of our thought?

So, when we try to consider Yeats's poems as being themselves "Befitting emblems" of the many truths about human experience that he himself caught gleams of in his time, then we should perhaps see - as part of the meaning of works like "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" and "The Man and the Echo" - just how effective they are in holding a mirror to precisely the sort of "zig-zag" freedom and flexibility of thought (and of thought's impelling desire) that Yeats believed to be necessary if the mind is to escape the imprisoning black towers that "things thought too long" can become. Blent with the other insights that these poems offer is their dramatisation of Yeats's own capacity for a quick-witted receptiveness to new and unexpected influxes of meaning; and the value of these dramatisations lies in the clarity with which they show the perennial danger that a "gloomy" entrapment by fixed ideas can pose. The "sick" restlessness of the modern mind that is depicted in "The Song of the happy Shepherd" and the staunch idolatry of the "oath-bound men" in "The Black Tower" are both shown to be products of the human readiness to enshrine - and to confer notions of permanence upon - ideas and emotions that really change not only "minute by minute", but sometimes even from one "throb of the artery" to the next.[139]

For, in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul", what seems to be more important - from our present tangent, at least - than the substance of Yeats's thoughts and feelings, is their tendency,

their direction. Not only is there the dialectic of voice and counter-voice - impulse and its organic contrary - that act to form the main pattern of the poem: there is also the unexpected change of gyre that takes place within the aspirations of the one voice or impulse itself, at the end of the first section, just before the Self begins its concluding monologue. After having apparently held its own against the claims of "the imagination of a man/ Long past his prime", the Soul completes its image of its own greatest dream:

> Such fullness in that quarter overflows
> And falls into the basin of the mind
> That man is stricken deaf and dumb and blind,
> For intellect no longer knows
> *Is* from the *Ought*, or *Knower* from the *Known* -
> That is to say, ascends to Heaven;
> Only the dead can be forgiven;
> But when I think of that my tongue's a stone.[140]

And, from this point on in the poem, the "tongue" that remains able to speak is that of the Self, that is prepared to throw away all such spiritual "fullness" and forgiven-ness for the "sweetness (that) flows into the breast" when Self can honestly forgive Self, and can thus "cast out remorse" in honourable atonement for what the Soul has called "the crime of death and birth" - no matter how temporary the atonement and its peace.

And we should realise that the main reason that the Self has things all its own way, at the end, is that the Soul itself is "stricken ... dumb", finally, by the prospect of the very ascent "to Heaven" that it has been urging upon the Self. In developing and articulating its vision of its dream to the Self, the Soul -

unexpectedly enough - finds its "tongue's a stone": finds the austerity and remoteness from ordinary life of the transcendence it desires suddenly chilling. At the most unexpected moment, in other words, the vision of the "fullness" that the Soul seeks for itself seems to shift ground - as if not even the Soul, so long as it is still incarnate, can unshakenly hold even the greatest of its truths in one steady light of meaning. We are left again with an image of even the highest human thought as a changing stream of unfinished glimpses, with even its most ideal imaginings leading to the sort of instability that is embodied in the Soul's reaching an almost simultaneous articulation of and seeming revulsion from its own purest aspiration.

And even the indications that "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" offers of the Self's being able sometimes to honourably "forgive" itself its own history - and thereby, for a while, to "cast out remorse"[141] - is surely yet another glimpse of Tom O'Roughley's butterfly of wisdom: the Self's capacity for being able to "forgive" itself constituting an image of an escape from "a gloomy bird of prey" that - in this instance - would try to absolutise in guilt some "event in action or in thought" and make another sort of black tower of it, binding the mind to a fixed thought. Both the image of human experience as a "fecund ditch" of perpetual "folly" - or of spiritual mutability - and the dramatisation Yeats offers of his own strategy of atonement for his immersion in that "ditch", confirm in fact a conviction

implicit in the whole grand system of Yeats's Gyres and Phases of the Moon: the conviction that human awareness must forever function within an order of things in which "the very owls in circles move",[142] and in which thought must be a butterfly on a breeze of psychic events that sail in varied and changing shapes out of perfection.

Given all this, Yeats would obviously have been led to praise and practice an art that set itself to help the butterfly evade the hawk of "the mind alone":[143] which leads us back to his calling upon "Irish Poets" to

> Cast your mind on other days
> That we in coming days may be
> Still the indomitable Irishry.[144]

Whatever else we may see in Yeats's thought about those days of the present that "other days" and "coming days" - past and future - bracket (such as his sense of their being shadowed by Locke's dream and by the nightmare of a growing social anarchy) he sees that the "sick children" of the modern world are in danger of being persuaded that the present is all that there is of reality. The songs of "other days" he invokes as antidote would offer reminder of other times and other ways, and help show what is currently in mind to be provisional and passing - one of the gleams in the mind's troubled mirror that is all that can be known of human truth.[145] The "actors lacking music" that raise the "spleen" of Yeats's ancient warrior in "Under the Old Stone Cross" would be likely, for Yeats, to reinforce a modern

audience's impression that the narrowly - absurdly - "human" images of life that the realist theatre offers them constitute absolute and final versions of the truth - and not a few among the many images of it that could be hung before the mind. Realism, in other words, would be a danger for Yeats simply in being so entrenchedly in fashion, and by being therefore a circumscription of its audience's sense of the endless running-on of the gyres.[146] As such, we could imagine Yeats's thought quite naturally leading him to challenge such a dominant image of things, lest that image come to be thought of as the only possible tack of the butterfly's flight.[147]

Notes to Chapter 3.

1. *C.P.* pp 388 - 89.

2. The "Helen" of the poem, for instance, was Maude Gonne, whom Yeats saw as abusing her own true nature - as living out of character with the "cradle" she was truly born to "fill" (see stanza 1, Section IV, "Under Ben Bulben", *C.P. pg 399*) and thus creating for herself - and for Yeats himself - a spiritual tragedy that no immediate social or political good gained thereby for others could ameliorate.

3. See *C.P* pg 358.

4. As Maeve Good puts it,

> In Yeats's view ... tragedy is not a choice but a necessity; it is his explanation of the world (*W.B. Yeats and the Creation of a Tragic Universe*, pg 138);

and

> Yeats's system (in *A Vision*) provides a framework or world-picture in which tragedy is inevitable, is an expression of reality itself (*ibid.* pg 62).

That "framework" to which she refers could well be the "lighted screen" in which the tragedy of all lives shows in "Why should not Old Men be Mad"; and her views generally suit well with what K.G.W. Cross says in his "'He Too was in Arcadia': Yeats and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall":

> As Yeats makes clear, men did not set to mourning for what the Fates had either bestowed or deprived, for "such mourning believes that life might be happy were it different, and is therefore the less mourning". Men mourned "because they had been born and must die with their great thirst unslaked" (*A. Norman Jeffares and K.G.W. Cross, eds. In Excited Reverie*, pg 75, citing *Essays and introductions*, pg 182).

The great "mourning" that is so much more primal than our "the less mourning" against the dispositions of "Fate" is the "great thirst" we are born with, and that life can never "slake" - simply the tissue from which all life's experience is made.

5. See "Crazy Jane on the Mountain", ll 5 - 6, *C.P* pg 390.

6. See "Politics", *C.P.* pg 392.

7. See "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", Section III, stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 235. (See also "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931", *C.P.* pp 275 - 76, with its last stanza about the choice he and others of the "last romantics" made to write of "whatever most can bless/ The mind of man".)

8. See *C.P.* pg 283. (Section III of the poem.)

9. See section II, stanza 3: *C.P.* pg 227.

10. See his typification of the individual mind in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", stanza 2, Section III

A man in his own secret meditation
Is lost amid the labyrinth he has made
In art or politics (*C.P.* pg 235.)

11. See Section II, stanza 3, "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (*C.P.* pg 392); "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea" (*C.P.* pp 37 - 40); the Fool's commentary on Cuchulain's "fighting the waves" at the end of On Baile's Strand (*The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, pp 277 - 78); and Emer's account of Cuchulain's end in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (*ibid.* pg 284).

12. Yeats says in *A Vision* that in his terms "Fate and Necessity" are "that which comes from without", while "Destiny (is) what comes to us from within": see pg 86.

13. *C.P.* pg 264. (See discussion above.)

14. See stanza 2, *C.P.* pg 217.

15. See "After Long Silence", *C.P.* pg 301:

Speech after long silence; it is right,
All other lovers being estranged or dead,
Unfriendly lamplight hid under its shade,
The curtains drawn upon unfriendly night,
That we descant and yet again descant
Upon the supreme theme of Art and Song:
Bodily decrepitude is wisdom; young
We loved each other and were ignorant.

The "wisdom" embodied in the use of "shade" and "curtain" to hide "Unfriendly lamplight" and "unfriendly night" from the forefront of the moment are themselves deft touches of the art their "wisdom" has taught them in keeping "bodily decrepitude" in its place - the "wisdom" they never needed before lamplight might show the ravages of age and night might speak too loudly of the grave. As such, these devices are fine examples of the sort of setting of art in deliberate resistance to the attrition of fate that we are discussing as a feature to Yeats's "wisdom" as a poet.

16. *C.P.* pg 391.

17. Yeats uses similar devices in "Sailing to Byzantium" and "The Man and the Echo", where again statements are challenged before they can settle into fixity. Yeats will admit that

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick,

only to immediately qualify the statement and break its grip:

... unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress (*C.P.* pg 217);
and he will hear the voice of the *Echo* that is a tempter and prompter within himself say "Lie down and die" - in response to his formulation of his "Sleepless" questionings "night after night" of how well he has met his life's responsibilities - and immediately finish the half-line with a rebuke:

That were to shirk
The spiritual intellect's great work,
And shirk it in vain (*C.P.* pp 393 - 94);

and the bent of character that shows in such moments is part of the attitude towards circumstances that help form the aesthetic stance.

18. See "Vacillation", section VII: "What, be a singer born and lack a theme?" (*C.P.* pg 285) and "Meru", l 7, *C.P.* pg 333.

19. See *C.P.* pp 218 - 19.

20. See "The Tower", section III, last stanza: *C.P.* pg 224.

21. See "Spring and Fall: *to a young child*", *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, pg 50.

22. See Chapter 2.

23. See section III, *C.P.* pp 222 - 25.

24. See *C.P.* pg 217.

25. This is far from being just egotism, or a bit of purely individualistic monadism: the only cure for fate's ills that Yeats knows is to "sing", and the only "singing-school" is "studying/ Monuments of (the human soul's) magnificence": by developing, in other words, a self that is ever-more highly attuned to the greater spiritual potentials that have been established in common human possession by our being able to gain access to records of other people's integrity and wisdom. (The process of which Yeats speaks would be, in fact, the achievement of an impersonality that is a pure social construct - a kinning with a fellowship of skilled and wise survivors who have gone the common human way before.)

26. See *C.P.* pg 218.

27. When we realise that the "aged man" of "Sailing to Byzantium" leaves the land of the young perforce, and not by choice, then Jeffare's saying that his "choice of the artificial bird" - the bird of the Byzantine goldsmiths - as his bodily shape

seems almost due to a hatred of the human animal's
limited scope, its lack of the spiritual quality
that Byzantium can offer (*W.B. Yeats*, pg 42)

seems too strong: while the contrast Jeffares notes

> between natural birds of the first stanza and the artificial bird of the last

puts its finger on an important dramatic tension, we should perhaps register that between these two emblematic poles of the persona's life - the natural creature he was when he was still young, and the image to be crafted in "the artifice of eternity" once the life is done - is what he is: a scarecrow, a withered tree from which the birds of youthfulness have already fled, leaving him the terribly simple choice of becoming a golden bird or becoming ever more a scarecrow.

28. See *C.P.* pg 223.

29. As Jung says - in discussing the problem of the residues of the "rationalistic point of view" that "is satisfying to the man of the eighteenth century" and that still survives as an anachronism within the twentieth (a problem we have seen Yeats himself confronting in chapters above) -

> To the man of the twentieth century (the psychological standpoint) is a matter of the highest importance and the very foundation of his reality, because he has recognised once and for all that without an observer there is no world and consequently no truth, for there would be nobody to register it (*Psychology and Religion: West and East*, pg 309);

and adds - in a later essay on *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* - that

> Psychic existence is the only category of existence of which we have *immediate* knowledge, since nothing can be known unless it first appears as a psychic image. Only psychic existence is immediately verifiable. To the extent that the world does not assume the form of a psychic image, it is virtually non-existent. This is a fact which, with few exceptions - as for instance Schopenhauer's philosophy - the West has not yet fully realised (*ibid.* pp 480 -81).

So Yeats's "faith" would seem to stand on firmer ground than the mystic individualism it might seem to some. Ellmann calls it "subjectivism", and says

> Humanism rushes to the point of solipsism; rather than concede anything to the opposition, it erects man as not only the measure but also the creator of all things (*The Identity of Yeats*, pg 225);

but the ground Yeats stands on is far more sober than that. If - as Jung as a scientist has to admit - "nothing can be known unless it first appears as a psychic image" because "Psychic existence is the only category of existence of which we have immediate knowledge", then to assume that what we can know of "sun and moon and star, all" due to the imaging capacities of our specific human psyche -

man's "bitter soul" - is exactly coincident with whatever such things are beyond the grasp we can get on them is actually vastly presumptuous; is an arrogance in itself. Yeats's vision of the immediately psychic nature of our knowledge of "all" there is to our experience is actually startlingly ahead of its times: the second of our quotes from Jung comes from 1939, but the first from 1952, and Yeats was writing in 1925 - which makes him even more signally one of those "few exceptions" who have "fully realised" the vital "fact" that "Only psychic existence is immediately verifiable". For Yeats to be affirming the creative nature of human consciousness so as to strengthen the dignity with which he - and we - can face the tragic circumstances of existence would seem then to be the offering of a shrewd bit of scientific insight (he was, of course, a psychic researcher himself of no mean order) and not a "romantic" and wilful evasion of the ways of the "real" world Ellmann assumes he is "rush(ing)" by in impatience, if not in fear. Yeats is affirming the vital fact that a being who is the key factor in constituting "all" the reality he can know can never be a simple victim of circumstances, and his "faith" is an exceptionally well-grounded one - even if it is also so exceptionally modern that not many of his contemporaries would have known how to take it.

30. We could recall again here Yeats's saying:

> behind the momentary self, which acts and lives in the world, and is subject to the judgement of the world, there is that which cannot be called before any mortal judgement seat (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 102).

31. See *C.P.* pg 222.

32. See *C.P.* pp 224 - 25.

33. See "The Fisherman", *C.P.* pp 166 - 67, and the discussion of it in the Introduction above.

When we recall that Yeats wanted to write his fisherman "one/ Poem maybe as cold/ And passionate as the dawn", we could think of his saying that "imagination ... must be carried beyond feeling into the aboriginal ice" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 523), and of his also saying - in a letter from July, 1935 to Dorothy Wellesley - that

> The lasting expression of our time is ... in a sense of something steel-like and cold within the will, something passionate and cold (*Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, pg 7).

Those he would have called his spiritual heirs - his true audience - would be those who could be led by "imagination" into "the aboriginal ice" that lies beyond any obvious human "feeling", so as to discover that "something steel-like and cold within the will" that was yet a part of the "passionate" ground of the deepest self.

It is obvious from a poem like "The Tower" that part of what Yeats sought to achieve in his verse was to help lead his readers' "imagination" towards the strength of that "something passionate and cold" that could bring its "steel" into their facing of the tomb - and of the inescapable tragedy that lies this side of it, as well.

34. See Yeats's wonderful image (in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen": see *C.P.* section III, stanza 1, pp 234 - 5.) of the swan that is symbolic of "the solitary soul" in its "pride" of "state":

Some moralist or mythological poet
Compares the solitary soul to a swan;
I am satisfied with that,
Satisfied if a troubled mirror show it,
Before that brief gleam of its life be gone,
An image of its state;
The wings half spread for flight,
The breast thrust out in pride
Whether to play, or to ride
Those winds that clamour of approaching night.

The bird that is poised, "breast thrust out in pride" before "play" or the "clamour" of impending doom alike, is a superb epitome of the spirit Yeats desired to be capable of maintaining himself, and that he wished in "The Tower" his heirs might "inherit".

35. See the second to last stanza, *C.P.* pg 213 - 14.

36. See Section IV, stanza 3, *C.P.* pp 399 - 400.

37. See *C.P.* pg 264.

38. See "Vacillation" Section III, *C.P.* pg 283:

No longer in Lethean foliage caught
Begin the preparation for your death
And from the fortieth winter by that thought
Test every work of intellect or faith,
And everything that your own hands have wrought,
And call those works extravagance of breath
That are not suited for such men as come
Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb.

39. See *C.P.* pg 234: The "mirror" in which Yeats sees "Some moralist or mythological poet" has reflected "the solitary soul" as "a swan" is "a troubled mirror"; and the suggestion is that even the "moralist" or "mythological" intuition is just a "brief gleam" in the mind's awareness of itself, "troubled" as that mind always is by the "winds" of fate and circumstance.

40. See the discussion of "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" in the Introduction above.

41. See *Autobiographies*, pg 6.

42. See *C.P.* pg 9.

43. Though the whole point of the poem "High Talk" is that elevation of manner in verse is designed to meet very natural human needs: without "Daddy-long-legs upon his timber toes", children would lack what they most "demand" of the "shows" that enliven their days; and "women in the upper stories" would miss the "face at the pane" they need to pluck their thoughts away from the "old heels" they "patch" in everyday life.

44. See "To Some I Have Talked With by the Fire", *C.P.* pg 56.
This poem appeared in May 1895, ten years after "The Sad Shepherd" was written; but its thought is prefigured in one of the sections of *The Celtic Twilight*, that appeared in 1893 - and that bears no dating of subsequent revision - in which Yeats talks about "those beings or bodiless moods, or whatever they be, who inhabit the world of spirits" (see *Mythologies*, pg 104). There is also the formulation, in the little essay on Father Christian Rosencrux - which is dated 1895 - which says that "the great passions are angels of God", who "labour" at times "for the ending of man's peace and prosperity" within us (see *Essays and Introductions*, pg 197). (Yeats's sense of the self as containing a complex of personae and as being a meeting-ground for strange, intangible "beings" is discussed more fully towards the end of the note on Phillip Larkin offered in Chapter 5 below.)

45. At least, from beyond the awarenesses Yeats typified as being of "the mind alone" - as distinct from what may be thought "in a marrow-bone": see "A Prayer for Old Age", *C.P.* pg 326.

46. *C.P.* pp 25 - 7.

47. *C.P.* pg 23.
The control of rhythm in these lines - particularly the complexity with which pace is poised and quickened and slowed at times almost syllable by syllable - makes the feeling carried by the refrain both vivid and constrained: if any proof is needed that Yeats is dramatising a genuine emotion for its own sake - and not being either sentimentally self-indulgent or falsely clever - then this is it. It is impossible to produce the impression of dignified and strong feeling in any medium without that feeling being a profound reality to oneself - even if it is only Mark Antony's absolute certainty that the emotions he is faking (or at least orchestrating) in his funeral oration exist in themselves as potent realities within human experience.
In other words, even if one were for some reason to decide that Yeats must be trying after something actually out of his own personal range in this poem - a very young man taking on himself the guise of the sorrow that old age brings: Keith Sagar, for one, might find such a position necessary - it still could not

invalidate my point that he has absolutely no doubt that such sorrow exists in its full power as a human reality: it must be a solid fact of his conception of life, which is all I need to establish right now.

48. *C.P.* pg 91.

49. *C.P.* pg 67.

50. *C.P.* pg 52.

51. "The Cloak, the Boat and the Shoes", *C.P.* pg 10.

52. See *C.P.* pg 385, as referred to above.

53. There is, of course, Yeats's awareness that his generation "had been taught to sympathise with the unhappy until we had grown morbid" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 55), but the ring of the "sympathis(ing)" that is there in the poems to which we are referring is undeniably sincere; and while the "unhappiness" and "misery" that Yeats recalls from earliest memories might have had "no reason" he could identify among the obvious conditions of his childhood (*Autobiographies*, pg 6), it is certainly a condition of his sensibility: one that the conviction expressed in "The Wild Old Wicked Man" (*C.P.* pg 358) that even the "child hid in the womb" lives "in suffering" shows to have been a central and enduring thread in Yeats's experience. As he says in rounding off the first Section of the *Reveries*,

> I have grown happier with every year of life as
> though gradually conquering something in myself,
> for certainly my miseries were not made by others
> but were part of my own mind (*Autobiographies*, pg 13);

and whatever that "something in myself" was - beyond all "miseries" that "others" could make for him - it certainly helped give Yeats an eye for human suffering as it objectively existed.

54. There is a sense in which Yeats celebrates sorrow as a sign of more than ordinary powers of awareness, and thus as a human capacity to be brought to proper attention for his audience: see *The Celtic Twilight*, where he says at one point that those who are taken by the Sidhe are

> in the bloodless land of Faery; happy, the story has
> it, but doomed to meet the Last Judgement like a bright
> vapour, for the soul cannot live without sorrow
> (see *Mythologies*, pp 70 - 1)

- a doctrine which is close to that which is quietly at work in "The Stolen Child".

Yeats also talks in *The Celtic Twilight* of "the visionary melancholy of purely instinctive natures and of all animals" (*ibid.* pg 5): the suggestion is, that whatever arises straight from the "instinctive" source, before reason, is essentially sorrowful; but

he also says -in the same sentence - that this "melancholy" is "wellnigh a portion of (the) joy" of the

> eyes (swift as the eyes of a rabbit, when they peered
> out of their wrinkled holes)

that he is evoking in this typification of "melancholy" as a bedrock human fact. The Heracleitian bedmates he wed in the "tragic joy" of the *Last Poems* are obviously already courting in his mind - which is another sign of the remarkable integrity of Yeats's thought, from first to last.

55. The imagery looks forward to that of "Adam's Curse":

> ..."A line will take us hours maybe;
> Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
> Our stitching and unstitching has been naught"
> (*C.P.* pg 88).

56. See Section IV, "Under Ben Bulben", *C.P.* pg 399.

57. See "Sailing to Byzantium", stanza III, *C.P.* pg 217 - 18.

58. We might recall here Red Hanrahan's faith:

> If there is any sorrow on you it is I myself
> should be well able to serve you ... for it
> is I know the history of the Greeks, and I know
> well what sorrow is and parting, and the hardship
> of the world. And if I am not able to save you
> from trouble ... there is many a one I have saved
> from it with the power that is in my songs, as it
> was in the songs of the poets that were before me
> from the beginning of the world (*Mythologies*, pp
> 239 - 40.)

59. *C.P.* pp 346 - 47.

60. Though Yeats means primarily the tatters of aging at this point in "Sailing to Byzantium", the image readily becomes one of the general afflictions the spirit suffers at the hands of fate. It is interesting to note how the lyric poet's chronicling of personal experience can become a sharing of strength, and not just an expression of selfhood for its own sake - setting it far from the mere "egoism" that J.B. Yeats thought it when Yeats was young: see *Autobiographies*, pg 127.

J.B.Y's criticism of lyric poetry - like that of many who see all lyrics as being "subjectivist" - actually misses the point that the lyric poet is really so sociable a being that he has to try to share even his most private and sometimes painful or embarrassing experiences with others, while the poet of public matters all too often is quite happy to let other people know only what he would like them to know about what he thinks about what is out in the streets anyway: so who is actually playing his cards closer to his chest - the lyricist, or the public man?

61. In "The Gyres", *C.P.* pg 337, and in the tragic gaiety of "Lapis Lazuli", pp 338 - 39.

62. See the discussion of these poems that is offered in Chapter 2 above.

63. See *C.P.* pg 337.

64. The fact that the destruction of Troy was predestined by the Olympians (see, for instance, Graves's recording of various traditions concerning this destiny in *The Greek Myths*, vol 2, pg 269 e) perhaps helps Yeats's theme along: the doom of Troy has over it the patterning of the inevitable working-out of the will of the gods - as the falling-apart of the "greater, more gracious time" that Yeats chronicles in "The Gyres" is also the working-out of a patterning at the heart of the gyres that govern human meaning.

65. See "Ancestral Houses", stanza 2, *C.P.* pg 225.

66. There is a sense in which the "tragic joy" of "The Gyres" is a twin condition of suffering, not just a product of its heroic conquest. The paradox, as stated in "Lapis Lazuli" - the next poem on in *C.P.* - is that "Hamlet and Lear are gay" at the end: as if this gaiety is something like that "joy" that comes "When a man grows old" and is in

> ... need of all that strength
> Because of the increasing Night
> That opens her mystery and fright

in "The Apparitions" (see *C.P.* pg 386). It is a "joy", in other words, that is providentially given to bear the sufferer through.

67. The term is an amalgam of "Things fall apart" and the view of the times Yeats ascribes to Maud Gonne in "A Bronze Head" (see *C.P.* pp 382 - 83), where he sees her looking out "On this foul world in its decline and fall".

68. See *C.P.* pp 393 - 95. It is interesting that Thomas R. Whitaker - in trying to typify what Yeats means by the rocky cleft in "*The Man and the Echo*" - should say

> The cleft of Alt is the abyss of the self where
> all things are called in question
> (*Swan and Shadow*, pg 297);

and should then return a few lines later to say

> That Man is on what Buber calls the "narrow ridge",
> being blessed and perplexed as he wrestles with his
> Daimon (*ibid.* pg 298):

The need to remake Yeats's "cleft" - surely a narrow and rocky fissure, a "place" where the Man is closely confined with the Echo, to whom he must say "What do we know but that we face/ One another in this place?', where the emphasis the line-end gives to "face" reinforces our sense of close encounter - into first an "abyss" and then a "narrow ridge" (the one a deep chasm or bottomless space,

and the other a place primarily characterised by a frightening spaciousness) seems to be an index of the difficulty Whitaker is having in getting hold of exactly what Yeats himself *is* struggling with here.

But it seems important to keep alert to there being something confined about the ground upon which the encounter between Man and Echo takes place: such a register helps reinforce the feeling of the ill restlessness that underlies the poem's thought having turned the Man's world into a type of prison of doubts and unresolved responsibilities; and it is also truer to the imaginative details Yeats takes care to provide: whatever else the "cleft of Alt" is, it is narrow and confining enough for the Man not to know whether the rabbit has been taken by "hawk or owl": he can't see the sky to tell if it is night or day outside - which helps maintain the sense of enclosure within the claustrophobia of his problem that the beginning of the poem establishes.

I raise this point simply as a reminder of how thoroughly Yeats works in concretely imagined terms even when dealing with the most complex inner tensions: set the Man in an abyss or on a ledge - instead of in a dark and narrow rocky cleft - and his dilemma takes on different nuances of atmosphere and of meaning. That cleft was "christened Alt" - was old even before its meaning was first addressed by the Christian mind; and such a narrow "cleft", in which thoughts of "that great night" Death come into such urgent focus, is also surely a premonitory image of the grave?

69. This is to emphasise the aspect to the Cuchulain myth that embodies the heroic resistance offered to the fate that - as we have seen - "the ungovernable sea" represents; Cuchulain in fact fights the sea under the spell of the Druids, whose "mystery" leads him to turn away from his clan the "raving" anger that Conchubar knows will follow the days of "dreadful disquietude" that fell upon him when he realised he had killed his own son (see the close to "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea", *C.P.* pg 40).

But my charter for directly linking Cuchulain with the notion of "tragic joy" comes from Yeats saying in a letter that - when he saw a production of *On Baile's Strand* more than thirty years after he had written it - Cuchulain "seemed to me a heroic figure because he was creative joy separated from fear" (see *Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, pg 184, and Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 913; this is the same letter in which Yeats noted the first version of what became the epitaph in "Under Ben Bulben", too: the notion of heroic poise in the face of fate was strong on him).

70. See "The Fisherman",stanza 2, *C.P.* pg 167, where this image seems to evoke a sense of Yeats's fisherman's closeness to the very well-spring of human meaning.

71. See "Tom O'Roughley", *C.P.* pg 158:

"Though logic-choppers rule the town,
And every man and maid and boy

Has marked a distant object down,
An aimless joy is a pure joy",
Or so did Tom O'Roughley say
That saw the surges running by,
"And wisdom is a butterfly
And not a gloomy bird of prey".

72. Though the deliberate practice of the sort of "ceremony" Yeats speaks of in this poem undeniably represents the active role the individual person must play in creating - and maintaining - the setting within which such "grace" may find a local habitation.

73. It will be clear by now that I find Bloom's rather sour dealings with the "tragic joy" of "The Gyres" unsatisfactory. Bloom says (*Yeats*, pg 435) that what makes the poem "extraordinarily expressive" is primarily "Yeats's disgust"; which misses the point of the internal refrain ("What matter?") - to say nothing of missing the tone of the poem - pretty well entirely. Bloom then goes on to say

> How seriously can the poem, or many of its companions, be read anyway? ... "Tragic joy" has been a much praised oxymoron among critics; presumably it must have an exper -iential meaning which is extra-aesthetic, unless it means that one feels only an aestheic reaction when "irrational streams of blood are staining earth", which is only possible in the abstract (*ibid.*).

Bloom also finds "the quality of the poem's joy disturbing", due to its being "coarser than the tragic joy of *The King's Threshold*" (*ibid.*).

All of which leaves one rather at a loss! As we have seen, the paradox - not "oxymoron" - of joy and tragic grief being rooted so close together was one that Yeats had discovered in direct experience as much as in Blake's and in Heraclitus' contraries. Crazy Jane knew - when old, and watching the young dancers - that these lovers "had all" there was of passionate love "who had their hate", and that "*Love is like the lion's tooth*" (*C.P.* pp 295 - 96); and the letter cited in note 74 below - from the month of the ending of "The Gyres" - shows that Yeats had found lasting proof of such an unexpected blend of extremes in the extremity of an encounter with what in "The Apparitions" he called "the increasing Night/ That opens her mystery and fright" (*C.P.* pg 387). Bloom's puzzling over whether or not this tragic joy - in all its being "coarser" than it was in the play, whatever that means - is more than "an aesthetic reaction"; over whether it has "an experiential meaning which is extra-aesthetic", shows that he doesn't know from personal experience what Yeats is talking about: which makes the almost brash confidence with which he deals with the doctrine presumptuous, if not impudent.

As Yeats has Crazy Jane tell the Bishop, "nothing can be sole or whole/ That has not been rent" (*C.P.* pg 295); Jack Kerouac derives "Beat" - as in "the Beat Generation", which some say he named - from the sort of conflation of "beat" as in "beaten" and "Beat" as

in "Beatitude" that happens to you when you hit the wall hard and often (this comes from *On the Road*): both formulations point in the direction of the very definite - and "extra-aesthetic" - "experiential meaning" possessed by the "tragic joy" of which "The Gyres" is speaking.

74. See *Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, pg 12.

There is, however, a letter from January, 1937 (the month in which Jeffares says Yeats finished "The Gyres; see *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg 435) that records an experience that shows that such a state of mind was no longer quite so "impossible (an) aim": one that speaks of

> Something (that) happened to me in the darkness some weeks ago ... I felt I was in an utter solitude ... I have come out of that darkness a man you have never known - more man of genius, more gay, more miserable (*ibid.* pg 123).

75. Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D' Urbervilles*, (Macmillan, 1957, rept. 1971) pg 323.

76. It is interesting that the youthful Yeats entertained the notion that "The wandering earth herself may be/ Only a sudden flaming word" ("The Song of the Happy Shepherd", *C.P.* pg 7). In "The Gyres", the Word that becomes flesh in human achievement is "Rejoice!".

77. *C.P.* pp 333 - 34.

78. *C.P.* pg 338.

79. See *C.P.* pg 232, and the discussion offered in Chapter 2 above.

80. He does, of course, speak in "Ancestral Houses" about "The abounding glittering jet", about life as a bright fountain of "self-delight": see *C.P.* pg 225.

81. It is worth noting that the sweetening branch would itself have been planted as part of someone's plan for "the little half-way house" - which is another implicit image within the poem of deliberate artifice brought to bear creatively upon the given conditions of experience.

82. We might recall here Yeats's recollection of how seeing Irving as Hamlet when he was "ten or twelve" led to the fact that

> For many years Hamlet was an image of heroic self-possession for the poses of youth and childhood to copy, a combatant of the battle within myself (*Autobiographies*, pg 58).

83. See "A Prayer for My Daughter", stanza 9, *C.P.* pg 214, where we have already seen Yeats praying his daughter may be granted strengths and blessings that would equip her so

She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
... be happy still.

84. There are many rock paintings in South Africa that share this manner: one in an overhang near Tendele Hutted Camp, in Royal Natal National Park, for instance, uses a swell in the surface of the stone to help suggest the moulding of an eland's jaw; two nicks in the rock - a Molteno sandstone - form the basis of the eye and the mouth. Looking at the piece - about three inches in length - it is difficult not to have an eerie feeling of the painter seeing his form potential in the surface, like the figures Michaelangelo saw waiting to be freed from the block!

85. See "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory", stanza IX, *C.P.* pp 150 - 51:

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
Wherein the gazing heart doubles her might.

6. *C.P.* pg 340.

7. See the Man's last speech, *C.P.* pg 394.

8. *C.P.* pp 386 - 87.

9. We could recall Yeats's anecdote about the night he and a riend - "both grown men" - became terrified by really allowing neir thoughts to dwell on "a little white moth in Burnham Beeches" see *Essays and Introductions*, pg 400): Yeats's point in telling his is how we can "talk() ourselves" into the most startling titudes, once we gather together and add our thoughts to each her; but the vivid suggestibility of imagination and the adiness to allow that imagination to assume control over the mind ows the openness to what thought could bring - whether or not "a n of sense" would agree - that was typical of him.

. See *C.P.* pg 400.

. Just as we have seen even "an old man's eagle mind" could be orgot" all too easily, without embodied reminders, in "An Acre of ass", *C.P.* pg 346.

. *C.P.* pg 250.

102. See Chapter 1 above.

There is also the letter from 1890 to Katherine Tynan, in which Yeats speaks of the extent to which his own interest in "magic and its fortunes" lies in its possibly being able to "prove the action of man's will, man's soul, outside his body" as a decisive blow against "materialism" (see *The Middle Years*, pg 62): he was trying to help prove that the "will" or "soul" was active beyond its physical confines and capable of affecting "real" circumstances even without recourse to mechanical intermediation - which is an indicator of just how essential to his vision the active and creative power of that will or soul always was.

103. To what we have already indicated of Yeats's thinking about Locke in chapters above, we could add Hone's comment that "Contempt for Locke is for him ... the beginning of knowledge" (see *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939*, pg 416).

104. See "Blood and the Moon", Section II, stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 268, where we have seen Yeats celebrating Berkeley's refutation of mechanist thinking and its trapping of the mind in "preposterous" fixities of conception.

105. See the last line of the poem, *C.P.* pg 8.

106. See again *C.P.* pg 8.

It's interesting to note how clearly the young Yeats had seen the key role of the astrophysicist in moulding modern thought: another sign of how far is his thought in the early poems from lacking an intellectual rigour and precision of its own.

107. We might bear in mind here the essay on Father Rosencrux we referred to in Chapter 2 above, and its speaking about the "external world" which modern illusions have made to seem "the sole test of reality": see *Essays and Introductions*, pg 197.

108. See C.P. pg 158.

109. The connection between rationalist abstraction and the more arid sort of idealism is obvious: Locke's dream kills the garden because it reduces the immediate and the present to a mere set of beginnings to serve a set of projected aims that are the only objects of value in the schema: the present is wasted by an idolatry that finds all meaning in the "distant" future.

110. See "A Prayer for My Daughter", *C.P.* pg 214, where the soul's "own sweet will is Heaven's will". "Tom O'Roughley" could be seen as an extension on Wordsworth's saying in "The Tables Turned"

> Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
> Our meddling intellect
> Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things: -
> We murder to dissect

- where the "beauteous forms of things" would obviously include (even begin with) those "forms" of meaning and of value that the imagination finds in our day to day circumstances.

111. It is perhaps worth noting that "trumpeter Michael" - calling the soul to waking - is the Talmudic Prometheus, who formed Adam from dust at the order of Jehova. (See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, vol. 1, pg 35, n. 3.) With his knowledge of the Kabbala, Yeats would possibly have known him in this guise: if he did, this would make Michael an image of the spiritual force that most primarily and immediately acts upon human awareness to "Bring the mind of man to God"; and Michael would as such become the primal type of the Yeatsian artist.

112. See *C.P.* pg 202.

113. See *C.P.* pg 337.

114. See "Meru", *C.P.* pg 333.
This could be compared with the much earlier poem called "The Coming of Wisdom with Time", *C.P.* pg 105; and we might also recall what we have heard Yeats saying about the passions being "angels of God", who sometimes labour "to end our peace" (see the essay on the Body of Father Christian Rosencrux, *Essays and Introductions*, pp 196 - 97): the implication here, too, is that our nature acts in terms of a vast and mysterious process that endlessly works out ends that are at times at odds with our conscious hopes and intentions; ends which include dismembering what we have found to be good and would wish to maintain - whether we would have it so or not.

115. See "What Then?", *C.P.* pp 347 - 48.

116. *C.P.* pg 141.

117. See *C.P.* pg 337.

118. The need to slip by any such mechanism of outlook obviously takes us back to Yeats's rejection of Newton and of Locke: even in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", the mechanical fixedness of the mind-set that the Enlightenment ushered in - and that now dominates the "sick children of the world" - is part of the problem under analysis: the "cracked tune that Chronos sings" is an image of such mechanical, unfree thought; and the death of "the woods of Arcady" and the unhappy death of the faun both symbolise living dimensions to human thought that have been excluded from the modern model of being and whose energies for the renewal of human thought have thus become suppressed. In the terms generated by "The Magi", these "sick children of the world" have come to believe there is nothing in the world but its Calvaries; and "the uncontrollable mystery" in which all "human truth" begins is entirely forgotten as the source of all new journeys after all stars other than the "whirling ...

ones that pass" in Newton's purely mechanical paradigm (see *C.P.* pp 7 - 8).

119. See "A Prayer for My Daughter", stanza 6, *C.P.* pg 213.

120. Yeats also speaks in "A Prayer for My Daughter" of the wish that she be brought "to a house/ Where all's accustomed, ceremonious" - which might seem to work against the argument being offered; but what he wants here is for his daughter's thought to be given a setting that keeps the mind itself free, because of that "house" being formed like one of those "Gardens where a soul's at ease" - and that make one think "heavens had opened" - that he mentions in talking about Quattrocento painting in "Under Ben Bulben" (see *C.P.* pg 399).

This flow of the stream of mind was obviously not the same thing for Yeats as mere restlessness: see the comment, in his Introduction to *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, that the Irish country folk

> have few events. They can turn over the incidents of a long life as they sit by the fire. With us nothing has time to gather meaning, and too many things are occurring for even a big heart to hold
> (*Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, pg 5.)

What Yeats wishes for his daughter seems to be a life in which things have "time to gather meaning" - which gathering is the essence of the flow of awareness of "Easter, 1916", as is made clear by the "stone" that fanaticism can make of "the heart" being seen as resulting from a state in which that heart has become fixed "with one purpose alone/ Through summer and winter": fixed beyond the "change" which is the natural flow onwards, "minute by minute", of the living attention.

121. See *C.P.* pg 122.

For insight into the register the name "Paudeen" had for Yeats, as type of the Dublin merchant class , see poems like "At the Abbey Theatre" (*C.P.* pg 107); "September, 1913" (*C.P.* pp 120 - 21); "To a Wealthy Man..." (*C.P.* pp 119 - 20); "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing" (*C.P.* pg 122); "To a Shade" (*C.P.* pg 123); and "On Those Who Hated 'The Playboy of the Western World', 1907" (*C.P.* pg 124). There is also the reference, at the end of "The Grey Rock", to

> the loud host before the sea,
> That think sword-strokes were better meant
> Than lover's music

- an obvious glance at the tastes of the Paudeens - with whom Yeats is "in no good repute" (*C.P.* pg 119). The tenor of things described in the opening to "The Fisherman" (*C.P.* pp 166 - 67) also has bearing here.

122. See the lines that trace the legacy of Ireland's troubles:

> Out of Ireland have we come.
> Great hatred, little room,

Maimed us at the start.
I carry from my mother's womb
A fanatic heart.
("Remorse for Intemperate Speech", *C.P.* pg 287.)

For all that "fanatic heart", "Paudeen" shows the saving grace of Yeats's own capacity for slipping-by the fixed views of those whose unshakable "purpose" made "a stone of the heart" out of that legacy.

123. See, of course, "Blood and the Moon", section II, *C.P.* pg 268.

Yeats's mood at the start of "Paudeen" is part of a long fight with Dublin over Synge's plays and Hugh Lane's pictures (for brief accounts of which, see Hone, *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939*, pp 216 - 19, and pp 264 - 68 respectively); which is why I call the initial perceptions of the Dublin mercantile class that the poem offers "persistently vivid attitudes": the Paudeens had cost Yeats and his dreams for Ireland dear for many a year.

124. See, in particular, the sense given in "To a Wealthy Man ..." of how the Paudeens had cost Ireland - in breaking Lane's plans for the pictures he wished to give to Dublin - some of "the right twigs for an eagle's nest" in which Ireland may "some day (have bred) the best" in the spirit of her youth; which is a vision of the public art gallery as a potentially Phidian public institution which is of course typical of Yeats's vision of art as shaper of the dreams - amatory and other - that qualify those who people tomorrow's streets.

125. In being such a signal, of course, the curlew is also acting-out the bird's archetypal role within the human mind of bringer of new awareness to the spirit: the role indicated above in the note given in the Introduction on the old cook of "The Black Tower".

It is also interesting to think of Yeats's intrinsic nobility of mind in dealing with his own enemies - a quality that shows in "Paudeen" - when we recall what he had to say about the behaviour of the Irish "middle class" which began its rise in the 1870's, and which - in his note in *C.P.* to the poems dealing with the Synge and Lane controversies - he said

made its first public display during the nine years
of the Parnellite split, showing how base at moments
of excitement are minds without culture (pg 530).

In what is undoubtedly a "moment of excitement" very much of the sort to which Yeats is referring in this note, he shows just how free he is himself of the sort of "base" and narrow rancour he sees as having typified the behaviour of "minds without culture" in the Irish 1890's - which helps give clearer insight into what Yeats means both by "culture" and by its lack.

Because what he means in this note by "culture" seems to be something that acts within the tendencies of the individual mind - and within the collective consciousness of a class or a people - so as to make that mind or consciousness more capable of the very sort

of openness to new vision that "Paudeen" takes for theme and that we are examining at this point in our discussion of Yeats's conception of the naturally stream-like flow of human consciousness. Yeats in "Paudeen" perfectly embodies an attitude of mind that is ready to accept even the most radically chastening changes of perspective, so long as the new vision is an overpowering truth; which means that the capacity for registering and vitally acknowledging new vision that is dramatised in this poem is actually a condition of profound liberty: of the freedom to escape from one's own existing conceptual constructs and prejudices as new experience or insight announces its altered perspectives. As such, it amounts to being a freedom from egotism and from egotistical fear. Yeats thought that "the average man is average because he has not attained to freedom" (*Explorations*, pg 168); and we find Paul Scott Stanfield saying that Yeats's

> belief in the aristocratic temperament ...(was based on) the freedom it enjoyed (*Yeats and Politics in the 1930's*, pp 44 - 5).

We could add to this B.L. Reid - in talking of the "passion" which he calls "a congenital property of temperament" in Yeats (*The Lyric of Tragedy*, pg 142) - drawing attention to Yeats's saying of Swift in a letter to Joseph Hone (Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 791) that

> There was something not himself that Swift served. He called it "freedom" but never defined it and thus has passion (cited in *The Lyric of Tragedy*, pg 141)

- which is a thought perhaps echoed in the formulation in the Introduction to *The Words Upon the Window Pane* of 1934 (which Hone calls "Yeats's Swift Play": see *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939* pg 415) in which Yeats says that for Swift

> Liberty depended upon a balance within the State, like that of the "humours" in a human body, or like that "unity of being" Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body, and for its sake Swift was prepared to sacrifice what seems to the modern man liberty itself (*Explorations*, pg 356).

So Yeats's objection to the Irish "middle class", and to its "base" behaviour - arising as he sees it from the activity of "minds without culture" - would probably have its root for him in what he would see as being the lack in such minds of the sort of "liberty" that he found to be so strong in Swift: from a lack of the "freedom" which Swift "never defined" - never contained within a fixed limitation of personal conception - but which he "served" in "passion": a freedom which is different from what "the modern man" would call "liberty", in its arising from fealty to "a balance" like Dante's "unity of being"; from a "balance" in terms of which the ego that is all that "the modern man" generally sees as constituting his "self" knows that it must operate in service of a greater psychic whole. (As Jung said,

> nowadays most people identify themselves almost exclusively with their consciousness, and imagine

they are only what they know about themselves:
Memories, Dreams, Reflections, pg 300.)

And, in such terms, Yeats's freedom to acknowledge the greater perspective upon the souls of even the Paudeens of his world that he finds issuing from what he calls "the lonely height where all are in God's eye" - along with the ability to so beautifully and so humbly celebrate the "crystalline" ultimate reality of these "blind men" that his own convictions and hopes have led him to "batter" in poem and letter and speech - is itself a fine embodiment of just the sort of "culture" at work in his own mind that he feels his Paudeens generally lack: a "culture" that is synonymous with a radical "liberty", with a "freedom" that allows Yeats himself to receive vision that is given from beyond his own ego; is synonymous with a flexibility that arises, ultimately, from a humility like that which made Swift see "liberty" as being a responsibility to a greater "balance" or "unity" than that which can be contained within the constructs of the limited ego and its more or less mechanical opinions.

Which means that the capacity for changing with the "surges" of truth that Tom O'Roughley is able to see as they come "running by" him - the capacity we have been discussing in this part of Chapter 3 - would amount to being the sort of state of mind that Yeats would see as one likely to be kept properly alive by a culture that placed the individual ego within a pattern of expectations in which truths greater than that ego's own perspectives are always felt to be imminent; which is perhaps why he spoke (in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited": *C.P.* pp 368 - 70) of his and Augusta Gregory's dream for Irish culture as being the same "contact with the soil" that is the "dream of the noble and the beggar-man": contact with that "soil" that is all that has been made of the world in the "dream" that arises for Yeats from unending immersion in those patterns of thought that act within those who have inherited either a vivid history or a vividly inescapable necessity - both of which are strong solvents of the sort of egotism Yeats saw at work in the baseness of the modern middle classes, with their "unremembering hearts and heads" bound to an outlook too fashionably contemporary to know the sort of "liberty" that Swift served.

And we should remember, too, that Yeats saw Swift's serving something "not himself" - something that he "called freedom" but refused to "define" - as being what gave him "passion": so the capacity for moving with "the surges" as they go "running by" that we are examining right now would be a capacity that Yeats would see as being closely involved with a capacity for passion.

Perhaps he would even feel that what makes for the difference between "passion" and mere "excitement" - in public as well as in personal affairs - is the capacity for such "freedom" as Swift's, that was ready to listen for and to serve what came from what was "not himself" - a thought which suits well with that of "The Statues", too.

126. See *C.P.* pg 278.

127. *C.P.* pp 396 - 97, and the discussion offered above in the Introduction.

128. As such, they and the Yeats of "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", for instance, are fellow travellers - with important differences in self-awareness regarding the dangers of allowing an idea to set into a monument.

129. See Chapter 4 below.

130. See "The Gyres", *C.P.* pg 337.

131. See the conviction expressed in the last stanza of "Blood and the Moon" that "wisdom is the property of the dead,/ A something incompatible with life" (*C.P.* pg 269), and its complement in Yeats's saying "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it" (Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 922.)

132. Should that formulation sound too idealist for Yeats's very embodied notions, perhaps I should say that the image is always unsatisfactory after a while because its very achievement demands that what Yeats in a *Last Poem* calls "Plato's voice" must begin to ask "What then?", as the newly-known brings its newly-known next prospects to mind (see "What Then?", *C.P.* pp 347 - 48).

133. See "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", section III, *C.P.* pg 234.

134. *See C.P.* pp 207 - 8. Yeats sees the demagogue of this poem as needing to "accuse/ All that is different of a base intent" out of a simple lack of "certainty" as to the actual self-evident righteousness of the details of his own position; if we consider what he had to say years later about "the English papers" that

> decide moral questions in the interest of their parties and express their decisions with a complacency that rouses other nations to fury (see the letter cited by Hone, *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939*, pg 426)

then we can see that Yeats is actually being somewhat gentler on the Irish demagogue than he was on the English journalist.

And if the populist leaders accused Yeats himself of such "base intent", then in Section V of "Under Ben Bulben" he returned the compliment out of the full certainty of a lifetime's rigorous thought about his own position: thought about epistemology, and therefore about politics as well. As Elizabeth Cullingford so aptly says, Yeats knew that science

> was essentially political: in describing the order of nature it prescribed the government of men: *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, pg 127;

and as all descriptions of "the order of nature" begin with assumptions about how we *know* nature, then all science begins with some sort of attempt at self-knowledge; so - taking Cullingford for ally - all politics begins in epistemology: which is a fact that Yeats saw the full importance of; while the populist leaders he

challenged ultimately allowed what he saw as being the mechanistic reductionism of the heritage of Locke's sort of science to substitute

> for the old humanity with its unique irreplaceable individuals

that an older science had allowed to be posited

> something that can be chopped and measured like a piece of cheese (*Explorations*, pg 436).

Once a proper knowledge of how complex is our way of knowing things - and consequently of who we are - has gone, then the demagogue's

> stimulation and condonation of revolutionary massacre and the multiplication of murderous weapons (*ibid.*)

becomes automatic; so we could see in what Yeats says about "The Leaders of the Crowd" a critique of notions about selfhood that are actually unscientific.

135. "Curious" in the sense that picks up the meaning of an interest which is painstaking in its attention to detail. It is important to recognise that the "truth" that shines on the scholar's labour is a state of being - a condition of openness created and maintained by dedication - and not an accumulation of knowledge: this again presents the mind as a stage upon which awarenesses have their comings and goings, rather than the mechanist's array of pigeon-holes.

136. This formulation isn't meant to imply that the people Yeats has in mind here are in any way less urgently real and less justifiably repugnant to him - as actual and culpable persons scotching their oar in the common stream - than were the hanging Lords that Byron stuck in his "Ode to the Framers of the Frame Bill".

Elizabeth Cullingford's terms - her saying that Yeats saw science as being "essentially political" - catch the fact that the core of his philosophy (from his contention with Newtonian space and time in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" onwards) was acutely political. The fact that Geoffrey Barraclough should feel that Yeats believed "that the world of science and politics was somehow fatal to the poetic vision" (*An Introduction to Contemporary History*, pg 251) is actually an unwitting compliment to the extent to which Yeats was able to keep his fascination with both science and the politics that it breeds subdued to his even greater fascination with the problem of how utterly unable we are to really think about even our most apparently abstract problems except by way of having to struggle with the most disconcertingly concrete and particularised conceptual terms. Barraclough - for all his shrewdness and readiness to risk himself as a commentator - hasn't caught Yeats out at being scientific or political; and Yeats would probably thank him for it.

137. See last stanza, *C.P.* pg 382.

138. *C.P.* pg 214.

139. That the fixities of mind suffered equally by the "sick children of the world" in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", and by the "oath-bound men" of "The Black Tower", should arise, on the one hand, from the legacy of a rational illusion, and on the other, from the ossification of a mystical intuition, is an important part of the point being made: whatever their pedigree, mental fixities are seen as being traps.

140. See *C.P.* pg 266.

141. Yeats could never have praised a self incapable of remorse at all, though: see the comment, in "The Municipal Gallery Re-Visited" (*C.P.* pg 368), on "Kevin O'Higgin's countenance" that finally "cannot hide/ A soul incapable of remorse or rest": the implication is that it is only the capacity for true remorse that can make "rest" humanly possible.

142. This conviction is stated in the last stanza of Section IV of the "Meditations in Time of Civil War", *C.P.* pg 229: "The Primum Mobile that fashioned us/ Has made the very owls in circles move" - where the suggestion seems to be that even the realm of the dark (and not just the falcon's realm of day) must follow on the spiral of the Gyres: the rhythm is omnipresent and omnipotent.

143. See "A Prayer for Old Age", *C.P.* pg 326.

144. See "Under Ben Bulben", section V, *C.P.* pg 400.

145. The emphasis on "human truth" as the reality that the presumptions of abstract reasoning often harm comes, of course, from "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", *see C.P.* pg 8.

146. In the essay on the French Symbolist drama discussed above, Yeats talks, of course, of what he calls "the great imaginative method" as being that which has held the stage in all peak ages of drama before the present temporary excursion into scientific realism.

His point is, that the imaginative method has proved itself in a sense unchanging, because it is the way of the butterfly itself. Realist drama, in this view, is an abberation, because it has departed from catering to a need that recurs in all ages, and is therefore - to all human purposes, anyway - eternal. The fact that Yeats's thinking contains within it such a strong sense of the eternal and of the evolving as moving together is not, of course a contradiction. As "The Gyres" makes clear, for all the "painted forms or boxes of make-up" of the passing embodiments of beauty and human meaning, there is still "Old Rocky Face" at the ground of human experience, always prompting the same struggle towards the discovery and articulation of what we can know of Truth.

147. All this obviously isn't to say that Yeats was himself merely flighty, or encouraging mere flightiness in others. He knew how central an abiding feeling for people and things is to properly integrated human experience - as is evidenced, for instance, by the lovely poem "Memory", (*C.P.* pg 168); and he prayed for his daughter to become "Rooted in one dear perpetual place", (*see C.P.* pg 213). He also knew how easy it was for the mind "to be choked with hate" and to become "dried up" in the process, ("A Prayer for My Daughter", stanza 7, see *C.P.* pg 213). To state anything about Yeats's convictions is to immediately begin to sail close to paradox - contraries rooting together like the three lovers in "The Three Bushes" (*C.P.* pp 341 - 46).

Chapter 4: Unearthly Stuff.

In having touched on some aspects at least of Yeats's own life and times that could be said to be abiding factors that he saw as acting within the human condition - and that he therefore tried to accommodate fittingly in his practice as a poet - we have already moved a good way towards another dimension of his total vision of things that we need to consider, if we want to examine the major influences upon his aesthetic theories. In speaking about the enduringly tragic tone to human experience to which Yeats was so alert - and about the need he felt there was, in all times and places, for people to resist the attrition of fate and chance - we have already begun to move in the direction of other aspects of human experience that Yeats also saw as being eternally-recurrent and transcendent of any particular set of historical circumstances: aspects that he therefore saw as facts that had to be urgently considered in framing any accurate notion of the nature of such art as possesses the highest practical human value.

As we have already seen, when Yeats gives us a glimpse of his sense of his duties as a poet in "Vacillation", what he knew he must do was to write verse fit to help his readers "come open-eyed and laughing to the tomb";[1] and I have argued that the prayer in "Sailing to Byzantium"[2] was offered - at least in part - to help make "the artifice of eternity" more imaginatively available to this audience as an armour it might use against the paltriness of mortal frailty; but there is

also, for Yeats, the great questions of eternity itself, and of what comes to us beyond the tomb[3] - questions which both focus, for instance, at the end of "The Man and the Echo":

> O Rocky Voice,
> Shall we in that great night rejoice?
> What do we know but that we face
> One another in this place?
> But hush, for I have lost the theme,
> Its joy or night seem but a dream;
> Up there some hawk or owl has struck,
> Dropping out of sky or rock,
> A stricken rabbit is crying out,
> And its cry distracts my thought.[4]

If human experience is, as these lines acknowledge, a thing always subject to the pressures of mortal change - and of the uncertainty and vulnerability that this subjection brings with it - this experience is for Yeats a thing that is even more so under the pressure of immortal and supernatural realities, for all the general blankness to this fact that he seems to have found in the "popular eye" of the typical "man of sense" of his day.[5]

And these immortal and supernatural realities - that were factors which he had to take into account in his own thoughts - formed for Yeats a complex and interpenetrating order of mysteries which he never tried to reduce to a dogma.[6] As we have seen, he saw human consciousness itself as being a mysterious and creative process, even when it was addressing itself to entirely mundane things;[7] and to this fundamental complexity he added his awareness of a greater stream of unsensed energies acting always so as to bear human thought along in its own greater eddies. Even the "things" that the

modern "man of sense" would deal with as being merely material objects under the sway of a purely mechanical causality seem very different realities to the eyes of someone who knew, as Yeats did, the Galway countryman's sense of the supernatural impinging upon the everyday world[8] - which is a view of things that is beautifully expressed in a poem we've already glanced at above:

> Things out of perfection sail,
> And all their swelling canvas wear,
> Nor shall the self-begotten fail
> Though fantastic men suppose
> Building-yard and stormy shore,
> Winding-sheet and swaddling clothes.[9]

To such a view, all our thought of a purely rationally-apprehensible causality - even our thought of mortality itself - is just "fantastic" supposition, a missing of the true shape of the dealings that eternity has with time. It is a mistaken dream of the coastwatcher mind that attributes sensible qualities - by an illegitimate extension of ideas - to what is actually supersensible.[10] Like the swans in "The Wild Swans at Coole", to Yeats's view things in "all their swelling canvas" are really "Mysterious, beautiful";[11] and they attest in their substance that the Matter of the rationalist and the mechanist is a product of an opinionated ignorance; attest that the rationalist universe of mechanical causes and effects is just the shadow of a "fantastic" illusion.[12] "Things out of perfection sail", and "all their swelling canvas" of apparent substance is really those trailing clouds of glory that the physical senses can register and interpret. In other words, the world of nature, for Yeats, is a mask that the

supernatural wears in becoming available to our consciousness,[13] and the supernatural itself can gleam through the eye-slits with disconcerting ease - as he had learned from the folklore still strong in parts of the Ireland of his youth, and as he confirmed for himself in the occult and magical experiments of his time with the Dublin and London Theosophists, and through the observations of a lifetime to which we will refer in more detail below. To borrow a term from one of the *Last Poems*, Yeats could be said to have been always acutely aware of the "unearthly stuff" that at all times surrounds the sensible human scene.[14]

He might, for instance, have had in mind Lenin's reductionism - and the "chop-logic" thinking of the 1930's "intelligentsia" who espoused it[15] - as he wrote "The Curse of Cromwell";[16] but he was also depicting in this poem exactly that knowledge of the "ever-hidden" roots of the deepest nature of things that such materialism expressly denies.[17] He has the poem's persona recount an uncanny encounter with the still-living dead - with an immaterial and final reality - to round-off his denunciation of the mentality of "Cromwell's ... crew":

> I came upon a great house in the middle of the night,
> Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,
> And all my friends were there and made me welcome too;
> But I woke in an old ruin that the winds howled through;
> And when I pay attention I must out and walk
> Among the dogs and horses that understand my talk.[18]

And what has happened here is obviously exactly what Crazy Jane describes in her musings on God, when she realises how vividly a physical landscape may be haunted by times and folk

apparently long vanished from its sensible surfaces:[19]

> Banners choke the sky;
> Men at arms tread;
> Armoured horses neigh
> Where the great battle was
> In the narrow pass:
> *All things remain in God.*
>
> Before their eyes a house
> That from childhood stood
> Uninhabited, ruinous,
> Suddenly lit up
> From door to top:
> *All things remain in God.*[20]

- which expresses a conviction about the play of what could be called spiritual forces within the apparently stable world of conventional time and space[21] that is also expressed (in Crazy Jane's rising-up again[22] in the *Last Poems*) when the trouble in her mind over immediate European events is suddenly visited by long-dead personages out of Irish myth and legend, complete with ancient chariot.[23] Over and again in Yeats's poems we have such images of the uncanny suddenly breaking-in upon the everyday: images given to remind us that he feels that the dead seem to "remain in God" - or in whatever other name we might give to this mysterious continuation of the past under the skin of the present.

At another moment, for instance, Yeats speaks in his own voice of these hauntings by the dead as the activation of "the Great Memory" in which such "images" are "stored":

> ...for centuries,
> Rough men-at-arms, cross-gartered to the knees
> Or shod in iron, climbed the narrow stairs,
> And certain men-at-arms there were
> Whose images, in the Great Memory stored,
> Came with loud cry and panting breast
> To break upon a sleeper's rest
> While their great wooden dice beat on the board.[24]

But, whatever the terms used, Yeats's conviction that the dead and the seeming past have direct dealings with living people and with physical places is abundantly clear from things he wrote at many different phases of his thinking. It was one of his abiding truths.

"The Spirit Medium", amongst the *Last Poems*, for instance, explores this central Yeatsian fact of life and death through the mouth of a persona who is close kin to Yeats himself:

> Poetry, music I have loved, and yet
> Because of those new dead
> That come into my soul and escape
> Confusion of the bed,
> Or those begotten or unbegotten
> Perning in a band,
> *I bend my body to the spade*
> *Or grope with dirty hand.*
>
> Or those begotten or unbegotten,
> For I would not recall
> Some that being unbegotten
> Are not individual,
> But copy some action,
> Moulding it of dust or sand,
> *I bend my body to the spade*
> *Or grope with a dirty hand.*
>
> An old ghost's thoughts are lightning,
> To follow is to die;
> Poetry and music I have banished,
> But the stupidity
> Of root, shoot, blossom or clay
> Makes no demand.
> *I bend my body to the spade*
> *Or grope with a dirty hand.*[25]

One of the striking things about this poem is that "root, shoot, blossom or clay" - the world of the senses, or "Nature" - offers a blessed escape into a "stupidity" that can keep at

bay the supernatural beings that would otherwise crowd about a mind that - like the mind of the old poet of "The Curse of Cromwell" - *can* "pay attention" to things that, in materialist terms, just "cannot be".[26] What the mechanist would call Matter, seen from this slant, becomes a sort of saving shield to hide from us immaterial entities and conditions of being that would be otherwise unendurably disturbing[27] - like those entities who apparently would use the incarnate person to "escape/ Confusion of the bed" - and that are beings that are terrible even for one well-versed in their ways to even think about, let alone to have dealings with: "An old ghost's (mere) thoughts" can apparently cause a mortal person's death, within the lore of Yeats's medium, at least. The spirit medium's bending to spade and to clay represents the incarnate consciousness in flight from the supernatural, as that dimension presents itself to one possessed of - or plagued by - the sort of second sight of which Yeats found so many instances amongst "the people" he "began to question" at "seventeen years old" about "apparitions".[28]

The fairy poems, for instance, that keep appearing in different forms all through Yeats's work, seem all inspired by the central conviction that what we experience as physical places are only the tangible portions of a broader, mysterious reality. He took quite seriously the banshees and pookas of Irish folklore - as well as its Sidhe or fairy-folk - not only because he believed that the onus of disproof in the matter of traditional beliefs lay with the disbeliever,[29] but because he

recognised in these supernatural beliefs the workings of forces that he had encountered himself in his occult researches and in his own experiments in the practice of magic.[30]

And these poems of fairy things, from the beginning of their appearance,[31] all possess an authentic sense of the threat and danger of the things that "come into (the spirit medium's) soul", if he isn't watchful: there is nothing of the sentimental leprechaunisms of trans-Atlantic Irishism about them at all.[32] Even in the first fairy poem of all, "The Stolen Child", the very human longing for an escape from a world "more full of weeping" than a child "can understand"[33] - a longing that the poem, in part, sets out to dramatise - is clearly tempered by the awareness Yeats shows of the loss that such an enchanted escape would involve. In his use of the very common traditions about children being taken by the Sidhe that were current among his countrymen,[34] Yeats makes it clear that the child's going away, at the end of the poem, from a "world (that is) full of troubles" also involves a loss of vital human meanings:

> 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 around the oatmeal-chest.[35]

As our discussion of this poem in an earlier chapter has already suggested, the child's escape, under fairy enchantment, "To the waters and the wild", becomes an extremely ambivalent thing, as the warm domestic intimacy of

the life he has been enticed away from is so tenderly revealed. Though these fairies can offer the child their world of careless mischief, it is the basis of his "solemn-eyed" humanity that they are also taking: his mortal belonging within a world in which even ferns "drop their tears/ Over the young streams", and even "slumbering trout" suffer "unquiet dreams" because of the hauntings of the Sidhe. The feeling that the poem tends to leave us with is actually - and unexpectedly - a heightened awareness of the mortal condition, with its immersion in suffering and its being so vulnerable to the action of supernatural forces; in this case, the action of the Sidhe. "The Stolen Child" is able to make one feel both the magic of the fairy enticements it describes and the in-humanness of the world that this magic creates. Whatever the forever-unsorrowing gaiety that the fairies have to offer the child might amount to as a temptation of sorts, it isn't a human thing they would have him be.

So, even in a poem as early as "The Stolen Child", Yeats's thought is already looking forward to the fully-developed awareness of the dark and dangerous side to the supernatural forces that make the spirit medium take his escape into the blessed "stupidity" of "solid" nature. The knowledge of the in-pressing mystery of the supersensible world is one that is heavy to bear: just as, in "The Curse of Cromwell", the narrator experiences his certainty that "things both can and cannot be" - his knowing at first hand of Crazy Jane's "things (that) remain in God" - as a "knowledge that my

heart destroys".[36] And even when a pilgrim sets out to "Lough Derg's holy island", then the experience Yeats weaves for him is an only-faintly-christened encounter with strange and terrifying supernatural things:

> All know that all the dead in the world about that place
> are stuck,
> And that should mother seek her son she'd have but little
> luck
> Because the fires of Purgatory have ate their shapes away;
>
> .....
>
> A great black ragged bird appeared when I was in the boat;
> Some twenty feet from tip to tip had it stretched rightly
> out,
> With flopping and with flapping it made a great display.[37]

And one effect of poems such as these is to make the origins of the reality that our senses and their notions dream-up for us seem eerie and often frightening mysteries; and this is a shade never far from the foreground of Yeats's thought about the human condition, and about the art that best serves it. To read Yeats whole is to carry away a sense of the world as being really an uncanny stage upon which people might at any moment encounter supernatural realities that not only go far beyond the order of things acknowledged by Yeats's "man of sense", but that are both frightening and at times actually dangerous. The effect created is of a vast mystery hedging our human understanding about; and - if we can say that Yeats was essentially asking himself the question "What is it, really, to be human?", when he asked what sort of art humanity most needed - then it is easy to see why he could never have himself given the answer implicit in the method of the realistic actors he criticises through his persona in "The Old

Stone Cross". Mixed in with the sensible dimensions to human experience for him is always "unearthly stuff"; and that "stuff" was something that Yeats's own art had to mirror, and not just restrict itself to whatever was in the footlights of the moment at the front of the modern, materialist mind.[38]

And we have to take this central strand of Yeats's thought as a key determinant amongst the convictions that led him to hold the views about art that he did. If human reality is actually rooted in such "unearthly stuff" as we have been noting; and if it is "rounded" by things such as those encountered by Yeats's spirit medium - and by his pilgrim to Lough Derg - then a properly truthful art would have to fully accommodate the pressures of such facts[39] within its ambit. Any purely realistic - rationalist and materialist - depiction of human reality would inevitably leave the picture incomplete, and would thereby close rather than open doors to actuality. As the aesthetic argument implicit in "The Curse of Cromwell" would have to aver, to leave hidden the "knowledge" that "destroys" the persona's heart would be to abandon the field of human understanding to nothing but the "rant" of materialism and to the sort of "schooling" in purely worldly things that knows neither the value of "all the Muses" nor "the time to die": that lacks, in other words, any real sense of the workings of the visionary imagination - either in everyday life, or in the further reaches of the mystery that prompts the entries and exits of that life.[40]

But we also need to recognise that the mystery that Yeats saw blent into all human experience - a mystery that art must therefore properly reflect - went for him beyond this realm of the purely supernatural that we've been glancing at so far in this chapter. Apart from ghosts or elementals - or other inhabitants of an apparently more "exterior" rind of things immaterial[41] - there are also the existence of dreams and of the workings of the human imagination generally to consider in this regard. If there are for him such things as the spirit medium and the pilgrim encounter - things that would seem to be among the more objective or less personally-psychic constituents of human spiritual experience - then there is also the question of the supernatural dimension that he found underlying more normal human dreaming: which is an issue that is raised in a complex way in "The Tower".

As the lines from this poem quoted a few pages above show, Yeats here gives us a view of even ordinary sleep as being a potential channel for contact with what he calls "the Great Memory": the "images" of which he speaks "break upon a sleeper's rest" in a sort of dream that seems very different from that which might be assumed to issue from any merely personal unconscious.[42] This view in itself raises the question of the sorts of underpinnings upon which Yeats sees the everyday mind resting; a question which then obviously raises important issues within any attempt to decide the true scope of art as full human utterance. If some "Great Memory" is capable of acting in actually-retrievable terms - at times

at least - through the mediation of our dreams, then this greater mind must think behind the scenes a good deal of the time; and its presence as an actor off-stage would thus need to be properly accommodated within any fully adequate artistic depiction of human thoughts and actions.[43] Beyond any mind that can be accounted for in purely rational and material terms, in other words, Yeats would obviously see the activity of vital super-material - supernatural - energies: energies of which his art would itself have to bear imprint for that art actually to be true to life.[44]

So, in this perspective on dreams as a potential link between the everyday persona - the "self" to which Yeats sees realistic art restricting its attention - and some greater way of human knowing, we obviously have another fibre in the weave that made his convictions about art what they were. For him to speak as he did in "Under Ben Bulben" of the need for Irish artists to "Cast (their) mind(s) on other days"[45] is not just to call for a conscious steeping in the models of history. It is also - and more profoundly - a recognition that the people "That were beaten into the clay/ Through seven heroic centuries" are still part of the actual plasm of human awareness: are still active in its marrow. As he has already affirmed - in Section II of the poem -

> Many times man lives and dies
> Between his two eternities,
> That of race and that of soul,
> And ancient Ireland knew it all.
> Whether man die in his bed
> Or the rifle knocks him dead,
> 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.[46]

And this "human mind" that Yeats talks of here is the entire phenomenon he has come to know: not just the "unremembering" shallows in which he saw the modern mind as being beached,[47] but both "eternities" together: the "race" of the particular embodiment, and the "soul" of the supertemporal species underlying all embodiments. The "actors lacking music" of "The Old Stone Cross" - with their focus upon what is "more human", rather than upon the "unearthly stuff" of the "drama" that he saw underlying our everyday awareness - would be guilty, given the terms that Yeats employs in "Under Ben Bulben", of restricting their audience's attention to only a fringe of just one everlasting pole (or eternity) between which the full human actuality is continually running.[48] Again, the realistic method in the arts is implicitly being seen - through the old warrior's eyes - as a limiting distortion of a greater reality: as an actual unrealism, in fact.

But beyond this facet to the suggestions that "The Tower" offers about dreaming as a dimension of human experience to which any aesthetic theorising must needs pay full attention, there is also the illuminating moment near the close of the poem in which we have already seen Yeats avowing his "faith" about the broader role that he is convinced that dreaming plays in the formulation of our fullest human reality:

And I declare my faith:
I mock Plotinus' thought

And cry in Plato's teeth,
Death and life were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul,
Aye, sun and moon and star, all,
And further add to that
That, being dead, we rise,
Dream and so create
Translunar Paradise.[49]

So not only can the dream for Yeats be at least sometimes a region of experience in which "the Great Memory" can unpack "certain" of its images - just as everyday memory does into everyday mind - but it would seem that this great "faith" that Yeats declares (a faith in the central part that human creativity plays in the genesis of all possible knowledge of things) amounts also to being the expression of a conviction that all things in Heaven and Earth are actually dreams arising out of humanity's "bitter soul": "sun and moon and star, all" - even "Translunar Paradise" itself. Without reducing any of the mystery of the process, this "faith" - so similar in essence to that of an aspect of the thought in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" that

The wandering earth herself may be
Only a sudden flaming word,
In clanging space a moment heard,
Troubling the endless reverie[50]

- centres in the belief that the process of human dreaming, beyond its imagining-into-being the sensible universe, goes on then to make up even whatever we experience after the death of the sensory complex. Even the "Translunar Paradise" that we know once the moon of mortal life has finally set is itself produced for Yeats by a continuation of exactly the same sort

of purposeful dreaming that built the details of sublunar life - with a shift, apparently, merely into another degree and enlarged dimension of imaginative creativity. The power at work in our dreaming-up of the sensible world is exactly the same power that acts to weave the substance of immortal experience.[51] As Yeats continues in "The Tower":

> I have prepared my peace
> With learned Italian things
> And the proud stones of Greece,
> Poets' imaginings
> And memories of love,
> Memories of the words of women,
> All those things whereof
> Man makes a superhuman
> Mirror-resembling dream.[52]

So the "physical" world - dreamt-up for Yeats in the first place out of some primal and eternal creative need in the mystery of the human soul - then becomes the set of raw materials that this soul uses to create the final concreteness of the "superhuman/ Mirror-resembling dream" that is its "peace" beyond the lunar pale. Not only would Yeats apparently agree with Prospero that "we are such stuff as dreams are made on",[53] but it would seem he would say further that so is all of nature - and all of supernature, too.[54] And even more than that, what Yeats seems to mean by "man" in this specific context - some basic template of awarenesses and responses at the core of the individual self, that "makes up the whole" of the human universe into the reality that it is for us[55] - is a dreamer at the root of all selves who produces every scrap of the "stuff" we can know: which makes the objective "matter" of Newtonian science mist into a mysterious dream mirrored in the

human senses.[56] The fallacy of the narrowly realistic position would then be, for Yeats, that it makes the mistake of taking this dream literally.

So, if this reading of the "faith" that Yeats formulates at the end of "The Tower" is granted, then the human capacity for dreaming that is so consistently explored and celebrated in his writings would appear, for him, to be the primal state or mode of human consciousness, out of which all other modes of apprehension - or even of being - must be fashioned. When the youthful Yeats said that "Of old the world on dreaming fed", it is possible - even probable - that somewhere nascent in his thought was the conviction that this was so simply because this "dreaming" is the origin of all human awareness:[57] which seems to be a thought that also points us in the direction of what is suggested by the certainty that "In dreams begins responsibility".[58] And when he talks in the *Last Poems* of "the secret working mind" - of which Michael Angelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling is taken as an embodiment - this too seems yet another glimpse of the action of the sort of "superhuman" dreaming that the end of "The Tower" defines.[59]

And if we take all this as forming part of the image of the nature of the human phenomenon that Yeats develops through his writings, then we must also recognise that he feels that the beings to which he addresses himself as poet and as critic - his audience - are mysterious and even awesome entities,

possessed of creative powers that make "unearthly stuff" of their most mundane actualities. As Yeats puts it in "The Old Stone Cross", the "mighty scene" that the imaginative dramatist presents is rounded or shaped by supernatural realities; but the imagination at work in such a "scene" is a portion of the common human dreaming that unendingly "makes up the whole" of the range of experience that the end of "The Tower" is examining.[60] And if we consider once again that it is upon the image of the real nature of the human phenomenon that Yeats has built - from study and from experience - that he grounds his notions as to what art would best suit the needs of such a phenomenon, then his insistence upon an imaginative and creative - upon a dreamlike - art seems all the more inevitable. What real value could a narrowly realistic - and therefore mechanistic - art have for beings whose essential nature is so entirely other than what such mechanisms can embody? seems the question that such a view of human awareness as Yeats held would make one have to ask. In this view, the mechanistic assumption - in becoming the realistic method in the arts - shows itself to be an essentially alien abstraction: shows itself as an illusion of purely synthetic construction, framed out of true with the realities it purports to reflect. If even the solid, objective substances posited by materialism - and assumed by its attendant realism - are really the stuff of dreams, any art that refuses to acknowledge the substance out of which all substances are made would actually be unrealistic in its programme.

For it is in the sense of the dream process[61] being an awakening into everyday awareness of supertemporal (but profanely-ministering) psychic contents that it seems Yeats wished at least key levels of a poem like "Hound Voice" - for instance - to be read:

> Because we love bare hills and stunted trees
> And were the last to choose the settled ground,
> Its boredom of the desk or of the spade, because
> So many years companioned by a hound,
> Our voices carry; and though slumber-bound,
> Some few half wake and half renew their choice,
> Give tongue, proclaim their hidden name -'Hound Voice'.
>
> The women that I picked spoke sweet and low
> And yet gave tongue."Hound Voices" were they all.
> We picked each other from afar and knew
> What hour of terror comes to test the soul,
> And in that terror's name obeyed the call,
> And understood, what none have understood,
> Those images that waken in the blood.
>
> Some day we shall get up before the dawn
> And find our ancient hounds before the door,
> And wide awake know that the hunt is on;
> Stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more,
> Then stumbling to the kill beside the shore;
> Then the cleaning out and bandaging of wounds,
> And chants of victory amid the encircling hounds.[62]

In this rather eerie poem, the tensions between "slumber" and being "wide awake" are used to set up a drama which allows Yeats to explore a mysterious traffic between two worlds: the "settled ground" of the everyday, pragmatical[63] routines of habitual awarenesses, and a realm of psychic materials that can present themselves upon the stage of fully-conscious action only through assuming the guise of symbolic, ritualised images: by becoming, in other words, fully-waking dreams. The rising "Some day ... before the dawn" to "know that the hunt is on" reflects an intuition of a special sort: a vision of a

state of awareness that is still only potential within the present from which Yeats speaks.

And this vision is obviously closely involved with those elusive "images that waken in the blood": "images" that "none" but the "few" of the poem's first stanza - and their type - "have understood". The "blood-dark track" down which we see that these "few" will someday "stumbl(e) to the kill by the shore" is a blood-spoor leading to a long-scented quarry: which constitutes an image of intimations of strange, dark truths being uttered by the blood - being articulated by some knowledge from far beyond that of the "settled" mind. In the hunt down the blood-track of the veins, the "victory amid the encircling hounds" - who suggest the uncanny "ancient" sensitivities of the subliminal mind - represents the consummation of a dream already wakened "in the blood" when the chase begins.[64] Within the "slumber" of "settled" life, the dream-image of all that being "wide awake" means within this poem stirs within the "marrow-bone"[65] of the beginnings of consciousness. To re-work Blake's terms, the dreaming or image-making faculty within the human psyche speaks for Yeats to time from eternity in just the sort of way that we find him affirming that it does in the note he made in 1899 to his poem "The Cap and the Bells":

> I dreamed this story exactly as I have written it, and dreamed another long dream after it, trying to make out its meaning, and whether I was to write it in prose or verse. The first dream was more a vision than a dream, for it was beautiful and coherent, and gave me the sense of illumination and exultation that we get from visions, while the second dream was confused and meaningless. The poem has always meant a

> great deal to me, though, as is the way with symbolic poems, it has not always meant quite the same thing. Blake would have said, "The authors are in eternity", and I am quite sure they can be questioned only in dreams.[66]

There are some distinctions made here - with an air of practised, authoritative experience - that make for a fascinating glimpse of the scope of Yeats's experience of dreams and of visions. Within the broad stream of dreaming, he recognises some experiences that are like visions - that he is "quite sure" originated "in eternity" - and others, like the second dream he alludes to, that are "confused and meaningless" because they are tied to a relatively uninspired level of super-rational activity: in the case in point, with the practical problems of the form in which the first, visionary dream was to be embodied, and with its explicable meanings.

So, for Yeats, while not all dreams have "authors (who) are in eternity", some do; and those that *do* have their special seal of authority in their being "beautiful and coherent" and in their giving "the sense of illumination and exaltation that one gets from visions". Such dreams have, in other words, a definite and consistent character, in Yeats's own experience of them; and - as his tone in this passage implies - he assumes that the same character would enact itself in the experience of others. These dreams thus represent for Yeats an objective[67] order of spiritual experience - as his borrowing of Blake's terms to typify his

own encounters confirms. As in the terrible beauty of the dream in "Hound Voice" - the "victory amid the encircling hounds", which is a dream of what it is like to be "wide awake", at last, in the blood-lit mind[68] - the person experiencing such apparently transcendent materials is seen as being actually visited by real facts of the spirit that are as much inflicted upon the individual mind from beyond itself as are the facts of physics in its trying to deal with impenetrable objects occurring in space.

All of which surely leads us, once again, into the conviction Yeats so often expresses that the basis of the most profound art lies entirely beyond the reach of a purely realistic - or Locke-bound - artistic method. "The Cap and the Bells" was written as the exact expression of a superhuman dream whose "authors" were "in eternity" and could not "be questioned" except "in dreams" - which reflects a conviction found over and again in Yeats's writings: a conviction which had to influence what he asked of art in its service of its audience.

It is, for instance, the same conviction that underpins the essay on the state of the theatre in 1900 that we have already glanced at more than once above: the essay in which Yeats calls the imagination "the voice of what is eternal in man".[69] It is also the faith dramatised in the images that Yeats gives us of Blake and of Michael Angelo in "An Acre of Grass":[70] the one able to "beat upon the wall/ Till Truth

obeyed his call"; the other - being "inspired by frenzy" - "Shak(ing) the dead in their shrouds". Such powers for Yeats enable both men to conquer what this poem calls "loose imagination", so as to lift their minds to higher planes of revelation. The "Truth" that Blake commands and "the dead" that Michael Angelo wakes represent potentials hidden within the further reaches of the mind - potentials that, the poem suggests, are brought into consciousness by the struggle to actualise the intuitions that signal their presence.

But the classic example amongst the *Last Poems* of Yeats's alertness to "the voice of what is eternal in man" uttering itself in imaginative art lies in "the proof" that Michael Angelo left ... /On the Sistine Chapel roof" of "the secret working mind", acting out its "purpose" - "Profane perfection of mankind"[71] - *via* the imaginings or "eternal" dreams of the inspired artist. The faculty we see at work in Yeats's glimpse of Michael Angelo embodying his dream of Adam's awakening is exactly that faculty which "holds" those that are "dear" to the "Rocky Face" of "The Gyres" obedient to the supernatural promptings that make them work at fashioning the mortal mind into a fit cradle for the joy of eternity.[72] And when Yeats calls upon his fellow-artists in "Under Ben Bulben" to espouse imaginative - dream-laden - art (rather than the realisms of a critical or reflective reportage), then the call is to help make a social scene that is all the more human for not being "more human" in the sense that the unmusical actors of "The Old Stone Cross" would use the term.[73] The "human" image of

the realistic artist is, for Yeats, a reduction and a distortion of the true human form - which contains within its scope modes of access to "unearthly stuff" beyond the camera's tamest dreams.

For, as the note to "The Cap and the Bells" that is quoted above should remind us, the human mind is, for Yeats, open to encounters not only with different orders of dreaming, but also with actual waking visions - encounters of the sort that he uses in this note as a yardstick to measure the quality of the inspired dream that gave him his poem. The intercourse with eternity that Yeats sees as being natural to the incarnate mind can still take place even without the lapse into actual sleep. Added to the dreams that lead us to touch on eternity - and to the attainments of a Blake or a Michael Angelo in giving sensible form to it - Yeats also brings an acute sense of the fact of visionary experience itself to round the image of the human nature he must contemplate in trying to define an art that will best serve humanity. The capacity for vision is for him a basic human possession; so another facet of complexity we must add to Yeats's picture of the human phenomenon is the direct access he sees us at times having to more-than physical worlds - which itself constitutes another dimension of human experience to which the Yeatsian artist must cater.

And this need to do justice to the visionary side to human experience seems to be one reason at least why we have

so many remarkable images in Yeats's own poetry of moments of vision of different sorts. He was himself someone gifted - and trained by discipline and study - in the mysteries of the visionary faculty:[74] this obviously gave him many moments of vision to act as immediate substance for his thought and his verse. But once we are on the tack of discourse that our theme has given us among the factors prompting Yeats's aesthetic convictions, it is difficult not to feel that these moments of vision are explored not just because they happened and because they contained specific insights of great value, but also because their very occurrence bears testimony to a vital aspect of the human reality that the artist must record, so as to have the picture whole. If Yeats felt he must call on Irish poets to sing of "other days" - in order that what present days had left out of mind might be disinterred from forgetfulness[75] and thus actually lived by people "in coming days"[76] - then we might take his own need to keep clearly before a materialistic age something that might be "Forgotten else by mankind"[77] (its own innate and omnipresent spirituality) more or less for granted.[78]

For there are many moments of vision depicted in Yeats's verse, from that such as the sudden opening of eye and ear to "that great height/ Where all are in God's view" (with its host of souls like crystalline curlews under the "luminous wind" of Heaven),[79] through that "one throb of the artery" in which the One that animates the many becomes a clear imaginative reality,[80] and on to the frightening "apparitions"

that Yeats himself habitually saw, "The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger".[81]

And it is clear, too, that images such as those that close "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" and "The Second Coming" mean far more to Yeats than just rhetorical frameworks. As he says - at least about the latter poem - they are images "out of Spiritus Mundi",[82] risen out of the "general storehouse of images which have ceased to be a property of any personality or spirit":[83] a formulation which places the source of such images somewhere in the region of the impersonally-sapient "blood" in which an order of "images ... waken" in "Hound Voice": places them in the eternity of the discarnate but imminent "soul" of Section 2 of "Under Ben Bulben". The image given in "The Second Coming" of the "rough beast" slouching "to be born" into Europe's dreams - with "That insolent fiend Robert Artisson", "his great eyes without thought/ Under the shadow of stupid straw-pale locks"[84] lurching along for company - is on one level an eerie premonition of the great shambling tyrannies just ahead in the shadows of time when Yeats wrote these poems:[85] which is a feature to them that adds its own authority to his conception of the profoundly supertemporal nature of the mind's most potent imagery. When Shelley said that poets are "the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present",[86] Yeats would have felt this to mean much more than just an ability to read the signs of the times. As his depiction of Michael Angelo in "An Acre of Grass" has shown us, he saw the human mind, at the

pitch of its visionary reach, as being able to "pierce the clouds" that hide eternity from the productions of time. The capacity for visionary experience becomes, then, no extraordinary thing, in any absolute sense of the word: it is for Yeats rather a normal capacity of the human mind that has grown aquiline in certain sorts of experience: it is for him a basic fact of human life, albeit a relatively uncommon one in post-Enlightened times.

Thoughts such as these help again to explain Yeats's call - in poems like "Under Ben Bulben" - for an art that renounces all materialist realism[87] of manner or of theme. The bringing of "the soul of man to God" that he there enjoins as the true aim of properly imaginative art - of art which is grounded in images of the sort that are authored in eternity - presents such art as a special sort of religious service offered to mankind: a quite literal and practical enrichment of the perfections implicit within the profane. When "Phidias / Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass",[88] he was, for Yeats, servitor of an actual - though unconstituted - "sect"; and Ireland's climb to "its proper dark" so that it "may trace / The lineaments of a plummet-measured face" - the climb prophesied at the end of "The Statues" - is an image of a more perfect state of profane being that Yeats is holding up as a valedictory dream that he believes his heirs the Irish poets might find strength in.[89]

In the same way, when Yeats's own heart is "sick with

desire / And fastened to a dying animal" so that "It knows not what it is", his greatest dream is to become in body a pure image - "such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make / Of hammered gold and gold enamelling"[90] - a golden bird on a measured golden bough. In other words, in the hunger for permanent reality that the decay of the body brings him, the most real and abiding thing that he can think of is the imaginative artist's image - the image that mirrors eternity precisely because it is of eternity itself.[91] And in the "singing school" of the "Monuments" to the soul's "own magnificence" of the same poem - monuments that are the only armour against mortality that the incarnate spirit has - it is once again only in the imaginative artist's image, produced by what Yeats here calls "unaging intellect", that spiritual strength is to be found. The knowledge and surety that the heart "sick" of mortality lacks is only to be discovered in "the artifice of eternity" - which means it is only to be discovered in the capacity for vision that acts within the imaginative artist more intensely than in others.

And when, in "What Then?",[92] Yeats takes his bit of peace from the fact that - for all his life-long discontent with his achievements - he had brought "something ... to perfection", that "perfection" surely has within its register of meaning something of the resonance it has in "Old Tom Again" and in "Under Ben Bulben": the "perfection" out of which, really, all "things ... sail",[93] and the "profane perfection" that is the "purpose set / Before the secret working mind" to sail home

to.[94] The bit of perfection he had achieved within his own work was both a touch of eternity revealed within time, and a portion of time gradually established in eternity.[95]

And in this faith - the faith that imaginative art is a revelation of eternal energies that seek to impress the "profane" to sacred shapes - we surely see something central to the meaning of Yeats's art to his own eyes. In "Under Ben Bulben", he borrows "Palmer's phrase" to typify the artist's true labour as one who has "Prepared a rest for the people of God".[96] As we have seen, this poem maintains that such labour is a prime artistic duty that Yeats's own age stood in danger of forgetting to honour, in the modern "Confusion (that had) fallen upon (its) thought":

> Quattrocento put in paint
> On backgrounds for a God or Saint
> Gardens where a soul's at ease;
> Where everything that meets the eye,
> Flowers and grass and cloudless sky,
> Resemble forms that are or seem
> When sleepers wake and yet still dream,
> And when it's vanished still declare,
> With only bed and bedstead there,
> That heavens had opened.[97]

The incarnate "soul's at ease", because "heavens had opened" to many a painter's vision, and had thereby given that soul a mortal place and habitation. The "cloudless sky" of a more than earthly reality gives "rest" and escape to the eternal within the more profane dimensions of human experience.[98] The "work" that Yeats calls upon his fellow artists to undertake in "Under Ben Bulben" is to be work in a tradition that he sees as running a course from Egyptian beginnings through to "Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude"; and it is a tradition

of the revelation of the action of what Yeats calls "the secret working mind", that has "a purpose set/ Before" it by the "God" who habitually uses the artist to call to Himself "the soul of man". Working through the imaginative artist, in other words, is a superhuman order of meaning that seeks to draw the productions of time towards sharing in its own nature - which is a faith that closely parallels the thought of "The Gyres".[99]

Which seems to be one of the reasons for Yeats's invocation at the beginning of "Under Ben Bulben" of "those horsemen, ... those women / Complexion and form prove superhuman": they form part of a sacred image on which he seeks to "Swear" poet, sculptor and painter to a commitment to their "work" as servants of this "purpose" set before the "secret working mind":

> Swear by those horsemen, by those women
> Complexion and form prove superhuman,
> That pale, long visaged company
> That air in immortality
> Completeness of their passions won;
> Now they ride the wintry dawn
> Where bare Ben Bulben sets the scene.[100]

The creed Yeats is calling upon his fellow artists to acknowledge is that of service of the "immortal" world that speaks through the spiritual imagination, and that seeks to re-make the "confusion" and partialness of the human scene into a superhuman "Completeness" or "perfection".[101] These "horsemen" and "women" (that win a "Completeness of their passions" that raises their experience to the level of "immortality") evoke again the terms that Yeats uses to

describe "Those that Rocky Face holds dear" - purveyors of spiritual meaning within the temporal flux and agents of a supernatural shaper of nature - in "The Gyres". The opening focus of "Under Ben Bulben" - as a poem that is primarily about art and its true vocation - falls in fact on the responsibilities that begin with a recognition of the "immortal" and the "superhuman" as being natural extensions of the mundane and the everyday into their fruition in eternity.

So - as the call upon his fellow artists shows - the Yeatsian artist must be a purveyor of waking dreams, and not just a "realistic" reporter of the sort of limitedly "human" perspectives on experience offered by the unmusical actors of "The Old Stone Cross": for it is in just such dreams that lie the clues we have to our state when "all are in God's eye".[102] As the first lines of "Under Ben Bulben" clearly establish, a mere speaking of what "the Witch of Atlas knew" could "set the cocks a-crow" in the sort of complete waking of the mind to the awareness of eternal truth that we see "Hound Voice" dramatising as a vision at its close. In this at least, the Witch of Atlas is the type of the artist, uttering visions of "superhuman" realities that lie beyond the reach of any outlook that perceives only the deformities of time - the deformities which are the sole subject of the shuffling, grunting and groaning dramatic realisms that the old warrior under his Celtic cross scorns.

We have been examining the "unearthly stuff" of which

human experience is finally made, for Yeats - been considering how consistently he recognised both the supernatural roots of the human universe and the eternal promptings that act upon the destiny of that universe - so as to suggest how certainly he saw these roots and promptings as being factors that inevitably make serious claims upon the artist's choice of matter and of manner. If we are to continue along the same way, we would need to examine the core of this mysterious "stuff", and to see how Yeats's conception of *it* acted upon his art. There are, in other words, still more things that we need to understand about Yeats's conception of what he meant by that "God" to whom the soul of man must be brought by the arts in "Under Ben Bulben".

For, even if he believed - as is stated at the close to "The Tower" - that the responsibility for even whatever Heaven or "Translunar Paradise" that awaits the soul at death lies with the dreaming, incarnate soul itself, that doesn't mean that Yeats's spiritual universe is one made up of a sort of superhumanism alone. At the centre of all the creative activity of the soul that he celebrates is a power from which the inspiration towards this activity comes, and to which the soul is ultimately answerable. There is, in other words, something like a God in Yeats's Heaven - for all his slowness to name Him.

One of the places where Yeats uses the term "God" in what is undoubtedly his own personal voice is in "Blood and the

Moon", where he speaks of "God-appointed Berkeley that proved all things a dream"[103] - a formulation which allows us at least a glimpse of a purposive being in Yeats's skies who had used this human agent to sweep away - for those who would listen, at least - the godless universe of the materialists. And it is significant that Yeats sees the event not only as a great moment in the history of ideas - a moment in which philosophy was set back on its traditional course. As far as Yeats is concerned, Berkeley's re-affirmation of the "dream" out of which all things are made is itself a revelation of an immaterial power that dreams-up everything we know - hence the epithet "God-appointed" that is applied to Berkeley to emphasise his instrumentality to the "purpose set" before the human mind by that power. The Bishop's great service, to this view, is that he has grafted the philosophy that Locke had bemused back onto its properly religious stem, and made it once again a discussion of created things - things that resonate with the "sudden flaming word" that the young Yeats was apt to believe formed even "the wandering earth herself",

> In clanging space a moment heard,
> Troubling the endless reverie[104]

of God's mind. Because Yeats doesn't use the term "God" in itself often, doesn't mean, of course, that his sense of what the term refers to is not rich with awareness and with reverence,[105] no matter what term he uses instead as sign.

And a good example of this awareness and reverence is the attitude towards one of the God-named-by-attribute Persons that Yeats evokes in "At Algeciras, a Meditation upon Death":

The heron-billed pale cattle-birds
That feed upon some foul parasite
Of the Moroccan flocks and herds
Cross the narrow Straits to light
In the rich midnight of the garden trees
Till the dawn break upon those mingled seas.

Often at evening when a boy
Would I carry to a friend -
Hoping more substantial joy
Did an older mind commend -
Not such as are in Newton's metaphor,
But actual shells of Rosses' level shore.

Greater glory in the sun,
An evening chill upon the air
Bid imagination run
Much on the Great Questioner;
What He can question, what if questioned I
Can with a fitting confidence reply.[106]

The sense of death that crystallises in the last stanza subtly pervades the poem from its first line: the cattle egrets Yeats describes - in their flying from the rich midnight of the garden trees" to seek the "foul parasite" that is the concern of their days - are such compelling emblems of the soul living out its phases of incarnation and of escape,[107] that "the narrow straits" (where seas mingle and continents all but touch) becomes an image of the threshold between worlds that Yeats himself stands upon - imaginatively, at least - at this moment: an image of a mortal vantage from which the ghostly shore is almost visible.

And it is telling just how inevitably the place and the hour "Bid" Yeats's thoughts towards "the Great Questioner" he might have to face upon his own crossing of the seas.[108] If - as we noted in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" - God is the Creator, whose single "flaming word" might in itself be the whole historied and destined world, then He wears another mask

for Yeats here at Algeciras. He is the mode of Being to which all human questioning tends and to which it must ultimately render account of itself.[109]

So the sense of God that we find in Yeats's thought here is that of a Person to whom some significant reckoning of one's life and of its quality is ultimately due - which is a view pretty much in accord with most sophisticated religious conceptions. But what is fascinating about Yeats's awareness of "the Great Questioner" of this poem is the clues that the second stanza gives us as to his feelings regarding this Person. If this is a sort of Vision of Judgement that Yeats offers us, then it is a judgement that elicits a very different response from its beholder than that of - say - the horrendous sermon on Hell in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.[110]

For the recollection of the boyish hope for a confirmation of his "joy" that Yeats finds in mind in this stanza is a sign of the spirit in which his thoughts approach "the Great Questioner". The memory of himself, "Often at evening" taking his boyish treasures

> to a friend -
> Hoping more substantial joy
> Did an older mind commend -

defines in a moving way the doubt Yeats feels in facing this Questioner - who becomes the ultimate "older mind" of his old age, to Which he must now bring for judgement the things he has found or made. It is all obviously much more complex now,

near life's end, than the boyish "joy" in having the beauty he had discovered confirmed by a respected other; but - as he says in another context - there were things that could "suffice the aging man as once the growing boy".[111] The image this stanza leaves us with is of Yeats coming to his God, life and work in hand, unsure and hoping - but still in important ways like the ardent boy who once sought a respected friend's confirmation of his own sense of what was true and beautiful. It is an image, finally, of a touching and simple piety; one that has survived all the intellectual journeying implied by Yeats's here naming his God "the Great Questioner". If we find implied another, more terrible mask of this God in the "hour of terror that comes to test the soul" in "Hound Voice", then Yeats's feeling in "At Algeciras, a Meditation upon Death", blends awe with an entirely unsentimental reverence.

And for Yeats to be able to so spontaneously think of God and His judgement in terms that have so unforcedly grown out of his boyhood's joys and affections and pieties speaks volumes about the quality of his religious awareness; and this attitude implies important dimensions to Yeats's motives as an artist, as well. When we call to mind that the greater part of the "shells" that the old man could bring to judgement would have to be his books and his labours as a shaper of his people's thoughts,[112] then the conviction of "Under Ben Bulben" that art must "Bring the soul of man to God" takes on a further timbre of meaning. Part of what "the Great Questioner" could be expected to search-into would be the

degree to which Yeats's own writings have performed that great work of nurturing the "profane perfection" that "Rocky Face holds dear".[113] So what would be to some a question merely of aesthetic method would obviously, in the light of such thoughts, become a matter of a special sort of spiritual responsibility. For Yeats to have praised or practised an art that failed to "Prepare() a rest for the people of God"[114] would certainly not have given him anything of "a fitting confidence" with which to "reply" to "the Great Questioner" when he had himself to "Cross the narrow straits" of death. Demanding that his fellow artists practice imaginative, spiritually-focused art perhaps actually had for him something of the nature of simple obedience to a sort of divine commandment.

We stand about as close as we can come to the God of Yeats's imaginings in "At Algeciras, a Meditation upon Death"; but this is far from being the final image of his godhead that the poems give us. There is also, for instance, the remarkable encounter with what he calls "Primordial Motherhood" that is dramatised in the "Supernatural Song" called "What Magic Drum?". Though this is cast in the terms of another person's experience - an experience within the traditional expectations of another culture to Yeats's own, even - there is no doubting the completeness with which he is able to countenance the validity of these terms and of these traditional expectations:

He holds him from desire, all but stops his breathing lest
Primordial motherhood forsake his limbs, the child no longer rest,
Drinking joy as it were milk upon his breast.

Through light-obliterating garden foliage what magic drum?
Down limb and breast or down that glistening belly move his
mouth and sinewy tongue.
What from the forest came? What beast has licked its
young?[115]

So, added to the attributes suggested by the name "the Great Questioner" - a Being who is masculine and spiritually analytical - there seems also to be this other possible facet to this complex Godhead that Yeats is prepared to entertain within his imagination: something feminine and emotional and essentially succouring. There seems a Mother aspect to complement the Father of the earlier poem - a thought that chimes well with what is said when *Ribh denounces Patrick* in the second of the "Supernatural Songs":

An abstract Greek absurdity has crazed the man -
Recall that masculine Trinity. Man, woman, child
(a daughter or a son),
That's how all natural or supernatural stories run[116]

Such a "supernatural" story, for Yeats, is actually less "abstract" but no less marvellous than the purely "masculine Trinity" of the orthodox Christian account. The questions that close both "At Algeciras, a Meditation upon Death" and "What Magic Drum?" in themselves help signal the sense of mystery that works in different ways in both poems. The "Primordial Motherhood" that the initiate exercises such profound self-discipline to keep present within his "limbs" and his "breast" - thereby holding his own childself at heart during his meditation[117] - is an unnamable and tender "beast" that comes "from the forest", out of the "light-obliterating garden foliage" in which the normal mind is eclipsed, its arrival

celebrated by an unnamable "magic drum". However we may try to speak about poems like these - or like "The Pilgrim" - the way in which Yeats deals with the subject of what meditation or pilgrimage reveal presents his reader with a sense of a transcendent but entirely imminent mystery: a mystery that he is able to establish in remarkably intimate and realised terms without any reduction of uncanniness. Even though we could go on adding detail to our understanding of what Yeats thinks, for instance, about the soul's experiences after death - detail gained from poems like "The Tower" and "The Cold Heaven",[118] perhaps - poems such as these we have just glanced at still finally leave us with a feeling very much in accord with the spirit of Crazy Jane's thoughts on God, in which the hauntings of the dead, the happenings of faery and the indelible memory of her true lover all simply "remain in God":[119] lie enfolded in a single mystery that can only be acknowledged, and never unmasked.[120]

And it is probably in the light of this sense of the final mystery of things that we should read Yeats's way of naming God anew in virtually every encounter. If one of the Divine masks can be "the Great Questioner" in the meditation upon death, then we also have the different guise of the Divine imperative that's there in "The Gyres": the elusive but centrally-real "Rocky Face", speaking His one Word from out of the oracular cavern of the stone that symbolises the divine in its most enduring physical form.[121] Yeats is intent, in "The Gyres", upon grounding all human creativity in an imperishable

joy. In "The Gyres", in other words, what we could gloss as God is not "the Great Questioner", but the Great Rejoicer; and Yeats's confidence in the meaning of that joy is - for this moment - clear and untroubled. But, in the more uncertain mood of "The Man and the Echo",[122] the "Rocky Voice" that Yeats names as the principle behind the echo that's been tasking his thoughts is, at last, enigmatic and uncertain:

> O Rocky Voice,
> Shall we in that great night rejoice?
> What do we know but that we face
> One another in this place?[123]

Though the "we" of these lines must refer primarily to humanity - to the "we" who "know" nothing but our questions - there's at least a suggestion that even this "Rocky Voice" (that echoes Yeats's thoughts as a so-characteristic inner prompt to his theme) is in the same dark as the Man is. In those terms, "Rocky Voice" isn't God - or even the voice of God - for all its probing radicalness of reply to the man's sayings. In this poem, from the shaky ground of his own mortal ignorance and frailty, the closest that Yeats can get to an encounter with truth - or God - is the indeterminate and unsatisfying Echo, that at the end gets lost in the death-cry of a rabbit, anyway. A "Rocky Voice" such as this, as the final irony, is just too stony to have an answer for mortal fear; and the distance between "Old Rocky Face" and "Rocky Voice" is also an indicator of how entirely Yeats must always address from within the exact mood of any moment whatever image comes close at that moment to being mask for an ultimate reality: the "old and ill" man who finds himself questioning "Rocky Face" could only be in the presence of the same god as

the one he knew in the very different mood in which "Old Rocky Face" speaks His "one word" if he had reduced that god to an enduringly consistent mechanism - to an abstraction: which Yeats's remarkable feel for the dialectic of our consciousness could never allow him to do.

Which helps again to indicate the complexity and mystery of Yeats's conception of the human encounter with the divine. Not only does God seem to wear different masks for different moods of meeting, but even the approaches we can make, as mortals, towards those meetings shift and change their depth of penetration and meaning under pressure of circumstances. In other words, for Yeats our access to the divine has nothing of the comfortingly assured repeatableness that your typical dogma claims for its sacred formulae.[124] In each possible moment of divine encounter, Yeats seems to be saying, all is uncertain - even the terms we must use to try to grasp and name what we are trying to deal with.

So there seems to be no possibility for Yeats of a view of the human encounter with the divine that can even begin to approach the mechanical or the doctrinaire. The implication of even the shift in names that Yeats uses for God is that each approach towards the divine - in revelation, or in thought - demands its own unique search for appropriate idiom. The indication is that all such thought and experience is inescapably the encountering of images that change from context to context, and from person to person: a point that is

made clearly, if only in passing, in "Under Ben Bulben":

> Quattrocento put in paint
> On backgrounds for a God or Saint
> Gardens where a soul's at ease.[125]

The construction we might expect is "On backgrounds for God or a Saint": and the implication of their being many Gods even within the single stream of Christian iconography - of many individual conceptions of God - is telling, in a poem that finds its centre in talking about the service that the arts must give to each individual person's spiritual imagination. The point of the implication seems very much part of what Yeats had already formulated in the poem called "Wisdom":

> The true faith discovered was
> When painted panel, statuary,
> Glass-mosaic, window-glass,
> Amended what was told awry
> By some peasant gospeller;
> Swept the sawdust from the floor
> Of that working-carpenter.
> Miracle had its playtime where
> In damask clothed and on a seat
> Chryselephantine, cedar-boarded,
> His majestic Mother sat
> Stitching at a purple hoarded
> That He might be nobly breeched
> In starry towers of Babylon
> Noah's freshet never reached.[126]

For Yeats, real "Miracle" is revealed only once it has been "Swept" clean of all "sawdust", and set in some "starry" place "Noah's freshet never reached": set in a place not of the world of workaday things, but in a place of the unlapsed imagination, which is "what is eternal in man".[127] And those different "Gods" that "Quattrocento put in paint" - the visions of its individual artists - are equally a reminder of Yeats's characteristic awareness that "Miracle" is approached

always only by way of images found within some image-maker's quest for what grounds a "true faith".[128] The approach towards an encounter with the divine is not only one made towards a mystery that seems always to wear a different mask, but one that must also always be made *via* the idiom of the individual imagination.[129]

Which perspective helps us again in thinking about those aspects to Yeats's conception of the human situation that seem to have offered direction to his conviction that the making of art must necessarily be an imaginative and un-realistic activity. To such a conception as his, there can be no purely realist approach to the human experience of the divine that could be of proper service in helping us to realise such experience.[130] As persons subject to the sorts of processes involved in the encounters with the divine that Yeats so often dramatises, we are committed by the nature of things to having to deal with an "unearthly stuff" that has - to our minds, at least - little fixed form to it. If we were to imagine a representation, by the "actors lacking music" of "Under the Old Stone Cross" for instance, of the situation out of which arises Yeats's meditation upon death at Algeciras, then there isn't too much they could realistically do with the objective facts of an old man facing a chill and splendid evening that would help them to capture how vividly his imagination runs on towards the greatest of mysteries. Only by employing an artistic method that takes full cognisance of how centrally the active streaming of the old man's imagination is itself

the course that the "real" seas and shores of which he speaks must take in becoming elements of truly human meaning could an audience be given even the slightest inkling of what the obvious trappings of the moment might add up to in the protagonist's own mind;[131] could an audience be given some hint of the intuitions - and uncertainties - regarding a transcendent order of meaning that sea and shore and chilly sunset bring into that mind by means of an utterly natural process. To insist that aged man, sea and shore all be kept down only to those "more human" bits of their possessions that Yeats sees the realist agenda as allowing itself - and its audience - would obviously be to falsify not only an emotional reality, but to deny validity of existence to an entire province of human experience that is available to us only in imaginative terms.[132] Where the realist actor would see only the mortal form that must "shuffle, grunt and groan", Yeats - as an imaginative artist of the sort he praises in "Under Ben Bulben" - must give us rather a dramatic image of the nature of the being whom the promptings of the scene "bid" so inescapably towards meditation: and a good deal of that being's possessions are obviously more-than-natural chattels - which is what makes his lean towards such meditation at such a moment so "human" and so natural.[133]

And to offer the sort of reduced version of Yeats's dilemma that is all that the realist actor of "Under the Old Stone Cross" could countenance of truth would also be, for him, to offer one's audience a false image of its own state as

a community mysteriously related to a divine reality. It would be an image of selfhood that tries to persuade that there is, indeed, no mystery - only what is available to reason through "objective" observation. A central fact of human experience would be denied - the mystery of the mind's traffic with the supernatural. The physical setting of "At Algeciras, a Meditation upon Death" and the more obvious circumstances of its persona's deepening old age are not the central focus of the poem at all, for all their compelling reality within its matter. These elements - the cinematographically available details - become a framework within which Yeats works to define a typically human process whereby the finite and mortal mind is called to grope towards what lies at the remotest limits of its reach, and to then try to grope beyond them. What the camera could capture of the scene that the poem sets is only such details as those that the persona's meditation must begin from its first moments to transform into something other than themselves - into elements within a further, symbolic setting that (in the form that the spiritualising imagination gives it so as to reflect the meanings to be discovered and expressed) never was on land or sea.[134]

We have already noted a good deal, in considering the full complexity of the "unearthly Stuff" with which Yeats sees human experience - and consequently the most serviceable art - having to adequately cope; but there are important features to his thought about the supernatural that still need our attention. One of these features is defined by some of the

issues raised by his System of gyres and phases of the moon; another - perhaps surprisingly - is the question of what he meant by the term "race". Both of these aspects of his thought reflect, in fact, Yeats's concern with what he saw as being profound forces that act their parts in the mysterious concourse of factors that make up human experience - and both accordingly had their influence upon his aesthetic principles, too.

And taking as the first of these features of Yeats's thinking the question of what he meant by "race", our best beginning is probably with a passage from "Under Ben Bulben" already noted above, in which he says

> Many times man lives and dies
> Between his two eternities,
> That of race and that of soul,
> And ancient Ireland knew it all.
> Whether man die in his bed
> Or the rifle knocks him dead,
> 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[135]

and in which his calling "race" and "soul" man's "two eternities" indicates a conception of race that goes way beyond any very usual notions. Like the soul itself, Yeats sees the "race" as being something that is really a sort of spiritual (or at least supertemporal) force that acts through the physical complex.[136] Again, the way in which Yeats formulates the idea deliberately[137] imbues it with a mysterious and enigmatic quality; the mortal is once again impressed with immortal meanings. Even leaving aside the

suggestions of a reincarnatory pattern to the greater cycling of human experience - as indicated by the "Many times" of the living and dying of the first three lines quoted above - the image that Yeats gives of the soil that the grave-diggers turn is one of something which is somehow "the human mind" itself. The dead - in other words - form a mysterious part of the living mind's substance: which is an idea that echoes Yeats's thinking about "the Great Memory" in "The Tower", with a deeper earthiness of conception added to it.

There is a passage in *Essays and Introductions* in which Yeats notes

> some Indian book that describes the people of past days as still living ..."thinking the thought and doing the deed";[138]

and this doctrine seems very close to what he is saying here in "Under Ben Bulben", where it seems that he sees the "race" as forming some greater community of being in which the dead are vitally implicated in the deeds and thoughts of the living[139] - which seems to be a community something like that sensed by the old poet of "The Curse of Cromwell", perhaps, when he feels that he is still the "servant" of those who are "all ... underground".[140] We also seem again near to Crazy Jane's intuition that "All things remain in God":[141] to the inkling she seems to have that the dead and the living constellate together in some great and strange society, with human action falling under the influence of superhuman minds. The dead are not just present, they also take an active part in the present - perhaps even the most active part of all.[142]

Which might be why Yeats spoke of Synge's search for "the race" - the specifically Irish clustering amongst the dead-in-the-human-mind - as he did, when he said that Synge

> sought for the race not through the eyes or in history, or even in the future, but where those monks found God, in the depths of the mind:[143]

so Synge is seen as having sought in those "depths" that are part of the same mystery into which Yeats's grave-diggers "thrust their buried men" after the "brief parting" of death, surely?

So what Yeats calls "the race" seems to be - at least to human eyes - a supersensual portion of the incarnate mind, and not just some set of physical - or even of cultural - characteristics.[144] He said in an important essay that

> our little memories are but part of some greater Memory that renews the world and men's thoughts age after age;[145]

and that this "Memory" is "a dwelling place of symbols, of images that are living souls":[146] so what he has in mind is some basal pattern within the individual psyche that actively disposes that psyche's most important functions - a collective unconscious, in fact; but these "buried men" that Yeats speaks of as being dug back into "the human mind" could also obviously be spoken of in terms very much like these. If we follow the promptings of Yeats's thought, the dead would form part of the substance of this Memory - a sort of semi-supersomatic[147] nervous system that mediates awarenesses of an order of incarnate human experience quite out of the realist actor's range of attention.

And another piece of Yeats's prose also casts an interesting light on this palpable haunting of the human mind by "the race" as a "dwelling place of ... living souls". Talking of how he sees "magical simples" to work, he says that he thinks they do so

> by awakening in the depths of the mind, where it mingles with the Great Mind, and is enlarged by the Great Memory, some curative energy, some hypnotic command.[148]

So, in his model of total being, there is "mind" - the contemporal awareness; "Great Mind" - the eternal or supertemporal awarenesses; and the enlarging "Great Memory", all of which "mingle()" in exactly those "depths of the mind" in which Synge found "the race". As Yeats also noted with approval, in a comment already discussed above, Henry More believed that

> the bees and birds learn to make comb and nest from that Anima Mundi which contains the knowledge of all dead bees and birds.[149]

So even what would normally be called instinct[150] in the animals is thus seen to be part of this great immortality of past Being that lies at the heart of what Yeats means by the term "race".[151]

So, added to the eternal claims and impulsions of the soul - or of "the Great Mind" - with which man incarnate stands to be inflicted, he also, for Yeats, stands under pressure of the further "unearthly stuff" of a "Great Memory", which is mediated through the ancestral lines of all individuals having become embedded in the soil of the human psychic structure.[152] Even a physical illness can, apparently,

be cured by the action upon the individual mind of "the Great Mind" as it is "enlarged by the Great Memory", which acts as yet another thread in the weave of human destiny. As we have already noted, "That pale, long-visaged company" of the dead, that haunt "the wintry dawn/ Where Ben Bulben sets the scene",[153] are real and central figures within Yeats's reckoning of the *dramatis personae* of the full human drama. But when we come to see them not just as spiritual energies - as conceived of within the more conventional framework of Western thinking - but as beings that intimately inhabit part of "the depths of the mind" (and that act there as the deepest connections that hold the individual within those mysterious patterns of community that Yeats calls "the race") then the reality of that human drama is made to seem all the more startling - all the more incarnately "unearthly" and "mighty".

So, when we come again to a poem like "The Old Stone Cross", with its strictures on realist drama, we come with a deepened sense of what lies behind those strictures - if the thoughts we've just followed stay in mind. If "The man in the golden breastplate/ Under the old stone cross" dismisses the narrowly "human" focus of the realist actor as thoroughly as he does, then "Under Ben Bulben" gives us the clue that part of his "spleen" would come - to Yeats's thought - from his being himself something "buried ... in the human mind"; from his being an "image in the Great Memory stored". The "actors lacking music", with their realist and materialist

assumptions, would deny the very existence of such a dimension to "the human mind"; would deny what Yeats means by "the race", as it plays its part in the activity of that greater "unearthly stuff" from which Yeats sees the human mind taking - from one moment to the next - its basal contents. The old warrior might well resent a view that would hold him to be a mere superstition!

And obviously a belief in the existence of this racial memory[154] or living template of the past, that acts as a prompt to the present - "think(ing) the thought and do(ing) the deed" through and in company with incarnate humanity[155] - must itself make very substantial demands upon the question of what sorts of art can be considered to be really humanly serviceable. Where the realist perspective - in its exclusive commitment to what is sensibly apparent within the present moment - can deal at best only with the more obvious aspects of "the mind alone",[156] then Yeats's concern, in a poem like "Under the Old Stone Cross", is with an art that can at least *try* to speak about - and to - "depths of the mind" that form a mysterious but totally objective frontier between the individual awareness and what he calls the Great Mind and the Great Memory. Again, the rejection of realist art in the aesthetic pronouncements offered in poems such as "The Old Stone Cross" and "Under Ben Bulben" could be seen as being made in terms of a conviction that such art is shallow and partial in reach; in terms of a sense of the unsatisfactory inventory of the realities with which the human mind must

really deal that such an art must offer. We may imagine Yeats as saying that only an art that attempts to reveal the mysterious but potent hidden personae that in fact always act within the individual mind's (apparently) finite, everyday role can really hope to offer anything of any lasting value to beings in whom such barely-imaginable "stuff" really is always at work. As one of Yeats's essays puts it, art

> brings us near to the archetypal ideas themselves, and away from nature, which is their looking-glass.[157]

And mixed-in for Yeats with these "archetypal ideas" are the "images" of the "buried men" who are in "the Great Memory stored" and who lived those ideas into being. Art, in other words, should keep in mind not just the person of the shuffling moment, but also those people buried in his deepest - even if most unconscious - thoughts.[158] In Yeats's terms, the realist actor of "Under the Old Stone Cross" - and the notions about art that he reflects in his method - would be simply holding a mirror up to a mirror, and not realising what he is doing.[159]

Having said which - in trying to establish some understanding at least of Yeats's notion of "race" as it shades into his awareness of the "unearthly stuff" that he sees the artist must help to embody within his audience's everyday thought - there still remains the great question of the ways in which Yeats's System also invites some puzzling over his view of the artist's responsibility towards trying to reflect a more complex and transcendent order of realities

than he sees realism as being able to accommodate within its view. The images and ideas that grew into his vision of the laws governing the progress and the history of individual souls and of civilisations alike - a progress that he symbolised in the whirling cones and in the moods of the moon - became for him forces that are as really active, in their own sphere, as is gravity in the dimension "defined" by Newton. When we try to follow Yeats's thought into this region, we are being led into what he obviously sees as being a great and fundamental pattern always at work within the human condition: a pattern that he, as poet, sees he must acknowledge as being one of the realities of that condition of which his art - and art generally - has to keep always cognisant.[160] And the principles he finds to be embodied in the rhythms of gyre and moon are at least echoes in the human mind of patterns that he sees as really acting within the mystery of the ways of what we have come by tradition to call God: which is precisely what makes these rhythms, for Yeats, agents and indicators of both psychological evolution and historical change. Whether or not the images he has of these forces reflect any sort of final "truth", they are the best working hypotheses that a life of dedicated enquiry has brought him.

The subject is a daunting one, but all through the intricacies of the details Yeats works into his account of his System - in *A Vision* and elsewhere - one of the most abiding impressions that the explication leaves with its reader is

surely the sense that Yeats is speaking of things that he is sure are objective spiritual realities that exert a decisive influence upon human experience.

He says, for instance, in speaking about the gyres and the phases of the moon together:

> Each age unwinds the thread another age had wound, and it amuses one to remember that before Phidias, and his westward-moving art, Persia fell, and that when full moon comes round again, amid eastward-moving thought, and brought Byzantine glory, Rome fell; and that at the outset of our westward-moving Renaissance Byzantium fell; all things dying each other's life, living each other's death.[161]

The summing-up of his theme at the end of this passage with an echo of Heraclitus helps reinforce the confidence implicit in these thoughts that their theme is a universal principle: behind each appearance of history, an eternal drama is acting itself out through "all things". Once again, there is an "unearthly stuff" acting as the pulse of history - eternity acting as the key rhythm of the productions of time.

Which is an impress of the supertemporal upon the mortal that shows yet again in Yeats's depiction of the "Great Wheel" - which is for him a symbol that seems to contain both gyre and moon within a larger pattern:

> The Great Wheel revolved innumerable times before the beast changed into man and many times before the man learned to till the ground. Perhaps our present revolution brought round Phase 4 or 5. At Phase 4 or 5 or perhaps a little later may have emerged the Sacred Legend of the sun's annual journey, symbol of all history and of individual life, foundation of all the earliest civilisations; and at

> the phases where Unity of Being becomes possible began perhaps those civilisations, Egypt or Sumer, which had made a progressive, conscious intellectual life possible by the discovery of writing.
> Is that marriage of Europe and Asia a geographical reality? Perhaps, yet the symbolic wheel is timeless and spaceless.[162]

This "symbolic wheel" may well be "timeless and spaceless", but Yeats still sees it as having "brought round" each of the phases of evolution within history - both human and proto-human - to which he refers: the growth from "beast ... into man", as much as that into the "progressive, conscious, intellectual life" that itself only becomes "possible", in this schema, "at the phases where Unity of Being became possible". It isn't, in other words, some mechanical evolution of material circumstances that brings about for Yeats a high civilisation, but some readiness slowly gathered within an insubstantial matrix of being.[163] In other words, the impulse that Yeats sees at work within each creative development of human history is a matter more of epiphany than of some accidental accrual of merely material advantages.[164] Things happen because the moon is ready: the moon doesn't rise because things are ready for it.[165]

Another example from *A Vision* of Yeats's sense of a great Design shaping what is manifest within human history comes from the seminal section in Book IV in which he talks of the Great Year of the Ancients, and rounds off by quoting from "The Second Coming":

At the birth of Christ took place, and at the coming

antithetical influx will take place, a change equivalent to the *interchange of the tinctures*. The cone shaped like an ace of diamonds - in the historical diagram the cone is folded upon itself - is Solar, religious and vital; but the *Body of Fate* and *Mask* are in the Solar cones during a *primary* dispensation, and in the Lunar during an *antithetical*, while *Will* and *Creative Mind* occupy the opposing cones. *Mask* and *Body of Fate* are symbolic woman, *Will* and *Creative Mind* symbolic man; the man and woman of Blake's *Mental Traveller*. Before the birth of Christ religion and vitality were polytheistic, *antithetical*, and to this the philosophers opposed their *primary*, secular thought. Plato thinks all things into Unity and is the "first Christian". At the birth of Christ religions become *primary*, secular life *antithetical* - man gives to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. A *primary* dispensation looking beyond itself towards a transcendent power is dogmatic, levelling, unifying, feminine, humane, peace its means and end; an *antithetical* dispensation obeys imminent power, is expressive, hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical. The approaching *antithetical* dispensation for which the intellectual preparation has begun will reach its complete systematisation at the moment when ... the Great Year comes to its intellectual climax. Something of what I have said must be, the myth declares, for it must reverse our era and resume past eras in itself; what else it must be no man can say, for always at the critical moment in the *Thirteenth Cone*, the sphere, the unique intervenes.

> Somewhere in the sands of the desert
> A shape with a lion body and the head of a man,
> A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun
> Is moving its slow thighs, while all about
> Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.[166]

So one of the things that the "rough beast" of "The Second Coming" seems to have meant to Yeats - as he wrote these words in *A Vision*, at least[167] - was the key factor of a final enigma that must always whirl in to veil all human vision "at the critical moment": the inscrutable sphinx, that takes an Oedipus to almost fathom its intents. Here it apparently represents the "*Thirteenth Cone*, the sphere, the unique (that) intervenes" to hide the future from even such eyes as have some inkling at least of the workings of the

gyres.[168]

In other words, the rhythms that Yeats sees governing both history and the individual human life are both exact and mysterious. He talks of the patterns determining human experience as having the authority of a "myth" - an arrangement of meanings acting as a fundamental impulse or imperative from within "the depths of the mind"[169] - and can speak of the phases and their characteristics as an ordered design that is susceptible to both analysis and a certain degree of prediction. But - just at the critical moment, when absolute prophecy seems about to be possible - the dynamics Yeats is discussing turn aside from certain understanding, and fade behind the mask of the riddling sphinx. The System being offered us is thus a very strange machine, one that possesses as its ultimate mechanism the inevitable intervention of "the sphere, the unique" - the purely unpredictable - just at the very moment when perfect mechanism seems about to be fully achieved.

Which leaves us with the impression of a dynamism operating for Yeats at the root of all things humanly knowable that in its action offers intimations of something transcendentally symmetrical and precise, but that also acts in its most critical moments - as far as human utility goes, at least - entirely beyond any certainty of prediction. Its general outline might be guessed-at, but its particulars never. Yeats can talk with persuasive confidence about

something like an

> approaching *antithetical* influx and that particular *antithetical* dispensation for which the intellectual preparation has begun;

but all that he can really be sure of is a bare outline, a tendency. What will come "must reverse our era and resume past eras in itself"; but beyond that "no man can say".

So the roots of our human reality - as detected by Yeats in these phases and gyrings at the Hub of things - is finally, once again, a mystery, a wonderfully symmetrical enigma. To aquiline eyes, the whirling cones and moon-changes might seem a pattern to which all things finally run, in Great Wheels of Time; yet even they are not the final picture of reality : the principle that sets everything moving into the shape of its moment is cloaked within the inscrutable "sphere, the unique". It remains always in itself a mystery - it doesn't only give rise to mystery by being unpredictable. When "Rocky Face" looks forth, as presiding deity of Yeats's dream of new beginnings of "progressive, conscious, intellectual life"[170] - of a newly-vivid cultural life which will someday grow again from the ruins that the "The Gyres" surveys - there is no more precise name that Yeats could give to the image than the one that he does. "Rocky Face" seems, in the last analysis, a mask for "the *Thirteenth Cone*", that forever offers its inklings of new direction only in some "rich, dark nothing" that dims all sure understanding.[171]

And, once again, it seems exactly this sort of mystery at

the heart of history that the realist actor of "Under the Old Stone Cross" has sought to exclude from his catalogue of things "human". As the old warrior of that poem knows only too well, "This age and the next age/ Engender in the ditch":[172] that is the way in which the gyres are set, just now. But there is always, for Yeats, the "unearthly stuff" that - equally - always "intervenes" to set new gyres spinning on unexpected tacks of individual experience and of communal history. Could a realist, materialist view of what it is to be "human" hope to grasp and represent a supernatural dynamic at the core of history that seems to build all things on model lines - and that then at some critical moment collapses them out of any sort of cause/effect continuum entirely?[173]

As Yeats said in another poem, "the Primum Mobile that fashioned us/ Made the very owls in circles move";[174] and if the gyres are that deeply embedded in the fabric of reality,[175] then only an art that is imaginative enough to discover their obscured presence and their secret action can really serve to offer some sort of satisfactory image of that reality. Any artistic focus that excludes such "unearthly stuff" from its attention, in other words, would leave even our thought about the earthly stuff of everyday experience itself radically disconnected from its deepest actualities; so the Yeatsian artist must therefore choose manner and theme in full consciousness of how Cone, Wheel and Gyre keep turning us all about.

Which is perhaps another way of saying what Yeats affirms in "Under Ben Bulben": that the arts must "Bring the soul of man to God", to a sense of the mystery of the rhythms to which our "real" world must eternally dance: to proper awareness of the "unearthly stuff" from which all things earthly always are being made.[176]

Notes to Chapter 4.

1. See Section III, *C.P* pg 283.

2. See Stanza III, *C.P* pg 217 - 18.

3. As he says in *A Vision*,

> Because we no longer discover the still unpurified dead through our own and others' dreams, and those in freedom through contemplation, religion cannot answer the atheist, and philosophy talks about a first cause or a final purpose, when we would know what we were a little before conception, what we shall be a little after burial (pg 223).

4. See the Man's last speech: *C.P* pg 394.

5. See "The Apparitions", *C.P.* pg 386:

> Because there is safety in derision
> I talked of an apparition,
> I took no trouble to convince,
> Or seem plausible to a man of sense,
> Being distrustful of that popular eye
> Whether it be bold or sly.

6. One of the signs of this is the number of different names he found for what someone else might have called God: "the Great Questioner" ("At Algeciras, a Meditation upon Death", *C.P.* pg 278); "Old Rocky Face" ("The Gyres", *C.P.* pg 337); "Rocky Voice" ("The Man and the Echo", *C.P.* 394); the potently vague "Whatever" that has

> ... written in what poet's name
> The book of the people

in "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931", (*C.P.* pg 274).

This way of naming the numinous by an attribute especially significant within a specific context of thought manages to preserve the mystery of something that lies always beyond precise formulation and to heighten the concreteness of the context that in each instance is being dramatised in one and the same stroke.

7. See the discussion in Chapter 2 above of Yeats's sense of the creativity of human consciousness.

8. See, for instance, *Mythologies*, pg 61, where Yeats talks of "an old countryman" he had come to know while "wandering in certain roomy woods" each day after having "finished my day's work", and says of him:

> I am not certain that he distinguishes between the natural and supernatural very clearly, he told me the other day that foxes and cats like, above all, to be in the "forths" and lisses after nightfall; and he will certainly pass from some story about a fox to a story about a spirit with less change of voice than when he is going to speak about a martin cat - a rare beast nowadays.

There is also the "belief" Yeats held that Hone speaks of as being one that Augusta Gregory - with her own experience of Irish folklore -"was prepared to accept without question": a belief in the literary significance of

> the stories of the folk which were made by men who believed so much that they were never entirely certain that the earth was solid under their feet (*W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 144).

And again, we could recall Yeats thinking near the end of life over the completion of the intellectual quest he had been on "since (he) was seventeen years old" and "began to question the countrypeople about apparitions", which led on to his work with Lady Gregory in which both began to feel

> Again and again ... that we had got down into some fibrous darkness, into some matrix out of which everything has come, some condition that brought together as though into a single scheme "exultations, agonies", and the apparitions seen by dogs and horses (*Essays and Introductions*, pp 428 - 29).

9. "Old Tom Again", *C.P.* pg 306.

10. We could recall here Yeats talking of Newton's illusion of an "objective world intelligible to intellect", and his saying that "recent mathematical research" - "for the first time since the seventeenth century" - has begun to show the world to be really "an object of contemplation", so that

> this ever-hidden thing which makes us fold our hands has begun to press down on multitudes (*A Vision*, pg 300).

So it is not that Yeats is objecting to the conviction that we know the world immediately through the senses: what he rejects is the materialist and mechanist notion of what those senses are in themselves, and of how they work, and of what other modes of perception there are to which our "senses five" add their limited perspectives.

11. See the final stanza, *C.P.* pg 147.

12. It's interesting to note here Kathleen Raine's saying, in her *Foreword* to *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, that

> it now seems to increasing numbers (as to Yeats and his circle) that our materialist culture is a heretical deviation, our "science" a partial and distorted knowledge (pp xiv - xv).

Yeats came in for a good deal of affectionately disbelieving ribbing from Katherine Tynan and her churchgoing family about his "occultism", which she says he followed with a "gentle persistence" so that

> if we would not have poetry we had very often to put up with and take part in occult experiences (*The Middle Years*, pp 27 - 8; the end of Chapter III of her book, pp 27 - 30, is illuminating in this regard);

so Raine's recognition that the view that Yeats held - even as early as the later 1880's - was actually one that prefigured a vastly important shift in the modern outlook on the validity of the "materialist" theory of reality quite clearly shows how wide of the mark was Tynan's evaluation of "Willie's occultism" as a serious study: there is indeed a letter Yeats wrote Tynan in March, 1890, in which he gently takes her to task for not having realised that - even though "you do not care for magic and its fortunes" - "your Church's enemy is also (the) materialism" that he saw magic as challenging:

> To prove the action of man's will, man's soul, outside his body, would bring down the whole thing (materialism) - crash - at least for all who believed one (*ibid.* pg 62).

13. Perhaps we could see in Yeats's thinking at this moment a position similar to that in Laurens van der Post's description of the physical world as "spirit seen from without". (See *Jung and the Story of Our Time*, pg 61.) Certainly, there is Yeats's own statement that the "vegetable world" is a "shadow" of the "real world of imagination" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 401); that the thoughts that we call real or external objects "differ but in regularity of occurrence" from "hallucinations, dreams, and the ideas of madness" (*ibid.* pg 77); and that "The created world is a stream of images in the human mind" (*ibid.* pg 419).

14. See the closing stanza of "The Old Stone Cross", *C.P.* pp 365 - 66.

For a glimpse of what Yeats himself found in "a mighty scene" that aimed at more than just realist reportage, see the close to his letter of the 7/12/26 to Olivia Shakespeare, in which - in speaking of his "version" of *Oedipus Rex* - he says

> In rehearsal I had but one overwhelming emotion, a sense as of the actual presence in a terrible sacrament of the god. But I have got that always, though never so strongly before, from Greek Drama (Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 720).

15. And who - through an allegiance to a *passe* scientific model - had shown themselves to Yeats as being ready to foster "the stimulation and condonation of revolutionary massacre" to match the capitalist intellectualists' readiness to foster "the multiplication of murderous weapons": (see "On the Boiler", *Explorations*, pg 436).

16. See the note in Jeffares: *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg 464.

Yeats was fighting the grip that materialist philosophy had on the modern mind just as much in this attack upon those - whether of the Puritan seventeenth or of the socially-puritanical twentieth centuries - who have nothing of the learning that helps one "know the time to die," as he was in the concern with "magic and its fortunes" expressed in the letter to Katherine Tynan we have noted just above.

17. Long before Yeats thought of Lenin as sort of modern Cromwell, he spoke of

> Tara uprooted, and a new commonness
> Upon the throne and crying about the streets
> And hanging its paper flowers from post to post,
> Because it is alone of all things happy
> (see "In the Seven Woods", *C.P.* pg 85).

18. See the last stanza, *C.P.* pg 351.

19. I say that the vision of the refrain is Crazy Jane's only for convenience: the voice that links all the facts and events that the poem gathers together into a single abiding rhythm is unlocated and choric - but at least what Crazy Jane says about all the men who have known her without wiping away her own knowledge of "wild Jack" her lover is implicit with what the refrain is affirming: the core of continuance at the heart of the flux of time.

20. See "Crazy Jane on God", stanza 2 and 3, *C.P.* pp 293 - 94.

21. "Conventional", as Yeats would put it, only since Locke and Newton's ideas about a mechanical universe: as the thought of *A Vision* has it, time is a mysterious dimension that is an expression of the total identity that ultimately arises from the *Daimon*, which "exists in its eternal moment" (pg 192): as the formulation goes, "*Spirit* is the future, *Passionate Body* the present, *Husk* the past" (*ibid.* pg 191); and if time arises from the interplay of such personae, space - given Einstein - must equally be a drama and not a mechanism. (The whole of Section III of Book II of *A Vision* is relevant here.)

22. See "Three Songs to the One Burden", stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 371:

> Could Crazy Jane put off old age
> And ranting time renew,
> Could that old god rise up again ...

23. See "Crazy Jane on the Mountain", *C.P.* pp 390 - 91.

24. See "The Tower", Section II, stanza 9, *C.P.* pg 221.

25. *C.P.* pg 366.
It is interesting to note how surely Yeats once again ties "Poetry, music" to the "unearthly stuff" of the reaches of mind beyond the saving "stupidity" of the world of the senses: true "music" - as the warrior of "The Old Stone Cross" affirms - takes us well beyond the pale of the realist's "human" scope.

26. See *C.P.* pg 350, stanza 2.

27. We might recall here Yeats's saying, in *The Trembling of the Veil*, that

> we are compelled at times to imagine a condition
> of unendurable intellectual intensity from which
> we are saved by the merciful stupidity of the body
> (see *Autobiographies*, pg 202).

28. See *Essays and Introductions*, pp 428 - 29; and see, for instance, also Yeats's recording that Madame Blavatsky had told him "Beware of (mediumship) - it is a kind of madness, I have been through it" (*Memoirs*, pg 25).

As to the strange and frightening contents of the dimensions in which the psychically sensitive person moves, there is the account Yeats gives of an experience - one in which a friend,

> a pious woman, suddenly screamed in the middle of some vision [of] Maude Gonne's. She had found herself amid the fires of Hell and for days afterwards found all about the smell of sulphur

- and then speaks of his thinking that

> Perhaps there was also an added contest between two troops of spirits for the control of her mind, and those who were pushing toward God may [have] caused the others to take on a diabolic shape. (*Memoirs*, pp 62- 3.)

There is also a reference in Yeats's essay on Swedenborg to the "Battle of the Friends" that went on around Swedenborg "intermittent(ly)", in which

> had not the good fought upon his side, the evil troop, by some carriage accident or the like, would have caused his death, for all associations of good spirits have an answering mob, whose numbers grew more hateful to look on through the centuries (*Illustrations*, pg 39).

29. See *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth*:

> I remain ... telling people that one should believe whatever had been believed in all countries and periods, and only reject any part of it after much evidence, instead of starting all over afresh and only believing what one could prove (*Autobiographies*, pp 96 - 7).

The encounters with an immaterial world that we have just seen Crazy Jane expressing for Yeats certainly are of a piece with things that have "been believed" by peoples far and wide in space and time: as Graves records of the traditions surrounding the burial of Achilles on the headland of Sigeum,

> Sailors on the northward run from the Bosphorus to Olba frequently hear Achilles chanting Homer's verses across the water, the sound being accompanied by the clatter of horses' hooves, shouts of warriors, and clash of arms (*The Greek Myths*, Vol 2, pg 317).

Graves is citing Pausanius and Philostratus - who were obviously quite content that Achilles should have kept-up with contemporary events from among the shades to the extent of knowing verses composed only long after his death; which is a notion of the attendance of the dead upon the developments of the living that is also fully in accord with the religious convictions of a piously pagan Zulu or Xhosa person.

And such a conviction is obviously at least fellow traveller with both Jung's hypothesis of the patterns of imaginative experience that our ancestors have laid down in us - and that we are in turn laying down as ground-base for our heirs - and with

the tendencies of the sociobiologist Shelldrake's hypothesis of morphic learning as an influence upon behavioral patterns within species, as this hypothesis tries to explain factors that suggest that individual experience accrues to a community even in the absence of direct cultural transfer.

30. The opening to the essay on Swedenborg makes it clear that Yeats progressed from country "cottage" to

> the top story of some house in Soho or Holloway, (to await) the wisdom of some fat old medium,

after he

> had noticed many analogies (with the "ancient system of belief" he found among the Irish country-folk) in modern spiritism,

and while he was

> reading all the writers of any reputation (that he) could find in English or French (*see Explorations*, pg 30).

For a taste of these researches and that practice, we could turn also to the recollections preserved in *Memoirs*, where Yeats recounts his encouragement of the Esoteric Section of the London Theosophical Society to "try experiments" that might help bring the "evidence" for which he was "always longing" (see pp 23 - 4). In the same recollections, he speaks of his having got "the reputation of a magician" among "the country people" about Sligo (*ibid.* pg 76) as a result of activities such as his helping his uncle George Pollexfen cope with the crisis of a serious fever:

> He was in a delirium and with a high temperature, and when I asked what he saw said "red dancing figures". Without saying what I was doing I used the symbol of water and the divine names connected in the kabalistic system with the moon. Presently he said he saw a river flowing through the room and sweeping all the red figures away. I then told him what I had done and stayed till he said he felt now that he could sleep. I then told him if the figures returned to banish them by the name of the archangel Gabriel who, as moon archangel, could control the waters (*ibid.* pg 75).

Yeats used such symbols to induce "reverie" within himself, and to influence the minds of other people, in what he called

> a practice, a form of meditation that has perhaps been the intellectual chief influence on my life up to perhaps my fortieth year (*ibid.* pg 27);

He also practised "a form of meditation" which led him to find that

> many people, after fixing their attention on the symbol, would pass not into reverie as I did but into a state of partial or complete hypnosis. Later on I discovered that it was enough to give their visions what direction I would if I myself called up the symbol to the mind's eye. My mind would influence theirs directly (*ibid.*).

He also

> had a crystal and showed many how to see in

> it, and an even larger number to see visions according to the method of my Order (*ibid.* pg 70.)

For a fuller account of the occult researches, the whole of "Hodos Chameliontos" from *The Trembling of the Veil* (*Autobiographies* pp 311 - 40) is helpful; as is the memoir of the time with the Dublin Theosophists (*Autobiographies*, pp 109 - 13); the record of the seance he attended in Dublin just before the family return to London (*Autobiographies*, pp 127 - 30); and the engagements with the London Theosophists and with Mathers that are sketched in Sections XVIII, XIX and XX of "Four Years: 1887 - 1891" in *The Trembling of the Veil* (*Autobiographies*, pp 212 - 33). There is also the gently satirical version of some of these researches that we have already noted in passing in Katherine Tynan's *The Middle Years*, in which she talks of Yeats's "experiments" as being sometimes "interesting - to one who had no belief in them", though "sometimes, oftener indeed, they failed" (pg 28). She noted that "There was a certain effrontery in his disappointments" (ibid.) of the sort one would perhaps expect from the Yeats who had been led to begin his experimenting in such a new and uncertain field when he was only seventeen; but she also remembers that

> Willie was always extremely patient and gentle with our scepticism. I can see him turning away with a little laugh - when his experiment had failed. But he was not in the least dismayed or disillusioned. For some years he drifted from one occultism to another - to the thickening of that cloud of dreams which lay ever about him (*ibid.* pp 29 - 30).

The account that Ellmann gives - in Chapters V and VII of *Yeats: the Man and the Masks* - of Yeats's engagement with "Occultism, the study of secrets too profound and secret to entrust to the ordinary man" (*ibid.* pg 58) as part of Yeats's combating of "the 'Materialists'" (*ibid.*) is also valuable as a survey.

And once one has considered the materials referred to above, the impertinence of R.F. Foster's saying that Yeats's

> identification of peasant mysticism with occult spirituality (sic) was ... unrealistic

and the result of a simply "cavalier" use and interpretation of Ireland by Yeats and Augusta Gregory "for their own purposes" (see *Modern Ireland 1600 - 1972*, pg 452) is rather disturbing. As a throw-away opinion - offered without any support but Foster's own prejudice - it is on a par with other moments in the book, such as that in which Foster says that Yeats's notions about Georgian Ireland were inaccurate (*ibid.* pg 194): meaning that Yeats's view of things Georgian doesn't fit with that aggregate of fictions that Foster himself has been able to stomach as historical fact.

It was actually a sign of Yeats's being at the intellectual forefront of his times that he *did* see that urban "occult spirituality" - did Foster mean to say "spiritualism" or "spiritism"? - had "many analogies" with what Foster calls "peasant mysticism", but that Yeats himself calls "an ancient

system of beliefs": Jung, during his first years at university, found in the

> observations of the spiritualists ... the first accounts I had seen of objective psychic phenomena;

and what he found in these "accounts" were "phenomena" that were

> in principle much the same as the stories I had heard again and again in the country since my earliest childhood (see *Memoirs, Dreams, Reflections*, pp 98 - 99):

so Jung certainly wouldn't have found Yeats's views so "unrealistic", having come to such urban "spiritualism" by very much the same experimental route as had Yeats himself.

In fact, Foster's reliability as a commentator is quite apparent in his speaking of Yeats's "identification" of Irish folklore and "occult spirituality (sic)", when we have just seen Yeats himself soberly claiming only to have found "many analogies" between them. One wonders how "realistic" Foster's own readings of the texts that have established "Georgian Ireland" to his own view might be, on the strength of such a "cavalier" and sloppy misreading of Yeats's actual words?

And what competent commentator on Yeats would dare to use the term "unrealistic" about his views without trying to offer an adequate definition of the set of parameters within which the concept "realistic" is to be understood, anyway - given the extreme complexity the term has in Yeats's own thought?

31. With "The Stolen Child", from *Crossways*. (See *C.P.* pp 20 - 21. The Druid poem "The Madness of King Goll", which deals with magic as a key to extraordinary awarenesses - and with the mind's extreme susceptibility to immaterial forces - is on pp 17 - 20.)

32. Yeats found in his reading in the British Museum when he began his researches into the literary parallels he might find to the "endless stories of apparitions" that he had heard "in Sligo cottages or from pilots at Rosses"

> stories Irish writers of the 'forties and 'fifties had written of such apparitions, but they enraged me because they turned the country visions into a joke (see *Essays and Introductions*, pg 513).

So the tradition of making what were living remnants of the Old Faith of Man into the sort of thing that even Walt Disney could eventually spoon his syrup over unfortunately began with urban Irish writers patronizing their country cousins; which is a reminder of how significant it was that someone of Yeats's imaginative vigour and intellectual gifts should have taken such "country visions" seriously, and should have helped make sense of them to modern times.

33. Though not more than it can feel: we could recall Yeats's early recognition of the sufferings of childhood, as shown in Section I of "A Reverie over Childhood and Youth", *Autobiographies*, pp 5 - 6.

34. Yeats talks of these in a number of places: the references made in *The Celtic Twilight* are as helpful as any (see, for instance, the piece called "Kidnappers", *Mythologies pp 70 - 6*).

There are also stories involving such practices on the part of the Sidhe that he relates in his *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, as in the series that runs between pp 49 and 57 of *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*. ("The Stolen Child" itself appears at the end of these tales, on pg 57).

35. See *C.P.* pg 21.

36. See stanzas 3 and 4, *C.P.* pp 350 - 51.

37. See "The Pilgrim", *C.P.* pg 360.
The exact scientific term "display" - meaning a special and ritualised pattern of avian behaviour used as a unit of visual communication - to describe the great bird's flight adds an extra edge of chill to the picture: a touch of the banal within the uncanny, like the feeling de Quincey had of a drunken Porter letting Banquo in to wake a dead king: see "On the Knocking on the Gate in *Macbeth*", in John Wain, ed., *Macbeth: a Casebook*, pp 90 - 3.

38. Which isn't to say that Yeats doesn't use realism as an element within the totality of his method: that "great black ragged bird" that "appeared" to Yeats's persona in "The Pilgrim" is made vividly real to the mind; but this is ironic, because the bird is an apparition: beyond the need to evoke a picture lies an intention - so the bird is no simple realist impression (particularly as what makes for the vividness of the picture is the skill with which Yeats's artifice has set the image within a framework of rhythm and of sound-patterns that create an illusion of reality that a less deft management of the medium would fail to achieve).

39. Louis Macneice speaks of the suspicion his generation of English poets felt for Yeats because "all his life he was a professed enemy of facts" (*The Poetry of W.B. Yeats*, pg 18).
But what Macneice's generation seems to have missed is that Yeats had no problem at all with facts: after all, he was - as we have seen - asked to resign from the Esoteric Section of the London Theosophical Society for insisting that he and his fellow students experiment so as to establish facts of a sort that would keep their minds from becoming abstract because of dealing with things beyond their own real experience: facts for Yeats are what keep our minds intact (see *Memoirs*, pp 23 - 4 for the anecdote: a note on pg 23 indicates that the experiments Yeats was doing were based on what he had found in a late eighteenth century astrological treatise, so he was working within the posited facts of a long-standing tradition, too - a tradition that Jung later proved had great significance for modern psychology, too).
What Yeats *did* have a problem with were people who used the term to refer only to events that fitted some narrowed - usually materialist or Modernist - set of assumptions. His experience of his own mind had led him to know that the closest he could get to facts - his "convictions" -

> were founded not upon any logical argument but
> upon a series of delicate perceptions (*ibid.* pg 66)

- and how could he derive crude "facts" from such a complex sense of the shyness with which our most significant truths approach us? And his experience of the tales of countryfolk and the teachings of mediums and the lore of out-of-the-way studies had taught him that among the "facts" of life of which his younger contemporaries so earnestly spoke one somehow had to fit the facts raised to contemplation by the fact of apparitions and by the fact that he could magically influence other peoples' thoughts simply by focusing certain thoughts of his own.

40. For the terms taken from "The Curse of Cromwell" in their proper context, see stanza 2, *C.P* pg 350.

41. For a good commentary on the purely "religious" aspects of Yeats's convictions regarding the supernatural order of things, see Graham Hough's *The Mystery Religion of W.B. Yeats*, which sets out the occult tradition upon which Yeats built, sketches his own particular beliefs, and discusses the important connections between the "practice" of magic as

> a form of meditation that has perhaps been the intellectual chief influence on my life up to perhaps my fortieth year (*Memoirs*, pg 27)

and the verse that Yeats wrote.

42. See the passage, for instance, in *The Trembling of the Veil*, in which Yeats speaks of beginning with Mathers

> certain studies and experiences, that were to convince me that images well up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than the conscious or the unconscious memory (*Autobiographies*, pg 227),

where Yeats uses the term "unconscious" as referring to the sort of "personal unconscious" to which Freud limited his attention; while the "deeper source" to which he refers would be moving towards what Jung termed the "collective unconscious". (A fuller discussion of the distinction between the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious is offered in a note below.)

43. As Yeats puts it in one of his "Supernatural Songs",

> Eternity is passion, girl or boy
> Cry at the onset of their sexual joy
> "For ever and ever"; then awake
> Ignorant what Dramatis Personae spake;
> A passion-driven exultant man sings out
> Sentences that he has never thought;
> The Flagellant lashes those submissive loins
> Ignorant what that dramatist enjoins,
> What master made the lash. Whence had they come,
> The hand and lash that beat down frigid Rome?
> What sacred drama through her body heaved
> When world-transforming Charlemagne was conceived?
> (see *C.P.* pg 332)

- which gives a good sense of all people acting their "ignorant" parts in the "sacred drama" that Yeats saw being played beneath both the individual life and the life of nations.

44. This "Great Memory" - as we have already noted - also obviously bears close resemblance to Jung's collective unconscious: as Kathleen Raine points out, this

> hypothesis of a collective unconscious far exceeding the possible experience of any individual comes near ... Yeats's belief in a Platonic "soul of the world" (see *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, pg xviii).

What Raine might have in mind are the thoughts that arose from the experiments Yeats performed, along with George Pollexfen, and that are recorded in the first ten sections of "Hodos Chameliontos" from *The Trembling of the Veil*, in which Yeats says - for instance - that he was brought

> face to face with the Anima Mundi described by Platonic philosophers, and more especially in modern times by Henry More, which has a memory independent of embodied individual memories, though they constantly enrich it with their images and their thoughts (*Autobiographies* pg 324).

Yeats also recalls the perspective that grew for him out of these experiments and discussion of them on the walks he and his uncle took "twice every day":

> Considering that Mary Battle received our thoughts in sleep, though coarsened or turned to caricature, do not the thoughts of the scholar or hermit, though they speak no word, or something of their shape and impulse, pass into the general mind? (*ibid.* pg 325).

But perhaps the most significant of these formulations from this part of "Hodos Chameliontos" comes when Yeats says

> I know now that revelation is from the self, but from that age-long memoried self, that shapes the elaborate shell of the mollusc and the child in the womb, that teaches the birds to make their nest; and that genius is a crisis that joins our buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind (*ibid.* pg 337).

45. See Section V, *C.P.* pg 400.

46. See *C.P.* pg 398.

47. See stanza V, *C.P.* pg 400. We could also recall the poem called "Three Movements" (*C.P.* pg 271):

> Shakespearean fish swam the sea, far away from land;
> Romantic fish swam in nets coming to the hand;
> What are all those fish that lie gasping on the strand?

48. See "Vacillation", Section I, *C.P.* pg 282:

> Between extremities
> Man runs his course.

49. See Section III, lines 25 - 36, *C.P.* pg 223.

50. See stanza 1, lines 18 - 21, *C.P.* pg 7.

51. We could recall here that Yeats spoke of Blake's "Imagination" as being the same human actuality as "the Upanishadic Self" (see *Essays and Introductions*, pg 518): he had found the ultimate ground of being as formulated by Indian philosophy to be a description of the same principle he had found Blake setting at the heart of all human experience - whether it expressed itself in everyday understanding or in Eternal vision.

52. See *C.P.* pg 223.

53. *See The Tempest*, IV, i, 156 - 58:

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

54. Yeats's "Translunar Paradise" has a widespread and ancient tradition of thought behind it - as a reading of his essay on Swedenborg shows (see *Explorations*, pp 30 - 70). Of particular interest here is his noting that

> Porphyry ... gives Homer as his authority for the belief that souls after death live among images of their experience upon earth, phantasms impressed upon the spirit body. While Synesius ... also describes the spirit body as capable of taking any form and so of enabling us after death to work out our purgation; and says that for this reason the oracles have likened the state after death to the images of a dream (*ibid.* pp 62 - 3).

Yeats then goes on to say:

> our terrestrial condition is, ... it seems, the territory of choice and of cause, the one ground for all seed-sowing, (pg 68).

So "souls after death" find the "form(s)" they must inhabit - so as "to work out (their) purgation" - "among images of their experience upon earth". As is shown by the range of references that Yeats makes in this essay - to his discoveries among the Noh plays Ezra Pound was editing (pp 64 - 68); to a tale from Aran (pg 68); to an anecdote from Doneraile (pg 69); and to Egyptian funerary statuary (pg 68 - 9) - he felt had found proof for his "faith" in more than one cultural basket.

55. The fact that it is "man" in this sense - and not just the individual person - who "makes up the whole" of the sensed universe steers the idea well away from any shadow of solipsism: the bias that makes things what they are, it seems, is for Yeats a common tendency and manner of conception - a patterning of perceptual expectations to be found arising in us from a definite and common psychic structure. (Which isn't to say that Yeats overlooks for a moment the individual creation of personal circumstances into their precise shape of meaning that is to be found - as we have seen above - in poems such as "The Peacock" and "Death".)

56. Yeats speaks, of course, of "The created world" as being "a stream of images in the human mind" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 419).

And this is a view that can be interestingly brought into company with what Jung says - in "On 'The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation'" - about "the conflict between science and religion":

> The west has developed a new disease: the conflict between science and religion. The critical philosophy of science became as it were negatively metaphysical - in other words, materialistic - on the basis of an error in judgement; matter was assumed to be a tangible and recognisable reality. Yet this is a thoroughly metaphysical concept hypostatized by uncritical minds. Matter is an hypothesis. When you say "matter", you are really creating a symbol for something unknown, which may just as well be "spirit" or anything else; it may even be God ... The conflict between science and religion is in reality a misunderstanding of both. Scientific materialism has merely introduced a new hypostasis, and that is an intellectual sin. It has given another name to the supreme principle of reality and has assumed that this created a new thing and destroyed an old thing. Whether you call the principle of existence "God", "matter", "energy", or anything else you like, you have created nothing; you have simply changed a symbol ... Materialism is a metaphysical reaction against the sudden realisation that cognition is a mental faculty and, if carried beyond the human plane, a projection ... It ... demonstrates how great is the fear of letting go one's hold on the securities of childhood and dropping into a strange, unknown world ruled by forces unconcerned with man (who) ... has to realise that he is shut up inside his mind and cannot step beyond it, even in insanity; and that the appearance of his world or of his gods very much depend upon his own mental condition (see *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, pp 477 - 48).

It will be obvious that I view a good deal of what Yeats had to say about "the human mind" as the well-head of "the created world" as constituting a challenge to the "intellectual sin" of the "new hypostasis" of "Matter": an hypothesis which he saw Enlightenment thinking - epitomised for him by Locke, and by Newton's "objective world intelligible to intellect" (*A Vision*, pg 300) - as having set up in place of the sort of view of the mind's own creative dispositioning of "the appearance of (its) world or of (its) gods" that - even in his youthful days - he was convinced was openly at work "Of old" when "the world on dreaming fed", and before "Grey Truth" became the modern "painted toy": (see "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", *C.P.* pg 7, where the sort of "metaphysical reaction" against metaphysics that Jung pictures in the above passage could stand as a gloss on the process whereby Yeats would have seen such "Grey Truth" as having supplanted the "dreaming" habits of mind that he typifies in this poem in the suggestions implicit in "the woods of Arcady").

57. As the opening to the second stanza of "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" states, even the worship of "dusty deeds" and the "hunger" after abstract "truth" simply "breeds/ New dreams": even such seemingly "objective" mental furniture begins and ends in dreams. And certainly, when Yeats talks in this poem about "human truth", then - while all truth comes from "thine own heart" - song and dreams are "also sooth": which implies that the heart here means more than just the seat of the emotions.

In fact, this implicit grounding of dream and song in the heart is a first step along the way towards the "marrow-bone" that cradles "a lasting song" in "A Prayer for Old Age" (*C.P.* pg 326), and towards "those images that waken in the blood" of "Hound Voice" (*C.P.* pg 385).

58. See *C.P.* pg 112.

59. For the register Yeats gives to "the secret working mind", see "Under Ben Bulben", Section IV, stanza 2, *C.P.* pg 399.

60. Yeats would, in other words, probably agree with Coleridge's assertion - in Chapter XIII of the *Biographia Literaria* - that the artist's deliberately re-creative "secondary" exercise of imagination differs only in degree from the "primary" imagination that is the real source of all human knowledge.

61. The phrase is Laurens van der Post's: see *Jung and the Story of Our Time*, pg 204, where he says

> Not the least of (Jung's) services to his time was his demonstration of how the dreaming process in man, far from being archaic and redundant, was more relevant that ever.

62. *C.P.* pg 385.

63. This uses the word with the register we have seen Yeats himself giving it when speaking of Berkeley in "Blood and the Moon" (*C.P.* pg 267), when he gives us his satirical image of "this pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world" - of the world of habitual and stable everyday facts as they appear to the mechanist viewpoint.

64. Part of the power of the imagery in "Hound Voice" comes from the suggestiveness of the hounds in the poem.

They seem to act, for instance, from within that complex of chthonic human associations that includes the significances of the Totemic animal. As B.J.F. Laubscher puts it in *The Pagan Soul*:

> Ancient man clothed himself in the skin of the Totemic animal to absorb the powers of its life. In ancient Egypt Horus had the skin of a cat for his badge ... Among the Red Indians the skin of a Totemic animal was placed beside the dying person, and conveyed the meaning of a renewal, resurrection for another life in (the) spiritual world. It has always been a common custom for the dead to be buried in the skin of an animal

> ... In the initiation of the Aborigines of Australia when the novitiate came out of a period of initiation ... he was rubbed by an old man with fat that was taken from the Totemic animal ... By having the fat smeared over him he is virtually covered by the substance of the animal; in fact a new skin is spread over him. He becomes a figure of the anointed, a memory relic of man's discovery of his procreative powers and his renewal of life in a new body after death - the anointed body of the resurrection; the spiritual body of St Paul in Corinthians XV:44. So we find that ... Horus was anointed when he was transformed from the mortal Horus to the Horus in spirit who rose again from the dead. It is most fascinating to see how these disguised archetypes of putting on a new body, as astral body, a soul body as universal knowledge, became transformed by the images and impressions of the primordial mind, into covering the body with something man had made sacred, to raise it above the common every -day things of life. Hence the skin, the blood or the fat of the sacred animal became the symbol of a future spiritual body and life ... (pp 113 - 15).

Yeats's hounds are very like "the sacred animal" who acts as guide to "another life in (the) spiritual world" that is "above the common everyday things of life" - above, in particular, what Yeats himself calls the "boredom of the desk or of the spade".

The hound was also a symbol of desire for Yeats - as is shown by his saying that "the wolf is but a more violent symbol of longing and desire than the hound" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 90); which is a statement from a discussion (dated 1900) of the images of hound and deer as "ancient symbols, (that) still come to visionaries in their dreams" (*ibid.* pp 89 - 90) that echoes with what Yeats said in a letter to Katherine Tynan in October, 1889:

> The place that has really influenced my life most is Sligo. There used to be two dogs there - one smooth-haired, one curly-haired - I used to follow them all day long. I knew all their occupations, when they hunted for rats and when they went to the rabbit warren. They taught me to dream maybe. Since then I follow my thoughts as I then followed the two dogs - the smooth and the curly - wherever they take me (see *The Middle Years*, pg 57).

So these actual hounds of his boyhood - the ones he speaks of in "Reveries over Childhood and Youth" as remembering "more clearly than any one except my grandfather and grandmother" (*Autobiographies*, pg 15) and then discusses at some length (*ibid.* pp 15 - 16) - were for him at least partly symbols of the special responsiveness to the dictates of the dream that these hounds had taught him in giving him the example that led him to know he must "follow my thoughts ... wherever they take me". As such, the hound as universal image of desire has added to it the special meaning for Yeats of the guide that leads the dream to its

boundaries - and even perhaps beyond: which reflects a function they certainly have in "Hound Voice".

And we could also recall Jung's description of the Nekyia as

> the journey to Hades, the descent into the unconscious and the leave-taking from the upper world; (the) descent into ancient times; the journey through the psychic history of mankind (which) has as its object the restoration of the whole man, by awakening memories in the blood (see *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*, pp 138 - 40).

And the "blood-dark track" of "Hound Voice" seems just such a path back to "Melusina", to the traditional seat of the soul in the blood of which Jung speaks in his essay on Paracelsus (*ibid.* pg 18).

65. See "A Prayer for Old Age", *C.P.* pg 326:

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

It seems a bit odd that so alert and sensitive a critic as Richard Fallis (*The Irish Renaissance*, pg 248) should call this "a slight poem" : "sleight" would suit it better.

66. *C.P.* pg 526.

67. See Laurens van der Post's use of the term "objective", with the same bearing, in *Jung and the Story of Our Time*:

> Freud had discovered a comparatively narrow and special area of the unconscious of man which one could call the "personal unconscious". Jung went deeper, to uncover below what one might call a racial or historical unconscious... "I found", he would tell me in a voice which seemed to have lost none of the original reverence of the observation, "that the more I looked into my own spirit and the spirit of my patients, I saw stretched out before me an infinite objective mystery within us as great and as wonderful as a sky full of stars spread out above us on a clear and moonless winter's night" (pg 145).

As van der Post puts it later, Jung

> established in a way no scientist can deny that (the) collective unconscious within man was objective; that the visions and dreams and imagery in which it communicated with man's conscious self were utterly objective facts, however subjectively they were experienced (*ibid.* pg 209).

What helps to add weight to this "objective" inner dimension that van der Post sees Jung as having thus "established" as an hypothesis that the terms of our best modern understanding cannot "deny" was the fact that his "look(ing) into (his) own spirit and the spirit of (his) patients" was done in the light of a diligence and caution that led him to work through "67,000 dreams

with his patients and helpers before even attempting to theorise about them" (*ibid.* pg 105).

That Jung should have been led to speak in terms of "a racial or historical unconscious" lying "below" any personal consciousness and below "the personal unconscious" that van der post sees Freud as having revealed, is an interesting bit of parallel vision to what Yeats formulated in Section II of "Under Ben Bulben" when he spoke of the "two eternities" between which "man lives and dies", "That of race and that of soul" (*C.P.* pg 398). As we have already noted above, Jung's "racial or historical unconscious" moves at least in the same direction as Yeats's "eternit(y)" of "race".

68. The "victory amid the encircling hounds" symbolically centres the awakened spirit in the magic circle of the senses as these are extended into superhuman acuteness. (One recalls also the dog's proverbial sensitivity to things beyond normal human ken - like the awareness of the "blind hound" that knows simply from "deep commune with his heart" that his master has died, in "The Ballad of the Fox Hunter", *C.P.* pg 27.)

69. See *Essays and Introductions*, pp 166 - 67.

70. See *C.P.* pg 346.

71. See "Under Ben Bulben", Section IV, stanza 2 (*C.P.* pg 399).

72. See "The Gyres", *C.P.* pg 337.

73. See *C.P.* pg 365:

But actors lacking music
Do most excite my spleen,
They say it is more human
To shuffle, grunt and groan,
Not knowing what unearthly stuff
Rounds a mighty scene.

74. We could recall here his account of the training he undertook with symbols that encouraged reverie: see, for instance, *Autobiographies*, pp 229 - 32, and Section IV of the "Autobiography" in *Memoirs*, pp 26 - 8.

75. See Yeats's use of the word in "The Gyres", *C.P.* pg 337: "Those that Rocky Face holds dear ... shall ... disinter ... The workman, noble and saint ..."

76. See "Under Ben Bulben", Section V, *C.P.* pg 400.

77. See "An Acre of Grass", stanza 4, *C.P.* pg 347.

78. This applies obviously to the final poems, where concerns such as the preservation of a proper sense of human selfhood, in the face of a reductionist intellectual milieu, are so close to the thematic foreground of Yeats's writing; but surely - as has been argued in the Introduction to this thesis - the concerns of even the earliest poems are close kin to those of the last. "The

Song of the Happy Shepherd", for instance, is a clear attempt by Yeats to set his reader's mind running back to "other days" of a richer human spirituality; and the conception of the milieu that this attempt challenges is certainly father to the view of "the filthy modern tide" of "The Statues".

79. See "Paudeen", *C.P.* pg 122.

80. See "A Meditation in Time of War", *C.P.* pg 214:

> For one throb of the artery,
> While on that old grey stone I sat
> Under the old wind-broken tree,
> I knew that One is animate,
> Mankind inanimate fantasy.

It might be of interest to keep in mind here something said in commentary on the philosophy of the Qabalah - in which Yeats was himself, of course, steeped from youth - where the writer says

> Esoterically, the object of this philosophy is a return of the universe into the structure of the first Adam,

which return involves "the Great Work" of "the absorption of the Knower in the Image of God": see J.F.C. Fuller, *The Secret Wisdom of the Qabalah*, pp 36 - 8.

If we accept these terms, what Yeats experienced in that "one throb of the artery" - in which Blake said all creation is done - was a spell in which something like that "Absorption of the Knower in the Image of God" took at least a great leap towards a moment of actualization.

Yeats himself uses the term "Knower" in pretty much this Qaballistic sense in the "*Knower*" who in "Heaven" will be absorbed in "the *Known*" in the last stanza of Section 1 of "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" (*C.P.* pg 266); and "the Great Work" towards facilitating, in oneself and in others, "a return of the universe into the structure of the first Adam" has tantalising echoes in "the work" to "Bring the soul of man to God" that Yeats enjoins upon the Irish arts at the start of Section IV of "Under Ben Bulben" (*C.P.* pg 399).

81. See "The Apparitions", *C.P.* pg 386.

82. See "The Second Coming", *C.P.* pg 210.

83. This comes from the notes Yeats wrote to *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, as cited by Jeffares's in his *Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg 222.

84. See "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", Section 6, *C.P.* pg 237.

85. As we have seen, Richard Fallis found in Artisson an image that could be either "Hitler (or) Stalin": *The Irish Renaissance*, pg 243.

86. See *A Defence of Poetry* (1840), in H.A. Needham, *Sidney - Apology for Poetry, Shelley - A Defence of Poetry*, pg 109.

87. It wasn't, of course, every attitude that has ever been called "realism" that Yeats was at odds with: only with that realism he saw as being ushered in by the "materialism" of a science that created "all that Whiggish world Swift stared on until he became a raging man", and that "Berkeley destroyed ... for all that would listen" when he "created modern philosophy and established for ever the subjectivity of space" (*Explorations*, pg 435). As Macdonagh has noted, the "distinct antipathy to modern urban and industrial civilisation" - an expression of "materialism and mass values" - that he finds "in Yeats's mind" gained its timbre from a valuing of its counter-truth, "Peasant life and language, the peasant's elemental nobility, stoicism and realism" (*Ireland: the Union and its Aftermath*, pg 73). Such "realism" is a far cry from what Yeats himself calls the "English empirical genius, (the) English sense of reality" that "It is customary to praise", even though

> throughout the eighteenth century when her Indian Empire was founded England lived for certain great constructions that were true only in relation to the will (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 400).

The "realism" of such an - English - outlook as this is a mechanism of "the will", a "genius" for "great constructions", and not the product of the "nobility" and "stoicism" of which Macdonagh speaks: such qualities imply an attitude towards fate and circumstance - towards "reality" - that lacks the egotism that naturally detects the lineaments of its own purposes in all that it encounters. The "peasant's ... realism" which Macdonagh sees Yeats as "cherish(ing)" is an actual "sense of reality" as it acts beyond "relation to the (human) will". And this a sense of things that is very like that Hone records Yeats as being very capable of feeling himself when he says

> All his thought was pagan, but he felt a sudden dependence upon the Divine will; (*W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 144; Hone is referring in this to *Autobiographies*, pg 465).

And this is an experience which reflects a sense in Yeats of real things which was one he shared at least partly with the old makers of Irish folk stories who

> were never entirely certain that the earth was solid under their footsole (*ibid.*).

88. See "The Statues", *C.P.* pg 375.

89. In thinking of Yeats here as re-constituting an "ancient sect", it is also interesting to reflect that his thoughts are probably running not only on Irish pieties but on Irish politics too: the sort of call to a distinctly Irish tincture of spiritual "schooling" and knowledge (see the last two lines of stanza 2, "The Curse of Cromwell", *C.P.* 350) is also a call to the core of a sense of Irish nationhood. As de Burgh says of Moses,

> He fixed the worship of Jehovah (*Yahweh*) as that of a people, and thereby called a nation into being (*The Legacy of the Ancient World*, pg 51);

and Yeats's final focus in "The Statues" on the "ancient sect" of Irish spiritual thought obviously shares something in intent with such fixing of a mode of worship in the mind of a nation.

For it is a telling bit of self-irony when Yeats calls himself "Malachi stilt-jack" in the last stanza of "High Talk" (*C.P.* pg 386): as the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi represents the last voice of the old school of Jewish prophecy; and there is at least a seam of the traditional prophetic manner to the cloak Yeats wears in poems like "Under Ben Bulben" and "The Statues" and "High Talk".

90. See "Sailing to Byzantium", *C.P.* pg 217.

91. This absolutely characteristic need to reach beyond the flux of the impermanent towards what is pitched deliberately beyond nature shows even in the style Yeats worked to perfect. As he says in Section III of "A General Introduction to my Work" - the section called "Style and Attitude":

> It was a long time before I had made a language to my liking; I began to make it when I discovered some twenty years ago that I must seek, not as Wordsworth thought, words in common use, but a powerful and passionate syntax, and a complete coincidence between period and stanza. Because I need a passionate syntax for passionate subject -matter I compel myself to accept those traditional metres that have developed with the language. Ezra Pound, Turner, Lawrence wrote admirable free verse, I could not. I would lose myself and become joyless ... The translators of the Bible, Sir Thomas Browne, certain translators from the Greek when translators still bothered about rhythm, created a form midway between prose and verse that seems natural to impersonal meditation; but all that is personal soon rots; it must be packed in ice or salt ... If I wrote of personal love or sorrow in free verse, or in any rhythm that left it unchanged, amid all its accidence, I would be full of self-contempt because of my egotism and indiscretion, and foresee the boredom of my reader. I must choose a traditional stanza, even what I alter must seem traditional ... Ancient salt is best packing. (*Essays and Introductions*, pp 521 - 22.)

As even so strictly technical a commentator as Antony Easthope says of this passage, the effect

> promoted by the pentameter can approximate to a poise and self-consistency that seems absolute (Yeats identifies it with art, the ideal, imperson -ality and indeed eternity): see *Poetry as Discourse*, pg 72).

92. *C.P.* pg 347.

93. See "Old Tom Again", *C.P.* pg 306.

94. See "Under Ben Bulben", Section IV, stanza 2, *C.P.* pg 399.

95. It is interesting to note that Yeats's desire - at the end of "Sailing to Byzantium" - for a golden eternity is in close

accord with the dream of "the Chinese sages and alchemists" whom Jung saw

> had endeavoured ... to arrive at the lasting translation of their ephemeral selves into a continuous and endlessly continuing truth beyond the here and the now, beyond our prescribed cycle of birth, life and death

- if we are to follow Laurens van der Post, *Jung and the Story of Our Time*, pg 202.

The gold of Yeats's Byzantine birds would certainly have been to him alchemical gold, symbol of the transfiguration of the actual substance of the real and total historical self; which opens the possibility that being "out of nature" for Yeats needn't mean more than his having completed the alchemist's very human dream of having "translat(ed)" his "ephemeral sel(f)" into the perfection that self naturally includes within its range of qualities as its highest aspiration: in these terms, "Byzantium" is possible this side of the circle of the moon, and Yeats's prayer is for the fullness that the mortal spirit dreams of, and not for escape to an immortal and inhuman condition.

Such a view is strengthened as a possibility by the fact that the alchemy Yeats knew is remarkably intent upon translation, rather than on any mere Platonic transcendence: the reason why the "base" metal of alchemy is lead is that it is the only one of the classical metals that shares with gold the quality of not rusting: within the waters of incarnate life, the unrusting or "water"-impervious natural substance of the soul is made in the retort of the alchemistic meditation into the gold that bears this "water"-imperviousness to glorious perfection, with the quality that makes the lead what it is to the alchemist being taken along for the ride, not shed in scorn. (It is in the alchemical sense that Yeats's typification of "The sort now growing up" in Section V of "Under Ben Bulben" as being "Base-born products of base beds" [*C.P.* pg 400] should finally be read: this "sort" is made in a faulty retort; and in the "translation" into the gold of the highest and most gracious human time at which the alchemy of the Yeatsian artist aims [see "The Gyres"], such obstinate lead - image of the soul that is trapped in the failed self-awareness that Yeats typifies in the "Confusion that fell upon our thought" of "Under Ben Bulben" Section IV - must be set aside as a failure in the process. "Base" in "Under Ben Bulben" means the alchemical "basal": that with which the transfigurative process begins; though he wasn't above feeling that a more strictly pejorative sense to the epithet was also quite appropriate, the pattern of the metaphor Yeats is using comes from the alchemical laboratory, and its terms finally govern the registers of the thought.)

96. See Section IV, *C.P.* pg 400.

97. See Section IV, *C.P.* pg 399.

98. Though the sky Yeats talks of here is "cloudless", it recalls tantalisingly his remembering that - when he was "deliberately" reshaping his style after finishing *The Wanderings of Oisin*, out of dissatisfaction with its "over-charged colour inherited from

the romantic movement" - then he "sought out an impression as of cold light" and

> tumbling clouds ... It is a natural conviction for a painter's son to believe that there may be a landscape that is symbolical of some spiritual condition and awakens a hunger such as cats feel for valerian (*Autobiographies*, pg 91).

By the time he wrote "Under Ben Bulben", this "natural conviction" seems to have become a certainty - as does the equal conviction that art should "awaken() a hunger" for the truths it embodies that wouldn't necessarily be felt without its deliberate temptations of its audience.

99. We might note Yeats saying that

> in pastoral scenes cut upon wood or copper by (Blake's) disciples Palmer or Calvert, one notices the peaceful Swedenborgian heaven (*Explorations*, pg 44).

100. See *C.P.* pg 397.

101. We could here recall Yeats saying that Berkeley had written that

> If we believe Diogenes Laertes ... the Pythagorian philosophers thought there was a certain pure heat or fire which had something divine in it, by the participation whereof man becomes allied to the gods. And according to the Platonists, Heaven is not defined so much by its local situation as by its purity. The purest and most excellent fire, that is Heaven, saith Facinus (*Essays and Introductions*, pp 440 - 411).

So there is "a certain pure heat or fire" active within the nature of things - a "fire" that constitutes a "Heaven" that is not a locality but a "purity" - "by the participation whereof man becomes allied to the gods"; becomes - in other words - one of those who may "Air in immortality/ Completeness of their passions won".

Again, the idea is of the transformative power of a "something divine" that is available to human experience, and that is capable of causing a sort of alchemy of the self: which is a doctrine that certainly makes the notion of a universe fixed forever in a mechanical mould that was held by Locke "vanish", and that opens rather a vision of a reality that contains within itself a capacity for further realisation of a "divine" potential within human experience; a potential very like that "Profane perfection of mankind" that is "set" as a "purpose" before "the secret working mind" to which Yeats seeks to win Irish poets to swear their fealty in "Under Ben Bulben".

102. See "Paudeen", *C.P.* pg 122.

103. See Section II, stanza 5, *C.P.* pg 268.

104. See "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", *C.P.* pg 7.

105. As we have seen, he can use the term, in very much his own voice, and with the exact meaning and feeling that no more conventional monotheist could fail to respect, in the image offered in "Paudeen" of "The lonely height where all are in God's eye", for instance, (*C.P.* pg 122.)

106. *C.P.* pg 278.

107. Yeats's views on reincarnation as an hypothesis explaining the patterns of human experience were both decided and tentative, in a manner typical of him. A poem like "Death" (*C.P.* pg 264) has more than a hint of a sense of each encounter within a specific life being underpinned by a body of experience from previous lives; and there is of course the poem to Mohini Chatterjee, (*C.P.* pg 279), to reinforce the sense we have of Yeats's appreciation, at least, of the appeal of the doctrine. What he says in *Memoirs* at one point could stand as an image of his attitude, when he recalls that when George Russell spoke of reincarnation to Maude Gonne, and he saw that she

> was deeply impressed ... I quieted my more sceptical intelligence, as I have so often done in her presence. I remember a pang of conscience. Ought I not to say, "The whole doctrine of the reincarnation of the soul is hypothetical. It is the most plausible of the explanations of the world, but can we say more than that?" or some like sentence? (see pg 48).

But there is also the comment on the views of Allen Cardec, in which Yeats notes that

> all the essential thought of Swedenborg remains, but ... these spirits do not believe in an eternal Hell, and like Blake they ... declare that the soul is no creature of the womb having lived many times upon earth. The sorrow of death, they tell us again and again, is not so bitter as the sorrow of birth, and had our ears the subtlety we could listen amid the joy of lovers and the pleasure that comes with sleep to the wailing of the spirit betrayed into the cradle (see "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places" in *Explorations*, pp 48 - 9).

Speaking more in his own voice, later in the same essay, Yeats adds:

> We should not suppose that our souls began at birth, for as Henry More has said ... We have within us an "airy body" or "spirit body" which was our only body before our birth as it will be again when we are dead (*Explorations*, pg 61).

(There seems to be an echo here of St Paul's "spirit body" of Corinthians XV:44.)

So for all the "more sceptical intelligence" that Yeats admits to having in the passage quoted above, the sense of just how "plausible" he found reincarnation as a "doctrine" shows quite clearly.

108. It is interesting to note that Yeats doesn't seem to expect an automatic questioning: he is concerned with what he can "reply" to the probings of the "Great Questioner" "if questioned"; and there is a quiet humility to this expectation - an attitude that suggests a total lack of self-importance in his relation to the infinite, for all the clear sense of personal responsibility towards infinite realities that this poem expresses.

109. The reference to "Newton's metaphor" is most apt, when we consider that Newton, when he spoke on his death-bed of his work as playing with shells, with the sea undiscovered at his back, actually was on the shore of the great unknown on which Yeats here stands imaginatively.

And the fact that Yeats's great concern in facing "the Great Questioner" should be with whether or not he will be able to reply "with a fitting confidence" is touchingly characteristic of him, early and late. When he slept in Slish Wood as a youth, to "watch my island (Innisfree) in the early dawn and notice the order of the cries of the birds", he

> could not sleep, not from the discomfort of the dry rock I had chosen for my bed, but from my fear of the wood-ranger. Someone had told me ... that he went his round at some unknown hour. I kept going over what I would say if found and could not think of anything he would believe (*Autobiographies*, pg 89).

Yeats says of himself at this stage - talking of his once having rolled himself in a mainsail to sleep in a becalmed yacht - that "I could sleep anywhere in those days" (*Autobiographies*, pg 90): so what kept him awake in Slish Wood really was his not having a confident "answer" for his imagined nocturnal interlocutor; his not having an answer such as his "athlete" friend at the Hammersmith school had managed to engineer, perhaps, when he "persuaded" one of a group of trespassers in Coomb Wood (on the edge of Wimbledon Common)

> to pretend to be a schoolmaster taking his boys for a walk, and the keeper, instead of swearing and threatening the law, was sad and argumentative (*Autobiographies*, pp 59 - 60).

110. See pp 117 - 24 of the Penguin edition (1960).

111. See "Meditations in Time of Civil War", Section VII, last stanza, *C.P.* pg 232.

112. See "The Choice", *C.P.* pg 278:

> The intellect of man is forced to choose
> Perfection of the life, or of the work,
> And if it take the second must refuse
> A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.
>
> When all that story's finished, what's the news?

In luck or out the toil has left its mark:
That old perplexity an empty purse,
Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse.

Having chosen "the second" path, it is mostly "the work" that Yeats *could* have in hand to "carry" to questioning.

113. See the last stanza of "The Gyres", *C.P.* pg 337.

114. See "Under Ben Bulben", Section IV, stanza 3, *C.P.* pp 399 - 400.

115. See *C.P.* 331.
In presenting this experience, Yeats is obviously thinking of an Eastern mode of spiritual encounter, of the sort of which he had learned from people like Mohini Chatterjee in his youth, and from Shri Pirhoit Swami in old age - with the reading of the translations of the lyrics of Rabindranath Tagore that led to his Introduction to the 1912 English version of *Gitanjali* falling along the way between.

116. See *C.P.* pg 328.

117. We could bear in mind here what Yeats says in his final public musing upon Maude Gonne, "A Bronze Head", where he wonders "Which of her forms has shown her substance right?" and then recalls that

maybe substance can be composite,
Profound McTaggart thought so, and in a breath
A mouthful held the extreme of life and death
(*C.P.* pg 382).

The suggestion is that the selves that are revealed - or developed - within time might all cohere in some same instant of eternal "substance" that precedes and forms and succeeds any given moment in time. If we follow such a doctrine, then the child is not only father to the man, but the old man and the child and every other persona in between are always all present in that "mighty stuff" that rounds the footlights of any present scene. The future is already completed and the past not yet begun - which indicates something of the sort of mysterious complexity that Yeats was prepared to accept as possibly characterising the facts of the human stage he had to do some sort of justice to as a poet and as a thinker. Once again, a purely time-bound method of depiction - such as the Chronos-song of the realist actors of "Under the Old Stone Cross" - would show itself to such a view as being a narrow slice only of the total human reality that the Yeatsian artist must try to reveal.

118. See *C.P.* pg 140.

119. See *C.P.* pp 293 - 94.

120. For instance, Yeats's term for the power that he felt making itself felt again "for the first time since the seventeenth century" as Newton's "objective world intelligible to intellect" evaporated under the light of "recent mathematical research" is

"this ever-hidden thing which makes us fold our hands" (*A Vision*, pg 300).

121. Apart from the obvious sense of the rock that underpins the Christian thought that gave Peter his name as the foundation of the Church, we could recall van der Post's thought about Jung's preoccupation with

> Stone, (which) to the inner eye of the candidate for initiation in self-awareness, is the naturally divine in its most lasting and incorruptible physical form. (*Jung and the Story of Our Time*, pg 73.)

122. Jeffares dates "The Gyres" as "probably written between July 1936 and January 1937" (*A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg 435) and "The Man and the Echo" as "written in July 1938 and revised up to October 1938" (*ibid.* pg 511). So as poems that offer images of the Rock against which our ultimate questionings come perforce to a stop, they stand not that many months apart in the making.

123. See *C.P.* pg 393.

124. His own knowledge and use of meditational and magical formulae is an interesting and typical instance of counter-truth, though; but these set circumstances afoot that would lead to differing experiences for different people, so the personal embodiedness and unpredictability of those experiences still remains as great a constant as does the repeatableness of the formulae: there is still no dogma, only ritual.

125. See *C.P.* pg 399.

126. See *C.P.* pg 246.

127. The reference is, of course, to *Essays and Introductions*, pg 167.

This isn't to attempt to abstract "The true faith" from history, but a recognition of the process whereby the vision of the Gospel's meaning was established within the history of the soul: Yeats talks, after all, of "the laws of art, which are the hidden laws of the world" (*ibid.* pg 163); so the discovery of the "true" image hidden beneath the "sawdust" of everyday impressions would be for him the revelation of the "true" shape of history itself, as it is most truly available to human awareness.

If, as Yeats believed, there is such a thing as "the vision of the world made perfect that is buried under all minds" (*ibid.* pg 63), then no mind can be content that history has been truly revealed until the details of its events have been rung against this "buried" touchstone of all human meaning.

128. The sense we gain here of images waking in the thought of the artist, to slowly become the conventional groundwork of outlook in later times, is in its way an interesting echo of the thought Shelley has when he says that the poet

> not only beholds intensely the present as it is,

and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest times (H.A. Needham, ed., *Sidney - An Apology for Poetry, Shelley - A Defence of Poetry*, pg 71).

129. It is worth noting here the ending to Yeats's essay "The Mandukya Upanishad", in which he says:

> I think it certain that Europeans, travelling the same way, enduring the same fasts, saying the same prayers, would have received nothing but perhaps a few broken dreams. Bhagwan Shri Hamsa's evocation of "the conscious", of "the unconscious", depended in part upon innumerable associations from childhood on, in part upon race memory (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 485).

So, in addition to the personal bias of conception each mind must follow, God must be approached by way of the terms that have been built into the blood by one's traditions, or He will not be found at all.

We could also recall that Yeats recognised "Blake's 'Imagination'" as being "what the Upanishads have named 'Self'" (*ibid.* pg 518), and that he was equally sure that this "Unity of Being" (or "Self") is not

> distant and therefore intellectually understand -able, but imminent, differing from man to man and age to age, taking upon itself pain and ugliness, "eye of newt, and toe of frog" (*ibid.*).

Or, as the voice he once heard whilst waking told him,

> The love of God is infinite for every human soul because every human soul is unique, no other can satisfy the same need in God (*Autobiographies*, pg 465; see also "Paudeen", C.P. pg 122):

so the Way to God is each person's own way - and Yeats's entire thought about race and nationality as dynamics acting within each person's outlook on the eternal shows how thoroughly the approach towards the divine is for him always an historically embodied way. Yeats heard the voice that announced this vision of the individual way of God's love to which the quotation from *Autobiographies* refers the very next morning after he had felt "an emotion never experienced before", that suddenly "swept down on" him in annunciation of an awareness of

> what the devout Christian feels (when) he surrenders his will to the will of God (*Autobiographies*, pg 465);

and when he

> felt an extreme surprise for my whole imagination was pre-occupied with the pagan mythology of ancient Ireland, I was marking in red ink upon a large map, every sacred mountain (*ibid.*):

so it seems it was precisely an immersion of his imagination in what were to him the roots of his own Irishness that somehow led him to this great universal of religious faith.

And another indicator of the sense that Yeats always had of just how involved the soul always is with its.own particular ways of history lies in the note he added in 1926 to his thoughts in

The Trembling of the Veil about Henry More's Platonist "Anima Mundi", to the effect that one cannot,

> as some suggest, separate a soul from its memory like a cockle from its shell (*Autobiographies*, pg 324, note 1).

130. That is, if the mechanist philosophy that - for Yeats - underlies realism as an artistic method could allow its adherent to even seriously consider depicting anything immaterial anyway.

131. As Shelley says,

> All things exist as they are perceived; at least in relation to the percipient. "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven" (see H.A. Needham, ed., *Sidney - An Apology for Poetry, Shelley - A Defence of Poetry*, pp 104 - 5).

132. Yeats's convictions that "imagination ... is the voice of what is eternal in man", and that "Blake's 'Imagination' (is) what the Upanishads have named 'Self'", both make it clear that he saw the channel between man and the psychic realities that his religions acknowledge as being the imagination: Locke and Newton's marginalising of the human imagination automatically meant a destruction of the real ground of all religious experience, and laid in its place the sort of mechanisms that Yeats - at seventeen - rejected in the

> Irish Protestant point of view that suggested by its blank abstraction chloride of lime

so as to begin

> to question the countrypeople about apparitions (*Essays and Introductions*, pp 428 - 29).

133. My point is that such complex tendencies as those we see working in the meditation upon death towards imaginative transcendence of the sorts of details to which the mechanist model of reality restricts itself are absolutely natural to the human way of dealing with experience; so any artistic method that leaves them out of the picture has left most of what is most centrally human out of it too.

134. The realist programme would therefore tend for Yeats to hide from its audience its own spirituality - a large blank in the truth of the realist mirror.

135. See *C.P.* pg 398.

136. We could recall here Yeats's comment, in *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth*, that his sudden longing for "something of Sligo to hold in my hand" as a boy was "some old race instinct like that of a savage" (*Autobiographies*, pg 37): he had slipped into one of his "eternities" of mind at that moment - despite the fact that he "had been brought up to laugh at all display of emotion" (*ibid.*) - in which an "old race instinct" was heard calling above what Lawrence called "the voice of my education"

(see stanza 6, "Snake", *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. 1, pp 350.)

137. To do otherwise would have been to encourage simplistic - and mechanistic - notions of what is still (for all the sophisticated genetics since Yeats's day) scarcely less of a mystery than ever.

138. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 47.

139. This is a view certainly implicated in the convictions that Yeats held concerning - for instance -

> the Anima Mundi described by the Platonic philosophers, and more especially by Henry More, which has a memory independent of embodied individual memories, though they constantly enrich it with their images and their thoughts (*Autobiographies*, pg 324).

This "spirit of the Earth, man's procreant mind" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 92) would be mediated for Yeats through the local roots of specific heritage - race branching into clan into family into self.

He would, in other words be holding a view of the fundamental underpinnings of specific personalty pretty much in accord with that of modern genetics.

140. See stanza 3, *C.P.* pp 350 - 51:

> But there's another knowledge that my heart destroys,
> As the fox in the old fable destroyed the Spartan boy's,
> Because it proves that things both can and cannot be;
> That the swordsmen and the ladies can still keep company,
> Can pay the poet for a verse and hear the fiddle sound,
> That I am still their servant though all are underground.

141. See "Crazy Jane on God", *C.P.* pp 293 - 94 (stanzas 2 and 3 in particular).

142. If not, why should the old wanderer in "The Curse of Cromwell" feel that he is "still ... servant" to the dead?

143. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 341.

144. To such a view, the unfading dead form part of the mind's daily warp - which is a view that is, of course, what we might have expected from Yeats, who could never have thought of any even supposedly "physical" patterning in materialist or mechanist terms - as his comment in a letter to Katherine Tynan of the early 1890's that

> Health and spirits are I suppose mixed up in some queer way - not quite as the materialists say, but in some fashion (*The Middle Years*, pg 69)

proves: one's spiritual tone and the state of one's health have their deep, significant linkings - but they could never be linkings of the sort that "the materialists" (with concepts such as theirs) could ever hope to grasp .

145. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 74.

143. *Ibid.*

147. I take the term from where de Chardin talks in *The Phenomenon of Man* of culture as being a sort of "supersomatic DNA".

148. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 50.
There is also an interesting parallel to this formulation in *Memoirs*, when Yeats recalls a dream of Madame Blavatsky's, in which she was cured of a crippling physical condition by her Master applying "a live dog split open" to her knee "so the entrails covered it". Yeats then says of Blavatsky that

> She was full of strange medieval learning, and a cure known to the medieval doctors, with their conception of transferred vitality, may have floated up in a dream - unless indeed such dreams, once actual events, linger on in the spiritual world and are perhaps the instruments of healing: see pp 25 - 6.

149. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 414.

150. We should realise that the term "instinct" is merely a pointer that indicates the activity of something of which we still have very little working knowledge: to call some behaviour "instinctive" means only that it seems to arise in a particular area of potential that we have so designated within the psychic structure of the creature we are observing; it is in real fact tantamount to admitting that the dynamics of this behaviour are still a mystery to us.

151. It is "past Being" only when we think in terms of strictly Newtonian time, of course: once we ignore that, then past, present and future show themselves to be merely constructs of the human sense of process, as is suggested by Jung's saying in "Synchronicity: an Acausal Principle" (1952) that

> Rhine's experiments (in E.S.P.) show that in relation to the psyche space and time are, so to speak "elastic", and can apparently be reduced almost to vanishing point, as though they were dependent on psychic conditions and did not exist in themselves but were only "postulated" by the conscious mind. In man's original view of the world, as we find it among primitives, space and time have a very precarious existence, They become "fixed" concepts only in the course of his mental development. In themselves, space and time consist of *nothing*. They are hypostatised concepts born of the discriminating activity of the conscious mind, and they form the indispensable co-ordinates for describing the behaviour of bodies in motion. They are, therefore, essentially psychic in origin

(*The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, pp 435 - 36).

This formulation is nicely parallel to what Yeats himself has to say in "On the Boiler" (1939) about Poincare, who

> described space as the creation of our ancestors, meaning, I conclude, that mind split itself into mind and space. Space was to antiquity mind's inseparable "other", coincident with objects, the table not the place it occupies (*Explorations*, pp 434 - 35).

And this "split" within the "mind" that caused space to seem external to human thought had led to

> denial of the immortality of the soul by hiding from the mass of the people that the grave-diggers have no place to bury us but in the human mind (*ibid.* pg 436).

152. That Yeats obviously approved Henry More's view that the experiences of "embodied individual memories ... constantly enrich" the Anima Mundi "with their images and their thoughts", is proof of his conception of this two-way traffic between eternity and the productions of time.

We could also recall Jung's saying - in the section of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* that he called "The Tower" - that he

> became aware of the fateful links between me and my ancestors. I feel very strongly that I am under the influence of things or questions which were left incomplete and unanswered by my parents and grandparents and more distant ancestors. It seems as if there were an impersonal karma within a family, which is passed on from parents to children. It has always seemed to me that I had to answer questions which fate had posed to my forefathers, and which had not been answered, or as if I had to complete, or perhaps continue, things which previous ages had left unfinished. It is difficult to determine whether these questions are more of a personal or more of a general (collective) nature (pp 233 - 34).

For this feeling that there is "an impersonal karma within a family" seems an intuition recorded from another slant of what Yeats himself calls the "eternit(y)" of "race" acting within any current moment of human experience.

153. See "Under Ben Bulben", Section I, Stanzas 2 and 3, *C.P.* pp 397 - 98.

154. Taking the term here at its widest, the Great Memory of the human race.

155. This Anima Mundi is the same "spirit of the Earth" that Yeats called "man's procreant mind" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 92).

156. See "A Prayer for Old Age", *C.P.* pg 326:

> God guard me from those thoughts men think
> In the mind alone

- where what is being stressed as much as the purely abstract or rational nature of such thinking is its being purely personal and remote from greater communion with the "marrow-bone" in which thoughts that remember more than the sum of the ego's personal and cultural experience pattern the mind's awarenesses: it is this latter liberation of outlook from what is narrowly personal and restrictively contemporary that makes for "lasting song"; that makes for art that can encourage the same liberation in its audience from generation to generation.

To recognise this register to the notion of "the mind alone" helps one to understand Yeats's point that realist - mechanically abstract - art involves a reduction of the conception of selfhood in terms of which one must interpret human experience.

157. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 102.

This essay of Yeats's is dated May, 1901, when Jung was only 25, and just five months after he had begun his "years of apprenticeship" (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections* pg 114) at the Burgholzli hospital under Bleuler and Janet: see van der Post, *Jung and the Story of our Time*, pg 111.

Yeats was thus using the term "archetypal" long before Jung ever began to have the "dreams" and "actual experiences of the unconscious" from which "in the course of years there developed ... the theory of archetypes" (Memories, Dreams, Reflections, pg 173). Van der Post points out that it was only with the study *Psychology and Alchemy* of 1944 that Jung fully established proof of the archetypal patterns (*Jung and the Story of our Time*, pg 206), and that the term "archetypes" itself was

> rediscovered from St Augustine and before him even used by Hermes Trismegistus, who exclaims in the *Poimandres*, "You have seen in your mind the archetypal image" (*ibid.* pg 209).

Jung says himself that *Psychology and Alchemy* was the work in which

> I had at last reached the ground which underlay my own experiences of the years 1913 to 1917: see *Memories, Dreams*, Reflections, pg 209);

and himself refers to Hermes Trismegistus in his essay on Paracelsus, where he says

> Paracelsus certainly knew the "Tabula Smaragdina", the classical authority of Medieval alchemy, and the text: "What is below is like what is above. What is above is like what is below. That is the miracle of the One accomplished" (see *The Spirit in Man, Art and Nature*, pg 21, note 26).

He also indicates in his essay of 1957, "On 'The Tibetan Book of the Dead'", that he was "following St Augustine" in calling the "typical images" - which he had found to be "categories of the *imagination*" - "archetypes" (see *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, pg 518).

Yeats of course had his own "ground" in alchemy; and Hermes Trismegistus is the authority to whom he refers when he says in the second of the "*Supernatural Songs*" that "things below are

copies, the Great Smaragdine Tablet said" (*C.P.* pg 329); see Jeffares's note to this line, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg 428. It is interesting how much Yeats and Jung had in common in the "ground" of their thoughts: folk "mysticism", urban spiritism, occult studies, astrology, alchemy, eastern philosophy - all when these were things pretty much out of the mainstream of European thinking. It is hard not to entertain the feeling of there being a current within the times that is acting through Yeats and Jung like two poles of the same energy: Coleridge's Truth, the "great ventriloquist", speaking through different dolls.

158. For a parallel to Yeats's thinking here, we might recall once more what we have just seen Jung saying in his talking about his own Tower at Bollingen and its creation of a local habitation for ancestral dimensions within his own psyche which made him so very "aware of the fateful links between me and my ancestors" (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pg 233.)

As Jung continues with his account, this conviction that the modern psyche is nowhere near being done with ancestral and historied things comes to the fore again when he says

> Body and soul ... have an intensely historical character and find no proper place in what is new, in things that have just come into being. That is to say, our ancestral components are only partly at home in such things. We are very far from being done with the Middle Ages, with classical antiquity, and primitivity, as our modern psyches pretend (*ibid.* pp 235 - 36).

And Jung's "Body and soul" that "find no proper place in what is new" seem close kin to Yeats's "eternities" of "race" and "soul" between which each "new" experience of "our modern psyches" is poised in its flight; and when one reads reflections such as these, it is fascinating to think of Yeats's own sense of the need for Irish poets to "cast (their) thoughts on other days" in service of "coming days" ("Under Ben Bulben", Section V, *C.P.* pg 400) in a discipline undertaken in avoidance of an exclusive immersion "in things that have just come into being".

The way in which Jung uses the term "modern" here also makes one suspect he would have felt at least some common ground with Yeats's sense that the Irish had been "born into (an) ancient sect" but had been "thrown upon the filthy modern tide" (see "The Statues", stanza 4, *C.P.* pg 375 - 76)) of an "unremembering" time that lacked traditional perspectives ("Under Ben Bulben, Section V).

And it is also tempting to recall that Jung's translators chose to render him as saying that "Body and soul ... find no proper place in what is new, in things that have just come into being": if we take "proper" (proprius) to mean that which is one's own, what Jung means here seems to share a good deal with Yeats's sense of the word when he uses it in speaking of the "proper dark" in which the Irish will some day find their own "ancient" image of selfhood established beyond the modern confusion of "things that have just come into being": for Yeats too, this "proper place" is one from the vantage of which the artist can "trace" - in the "intensely historical character" of what

underlies that which "our modern psyches pretend" is all that there is to reality - "The lineaments" of a new Phidian dream (see stanza 4 of "The Statues") of the urgent future.

159. This would also be without realising that his mirror really mirrored "archetypal ideas", and not the objective nature assumed by the mechanist confusion. We could perhaps recall Yeats's epitomising of the Bhuddistic vision in "The Statues":

> Empty eyeballs knew
> That knowledge increases unreality, that
> Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.

If "all the show" that the mind absorbed in nature can "know" is such a bewildering shimmer of counter-reflections, an art that simply holds up its own mirror, to add another "show" to the display - rather than trying to capture something of what prompts the play of images in the first place - can surely only "increase() unreality"? Or, so one would imagine Yeats's thoughts to run. So realism in the arts "increases unreality" - an irony Yeats would have enjoyed - and is therefore no basis for a satisfactory artistic method.

160. The fact that Yeats's "unknown instructors" had to prevent him from mistaking their purpose with him - in his wishing to devote the remainder of his work to a philosophical explication of their doctrine (see *A Vision*, pg 8) - says a great deal about how seriously he himself took the System as an image of a vital reality.

161. See *A Vision*, pg 270.

162. See *A Vision*, pg 205.

163. It is interesting to note, in this regard, Laurens van der Post's thinking that the impulse towards discovery that underlay the Renaissance came from "a profound shift in focus in the area of the human spirit in which faith arises"; from a shift in which he believes that

> greed found the power great enough to abolish the impediments which had confined the imagination of the West for over a thousand years (*Yet Being Someone Other*, pg 17).

In a model of the dynamics impelling human history such as this, what van der Post calls the "purely rational" explanation of "conventional history" - one that holds that "materialistic greed" alone was the prime mover in the process - is seen as being inadequate in its terms, and is then replaced by a view that sees this "greed" as itself taking direction from a ground-swell of "passion" that was already running as

> the imagination of the West was swinging over into another principle of itself, and beginning to focus on an external world for too long underrated (*ibid. pp 17* -18).

The very Jungian form to this conception possibly takes its authority from a passage in Jung's own writings such as the one we have noted just above, in which Jung speaks of the

"archetypes" as being "categories of the imagination" and not "of reason" (*Psychology and Religion: West and East*, pg 518). As does van der Post, Jung sees the imagination as being the real power behind human history - which makes that history at heart a chronicle of the "shift(s) in focus" that have marked the changing imaginative boundaries of different ages.

For Yeats too, history arises from the play of what could be called the action and counter-action of profound "principle(s)" of "the imagination": in the schema of the Great Wheel to which we have just referred, the very notion of history itself arose in the slowly opening human imagination out of "the Sacred Legend of the sun's annual journey" - which "Legend" began to glimmer only when a profound "shift of focus" began to dawn in us: a new focus which allowed a sense of the self and of the community as personae enacting a "Sacred" tale such as this to form. Whatever else we can say about this Great Wheel, it acts for Yeats within the human register upon and through the human imagination: which is reason enough in itself for Yeats's insistence upon the need for an art that is rooted in - and that serves to nourish - that imagination: if the whole track of our story has been the series of awakenings and shifts and realignments of our imaginative awareness that Yeats's Wheel suggests it has been, then those who have mediated new inklings of imaginative vision to their fellows have served the purpose embodied in that Wheel to the full: whoever first glimpsed the pattern of the Sacred Legend and told his fellows helped to turn the Wheel; and Yeats would have seen him as having been to his people exactly what he hoped the Irish poets of "coming days" would clearly be to theirs.

164. "Epiphany" rather in the sense of moments in which the future is implanted within the present, as is described in poems like "Leda and the Swan", (*C.P.* pg 241) and "Long-Legged Fly (*C.P.* pg 381).

It is also interesting that Yeats knew what it was to have a sudden sense of a religious awareness utterly outside what he took to be his own immediate range of selfhood sweep down upon him in revelation: see the recollection in *The Trembling of the Veil* - to which we have already referred - of the moment in the last years of the 1890's when he

> was crossing a little stream near Inchy Wood and actually in the middle of a stride from bank to bank, when an emotion never experienced before swept down on me. I said, "That is what the devout Christian feels, that is how he surrenders his will to the will of God" (*Autobiographies*, pg 465).

165. Though Yeats would hold that things in Egypt or in Sumer were already ready for moonrise: it was that time of the Wheel.

166. See *A Vision*, pg 262 ff.

167. Which isn't to say that this is exactly what he had in mind when he wrote "The Second Coming": as he said in a note to another poem that we have discussed above,

> The poem has always meant a great deal to me, though, as is the way with symbolic poems, it

> has not always meant quite the same thing
> (*C.P.* pg 526).

To find in the rough beast an application in another context that it might not have revealed at its inception is simply part of the on-going suggestiveness that symbols have as agents of meaning.

The sphinx in the desert wasn't the first form of the image to visit Yeats, either: he recalls of the first symbol that Macgregor Mathers gave him to meditate on that he saw

> mental images that I could not control: a desert and a black Titan raising himself up by his two hands from the middle of a heap of ruins. Mathers explained that I had seen a being of the order of Salamanders because he had shown me their symbol
> (*Autobiographies*, pg 230):

and the "rough beast" of "The Second Coming" is surely itself something like such "a being of the order of Salamanders" - creatures who are traditionally phoenixes who survive the "ruins" of the fire?

I am reassured to see that Jeffares notes that Peter Ure pointed out this parallel between the "beast" of "The Second Coming" and the Titan evoked by Mather's "symbol" (*A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pp 243 - 44); but Jeffares makes reference to *Autobiographies*, pp 185 - 6. The 1926 edition I have before me has it as given above.

168. Oedipus gets the "right" answer to the Sphinx's riddle; but he doesn't seem to see how the image of human life that this riddle involves - the full circle from helplessness back to helplessness - applies to his own human fatedness and limitation.

169. Which, as we know from the passage discussed above, "mingles with the Great Mind, and is enlarged by the Great Memory ".

A myth inhabits highly authoritative psychic ground for Yeats: in his comments on Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, he says that in reading

> the (early) Irish stories (we) understand why the Greeks call myths the activities of the daemons (*Explorations*, pg 10);

while he identifies the "daimon" with "the permanent self" in a diary from 1930: see *Explorations*, pg 331. And he also says in his Introduction to *The Cat and the Moon*:

> Myth is not ... a rudimentary form superseded by reflection. Belief is the spring of all action; we assent to the conclusions of reflection but believe what myth presents; belief is love, and the concrete alone is loved: nor is it true that myth has no purpose but to bring round some discovery of a principle or a fact. The saint may touch through myth the utmost of human faculty and pass not to reflection but to unity with the source of his being (*Explorations*, pg 400).

So Yeats would have disagreed with Robert Graves' view that

> A true science of myth should begin with a study of archaeology, history, and comparative religion, not in the psycho-therapist's consulting-room.

Though the Jungians hold that "myths are original

> Though the Jungians hold that "myths are original revelations of the pre-conscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings", Greek mythology was no more mysterious in content than are modern election cartoons, and for the most part formulated in territories which maintained close political relations with Minoan Crete - a country sophisticated enough to have written archives, four -storey buildings with hygienic plumbing, doors with modern-looking locks, registered trademarks, chess, a central system of weights and measures, and a calendar based on patient astronomical observations (*The Myths of Greece*, vol 1, pp 21 - 2).

Setting aside Graves's rather *ad hominem* tone regarding the right place for a "science of myth to begin" - one senses a touch of the ruffling of the scholar at the supposedly "unqualified" intruder - one wonders why "hygienic plumbing" and generally living within a "sophisticated" system should somehow automatically be incompatible with an awareness of "unconscious psychic happenings": after all, Yeats once impressed his son's new headmaster with the practicality of his questions about the efficiency of the school's "sanitation, ventilation, heat and so on" (see Hone, *W.B. Yeats , 1865 - 1939*, pg 421). He had also himself thought deeply about "astronomical observations"; and the shopgirls he met in London going to seances in multi-storey buildings to get news of their young men out in the trenches of Flanders were certainly not unaware of hygienic plumbing themselves: Graves's logic would imply that they must have become less prone to go to clairvoyants as soon as they learnt about the modern scientific wonder of mustard gas.

And the notion that Greek myth was "formulated" in "a country" of some cultural and scientific sophistication - so there could have been no primitive complexes still significantly at work amidst its inhabitants' unquestioned assumptions - also overlooks the rise in the 1930's of Nazi neo-Wotanism in a country that a few years later flew the first combat jet aircraft; just as it overlooks the power of the myth of the Russian Bear (memory-relic perhaps of *Ursus spelaeus*, the Grendel that raided the inner gloom of our first caves, for which see Norbert Casteret, *Ten Years under the Earth*, pp 63 - 73) that - even as Graves was writing - haunted the shadows beyond the McCarthyite watch-fire which had just been kindled at Hiroshima.

But perhaps we should recall Graves on Freud's Oedipus Complex, to be fair to what he might have had in mind. As Graves has it, Freud's reading was based on what is an illogical and entirely subjective misreading of what was probably only a "perverted anecdote" concocted by "a thirteenth century invader of Thebes", where a cult-ritual - in which

> the new king, though a foreigner, had theoretically been a son of the old king whom he killed and whose widow he married (*The Greek Myths*, vol 2, pg 13, n. 3)

- had been "misrepresented" by "the patriarchal invaders" as actual "parricide and incest". Graves' clincher runs:

> while Plutarch records (*On Isis and Osiris 32*) that the hippopotamus "murdered his sire and forced his

has a hippopotamus complex (*ibid.*).

These comments on "the Jungians" - dating to about 1955 - actually show that Graves knew little about Jung as a scholar: a dip into works like "A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity" (*Psychology and Religion: West and East*, pp 109 - 200), or "Transformation Symbolism in the Mass" (*ibid.* pp 203 - 96), or the whole of *Psychology and Alchemy*, would have left Graves with no doubt as to the rigour and profundity of Jung's intellectual discipline - or to the respectability of his approach. In fact, a glance at the paragraph in the "Answer to Job" on the association (in Ecclesiasticus 24: 3 - 18) of Sophia or Wisdom with symbolic trees (see *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, pg 388) would have made the writer of *The White Goddess* feel on very familiar ground.

170. See the passage on the Great Wheel quoted above.

171. See *C.P.* pg 337.

When we come to the end of "The Gyres", and its sense of the birth of a new "gracious time" as being a running of "all things/ On that unfashionable gyre again," we should remember that it is only the gyre - the pattern - that is repeatable: Yeats no longer sighs "For painted forms or boxes of make-up/ In ancient tombs" precisely because such achieved particulars of craft-achievement are entirely beyond prediction. The gyre will come again; that is all he knows.

172. See *C.P.* pg 365.

173. Yeats's answer would probably be along the lines that such an ultimately "rationalist" view could detect only the sorts of patternings to human experience that "conventional history" deals in - the terms being borrowed from Laurens van der Post's comments on the imaginative origins of history that we have noted above.

174. See "Meditations in Time of Civil War", Section IV, stanza 3, *C.P. pg 229.*

175. If we take the owl as bird of wisdom, the owl flying its gyre becomes an emblem of the pattern to which all human knowledge must move.

176. In his clear awareness that the realities we can know are mysterious and beyond any clear and distinct understanding of the Cartesian sort, Yeats stands on a ground very near that of Aquinas, with his

> *abyssus humanae naturae* and *factus eram ipse mihi magna questio*, the abyss of human nature and man's radical questionability (see Martin Versfeld, *Sum*, pg 22:

the whole of the essay called "Descartes and Me" from which this quote is taken - an account of Versfeld's own excurse through the early modern philosophers back to the scholastics - is valuable *a propos* of Yeats's own rejection of the *cogito* of the early moderns in the name of a proper sense of the *abyssus* and *magna*

questio that he sees our experience of ourselves in the full complexity of our nature as revealing: see *ibid*. pp 13 - 24.)

Chapter 5: What Then?

Having taken such a tangent as we have through Yeats's work - a consideration of his views concerning the nature of art and concerning some of the factors we could say influenced or confirmed him in his holding such views - one of the dangers we are left with is the narrowed and very partial emphasis all this has given to what has been said about Yeats's thinking. In making a more-or-less sustained point throughout the discussion, what has been said has inevitably become a slant, true only up to a certain point even within the limits this discussion has set itself.

And one such area of slanting of which I am sharply aware lies in the danger in which this thesis stands of giving an impression of a sort - and of a degree - of idealism to Yeats's thought that might falsify the broader picture. There is a distinct danger that the emphasis I have had to lay upon Yeats's contest with realistic or unimaginative art might leave the reader with a skewed notion of his thinking - unless some attempt at least is made to define this "idealism", and to place it as a tincture within the fuller context of a many-sided personality. What has been offered in the preceding chapters seems to require such an attempt at defining and placing, so as little unintentional disservice may be done as possible. The house of cards needs folding back into the deck.

For one thing that needs to be quite clearly

established - in considering the depth and range of Yeats's sense of what could be called the ideal - is how little there is in it of the mere rejection of what the "realist" affirms. The idealist whose view is mostly an uneasiness with the rough edges of human experience, and who thus posits an order of realities that are then deemed to in some way transcend - and essentially invalidate - that experience is obviously in grave danger of being trapped in an evasion. This negative sort of "idealism" I don't find in Yeats's writings. Even in the earliest verse, with its dreaminess and its evocation of things Indian and Arcadian, Yeats is trying to formulate alternative standpoints on accepted "reality" that take existing standpoints vitally into count - even if it is an antagonistic account - with a toughness of grasp that isn't always recognised.[1] The stance, even in these early poems, can hardly in justice be called escapist - in the sense of the sort of escapism that grows from a merely personal and characteristic discontent with what actually exists.

Take, for example, the poem that often is read as a sign of some sort of "idealistic" escapism, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree":

I shall arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always, night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.[2]

One thing that is always striking about this poem is its precision. As Hone recalls, it "set the professors agog by the arrangement of the vowel sounds";[3] and the intrinsic musicality that this comment recognises is symptomatic of a control and an exactness of thought as well as of expression that is at work in the poem: of an exactness that is the sinew of the strength of the poem's feeling. Far from being a vague reaching for some dimly-realised place of mere escape, the lake and its isle are presented with an exact vividness that should remind us that Yeats was speaking about a place he knew well, by night and by day, from boyhood onwards.[4] What Yeats expresses in this poem is a desire - bred in "the deep heart's core" - for a particular place that has clearly-known and specific qualities, and that will allow him to carry out an exact programme - exact down to the number and content of the "rows" of his garden - in pursuit of a specific and exactly-understood end: the finding of a "peace" that the "roadway, or ... the pavements grey" of the city can't themselves give him. What we find in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is, in other words, the expression of an exact blueprint and of a clear purpose - both of which are founded in an open-eyed understanding of self and of circumstance, and are driven by a perfectly legitimate desire to find a way to fulfil needs to which Yeats's current situation cannot cater.[5] To that degree,

place - to senses capable of such vivid awareness of midnight's "glimmer" and noon's "purple glow" - is so obviously a spur in itself,[12] the fact that even the bean-rows Yeats plans are numbered with symbolic meaning - nine being a kabbalistic number of great significance[13] - is typical of the poem's intellectual tenor.[14]

And this precision of awareness to the poem - its utter lack of any sort of anywhere-but-London! funk - is signalled again even in a detail as seemingly just a bit of nostalgia as Yeats's longing for evenings "full of the linnet's wings".[15] We need to remember Yeats the naturalist, whose first planned book was to be "about the changes through a twelvemonth among the creatures of some hole in the rock",[16] when we try to catch something of what those birds meant to him in composing this poem. The first-hand knowledge he had of natural things would already have given him at least the ground of the sort of understanding of the linnet that grew into his choosing this bird of rare and unobtrusive grace[17] as the most apt image he could find for the sorts of thoughts he prayed his daughter would be granted, in that poem about the sanctity and efficacy of the same sort of "sweet will" of creative desire that "Innisfree" itself so clearly manifests, "A Prayer for my Daughter".[18] Given where the linnet ended-up in Yeats's mature vocabulary of images, the longing for the evenings "full of linnets wings" sounds like the young craftsman's instinct for being surrounded by his materials, rather than any evasion of his responsibility towards "reality".

Even the "peace" that Yeats seeks in "Innisfree" needs to be carefully placed within a proper context of meaning, if we are to grasp it as a positive engagement with meaning, and not simply as a sign of some sort of evasion. Though the values of the country-bred are not always appreciated by townsfolk, the peace that Yeats desires in this poem is a simple quality of existence that no-one who knows what it means would accuse anyone at all who lacked it of wanting illegitimately.[19] Yeats actually needs no defence for missing such "peace" at all.

But, if we are after some exact register to the meaning of this "peace" that he is so sure his plans will bring him, we must recall also what he had already established of his vision of the modern mentality and its ills years before he wrote "Innisfree":

> The woods of Arcady are dead,
> And over is their antique joy;
> Of old the world on dreaming fed;
> Grey Truth is now her painted toy;
> Yet still she turns her restless head:
> But O, sick children of the world,
> Of all the many changing things
> In dreary dancing past us whirled,
> To the cracked tune that Chronos sings.
> Words alone are certain good.[20]

So modern life, for the Yeats of these lines, is one in which people suffer a restless sickness, deprived of all that "The woods of Arcady" represent of an aboriginal connectedness with the world beyond the modern city.[21] The only "certain good" is the "Words" that can embody the lost dreams that the "sick children of the world" stand so painfully in need of recovering; and the "antique joy" of the Arcadian wholeness of

head and dreaming heart that this little poem expounds is surely a state that is near cousin to the "peace" that Yeats seeks beyond the grey urban confines in "Innisfree"? The two terms at least lie in the same direction of meaning - which should make us even more certain that the "peace" that is sought in "Innisfree" has to be seen as having behind it a fuller set of intellectual resonances than might first seem to be at work. "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is actually a far more thoughtful poem than many readers seem to recognise - for all its obvious sincerity and the command it has over its emotion.[22] Veiled within the image that the poem gives us of the dreamer at the kerb-side is an equally vivid impression of the workings of a thoroughly practical mind that can take full account of pavements and roadway - the concreteness of their evocation comes from a fully alert perception of their reality - even as that mind refuses to take their materiality to be all that can really be had in life. Yeats was, in fact, possessed of an extremely shrewd sense of practical necessities, as any number of instances from his life and work can show.

There is, for example, his memory of being derided by a family living next to his father's house in Dublin, who were mocking the antics he was performing while writing. As Yeats tells it,

> I have a habit of acting what I write and speaking it aloud without knowing what I am doing. Perhaps I was on my hands and knees, or looking down over the back of a chair talking into what I imagined an abyss.[23]

So he was "workshopping" his verse in the most practical and

exact way he could devise: which is a sign of a creative pragmatism that is also reflected in the way he stood watching his plays performed night after night so as to "use the theatre as a workshop".[24]

Or there's the Yeats who surprised his son Michael's new headmaster with questions about practical arrangements at the school;[25] or there's Senator Yeats, sniffing about in cupboards under stairs in the building in which the Free State senate first sat, and repeatedly blasting his colleagues in speeches about poor fire precautions - he'd found cotton waste and inflammable fluid together in one closet - that were a threat to the Irish national treasures stored under the same roof.[26]

Or there's the Yeats who it was found kept such meticulous records of his money matters that he noted debts of a farthing, for repayment when he could manage it.[27]

Or there's the Yeats who could advise the Ministers of the Cosgrave government to enter into negotiations to have the oath of allegiance to the Free State removed so that De Valera could enter the Dail and bring the civil war to an end.[28] Or there's the Yeats who could tell from a mere photograph that an Oxford classical don was thirty years too early in the date he'd hazarded on some newly-discovered Greek sculpture - and be proved right, in the mature judgement of the scholars.[29] To be able to advise a Cabinet on how to end a war, and to be

able to correct a scholar's dating of an artefact germane to his own field, by looking at a photograph, can be signs only of an intellect deeply capable of confronting and assessing the hard details of experience over an unusual range.[30] And we need only think of how the young man set about trying to learn self-possession by "often" going to some "strange house where I knew I would spend a wretched hour for schooling sake"[31] to have brought vividly before us this capacity for an intensely practical pursuit of any ideal prompting that Yeats felt.[32]

So what we might call Yeats's idealism was then really a rare and creative attitude held towards both the actual and the potential ingredients that he recognised as inhering within a particular set of concrete circumstances. Though, for instance, he might speak at the end of "The Tower" of his "faith" that man had dreamed up everything "out of his bitter soul", we must remember that this faith is there being set in explicit antagonism to Plato's thought about the real and the ideal. As the formulation at this moment runs,

> And I declare my faith:
> I mock Plotinus' thought
> And cry in Plato's teeth,
> Death and life were not
> Till man made up the whole,
> Made lock, stock and barrel
> Out of his bitter soul,
> Aye, sun and moon and star, all,
> And further add to that
> That, being dead, we rise,
> Dream and so create
> Translunar Paradise.[33]

So, while Yeats would go along with Plato in the general sense that "sun and moon and star, all" are not material in

the pragmatical seventeenth century meaning of the term, and would go along in a sense of these things being - in an important dimension of the word - really ideas,[34] the great difference between Plato's thought and Yeats's lies in the emphasis Yeats lays on man, the dreamer, and on his "bitter soul". Why his "faith" is one he can fling "in Plato's teeth" is because it is really an affirmation of the central role the incarnate human soul plays within the ordering of final reality. The temptation that Yeats is warding-off here is that of trying to escape the terrible absurdity of mortal decrepitude through embarking upon some process of abstraction, through initiating in himself some denial of the meaning and value of the mortal being of man: a denial to be achieved by way of exalting as a final fact the notion of an eternal Pure Intellect whose dealings with mortal experience would seem to be little more than a distasteful entanglement in illusion and unreality.[35]

And this warding-off of abstraction that "The Tower" finally builds into its answer to mortal absurdity is achieved by establishing what is, within the broad stream of idealism, a counter-truth to Plato's sort: is a celebration of the meaning and supreme value of mortal existence and knowledge within the dynamics of both the natural and the supernatural dimensions of the totality of things. The lamps of the heavens themselves - and all that they mean to human understanding - as well as Heaven itself ("Translunar Paradise") are "made up" as a tale or a dream by the intrinsically "bitter" soul -

whether that soul be incarnate or discarnate. It isn't for Yeats, as for Plato, that Heaven is a realm of Eternal Ideas that are abstracted from - and that entirely pre-existed - the mortal world, and that really have nothing to do with that world except to suffer dimming and distortion by the illusions of nature. As Yeats ends "The Tower", his "faith" is that whatever he will know of the ultimate riches of Heaven or "Translunar Paradise" - or of any Ultimate Reality - will be "made up" of what he has found to be the riches of the very mortal life that has led him to this absurd old age that he is now facing:

> I have prepared my peace
> With learned Italian things
> And the proud stones of Greece,
> Poets' imaginings
> And memories of the words of women,
> All those things wherof
> Man makes a superhuman
> Mirror-resembling dream.[36]

So not only is mortal life, at its most vivid, a sort of mirror of some "Translunar Paradise" to come, but this Paradise is "prepared" by the incarnate soul's piecing it together out of mortal knowledge. Yeats's "faith" is one that celebrates the profane as being the material from which the sacred fashions its further actualities, as if mortal life were a place of gathering, a vital stage in the greater dream that is the soul's progress through the Heaven and Earth it variously inhabits primarily as completer of both.[37] Earth and our mortal experience are not the dark place of exile from Reality that they are in Plato's myth of the cave, for instance,[38] but are part of the soul's sacred way - a vale of

soul-making, not a vale of exile and of tears.[39]

The point is clearly made again by Yeats in *A Vision*, where at one point he speaks of "the truth into which Plato dies" as being

> a form of death, for when he separates the Eternal Ideas from Nature and shows them self-sustained he prepares the Christian desert and the Stoic suicide.[40]

And what we could valuably set in contrast to this bias that Yeats finds to Plato's thinking is his own statement that

> art brings us near to the archetypal ideas themselves, and away from nature, which is but their looking-glass;[41]

because - though a too-cursory glance might prompt the feeling that here Yeats is himself holding "nature" rather cheap[42] - the real differences between a stance such as the one he sees Plato as maintaining and his own are quite startling. Plato, for Yeats, negates all significant connection between Truth and Nature; but Yeats himself finds our deepest realities actually embodied or imaged in nature - which is, in fact, the mortal dress such realities wear to our senses. The meaning and value that Yeats finds in all that can be summed-up in the term "nature" is thus profoundly at odds with the sort of Idealism he identifies in Plato's view. Yeats's "nature" is like one of those Quattrocento paintings he typified in "Under Ben Bulben" - paintings that can lead the imagination to where "heavens had opened".[43] Nature is thus for Yeats a sort of magic window through which supernatural energies may be glimpsed: the sensible tree being sustained by the "archetypal ideas" that are its hidden roots. However we try to present

the conception, the central fact is that the connections that Yeats finds between ultimate reality and mortal nature are entirely without severance of the sort that he found - and rejected - in an idealism such as Plato's.[44]

So it should come as no surprise that the sort of idealism that shows, for instance, when Yeats speaks of the "secret purpose" that he saw at work in the service that truly imaginative art offers "the soul of man"[45] should centre in the faith that this "purpose" is one that is itself inspired by a very different vision to the sort of contempt for things natural that he saw as having led to "the Christian desert and the Stoic suicide". What this "purpose" is, on the contrary, is the deepest possible sanctification of mortal life - or of "nature" - itself, "Profane perfection of mankind".[46] The "secret working mind" that Yeats sees in this poem as having through all the ages sought to foster this goal is certainly a spiritual or supernatural agency,[47] and it is equally certainly an agency that is set, in important ways, actively in tension to the existing patterns to which natural things are arranged; but Yeats's formulation makes it clear that he sees this "mind" or ultimate reality as a force forever seeking embodiment within nature itself. His ultimate truth is always seeking incarnation - and is thus never any sort of lure towards any sort of attempt to escape from incarnate experience into an ever more-refined transcendence of nature - as the Platonic construct can so easily become.[48]

And perhaps one of the root differences in ideal conception between Yeats and Plato lies, in fact, in this central question of the attitude towards mortal imperfection. In Plato's model - as Yeats saw in the judgement quoted above - only the Eternal Ideas are perfect; everything else is an imperfect distraction away from Truth. Plato's way is very much the way of the hawk, Yeats's symbol of the rationalist notion of the straight aim and the clear and single goal.[49] But Yeats's way is the way of the butterfly, that must know indirectness and imprecision as part of the necessary track of its journey; that must acknowledge the "imperfect" thought or thing as being an energy that must explore its own "zig-zag" of significant meaning, and that must transmute itself onwards in being through submitting to processes that often reveal precisely the sorts of paradox that baffle rational understanding.

Take, for instance, the poem called "His Confidence", from "Words for Music, Perhaps":

> Undying love to buy
> I wrote upon
> The corners of this eye
> All wrongs done.
> What payment were enough
> For undying love?
>
> I broke my heart in two
> So hard I struck.
> What matter? For I knew
> That out of rock,
> Out of a desolate source
> Love leaps upon its course.[50]

The "undying love" that the speaker seeks is his own capacity for loving - not for love given to him; and the ideal he

follows is pursued by what some would think crazy means: he deliberately breaks his own heart through the rigour with which he inflicts upon himself the memory of "All wrongs done". Where the rational expectation of cause and effect would probably be that this could cause only some sort of callousing of the feelings, the speaker is certain that such things work in paradoxical ways. As Crazy Jane tells the doctrine-wielding Bishop, in the same group of poems,

> ...nothing can be sole or whole
> That has not been rent.[51]

And in this readiness to recognise and accept the paradoxical - the super-rational - that both Crazy Jane and the speaker of "His Confidence" so well exhibit, we find what amounts to a readiness to accept imperfect events and things as performing their own profound part in the piecing-together of the fullest human meaning. The imperfect and the incomplete have therefore a central significance within the human search for meaning that they never could have for the sort of Idealism Yeats finds in Plato's thought. As Crazy Jane knows, the only way to win any sort of completeness of being is to accept fully the painful ministry of things imperfect. Rending is part of making, with the imperfect and the perfect[52] showing themselves to be parts of the same whole - and with what has been "rent" not being seen as just dross to the making of the "whole" either.

Which is an element to Yeats's thinking that is implicit, for instance, in the image he offers of the scarecrow of old

age in "Sailing to Byzantium". One of the recognitions involved in the perspectives that this poem establishes is surely that - even though the old man genuinely and urgently needs Byzantium as the only aid for his mortal tatters - "the holy city" wouldn't come so vividly to mind as a dream of transcendence if it weren't that these tatters insist that it should do so. As is said in "Meditations in Time of Civil War", "only an aching heart/ Conceives a changeless work of art."[53] So it is through imperfection - through our suffering mortal tatters - that "the secret working mind" works its way towards "profane perfection of mankind". After all, as the Yeats of "Sailing to Byzantium" is well aware, it is only once one has left behind the "country" of the young and their "sensual music" that the "Monuments of unaging intellect" - the soul's "singing school" that draws it towards Byzantium - cease to suffer "neglect". The Soul, in other words, awakens as it is rent by imperfection; and the first stanza of the poem in particular makes it quite clear that "old men" don't willingly seek to leave that "country" where "all neglect" such "Monuments". They leave it only as unwilling exiles, and only once they have begun to be "Caught" by mortal tatterings.[54]

And this acceptance of the imperfect as being forever interwoven in creative mix with our ideal purposes also involves a sense of the great significance of small, everyday details: a sense that is also very much at variance with the more negative and escapist forms of idealism one encounters.[55]

If there is, for Yeats, a "secret working mind" or a set of "archetypal ideas" that functions as a sort of dynamic template for the progress of the natural world, then this Heavenly will[56] works in and through the minute details of that world - works not in contempt of them, or despite them.[57] If the need to dream was of central importance in Yeats's thinking, from his earliest years on, so equally was the imperative to go about finding ways to try to make one's dreams come true in the real particulars of incarnate living.

Just how basic to his nature was this practical response to the pressure of his dreams can be seen in the passage in *Autobiographies* in which he remembers how stories he heard of local troubles affected him as a young child:

> Later on I can remember being told, when there was a rumour of a Fenian rising, that rifles had been served out to the Orangemen; and presently, when I had begun to dream of my future life, I thought I would like to die fighting the Fenians. I was to build a very fast and beautiful ship, and to have under my command a company of young men who were always to be in training like athletes and so become as brave and as handsome as the young men in the story-books, and there was to be a big battle on the sea-shore near Rosses and I was to be killed. I collected little pieces of wood and piled them up in a corner of the yard, and there was an old rotten log in a distant field I often went to look at because I thought it would go a long way in the making of the ship.[58]

For one of the striking things about this recollection is how the small boy's dream - begun by local rumour and fed by "story-books" - should possess not only such detail of projected event, but also such detail concerning the means whereby such an adventure was to be keeled, years to come in real life. As in the dream of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", it

isn't a vague and billowing fancy that is being described here: the detail of the events is clear and dramatically whole.[59] There isn't just the "company of young men" who were to be a "brave and handsome" crew: their budding captain even had his ship's daily discipline already planned, and had in all seriousness begun gathering timbers for his ship's building. The small boy musing over the "old rotten log in the distant field", thinking "it would go a long way in the making of (his) ship", is without doubt clear father to the man who planned and did what Yeats did as an adult for himself, for Ireland, and for us all. He knew, for instance, (that young himself) that his "company of young men" would always have to be "in training like athletes", if they were to "become as brave and handsome as the young men in the story-books". Handsome heroes are in other words to be made by profane perfecting, and not just born ready-made out of fancy; and the heroic ending in the "big battle on the sea-shore near Rosses" was to be not an accident, but an event prepared-for by a long, disciplined, daily attention to everyday details. There is a remarkably "hands-on" feel about all this, for so young a dreamer: a remarkable eye for the practical details that go into the building of a dream into actual human deed. Everything has been thought-out with a sense of what will be needed to make the thing ultimately *work;* and the touching detail of the many solemn excursions to "the old rotten log in a distant field" makes the seriousness all the more a sign of a clear - if innocent - recognition that the things we desire must be built into being out of the materials that can

actually be found to hand.[60]

Certainly, the picture this passage gives us of the sort of detailed planning that went into Yeats's dreaming of his "future life" - and of the dogged beginning with what could immediately be done towards making that life obedient to his dream - is exactly the characteristic at the core of the poem amongst the *Collected Poems* that most fully casts an eye back over the history of the life's work, "What Then?". If this poem is a chronicle of successes gained under the prod of the quizzing "ghost" of the never-ending next imaginative horizon, it is just as much the record of the activity of a remarkably practical sort of idealism. As the poem begins:

> His chosen comrades thought at school
> He must grow a famous man:
> He thought the same, and lived by rule,
> All his twenties crammed with toil;
> *'What then?' sang Plato's ghost. 'What then?'*[61]

And verse and refrain both bear the impress of this idealism: the promise recognised by self and "comrades" alike is a dream of what is still only the merest potential, and therefore a remote ideal; but what this ideal immediately meant to Yeats was the need to live "by rule" and to cram "All his twenties ... with toil". The ideal, in other words, immediately becomes a duty, a responsibility to be met and a dream to be made actual by means of careful thought and steady labour; and it is, of course, typical of Yeats that the aspect of Plato to which he here responds - in the impulse imaged by the refrain - should be the concern with on-going process,

rather than with arrival. What "Plato's ghost" represents in this poem, more than anything else, is the eternally unfinished pull towards perfection, rather than perfection itself. It is the same sort of "idealism" that makes Yeats's focus in "The Gyres" fall on the impulse that builds human greatness, rather than upon any particular mortal monument that temporarily embodies and thus fleetingly signals the passage of that impulse.[62] Not only does "What Then?" once again indicate Yeats's awareness of the dream or the ideal as it might act as a prompt to careful and practical labour, it also implicitly defines an essential difference between Yeats's and Plato's attitudes towards the ideal. Where Plato's concern is mainly with Eternal Ideas that Nature cloaks from human view, Yeats's is with the dynamics of growth that imbue nature with eternal characteristics. Signs of human promise mean for Yeats not ideally existing qualities that merely need to be revealed in Time, but tendencies within raw materials that must be patiently and thoughtfully crafted into completeness. The ways in which the two men value these "raw materials" in themselves couldn't differ more widely.

And this view gives an importance to the minute-by-minute details of everyday living that not every sort of idealist would admit. The life lived to an arduous "rule" that is recalled in "What Then?" - part of the doctrine of living deliberately that the young Yeats possibly found confirmed for him by Thoreau,[63] as much as by Blake's conviction that life itself is art - is a life devoted to a disciplined attention

to the "minute particulars" of self and of sense in which alone, for Blake, God exists. For all this living "by rule" in accord with an abiding purpose that Yeats remembers of his youth, the way in which he shows himself to have dealt with the lure of such a "distant object" was very different from that of the "logic-choppers" who "rule the town" in "Tom O'Roughley"[64] - or from the "terrible", sacrificial beauty of the political idealism that holds to "one purpose alone/ Through summer and winter" and that "Can make a stone of the heart".[65] Yeats, "at school", had, in a sense, "marked a distant object down" - the ultimate fame his comrades expected of him; but the path he set out to follow towards this object was one of growth through minute and rigorous attention to the ways in which his unfolding energies were to be nurtured, "minute by minute". Put rather clumsily, the object was to be achieved by way of time, and not by the sort of abstract, chop-logic fixation on some ideal image that often keeps the means from ever maturing far enough to produce the desired ends.

Yeats, in fact, felt the actual moment - and what Whitman called "all its belongings"[66] - to be clay to be worked into "profane perfection", and not just dross to be impatiently o'erleapt. As we have seen in the poem called "Wisdom", even something as apparently final as the revelation that "some peasant gospeller" had of the "Miracle" of Christ becomes for Yeats immediate raw material for a slow amendment by the spiritual imagination, as this imagination works within time

to discover to Time "The true faith" that can act on human awareness to full effect thereafter.[67] Again, it is the labour that establishes an ideal conception as a traditional icon that is what holds centre stage in Yeats's attention in this poem, far more than does the ideal conception in itself. There is a remarkable passage in *Explorations* in which Yeats says:

> Yesterday I came upon a little wayside well planted about with roses, a sight I had not seen before in Ireland, and it brought to mind all that planting of flowers, all that cleanness and neatness that the countryman's ownership of his farm has brought with it in Ireland, and also the curious doctrine of Soloviev, that no family has the full condition of perfection that cannot share in what he calls "the spiritualisation of the soil" - a doctrine derivable, perhaps, from the truth that all emotional unities find their definition through the image, unlike those of the intellect, which are defined in the logical process. However, Soloviev's a dry ascetic half-man, and may see nothing beyond a round of the more obvious virtues approved by his Greek Church. I understand by "soil" all the matter in which the soul works, the walls of our houses, the serving-up of our meals, and the chairs and tables of our rooms, and the instincts of our bodies ...[68]

And apart from the typically shrewd alertness that Yeats here exhibits to concrete, physical details like the changes in the very look of the countryside that land-ownership for the Irish countryman had brought with it,[69] the doctrine of "the spiritualisation of the soil" that he borrows from Soloviev - and characteristically amends in doing so - is full of meaning for our understanding of his particular sort of idealism. As he sees things,

> the walls of our houses, the serving-up of our meals, and the chairs and tables of our rooms, and the instincts of our bodies

are all "the matter in which the soul works" - the "soil"

which must undergo "spiritualisation", if we are to know "the full condition of perfection".

So what we see here is obviously a very special sort of idealism, the "soul" being the locus, and all that is meant by "the soil" being essentially subordinate to a spiritualising impulse. But we must note immediately that this "soil" - which radiates from the instincts of the body to the physical structures and social ceremonial of daily life - is "the matter in which the soul works", with whatever degree of competence it has, towards achieving "perfection".[70] What Yeats himself seems to mean by "the spiritualisation of the soil" is the degree to which the soul has effectuated itself in shaping after its own image the profane materials that it finds close to hand - which is a thought echoed in another essay too, in which he says:

> Only by substantiation of the soul, I thought, whether in literature or in society, can we come to those agreements, those separations from all else, that fasten men together lastingly [71]

- which seems to make essentially the same point from a complementary angle: what forms any community that approaches a "perfection" of sympathetic cohesion is the making substantial of the individual souls within the group: is their fully-attentive engagement in "all the matter in which (they) work()" concretely and sensibly.[72]

So what Yeats means here by "the soil" - all things physical and instinctive; all things social and traditional - is a substance that is utterly plastic to the workings of the

spirit: a responsive medium expressing that spirit's nature and its condition.[73] This is a view entirely remote from the sort of materialism that begins with the soul's ejection into ideal abstraction, and that consequently leads to its incarnation being reduced to a relationship - that can be only mechanical - with an antipathetic, debased and relatively unreal flux of appearances. Soul and matter, in Yeats's terms, go nerve in hand together.

And this "doctrine" of his - that works closely but unobtrusively behind the formulation in "A Prayer for My Daughter" of "The ceremony of innocence" that is fully named in "The Second Coming",[74] for instance - was something that Yeats carried into his dealings with the features of his own everyday life to a degree of attention to detail that was wonderfully consistent. Beyond the care he gave to his craft - to the "stitching and unstitching"[75] required by the struggle to write as he wished to - there was a care given to ordinary situations and to their claims like that which is indicated in the anecdote Hone relates of Edith Lyttleton speaking to Yeats about an extra round of duties that were looming and that would take up the little spare time she had:

> I was tired and rather fretful because I never seemed to have time enough to read or write.... I cannot think why I poured all this out to Yeats, but I did, and I am glad I did because he said something to me ... that I have never forgotten. "Whenever I have to do something," he declared, "like a dull bit of routine business, or enduring the talk of a bore, I always say to myself 'Remember, this is an occupation which requires great skill'"[76]

Such an attitude towards everyday duties shows how thoroughly

the wish Yeats felt to spiritualise the soil of the most mundane occasion was carried into effect: one wonders to what extent an idealist of the negatively transcendentalist sort would be inclined to recognise the something there within even such "routine" situations that is worthy of such careful dealings?

In fact, the clue to Yeats's sense of the central importance of the sort of courtesy in which he prayed his daughter would "be chiefly learned" - and of that "ceremony" that he hoped would permeate her life - seems to lie exactly in the especially-robust sort of idealism that centred his habitual outlook:

> How but in custom and in ceremony
> Are innocence and beauty born?
> Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
> And custom for the spreading laurel tree.[77]

In this paradox, "innocence and beauty" - grace of soul and grace of body - are naturally "born" only due to "custom and ceremony": due to the sort of deliberate artifice of hourly living that is itself an aspect of the "measurement" that "began our might" (along the path of human history that Yeats is sketching in "Under Ben Bulben" IV) as this measurement is applied to the most immediate of all materials - the "soil" of the pressing hour and its minute, mundane particulars. As the close to "A Prayer for My Daughter" affirms, "ceremony" - the deliberate formalising of action and social intercourse into a type of conscious dance - is the cornucopia that contains the fruits of natural abundance to unspilled fullness;[78] and what Yeats here calls "custom" is "the spreading laurel" of

thoughts carefully knit into a deliberate, unbroken, "perpetual" continuity of selfhood.[79]

And in this "ceremony of innocence" - which Yeats makes clear in "A Prayer for My Daughter" is part of a benign self-conquest in search of something more "radical" than whatever the promptings of fate and of habit alone could find us - the conception that he seems to have of both "ceremony" and of "custom" reflects an attitude towards time and space and their human meanings that is quite characteristic of his thinking, too. This "ceremony" and "custom" entail a creative ordering of time and of space - a specialised use of them - so as to render the natural more plastic to the ideal.[80] Not only is this once again a clear indication of how far Yeats's own sense of the ideal is from Plato's Eternal Ideas remote from nature - Ideas really located somewhere beyond mortal space - it is also a sign of an attitude towards time on Yeats's part that is very different from Plato's.

Because we need to remember that Yeats makes it clear that he, like Blake, saw Eternity as being in love with the productions of Time. Time, for Yeats, is thus a medium through which the eternal seeks to express itself; and so time is itself vitally important, a sort of prime substance within the complex of reality that the timeless yearns to model after its own image - as the lines in "Under Ben Bulben" about the "Profane perfection of mankind" that is the "purpose set/ Before the secret working mind" suggest.[81]

So, although Yeats could say that

> art is the disengaging of a soul from place and history, its suspension in a beautiful or terrible light to await the Judgement, though it must be, seeing that all its days were a Last Day, judged already[82]

"place and history" are really factors he never could overlook or undervalue. Art is time brought to witness to the timeless: not time cancelled or negated, but time brought to "Judgement" - to a meeting with that which has all along contained its central meaning. In this view, art effects a firmer linking of time to eternity - not a severance. What we might call the eternal is for Yeats at the heart of time and space - not pitched remotely beyond them.

In a poem that we have already examined, for instance, Yeats says:

> For one throb of the artery,
> while on that old grey stone I sat
> Under the old wind-broken tree,
> I knew that One is animate,
> Mankind inanimate fantasy.[83]

And - beyond the specific meanings that the poem embodies - what it demonstrates that is particularly apposite to the slant of our discussion right now is the *way* in which this revelation comes to Yeats. The knowledge that is there in full authority "For one throb of the artery" only is a timeless perspective breaking in upon an urgent present - eternity becoming manifest for a mere heartbeat, but still, for its spell, changing the whole face of reality. But this momentary pulsation of an eternal perspective on time is not something that Yeats saw as being uncharacteristic of the dealings

eternity has with time generally. We could recall him saying in an essay:

> If one studies one's own mind, one comes to think with Blake that "every time less than a pulsation of the artery is equal to six thousand years, for in this period the poet's work is done, and all the great events of time start forth, and are conceived in such a period, within a moment, a pulsation of the artery".[84]

And, in this endorsement of Blake's doctrine, we have a glimpse of a notion of time that is characterised by a profound relativity; a notion in terms of which an eternal impulse of vast significance can instantaneously complete itself to its full magnitude within the everyday temporal envelope, and can set a stamp on time to come that will determine its course. If Yeats felt that God was to be sought "in the depths of the mind",[85] then "A Meditation in Time of War" and the approval of Blake cited above reveal a sort of corollary: eternity is to be sought in the depths of time.[86] Again, there is nothing of the sort of absolute sundering between the eternal and the temporal that Yeats found in Plato.[87]

And space for Yeats is equally imbued with spirit - with an "ideal" actuality that is no remote abstraction, but is immediately involved in time's substance. He mentions with approval, for instance, Poincare's saying that "space (is) the creation of our ancestors":

> The mathematician Poincare, according to Henry Adams, described space as the creation of our ancestors, meaning, I conclude, that mind split

> itself into mind and space. Space was to antiquity mind's inseparable 'other', coincident with objects, the table not the place it occupies. During the seventeenth century it was separated from mind and objects alike, and thought of as nothing yet a reality, the place not the table, with material objects separated from taste, smell, sound, from all the mathematician could not measure, for its sole inhabitants,and this new matter and space, men were told, had preceded mind and would live after. Nature or reality as known to poets and tramps has no moment, no impression, no perception like another, everything is unique, and nothing is measurable.[88]

So, to borrow the terms Yeats uses at the end of "The Tower", the materialist notion of an abstract and empty space was itself something that has been "made up ... Out of Man's bitter soul": this time, though, the dream was a damaging illusion. As Yeats continues the essay from which I have just quoted,

> The ancient foundations (of space as it was known "to antiquity") had scarcely dispersed (under the separation of space from mind by seventeenth century science) when Swift's young acquaintance Berkeley destroyed the new for all that would listen, created modern philosophy, and established forever the subjectivity of space.[89]

And this "subjectivity of space" is central to Yeats's thought when he says, in a formulation we have already noted, that

> There is no evidence that Balzac knew that things exist in being perceived, or to adopt the formula of a later idealism, that they exist in being thought; his powerful body, his imagination which saw everywhere weight and magnitude, the science of his day, made him, like Descartes, consider matter as independent of mind.[90]

So, even Balzac's belief that things had "weight and

magnitude" was, for Yeats, a product of a particular bent of "imagination", acting as it did in the clothing of a "powerful body" and under the tutelage of "the (rationalist) science of his day". The idea Balzac had that objects were independent of a perceiving subject was, then, just another of those things "Made lock, stock and barrel"[91] out of a specific soul's habitual bias of conceptions.

There are other instances of Yeats's declaration of the sort of "idealism" in terms of which he speaks in these passages, but what we have seen already gives enough to go on in examining the conception of space that is involved, and in saying something about the implications such a conception has for our sense of what such a self-avowed "idealism" means within Yeats's thinking. Most importantly - as we have seen - he holds any seventeenth century mechanist notion of space to be a fallacy that was "destroyed ... for all who would listen", almost as soon as it was formulated, by Berkeley's implicit re-affirmation[92] of space as being still essentially as it was "to antiquity(,) mind's inseparable other". So - as we found with his conception of eternity - if we gaze with Yeats far into space, we find ourselves back in the human mind.

Which is valuable to bear in mind in assessing Yeats's own type of idealism, because the sense he had of space and of time as intimate human realities sets his ideas, in a fundamental area of his thinking, in another world entirely

from the outlook of the common sort of idealist who would reject the materialist abstraction without being able really to disbelieve it - and who must therefore constitute an immaterialist abstraction as a counterpoise. If eternity acts directly within the pulses of the incarnate moment,[93] and if things really seem to be what they are because of the different ways in which imagination is embodied in each of us,[94] then the world of the senses and the world of spiritual ideas meet exactly as they do when Yeats says, further on in his comments on Poincare, that "the grave-diggers have no place to bury us but in the human mind":[95] the apparently material and the apparently immaterial are mysteriously conjoined aspects of the same totality - the material being in fact an ideal production, the integument of an eternal substance, or that substance as it manifests itself to the sensible portion of the mind.[96]

So, unlike the idealist in flight from Matter into Spirit, for Yeats the literal soil itself is quick with whatever ultimate Unmanifest there is - and is that Unmanifest itself, clothed in the mortal mind's own idiom of possible knowing. Yeats, therefore, far from denying the substantial reality of the supposedly material order - as the matter-haunted idealist must - is actually affirming this reality and celebrating its supreme value as an integral part of the sum of things real. Yeats's sort of idealism takes the world of sense experience and the rhythms to which this world unfolds as being ponderable portions of the sacred, and not the desert

of unreality that this world can easily become to the negative idealist - with spirit and meaning trapped together in exile in a mechanism, and all true reality forever hidden beyond any possible incarnation.

If we recall Doctor Johnson's "refutation" of Berkeley's idealism, the point becomes more clear: kicking a stone, and saying "Thus I refute him!" In Yeats's terms Johnson - also a man, like Balzac, who was strong in body[97] and steeped in the rationalist science of his day - missed the point: in a sense, he even missed the stone! His was really a classically materialist view: that something really existing only as the result of being an object to a subject could not be substantial.[98] In the view that Yeats indicates in explorations like the one detailing Poincare's account of the creation of space, the fact that something exists solidly-enough to kick doesn't bring in question its spiritual or ideal or eternal origins. In Berkeley's terms, the foot and the rock would be in the same substantial dimension, so of course rocks are kickable. Johnson, the rationalist, couldn't even dream that thought could be substantial - could be anything other than an immaterial, ideal production acting on matter only indirectly, through the intermediate agency of a mechanical implement or a physical agent - a foot or a spade, perhaps.[99] Berkeley's doctrine - *a la* Yeats - that you can literally kick an idea around simply wasn't available to him.[100]

As Yeats says in "Among School Children",

> Plato thought nature but a spume that plays
> Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;[101]

and this seems pretty close to the assumptions behind the sort of view embodied in Johnson's outlook, too. Johnson, too, seems to have implicitly held that mind and matter were far asunder in their natures: which for a particular sort of rationalist would immediately set "nature" - or the sensible matter of objective space - at a devalued lower end of the scale; make it a mere froth obscuring from our view an immaterialised symmetry or ideal "paradigm".[102]

But how far Yeats's evaluation of the space of mortal experience differs from both Plato's and Johnson's can be seen from an essay in which he uses imagery tantalisingly similar to that of Plato's "spume" of nature, in discussing that particular wavelength of nature into which our conscious thoughts and emotions fall.[103] In this essay, Yeats says

> our thoughts and emotions are often but a
> spray flung up from hidden tides that follow
> a moon no eye can see.[104]

For Yeats's Plato, all "nature (is) but a spume that plays" - idly, one would imagine - to blur the configuration of a deeper reality. But for Yeats himself, our conscious mental and emotional life is often really a "spray" that follows "tides" and "a moon" that are forever unknown in themselves to the senses: which is a formulation that constitutes a very different image of the relationship between unknown and known to what is suggested by the image ascribed to Plato's view of the same bit of epistemological pathway. Yeats's image of

"tides" and "moon" picks up a sense of irreducible mystery, but certainly not one of radical disconnection. For one thing, it is a metaphor that retains an organic unity between the elements involved, conscious and pre-conscious: obviously, the spray we can see is directly produced by the "tides", which naturally are made to "follow" the ways of the "mocn". For all the sense of final mystery that this metaphor creates, the unity of its components suggests an unbroken causal linkage - a direct kinship of meaning - between knowable "spray" and "hidden" Primum Mobile "moon". There is no imaginative disjunction involved along the line - and thus no diminution of reality as we move along the track of the conception from source to manifestation.[105]

So Yeats's "nature" is a very different thing to Plato's - at least partly because Yeats is prepared to recognise a supersensual source for at least some of our emotions, as well as for some of our thoughts. His idealism, such as it is, is concerned not only with purely mental ideas, as is that of the rationalist, but with a whole complex of supernatural realities. When he sums up Berkeley's position as being that "things exist in being thought", what he means by "thought" involves a far more ranging and inclusive mental activity than Plato would allow to the term. Given his convictions regarding its "subjectivity", space for Yeats would be felt into being from out of a hidden matrix - the "marrow-bone"[106] - long before conscious ideas about things begin to firm into cerebral terms.[107] Whatever "scene" stands

at any moment before the conscious mind actually began to take shape amidst an "unearthly stuff" that still "rounds" its image - that still contains it, and gives it its form; and this originating "stuff" is mediated through "the blood",[108] not despite it. One feels that Yeats's "ideal" origins would be rather too blood-thirsty for Plato.[109]

But, having gone so far in trying to define the quality of Yeats's idealism in itself, we need also to recognise how thoroughly he acknowledged the resistance that the ideal conception or dream is always fated to encounter in its meeting with actual human circumstances. If he was ready to believe that there was a "secret working mind" that sought to prompt the "spiritualisation of the soil" towards "profane perfection of mankind" - and if he was also ready to do what he could himself as a poet to help the process along - then equally he had a thoroughly un-illusioned sense of how intractable that "soil" usually proves to be, and of how transient the moments of greater human perfection that are achieved always prove themselves to be, as well. His idealism, in other words, acted within a clear-eyed sense of the ways of the world, and not in the sort of impatient intolerance of them from which much thought that seems at first to be going in the same direction as Yeats's at base suffers.

There is, for instance, the way in which idealism - if we may call by that name a dream of the refinement and enrichment of everyday life into a type of earthly perfection -

inevitably shares the stage of Yeats's thinking with the certain knowledge that the facts of life tend to thwart and destroy such dreams; which is a tension to be found, for instance, in the first of the "Meditations in Time of Civil War":

> Surely among a rich man's flowering lawns,
> Amid the rustle of his planted hills,
> Life overflows without ambitious pains;
> And rains down life until the basin spills,
> And mounts more dizzy high the more it rains
> As though to choose whatever shape it wills
> And never stoop to a mechanical
> Or servile shape, at other's beck and call.
>
> Mere dreams, mere dreams! Yet Homer had not sung
> Had he not found it certain beyond dreams
> That out of life's own self-delight had sprung
> The abounding glittering jet; though now it seems
> As if some marvellous empty sea-shell flung
> Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams,
> And not a fountain, were the symbol which
> Shadows the inherited glory of the rich.
>
> Some violent bitter man, some powerful man
> Called architect and artist in, that they,
> Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone
> The sweetness that all longed for night and day,
> The gentleness none there had ever known;
> But when the master's buried mice can play,
> And maybe the great-grandson of that house,
> For all its bronze and marble, 's but a mouse.
>
> O what if gardens where the peacock strays
> With delicate feet upon old terraces,
> Or else all Juno from an urn displays
> Before the indifferent garden deities;
> O what if levelled lawns and gravelled ways
> Where slippered Contemplation finds his ease
> And Childhood a delight for every sense
> But take our greatness with our violence?
>
> What if the glory of escutcheoned doors,
> And buildings that a haughtier age designed,
> The pacing to and fro on polished floors
> Amid great chambers and long galleries, lined
> With famous portraits of our ancestors;
> What if those things the greatest of mankind
> Consider most to magnify, or to bless,
> But take our greatness with our bitterness?[110]

It is typical of the rigour of Yeats's thinking that he should be able to push his meditations upon "those things the greatest of mankind/ Consider most to magnify, or to bless" to where he can recognise so honestly not only the extrinsic dangers that such "things" face - their vulnerability before the sort of violent change that is explored in poems like "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen"[111] and "The Second Coming"[112] - but also the intrinsic flaws that seem to lie in the entire projection of course and outcome on which such considerations of "things (that) magnify ... or bless" our lives are based. In other words, Yeats is facing the bitter fact that all our dreams of being able to make a lasting fountain of growing "sweetness" for our posterity might well be "mere dreams", after all. The series of questions that form the two last stanzas in fact call in doubt the entire meaning of Yeats's own poetic vocation, as well as that of all poets from Homer on: what if all that the dreamer - and the artist who serves him - can establish to try to assuage the "bitter" longing of the human heart for "Sweetness" and "gentleness" then "But take(s) our greatness with our bitterness?"

What Yeats is in fact facing in this poem is the tragic flaw potential within all "ambitious pains" taken to encourage the flow of an "abounding glittering jet" of a life that has been re-made by artifice so as to provide contemplative "ease" as well as "delight for every sense".[113] Beyond the material frailty of the artifacts that patron and artist together contrive in the hope that they will be "the right twigs for an

eagle's nest"[114] - their frailty before physical decay or violent despoliation - lies the danger that the very effectiveness of their service of the human need that they seek to satisfy might well ultimately bring down the very greater house of the spirit that they are trying to build. The tragic paradox that Yeats must face here is that artists are bound to serve the bitter human hunger for unknown "sweetness" - even though the "spiritualisation of the soil" that their art achieves may well be the more thoroughly doomed to ultimate failure the more thoroughly it succeeds in following out its plan.[115] As he states the dilemma in the fourth of the "Meditations":

> Having inherited a vigorous mind
> From my old fathers, I must nourish dreams
> And leave a woman and a man behind
> As vigorous of mind, and yet it seems
> Life scarce can cast a fragrance on the wind,
> Scarce spread a glory to the morning beams,
> But the torn petals strew the garden plot;
> And there's but common greenness after that.[116]

So what is true for Yeats the artist who has dreams for the human family holds true for the father who must dream for his own children: life has its own rhythms and ways, whatever we are compelled to dream; whatever the pains we must take to try to actualise those dreams. It is a tragic view, and it is also a view of the human condition that fully acknowledges its ingrainedly un-ideal and unpredictable bias; which is the same as saying that it is a view that fully acknowledges that life is not a mechanism that can be dealt-with in mechanical terms - ideal or otherwise. In these "Meditations", Yeats is facing the knowledge that the greatness of self-responsible

freedom that he is sure all artists - taking Homer as their prototype - strive to nourish in themselves and in their fellows is more a matter of mystery and of miraculous providence than it is of accrued skill and craft in imaginative breeding. As he admits, "the inherited glory of the rich" - the cradle of their culture - now seems to him like

> ... some marvellous empty sea-shell flung
> Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams,
> And not a fountain ...

- which is a formulation in which the "fountain" that lifts the water of awareness into "more dizzy high" reaches of deliberate cultivation gives way as an image to the "marvellous (but) empty" shell from "the obscure dark of the rich streams" of the sea of the mystery out of which - as the extract from "The Autumn of the Body" discussed above reminds us - our deeper "thoughts and emotions" are "flung up" like "a spray". Before the great mystery of the "obscure dark" that is "rich" with our human destiny, the conscious will and its ideal projections must stand humbled.[117]

Which means that, for all the dream that Yeats feels he shares with Homer - the faith that the "profane perfection of mankind" is a valid and unavoidable artistic dynamic - there is no methodism to his idealism. Not only is the source of provenance of any "inherited glory" seen to be a forever-hidden imponderable, but all attempts towards methodically building such a lasting edifice of human riches are equally seen to lead right away, perhaps, from the goal which such an

ideal labour might believe itself to be certain to achieve. As the poem called "Church and State" puts it:

> Here is fresh matter, poet,
> Matter for old age meet;
> Might of the Church and State,
> Their mobs put under their feet,
> O but heart's wine shall run pure,
> Mind grow sweet.
>
> That were a cowardly song,
> Wander in dreams no more;
> What if the Church and the State
> Are the mob that howls at the door!
> Wine shall run thick to the end,
> Bread taste sour.[118]

These "dreams" of sacred and secular authority established in absolute dominion over their respective realms of human affairs are rejected as being "cowardly" in their falsification of truth through wishful thinking. The temptation voiced in the first stanza is one towards believing that Church and State, as institutions of authority, could actually establish some sort of Utopian purity of heart and sweetness of mind through the exercise of their might.[119] The poem dramatises - and deflates - the belief that institutional authority - forms of government, sacred or secular - could mechanically induce conditions of thought and feeling that would represent a genuine leap of human progress.

For the truth Yeats returns to in "Church and State" - once the temptation has been seen and shrugged off - is that of the incorrigible nature of the human reality that authority of any sort seeks to regulate or to improve. "Wine shall run thick to the end,/ Bread taste sour" for Yeats, no matter what

ideal social levers are applied to the problem - and this conviction arises essentially out of a disbelief in the efficacy of ideal social paradigms. Again, the ideal as agent within the real world is felt to be wanting in real power.

And this is because there always is for Yeats the role that paradox plays in life. For all the certainty "beyond dreams" of *"Ancestral Houses"* that out of "self-delight" grows more self-delight - and that from thence grows "the inherited glory" of a transmittable culture tempered by art - there is equally for him the sort of truth that is acknowledged, for instance, in "Stream and Sun at Glendalough":

> Through intricate motions ran
> Stream and gliding sun
> And all my heart seemed gay:
> Some stupid thing I had done
> Made my attention stray.
>
> Repentance keeps my heart impure;
> But what am I that I dare
> Fancy that I can
> Better conduct myself or have more
> Sense than a common man?
>
> What motion of the sun or stream
> Or eyelid shot the gleam
> That pierced my body through?
> What made me live like these that seem
> Self-born, born anew?[120]

As a record of an experience, this poem reflects two types of idealism - or perhaps I should say, it invites us to use the term in two different ways. The "attention" given to the "intricate motions" of "Stream and gliding sun" at the start is broken by a "Repentance" that is very much a part of the habitual moral stock of the person who every day found his "conscience or (his) vanity appalled"[121], and who - being "old

and ill" - lay awake "night after night", questioning his words and deeds to try to come to some sort of final judgement on them.[122] As such, it is a repentance that arises from a very real idealism: from a self-awareness that must steadily measure the life being lived against a dream of "conduct"[123] that tugs Yeats away from stream and sun.

But what in turn saves Yeats from this distraction of conscience is the shift of view that his humility brings to give his idealism its proper counter-weight, and to restore to him a greater sense of proportion. The rigour of the ideal standard is chastened by the sense of his own presumption that is implicit in Yeats saying that the hope that even a full life's hard work at self-government could bring him "Better conduct" or "more/ Sense than a common man" is just a "Fancy". The conscience - or personal idealism of conduct - is saved from a sort of pride that is "impure"; and the admission of common human frailty in the second stanza marks a phase in the recounted experience that offers proof, if any is needed, of the sort of balance that Yeats seems naturally to have been able to strike - even when it was actually his capacity for dreaming of perfected things that was involved. Taken thus far, "Stream and Sun at Glendalough" stands as an example of an idealism intense enough to colour someone's vision entirely, but that is yet quickly responsive to reasonable self-correction.

Yet the examination of the nature of the ideal that we

could see to be at work within the poem doesn't end there: the last stanza isn't just an account of a regained "attention" that can then be paid to realities that Yeats's time of absorption in "repentance" had temporarily obscured: it also records an actual transfiguration of both self and scene. Apart from giving a valuable gloss on an aspect of what Yeats means when he talks about "things exist(ing) in being thought", these lines and the experience that they convey embody a paradoxical enrichment of ideal awareness that occurs not as a result of ideal effort or rigour, but through a humble acknowledgement of the limitations of exactly such effort and of such rigour. Man and setting both "seem/ Self-born, born anew" - which indicates an influx of ideal awareness in another shade of the word's meanings. What has happened to Yeats is a mystery as to its causes; but the experience that he has is the revelation of a quality within the moment that places all its participants beyond the normal bounds of everyday reality. The fact that all seems "self-born, born anew" signals that this is a moment out of habitual space and time, a glimpse of a more perfect dimension of being. A sense of eternal or ideal values might prompt in Yeats a dream of exceptional conduct for himself; but there is a perfection of selfhood (that can fleetingly come to him in a moment such as that dramatised by the end of the poem) that comes entirely at its own will, and not by any self-willed command. To borrow terms from Christian doctrine, we could say we see in the action of "Stream and Sun at Glendalough" an analogy to the experience of someone who has striven through

good works - through "conduct" - to attain an ideal state of untroubled conscience, but who then finds that such blessedness comes instead by a sort of grace that is actually beyond his own personal management.[124]

Which is a resolution to the poem that we should perhaps expect from the Yeats who spoke of how "wisdom is a butterfly/ And not a gloomy bird of prey".[125] If wisdom is such, then it is so because life and truth are like that too; and "the hawk of the mind"[126] and its willed goals must often miss the mark, for the simple reason that the mark is too remote for the hawk's own good - just as the ideal of conduct that prompts the "impure" repentance of "Stream and Sun at Glendalough" is itself too nice, before the ministration of the balancing humility recorded in the second stanza takes its effect. Part of the blessedness felt at the end of the poem comes from Yeats having escaped from the confines of a dream of being - of an ideal of conduct - that has become at that moment at least "impure", has become a sort of falsity, because it has become unrealistically exacting.

And this capacity for escaping from the influence of the dream or the ideal when it has become in some way unreal to the present moment - or when claims in some way more genuinely urgent than itself must be recognised - is something we see at work at other moments in Yeats's work as well. One of the most obvious of these instances is the outcome to "A Dialogue of Self and Soul",[127] and is seen in the way in which the Soul

elaborates and refines its dream of release from "the crime of death and birth" to such an austerely beautiful pitch of precise eloquence - only to acquiesce, in silence, in the Self's last word on its love of all that this "crime" brings despite its unideality and "confusion":

> 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 that most fecund ditch of all,
> The folly that a man does
> Or must suffer, if he woos
> A proud woman not kindred of his soul.
>
> 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,
> Everything we look upon is blest.

So, even though Yeats knew so well what he meant when he spoke of Coole as a house in which "none has reigned that ... out of folly into folly came",[128] it is finally life, with all its relentless "folly", that really claims him. Though he was never "content" with anything he had done,[129] he is still "content" - at the moment that "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" records - to take the way of human life, with all its blindness and "remorse", in preference to the "fullness .../ (that) falls into the basin of the mind" once

> intellect no longer knows
> *Is* from the *Ought*, or *Knower* from the *Known* -
> That is to say, ascends to Heaven.[130]

And to realise what this choice for the confusion of life

entails it is necessary to fully comprehend just what that ascent "to Heaven" would seem to offer Yeats. The exact terms of the Soul's temptation of the Self at this moment amount to an escape from all sense of incompleteness, from all sense of disjunction between dream and fact, duty and capacity, ideal and actual. The "remorse" that Yeats settles on as what is the final obstacle with which he has to contend in dealing with "Every event in action or in thought" reminds us just how unresting was Yeats's capacity for such remorse,[131] and indicates again the quick, responsible idealism that prompts the dream of conduct that underlies this account of the exactions of his conscience. And it is just such "remorse" that the "fullness" of the Soul's way would forever do away with.

Yet Yeats is "content" to choose the imperfect, to set his final loyalties with the struggle of self-measurement and self-forgiveness, and to remain within an unending cycle of mortal blindness and responsibility; and this choice is made simply because the dream of escape and of peace would cost him too dear in the human "sweetness (that) flows into the breast" when a spell of peace has been honourably won in the continual contention between "the *Is*" and "the *Ought*" that haunts the inner drama of the passionate idealist.

And this is a choice typical of Yeats: we remember that, at the end of "The Man and the Echo", once he has formulated his doctrine of the self-judgement and self-atonement that he

believes will be enacted beyond death - a doctrine that must have offered only austere comfort to someone as worn with uncertainties and responsibilities as is the Yeats of this poem - then (even before the death-cry of the hare brings all his thought tumbling down) the very super-humanness of the "great night" that awaits the soul on its climb up the stair brings its own new human uncertainty:

> O Rocky Voice,
> Shall we in that great night rejoice?[132]

So once again, for all the destined completeness and final peace that such a "great night" would finally bring to such a restless mind, the release that the Man's doctrine offers shifts its meaning and loses its assurance simply because such a release might well bring with it the loss of the joy that he also finds a dear part of the tangle of mortal life. The dream of release from life is in fact defined in these lines from "The Man and the Echo" with a pristine and ideal clarity; but then even so chiselled a dream collapses into uncertainty for the simple reason that even such an authoritative prospect of deliverance cannot assure Yeats of the survival of what might be at last only a human quirk - something that may be shed by the soul as the self is hawked off into its final oblivion. The ideal conception, in other words, is weighed against the mundane in a reflex that is entirely characteristic of Yeats - and the weighing characteristically leaves the ideal very much in question.[133]

And we could also think, while on this tack, of the ending to "From 'Oedipus at Colonus'", where once again the

voice of the ideal Soul, that gets trammelled in the "entanglements of mankind", utters its warning against love of life - only to be countered by the voice of that very love, as it deliberately chooses its own dear and mortal "second best" way of tragic courage over the "best" strategy of willed transcendence:

> Never to have lived is best, ancient writers say;
> Never to have drawn the breath of life, never to have
> looked into the eye of day;
> The second best's a gay goodnight and quickly turn away.[134]

The voice that comes down in these lines on the side of human "entanglements" has no doubt of the authority - or even of the rightness - of those "ancient writers"; the choice made is one clear against the grain of ideal wisdom, and is one that doesn't even try to defend its love of life against the ideal strictures of those "ancient writers" that it acknowledges without obeying.[135] The dream of deliverance finally isn't as strong as the lover's attachment to his beloved and imperfect human life. As the end of the third stanza of the poem affirms, no matter what the soul's dream of deliverance from mortal suffering can promise, the lover-persona can only "celebrate the silent kiss that ends short life or long": so death for him must be the tragic parting of lovers, and not a final escape from "entanglements" - which is fundamentally the same choice that is made by "The Wild Old Wicked Man" of the *Last Poems*, who also takes the way of life, for all his acute sense of the essence of mortal existence being "suffering":

> "That some stream of lightning
> From the old man in the skies
> Can burn out that suffering
> No right-taught man denies.

But a coarse old man am I,
I choose the second best,
I forget it all awhile
Upon a woman's breast".[136]

Again, there is no attempt on the part of this persona within Yeats's play of self to devalue that "stream of lightening/ From the old man in the skies"; the choice goes with the bent of the man's nature - and it is again a choice of un-ideal mortal life, no matter the suffering that is this life's very substance. Through the guise of this man, Yeats's own love of life, for all its pain, cleaves to the human world - for all the certainty he also has that the ideal of transcending this world by acquiescing in the will of "the old man in the skies" is "right", too.

And what the wild old man of this poem expresses is a bias of loyalties that is very much the same as that which adds its own tragic tinge to Yeats's acknowledgement of the frailty of all human achievement in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", where the pattern that Yeats finds to history whereby "ingenious lovely things .../ That seemed sheer miracle" are broken - by greed or by malice or by indifference - prompts in him a momentary lean towards "ghostly solitude": towards a withdrawal into an attitude towards human life that is closely akin to the detachment urged by the "ancient writers" acknowledged in "From 'Oedipus at Colonus'":

He who can read the signs nor sink unmanned
Into the half-deceit of some intoxicant
From shallow wits; who knows no work can stand,
Whether health, wealth or peace of mind were spent
On master-work of intellect or hand,

No honour leave its monument,
Has but one comfort left: all triumph would
But break upon his ghostly solitude.[137]

But, as soon as this "one comfort left" has crystallised into utterance - compelling though it may be, as an answer to desolation - there comes, in the very next stanza, the immediate recognition that this is no answer at all for Yeats, or for humanity:

But is there any comfort to be found?
Man is in love and loves what vanishes,
What more is there to say? That country round
None dared admit, if such a thought were his,
Incendiary or bigot could be found
To burn that stump on the Acropolis,
To break in bits the famous ivories,
Or traffic in the grasshoppers or bees.[138]

So again, at a moment in which being able to adopt a certain idealistic contempt for life and human wishes - a Stoical dealing with personal and general loss, perhaps - would be a comfort, we find Yeats unable by nature to accept such an attitude: "Man is in love and loves what vanishes, /What more is there to say?" except that the dream of a "ghostly solitude" - in which one may be immured away from loss - is an illusion, an ideal of self-reliance and of detachment from mortal bias that goes against the facts of human life as Yeats here sees them. His love of life's human meanings makes it impossible for Yeats to really seek escape from its tragic uncertainty and its suffering. He is compelled once more to accept the painful imperfections of human reality over the dream of their transcendence - a characteristic bias that finds one of its most perfect utterances in the crisp little dialogue that develops between Soul and Heart to form

Section III of "Vacillation":

The Soul. Seek out reality, leave things that seem.
The Heart. What, be a singer born and lack a theme?
The Soul. Isiah's coal, what more can man desire?
The Heart. Struck dumb in the simplicty of fire!
The Soul. Look on that fire, salvation lies within.
The Heart. What theme had Homer but original sin?[139]

The Soul, in its own terms, is unanswerable: "Isiah's coal, what more can man desire?" But the answer that *does* come arises from what is simply another basis of meaning - the poet's, whose only "theme", in the end, must be a human one.[140] The choice is once again for Adam's curse rather than for "salvation" - which is a choice that has its roots in the same sense of the supreme value of everyday human experience that shows in the ending of "The Stolen Child" that we have already looked at before:

Away with us he's going,
The solemn-eyed:
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 oat-meal chest.[141]

The "warm hillside", the "peace" of "the kettle on the hob" at its song, and the familiar creatures of the child's small world all act as ballast to the fairies' dream of escape; and their evocation here quietly weighs this heartfelt world that is vanishing against the gay but heartless world of faery. Again, as in poems like those we have just been

examining, it is this human world that is given the last word - which makes its own point about how Yeats, even in his more youthful dreams, felt about the relative claims of our human realities and our ideal wishes.

So it seems that we need to set the complex sorts of idealism that Yeats articulated over against his equally persistent awareness of the dear claims of the finite, the limited, the mortal and the imperfect aspects to human life. As he once said, "Wisdom is the property of the dead,/ A something incompatible with life"[142] - and this ideal state of being he here calls "wisdom" might well constantly beckon and command and secretly lead the human mind - as does the "secret working mind" of "Under Ben Bulben" - towards ideas of perfection; but it is a "profane perfection" that really draws Yeats's own thoughts most powerfully in this area of himself: a state of being that he saw as functioning still within the limits of mortal life - however much that life under certain circumstances might perhaps have seemed to have grown "superhuman".[143] While giving full honour to the impulse towards the ideal and towards the perfect, Yeats also fully honours the dear and familiar stuff that the confusion and the pain of living still remain to be for him. Part of the value of his achievement as a poet lies, in fact, in his doing such justice to each of our "two divisions"[144] that he can fully acknowledge the depth of their antagonism towards each other, and can yet effect a wild sort of marriage between them as truth and counter-truth acting together within a greater

whole. Without reducing the primal truth of either of these aspects of our experience - of either of these "divisions" - in themselves, Yeats is still so often able to give each aspect its proper "looking-glass",[145] and to bring them together in a proper harmony of conflict.

This is a process we can see quite clearly at work in "The Three Bushes" and its attendant Songs,[146] for instance. As the tale of this sequence unfolds, Lady and Chambermaid come to personify the Lover's "Soul" and his "Self", to borrow the register of these terms from "A Dialogue of Self and Soul". This is made quite clear at a moment such as that in which the Lady says to her Chambermaid in the stanza to her "Second Song" just referred to:

> He shall love my soul as though
> Body were not at all,
> He shall love your body
> Untroubled by the soul,
> Love cram love's two divisions
> Yet keep his substance whole.

And - underlying the tale's psychological interests and tensions[147] - the sequence becomes a type of fable about human life, and about the two great contraries that attend it: our immersion in the facts of a supposedly mortal Nature, and our aspiration towards union with a supposedly immortal Spirit. When the Lover speaks for himself, in his one Song, his thought contains within itself both these realities - body and spirit - in a wholeness of awareness that neither Lady nor Chambermaid ever attempt to reflect; but then, the three personages are symbols of aspects of human experience and between them form a human whole. As his Song runs, the Lover

knows that

> Bird sighs for the air,
> Thought for I know not where,
> For the womb the seed sighs.
> Now falls the same rest
> On mind, on nest,
> On straining thighs.[148]

And this intuition that the Lover has of the nesting-together of all aspirations - the inclusion of what is ideally human and of what is incorrigibly animal within one magic circle - so all can meet in one common "rest" of physical love, shows just how "whole" the Lover's "substance" actually is in this moment from which he speaks.[149] Maintained as he is within the blessed conspiracy of differing aspects of himself that the Lady's and the Chambermaid's subterfuges symbolise, the Lover becomes the medium through which Body and Soul can act in creative accord - each in its own domain, but in a mutually-enriching harmony. In this patterning, the Lover becomes not only an image of a Unity of Being - spiritual with physical - but also a depiction of the mortal condition itself: of the human identity, that must encounter and deal with such disparate fellows in the trinity of earthly experience. The Lover isn't just either Body or Soul, he is both - and more than both, in holding his "two divisions" together in the way that the fable suggests that he does.[150]

And the fact that the Lover becomes such a ground of reconciliation upon which two such potentially-discordant personae can meet is typical of Yeats's sense of the need for a human wholeness in which "neither soul nor body has been crossed".[151] When, in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul", Yeats

turns back to celebrate mortal life, once the claims of the Soul have been fully felt and fully honoured, he implicitly expresses the same sort of reaching towards wholeness of Body and Spirit of which he speaks in his Preface to Shree Purohit Swami's translation of *The Ten Principle Upanishads*:

> It pleases me to fancy that when we turn towards the East, in or out of church ... our genuflections discover in that East something ancestral in ourselves, something we must bring into the light before we can appease a religious instinct that for the first time in our civilisation demands the satisfaction of the whole man.[152]

One of the clearest expressions within the book he is introducing of this "religious instinct that ... demands the satisfaction of the whole man" can be found in the Eesha-Upanishad, which is known as "The Lord" of them all:

> Of a certainty the man who can see all creatures in himself, himself in all creatures, knows no sorrow.
> How can a wise man, knowing the unity of life, seeing all creatures in himself, be deluded or sorrowful?[153]

And, as a formulation of "the unity of life" and the oneness of Spirit with Nature, the sense of the "whole man" defined here is essentially that which speaks in "The Lover's Song" that we have just been examining. When - at the end of the initial ballad of the "Three Bushes" sequence - the priest who hears the Chambermaid's last confession has her buried beside her Lady and her Lover (and has her own rose of timeless truth set above her, in acknowledgement of the sacred dimension to her meaning as the Body's emblem) then the sanction given her, and the interlacing of the three bushes that confers supernatural confirmation upon this sanction, symbolise the sacred unity of Body and Spirit that has been enacted within the Lover's experience as a person who has managed to know and

managed to know and to honour both "divisions", in their soleness and in their meeting, equally.

At the end of this first ballad of the sequence,

> ... none living can,
> When they have plucked a rose there,
> Know where its roots began[154]

which suggests that - whatever lies with the dead themselves, in the mystery beyond the grave - the meaning that is there in the tale for mortal ears is the sanctity of the marriage of Body and Soul that the three intergrown bushes symbolise. Whatever shift in realities and modification of claims may occur beyond life, the emblem that the priest causes to be set up is for the living who can still "pluck a rose" of meaning "there".

So the three bushes seem to represent for Yeats an inextricable inter-wovenness of Body and Soul, Nature and Spirit, the Given and the Dream, within incarnate experience. If Yeats can be said to have an over-riding ideal in mind in "The Three Bushes" - an ideal reflected in the "profane perfection of mankind" announced by "Under Ben Bulben", too - it is the ideal of this wholeness of being that seeks to incarnate the ideal, and thus spiritualise the actual, until sacred and profane can seem such that "none living" can tell where each's "roots began". It seems that the ideal, to Yeats's mind, best acts as does the Lady: stage-managing the human drama so as to ensure that both the spiritual and the mundane may be given their proper expression in the complex

whole of the mortal condition - a whole in which the parts are balanced and are transformed by the balancing. The third bush, that rounds Yeats's symbol in these poems into its completeness, is itself an implicit refutation of all negative, one-way, spirit-biased idealisms, and is an intimation of that "satisfaction of the whole man" that Yeats felt beginning, "for the first time in our civilisation", to beckon as "a religious instinct".[155]

Perhaps that is part of what he meant by "profane perfection of mankind": spirit being given its home on earth so thoroughly that earth would become truly "spiritualised". After all, as the doctrine of the subjectivity of space that he approved would maintain, such a "spiritualisation of the soil" would involve a very direct recognition that what we call the ideal and the actual are just parts of the same spectrum of some greater "unearthly stuff", anyway. Viewed from an angle such as this, Yeats's "idealism" seems a special sort of realism - a recognition that "the whole man" is the ultimate reality that is available to incarnate humanity, not just one fragmented part or the other.[156]

The last word on this head could, in fact, go to the poignant little poem Yeats called "Words", with its "thought" about the impulses underlying what he has "done" till then as poet:

> I had this thought a while ago,
> 'My darling cannot understand
> What I have done, or would do
> In this blind bitter land.'

And I grew weary of the sun
Until my thoughts cleared up again,
Remembering that the best I have done
Was done to make it plain;

That every year I have cried, 'At length
My darling understands it all,
Because I have come into my strength,
And words obey my call';

That had she done so who can say
What would have shaken from the sieve?
I might have thrown poor words away
And been content to live.[157]

What has prompted his work - even more than the need to bring light and sweetness to his "blind bitter land" - has been the need to try "to make it plain" to his "darling" what his deeds and dreams have been. All his struggle towards "strength" as a poet has been undertaken, in other words, in the service of the most significant aspects of his actual life: his love and hopes for Maud Gonne, and his love and hopes for Ireland. For all the fact that this art that has learned to make "words obey (his) call" is an edge held against the grain of the actual "blind bitter(ness) of his "land" and against his beloved's incomprehension - that it is therefore an art deeply in tension with the tenor of the life itself - it is nevertheless an art entirely at the service of the deepest realities and the most urgent necessities of that life. The art, in fact, could even - perhaps - be "thrown away" if ever it could really complete its service and bring to life what the heart desires for it; which is something like Prospero abjuring the "art" that seems to him but "rough magic" now that it is near to setting life itself to rights.[158] No matter how much Yeats's art might have been an ideal challenge of sorts to the particular configuration of the life in which he

was actually grounded, that art was never an end in itself, but was an attempt to bring a "content" to the life that its actual circumstances lacked.

The thought that Yeats manifests in his poetic dealings with his life is, in fact, close kin to the virtue that Martin Versfeld sees as being brought to light in what he calls "the scholastic analysis" of "the grand virtue of *prudentia*", which virtue exhibits

> a certain flair for getting onto terms with the circumstances of the here and now as they affect our personal decisions, and embodying a moral meaning in them through our action.[159]

The fact that this definition comes from an essay that attempts to define the true nature of the contemporary - and that Versfeld finds "similarity between the virtue of being contemporary and the grand virtue of *prudentia*"[160] - also has its bearing: *prudentia* recognises

> our existence as temporal and historical and local ... It enables us patiently to set free the ascending dialectic of desire which is immanent in the local and historical situation of any community.[161]

And this notion of a "patient" labour with the immediate materials of "the local and historical situation" of one's self and of one's community - so as to "set free" a dream that is "immanent" in those materials as a reality seeking ever-fuller manifestation - could well stand as a gloss on Yeats's own particular sort of idealism: the recognition and service of what is "immanent" in the real "desire" of himself and of his fellows - whatever the "blind bitter" present and its

obscuring of that desire might seem to present as immutable fact to the contrary.[162] As his father said, in contrasting Yeats with AE,

> your interest is in mundane things, and Heaven to you is this world made better, whether beyond the stars or not.[163]

So, though Yeats himself thought that someday he might

> dine at journey's end
> With Landor and with Donne,[164]

he could just as well be there at last at a board cut to suit St. Thomas's comfortable belly.[165]

And it's hard not to think here also of the telling image of Yeats in the opening stanza of "Easter, 1916" [166] - the day's dreaming done - passing on his way amidst Dublin's "grey eighteenth century houses", his thoughts already running on "a mocking tale or a gibe/ To please a companion/ Around the fire at the club". For all the mere "casual comedy" of un-ideal Ireland and its Paudeens at their "pitch-and-toss",[167] the simple warmth of friendship and of good talk was still an unalloyed delight for him - as we might expect of someone who could weigh all he'd achieved as he does at the end of "The Municipal Gallery Revisited":

> You that would judge me, do not judge alone
> This book or that, come to this hallowed place
> Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;
> Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;
> Think where a man's glory most begins and ends,
> And say my glory was I had such friends.[168]

So for all the fact that his restless dreams had made him bring "something to perfection" in his own work that his life

couldn't of its own accord give him, his truest "glory" in his own eyes was still the actual "history" of his own given time amongst those he loved and revered.[169]

One last question about the way in which Yeats seems always to have been led to follow a star other than those currently in fashion - which is an aspect of the complex sort of "idealism" (considered in the sense of an attraction towards values or imperatives not commonly recognised by the majority of one's fellows) that we have been examining - still needs some exploration.

And this question arises from what might seem to some the "irrelevance" of the poetic programme that Yeats lays down as guide to "coming days"[170] - considering the path that English poets since his own day have chosen. The call upon the arts to seek to express only "what is well made" - in scorn of the tendencies of "the filthy modern tide" of "The Statues"[171] and that tide's "unremembering"[172] preoccupation with anything but the narrow present[173] - certainly doesn't seem to have been heard by English poets generally. If his belief was that "coming days" could best be given an "indomitable" spirit by the making of romances about "other days",[174] then a poet like Philip Larkin - who is certainly at least a strong contender for being held Yeats's successor as "King of the Cats"[175] - seems himself to have cast about for other ways as a poet than Yeats's. The subject and manner of poems such as "Church Going" or "Mr Bleaney" seem worlds away from the romance

milieu of the "peasantry" and "country gentlemen" and "lords and ladies gay" that Yeats offers poets to come as model in "Under Ben Bulben". The self-conscious, almost self-apologetic character in bicycle clips with a draw to visiting empty churches, and the nameless successor to Mr Bleaney's room and the domestic trappings of a life lived at beck and call of "the Bodies" seem the stuff itself of the modern up-rootedness Yeats scorns as subject: after all, Larkin's persona in "Church Going" is quite ready to see someone who in years to come might "seek/ This place for what it was", and who might be "Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt/ Dispersed", to be "my representative".[176]

But we must keep in mind too the importance of the specifically Irish register to Yeats's stance in "Under Ben Bulben": it is to "Irish poets" that he speaks - just as in "The Statues" it is "we Irish" who have been "wrecked" in "the filthy modern tide" of unmeasured naturalness, and who must begin the "climb to (their) proper dark" - who must begin the labour towards re-fashioning a set of spiritual artifacts "proper" to the specifically Irish bias of sensibility that becomes Yeats's final focus in this poem - once the broader pattern of the action of what he calls "measurement" upon the human spirit from Egypt through Greece to "the tropic shade" of "Bhudda's emptiness" has been traced down to Pearse calling Cuchulain down from the Irish valhalla to "stalk() through the Post Office" at "his side" under British gunfire. As we have already seen in this chapter, the certainty that Yeats felt

that "race" is one of the "eternities" between which all people must "live and die" was developed in him to the degree that he was convinced that any European attempting to follow the spiritual exercises that had led Bhagwan Shri Hamsa to attain *Turyia*[177] "would have received nothing but perhaps a few broken dreams" because such a state

> depended in part upon innumerable associations from childhood on, in part upon race-memory.[178]

So even the attempt to raise human life to the peak of a more than natural fullness of spirit must, for Yeats, work within the finite system of the forms of the aspirant's specific cultural complex - as this complex fades into the "marrow-bone" of a specific "race-memory".[179] Given such a view, when Yeats says that "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it",[180] what he is saying here would almost certainly involve a conviction that what he called "race" - for him the deep structure of the individual's potentials towards knowledge - inevitably gives its tincture to any conception anyone can have of anything. If truth can only be embodied - lived into one's own view as much as into the view of others - through the patternings and tendencies of one's actions, then this makes what is revealed something that is rooted in the totality of whatever gives rise to one's behaviour. Even the apparently abstract formulation of experience into words would - to such a view - carry with it a complex bias of tendencies that are as much a part of the thinker's phylogenetic vocabulary or idiom as whatever it is that makes a number of species of chat flirt their wings two or three times on

landing.[181]

Though this might all constitute a view that doesn't sit too well with modern humanist optimism[182] and its laudable commitment to a faith in a universal human mind, we should take serious - and respectful - cognisance of the fact that what Yeats feels he must say to his countrymen about what poetry he thinks Ireland needs to prosper takes as its central perspective the certainty that their Irishness - the specific tincture of what he terms their "race", as well as their conscious national traditions - is an issue of central importance in both stating and in trying to find an answer to the problem that he is facing in offering valedictory advice as an important cultural leader.[183]

All of which leads us back to English poets having apparently found this advice not to their taste. Once we acknowledge the importance that Yeats attached to cultural matrix as a prime determinant in the complex of factors that spin themselves into a person's or a nation's exact weave of outlook and expectation and accustomed manner of approach to experience, then the fact that someone like Larkin doesn't sound like Yeats, and that he chooses subjects very different from those Yeats himself identified as being natural to the poet's "trade" would be - for Yeats himself - at least partly a simple reflex of the fact that Larkin was English by birth and breeding, where the "Irish poets" Yeats is addressing in "Under Ben Bulben" - even if they wrote in English, and had no

Gaelic - were not.

And this sense of the Irish as being a different breed of person to the English - of there being vital areas of outlook in which the Irishman (for complex but potent reasons) would tend to see the world in a way that didn't accord with how he would tend to find that an Englishman would tend to see it - is an element among Yeats's convictions that goes both deep and far back. For all his being a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendency by birth, and not a Gael of the old Irish stock, the feeling that he had of being Irish and of not being English was strong in him from boyhood onwards. When he spoke of the needs of the Irish soul in facing the modern world as being in important ways distinct from those of other peoples - as is the implicit assumption in "Under Ben Bulben" and in "The Statues" - then he was expressing a faith that was far more than a logical position necessitated by his involvement in the intellectual history of the development of Irish nationalism: it wasn't just an ideal being foisted onto his experience to suit a ready-made and willed programme of thought and action, but a perspective on himself and on his compatriots that grew from his own honest interpretation of the facts of his experience themselves.

For instance, when Yeats in 1931 noted Berkeley's refutation of the seventeenth century postulation of a space that was

> a nothing yet a reality, the place not the table,
> with material objects separated from taste, smell,

sound, from all the mathematician could not measure,[184] then added to his "delight" in this refutation of "the philosophy of Newton and of Locke" was the fact that Berkeley rejected such thought not only for its falsity, but because "Irishmen thought otherwise".[185] Part of the significance that Yeats finds in Berkeley's stance is in fact that Berkeley is certain that the Irish intellectual tradition differs in vital ways from the English.

But this approval of the view that the ideas that Berkekely had unseated were actually alien - were what Berkeley himself had called the philosophy of a "neighbouring nation"[186] that was not natural to the Irish tenor of thinking - reflects a conviction about the relationship between the Irish and the English sensibilities that begins to show in Yeats's awareness many years before these reflections of old age were formulated. When Yeats was just a boy - not more than a few years after he first was sent to London to stay with his father, which was when he was "eight or nine"[187] - he had the experience he and his sister shared at "the drinking-fountain near Holland park", where the pair had "spoken together of (their) longing for Sligo", and when Yeats himself found that he "longed for a sod of earth from some field I knew, something of Sligo to hold in my hand", a longing which he calls from later vantage "some old race instinct like that of a savage".[188]

And what is interesting about this recollection - given

the tack of thought we are on - is the way in which it evokes this longing for Ireland that he felt as being a blend of the child's normal homesickness for a dear, familiar place[189] and "some old race instinct" that has already wedded even a child to soil that has been loamed with ancestral experience.[190] Even to the boy who had as yet no philosophy or politics, the sense of being not just far from home but of also being an exile on foreign soil seems to have been a poignant reality.

Which was an awareness that longer acquaintance with England did not disperse. As I have said, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is itself one of the many songs of the Irish exile; but even before Yeats wrote it, he was constantly aware of being a foreigner in England; of being someone who actually did not have the same access even to the physical earth he trod as did the English themselves - as can be seen from his recollection of sharing "adventures" with his friends from the Hammersmith Road School that left him knowing that

> No matter how charming the place ... those other boys saw something I did not see. I was a stranger there. There was something in their way of saying the names of places that made me feel this.[191]

And though this may have been the intuition of a nature extraordinarily sensitive to the nuances of human communication, Yeats's knowing so clearly that the other boys shared a space to which he must always remain "a stranger" offers a fascinating glimpse into the social alertness that led him to form his certainties about the different worlds

both people and peoples inhabit, even as they tread an apparently common ground.[192] It was due to this sense of our worlds being spun - in their fundamental elements - out of psychic materials that are conditioned by modes or tendencies of response that are themselves at least partly the results of the depositing of ancestral layers within the psyche, that Yeats was led to assert his doctrine of the "proper dark" of racial matrix in prescribing a specific sort of poetry for Ireland's ills. If he felt that Europe generally faced urgent spiritual problems[193] - largely because of the tendency he found in its Modernist thought to adhere to "the objective matter and space of popular science", which allows for "deductions" that can

> make possible the stimulation and condonation of revolutionary massacre and the multiplication of murderous weapons

and that "compel denial of the immortality of the soul" among "the mass of people"[194] - then he also felt that these problems had to be approached by Irish people from the ground of their own particularly Irish bias of conception. The aesthetic problem he is tackling in "Under Ben Bulben" and in "The Statues" is, in other words, a problem that takes its deepest quality from the facts that form the complex of the history of the Irish psyche.[195]

So we need to step aside from any strictly Anglocentric view of the figure Yeats is cutting in "Under Ben Bulben" and in "The Statues" simply so as to get the perspective he himself is offering right. Whatever the issues facing Europe

generally and England particularly (regarding the direction the arts would be taking into the future) when Yeats wrote these poems, he has chosen to put aside the international mantle his standing as the dominant poet writing in English at the time would allow him, so as the better to take up the more local issue of Ireland and her needs.[196]

Which means that we need to assess Yeats's calling upon the Irish poet to "scorn" the "modern tide" of European attitudes and assumptions (so as to sing of "other days" when what he once called "Romantic Ireland"[197] was still strong upon the ground and not yet finally "beaten into the clay") with proper alertness to what those "other days" - Ireland's past - had really been like.

And one of the key features of that history is obviously the centuries of domination and colonisation and dispossession that Ireland suffered under English rule. An important part of what Yeats means when he talks in "The Statues" of the Irish having been "thrown upon this filthy modern tide/ And by its formless spawning fury wrecked" is that Ireland had fallen into the tragedy of being caught like a ship in a storm in a tide in the affairs of men that he saw as being not only in itself chaotic and destructive of the finer human values, but as being also a mood that was actually alien to the spirit of the Irish people - a disaster involving a double unselving.[198]

In other words, the problem Yeats is facing in these

poems is that his people have been caught up in a catastrophe that has grown not out of some failure of their own "proper" ways of thinking, but out of their being forcibly involved in just such a failure of the ways of what Berkeley called "another nation". Ireland had been uprooted by conquest from her own proper spiritual soil, and then caught up, to boot, in a spiritual disaster that - in Yeats's terms, anyway - had "wrecked" even its own "proper" originators, the English who chose the path of Newton and of Locke rather than that of Berkeley and who - in being the conquerors of a folk very different from themselves - brought their own unrecognised ills for planting in Ireland.

So, when we see Yeats in "Under Ben Bulben" and in "The Statues" standing against what he has poetically defined as "the filthy modern tide", what prompts him is only partly covered by what L.T.C. Rolt so shrewdly sees as being the objections that prompted his contest with "the Moderns". As Rolt puts it,

> It is significant that W.B. Yeats, whom it is probable that posterity will regard as the dominant figure in the art of our period, remained faithful to traditional form. With consummate genius he proved that traditional language and symbolism could yet remain flexible and adaptable to the changing mood and thought of modern life ... (and) with this style he challenged the modern school on its own ground. He proved, moreover, that the traditional forms which he used were, when moulded by his genius, capable of greater eloquence than the modernist symbolism[199] of the younger artists. Yet the difference between Yeats and the Moderns is not merely one of style, but of philosophical conception, a difference profoundly significant. For whereas the majority of the Moderns accepted the tradition of humanism, of "liberty, equality and fraternity",

> and therefore espoused the cause of collectivism, Yeats remained an implacable individualist. He perceived that the socialist aim of equality could only be achieved within the framework of modern civilization by the extinction of all those individual qualities that are the inspiration of all art, and which alone can make men great. He was deeply conscious of that ebb of the spirit which coincided with the flow of reason from the Renaissance onwards.[200]

Though Rolt is certainly formulating an undeniable truth about Yeats's standpoint against "the Moderns" and their "profoundly significant" differences from his own "philosophical conception", he is in fact defining here a broad frequency within which the concerns of "Under Ben Bulben" and "The Statues" - when seen as challenges to the "modern tide" - ultimately offer a finer tuning.[201] Yeats isn't taking issue - in these poems, at least - with a general European

> ebb of the spirit which coincided with the flow of reason from the Renaissance onwards

so much as with what this "ebb" and this "flow" had done to Ireland.

And the fact that Ireland had been "thrown upon this filthy modern tide/ And by its spawning fury wrecked" because of invasion and dispossession makes the question of the "proper dark" to which Yeats would call the Irish mind - by way of the poetic programme he outlines in "Under Ben Bulben" - a question of the attempt to help that mind deal with an alienation from its roots in its own traditional culture - an alienation that took place when that culture was smashed in

its collision with the English drive towards empire. "Under Ben Bulben" and "The Statues", in fact, are the first statements of a theme that has come to dominate much of the thinking of the various peoples who in this century have each been picking their way out of the aftermath of their own collisions with the general European drive towards empire: of the theme of the re-discovery of peoples' own authentic centres of outlook and value after these centres have been dislocated and denigrated and marginalised by the imposition of the customs and assumptions of alien Ascendencies.

Seen in this light, Yeats's call upon Irish poets to turn away from English and European ways towards a re-discovery of their own cultural patterns - a re-discovery beginning with a gathering of the hints of these patterns that still remained within the debris of a colonial history that had made the Irish exiles in their own land - is no mere nostalgic wish to turn back the clock now the world's grown unromantic.[202] It is as vital a prompting towards a step into the future on the part of a culturally dispossessed people as was anything Gandhi or Martin Luther King or Steve Biko had to offer their own people in their own day; and to see Yeats as being just a bit silly and reactionary and wilfully out of step with the modern world is to be too Eurocentric entirely.[203] In fact, what Yeats is trying to do in his exhortation of Irish poets is profoundly ahead of his times - as the battle on the part of ex-colonial writers to have their art judged by other than European standards in the decades after Yeats wrote the

overture to the effort shows.[204]

But perhaps we should remember, at the last, that it was part of Yeats's hope as a poet that he should never be seen as "a wise old man/ That can be praised of all".[205] As the last stanza of the poem from which these lines come puts it

> I pray - for fashion's word is out
> And prayer comes round again -
> That I may seem, though I die old,
> A foolish, passionate man.

For what Yeats wants far more than ever to be taken as a mere purveyor of wisdom - which is always to some degree at least wisdom framed in terms of some current "fashion" of conceptions, anyway - is to be capable of singing "a lasting song"; and this means being capable of embodying a whole human vision - flaws and all - that may even be "foolish" just as long as it is "passionate". As he says to close the second stanza,

> O what am I that I should not seem
> For the song's sake a fool?

and this putting of the song before any concern with how an audience might come to think of the singer's ideas as such is something we should obviously keep at least somewhere in mind in thinking about any pose Yeats may strike in a poem - no matter how consistent the pose might be with other moments in other poems, or with parallel formulations in the essays or letters. In other words - without attempting for a moment to suggest that Yeats didn't expect to be taken seriously for the quality and significance of his intellectual vision[206] - what would seem to be the most important consideration for the

Yeats of "A Prayer for Old Age" at least is managing to create the presence within a poem of a lived position, of a self captured in all its limitation and bias of outlook but caught whole and true in the sense of truth defined in the thought crystallised in the letter to Lady Pelham we have considered more than once already, when Yeats says "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it".

So we might well need to think - even in a poem as seriously intent upon making a point as is "Under Ben Bulben" - that there is at least the possibility that at least part of what Yeats is doing here is (in a very special sense of the term) playing the fool. To be taking a line so much at odds with what he knew was the current European fashion of thinking about the arts might well be as much the final embodiment of a slowly-crafted poetic persona - the last gesture in the enactment of a life-myth - as it is a serious engagement with an issue that was part of a work Yeats had taken for task from the beginning of his writing on.

Because it is fascinating to see in the old man challenging "the filthy modern tide" that has "wrecked" his people - by calling upon his poetic heirs to "scorn" it out of being - the last image of the Irish myth that was closest to Yeats's own pattern of purpose - Cuchulain fighting the ungovernable sea.[207] In the letter to Lady Pelham - almost the last letter of them all - Yeats expresses a wonderful sense of fullness growing in him as his "time" grows short:

> I know for certain that my time will not be long ... In two or three weeks ... I will begin to write my most fundamental thoughts and the arrangement of thought which I am convinced will complete my studies. I am happy, and I think full of an energy, of an energy I had despaired of. It seems to me that I have found what I wanted. When I try to put it into a phrase I say, "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it". I must embody it in the completion of my life.[208]

And it is tempting to see the glimpse of Cuchulain that is embodied in Yeats's battle with the modern tide as a sort of valediction in itself - the final take of the life's myth,[209] pushed into a new edge of completeness, and significant as such, beyond even any good that may come of the exhortation of "Irish poets" and of the Irish generally to choose a path "proper" to their own ways. After all, within a few months of writing "Under Ben Bulben" Yeats formally laid Cuchulain to rest, as if the myth were complete at last, in "Cuchulain Comforted", where the old hero finds himself amongst "convicted cowards"[210] - amongst the timid who stitch the shrouds of anonymity that wrap hero and coward alike at some turn of the gyres when cowards at last can begin to comfort heroes who need at last to have cowards for guides. It is as if Yeats is sending his own most abiding mood out into the paradoxical beyond to meet its proper new beginning, now it has won completeness of its passion.[211]

So even where we see Yeats apparently out on a limb on the issue of the future method of the Irish arts, it is impossible to seriously claim that his stance is marginal due to some sort of fixation with out-of-date or merely eccentric ideas; due - in other words - to a debilitating sort of

idealism. If we consider how much common ground we can find between the perspectives on the distinct sensibilities that make up "the great festival of the world's culture" that we have seen Achebe offering in 1974 and the demand we see Yeats making that Irishmen acknowledge the facts of their own history and temperament in choosing subject matter - no matter what the English might think - late in 1938,[212] then what Yeats is saying seems the first running of what then becomes a mainstream and international cultural issue only in years to come. What might have sounded merely odd and off-beat to those contemporary ears that were pitched only to more current concerns shows itself with hindsight to be the strangeness of the first stirrings of a genuine new direction of time.[213]

And if Yeats was also completing himself even as he rounded into finality what he had to offer his people and to offer humanity, then the unity of the achievement is quite startling. To play elder statesman of the land of letters and hero and clown all in the last scene - before taking his own "holiday" from the world "*in grass-green Avalon*"[214] - puts the performance in a class all its own.

Explicit hoc totum;
Pro Christo da mihi potum.

Notes to Chapter 5.

1. See the discussions of some of these early poems that are offered above.

We should remember that the rejection of Descartes and Locke and of the sort of

> pure reason (that) has notoriously made light of practical reason, and has been made light of in its turn from the morning when Descartes discovered that he could think better in his bed than out of it (*Autobiographies*, pp 237 - 38)

began from Yeats's earliest thinking about the effects that he saw such an exclusive concern as theirs with "Grey Truth" (see "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", *C.P.* pp 7 - 8) as having had upon the arts. During the days of "the Rhymers", for instance, he had spoken of his "conviction that the world was now but a bundle of fragments", and

> had been put into a rage by (those) who not only asserted the unimportance of subject whether in art or literature, but the independence of the arts from one another (see "Four Years: 1887 - 1891", from *Autobiographies*, pp 234 - 35).

The modern "bundle of fragments" is seen as the natural product of the "pure reason" that scorns "practical reason": as Martin Versfeld puts it, rationalism is "the emasculation of reason" (*Sum*, pg 36); it is the radical disembodiment of mind from world into the sterile egoism of Descartes' solitary bed.

2. See *C.P.* pg 44.

3. See *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939*, pg 77.

4. See *Autobiographies* pp 88 - 9 (and the discussion offered below) for details of the night tramp from George Pollexfen's home to Slish Wood, "opposite" the island of this poem, a thirty mile round-trip, in all.

5. It's always rather amused me that "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is escapist, but Dick Whittington isn't: it's perfectly respectable to want to run away *to* London, but not *from* it!

It might be worth recalling here Yeat's feeling of being a stranger in England that permeates the memories of his childhood and early youth, as these are epitomised in the sense that the companions with whom he explored common and wood "saw something (he) did not see":

> No matter how charming the place, (and there is a little stream in a hollow where Wimbledon Common flows into Coomb Wood that is pleasant in the memory,) I knew that those other boys saw something I did not see. I was a stranger there. There was something in their way of saying the names of places that made me feel this (*Autobiographies*, pg 60).

With such sensitivity to the nuances of a person's relationship with his home soil, the sort of yearning for his own place in the

world that came over Yeats as a small boy at "the drinking-fountain near Holland Park", longing for

> a sod of earth from some field I knew, something of Sligo to hold in my hand (*Autobiographies*, pg 37)

- a wish that he called "some old race instinct like that of a savage" (*ibid.*) - sets him in the long Irish tradition of the exile cast by necessity in far-away lands that is the theme of so many folk songs. ("The Statues" is - in a sense - the ultimate expression of this theme of Irish exile: it shows Ireland herself as an exile wandering in the alien materialism of the "modern" world.)

There is also the awareness of foreignness in an alien land that is expressed in Yeats recording the fact that he "was divided from all those boys" at the school at Hammersmith

> because our mental images were different. I read their boys' books and they excited me, but if I read of some English victory, I did not believe that I read of my own people (*Autobiographies*, pp 42 - 3).

Again, the sense of dislocation from his actual roots that being in England caused him from boyhood on is clear. As we see him saying in a letter from the same year as "Innisfree" to Katherine Tynan,

> How I envy (O'Leary) going over to Ireland! London is always horrible to me. The fact that I can study some things I like here better than elsewhere is the only redeeming fact. The mere presence of more cultivated people too is a gain of course, but nothing in the world can make amends for the loss of green field and mountain slope, and for the tranquil hours of one's own country side (*The Middle Years*, pg 63).

But perhaps the last word on the dream of peace expressed in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is the fact that Yeats's plan "to live some day in a cottage on a little island called Innisfree" dated from his boyhood holidays in Sligo, staying with his uncle George Pollexfen, under prompting of the "passage out of *Walden*" that his father had read him, and that made him wish to live "as Thoreau lived, seeking wisdom" (see *Autobiographies*, pg 88).

This wish is recalled later in *Autobiographies* (see pg 189) when Yeats speaks of his having "still", as a young poet in London,

> the ambition, formed in Sligo in my teens, of living in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree, a little island in Lough Gill.

And there was also

> a story in the county history of a tree that had once grown upon that island guarded by some terrible monster and borne the food of the gods;

and Yeats "was twenty-two or three before (he) gave up the dream" of his cabin there (see *Autobiographies*, pp 88 - 9). So the "pavements grey" didn't spark the swing of Yeats's soul towards Innisfree, they only revived a long-standing feature of his own personal mythopoeia, and prompted at last its so fluent embodiment in verse.

6. If the feeling in this poem is escapist, then so was that which prompted the French Revolution - and all its progeny.

7. The link between dreams and the responsibilities that they begin is so central to Yeats's thought that this reminder of it is offered only so as to recall that no dream could fail to rouse in him the need to try to actualise it as living fact.

(As the passage from the letter to Katherine Tynan that we have just quoted indicates, "the only redeeming fact" to his being in London was that he could "study some things (he) like(d)" there "better than elsewhere": so his staying was itself actually a sign of responsibility to the "study" that formed part of the "boyish plan" to which he refers in "What Then?" [see *C.P.* pp 347 - 48]: what kept him from following his dream of being in Ireland was the pull of his schoolboy dream of "grow(ing) a famous man" and of bringing "something to perfection" in himself.)

8. He was in his twenty-fifth year.

9. It will be noted that I refuse categorically to "interrogate the text". One's birth as a reader demands the putting to death of the writer only if one is the sort of poor listener who wishes for full licence in egoism.

10. See *C.P.* pg 8.

11. We can choose to ignore the claims of what is felt in "the deep heart's core" as urgent and valid facts within the inventory we might make of the world evoked by the Yeats of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" only if we have already chosen to limit our notion of what "facts" are to something like the sort of sadly materialist register that Dickens satirises so well in the outlook of Thomas Gradgrind in the earlier stages of *Hard Times*.

And we should also remember how well Yeats knew those London streets, and from what angle: walking from the British Museum to Bedford Park to save money for a cup of coffee (*Autobiographies* pg 184), his socks inked to hide the rents in his boots (*ibid.* pg 191), even though he was so "delicate" in health right then that he remembered later

> often putting off hour after hour consulting some necessary book because I shrank from lifting the heavy volumes of the catalogue (*ibid.* pg 184; Hone summarises the facts in *W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939, pg 59*).

For many reasons, the London that Yeats knew was a very different place to Doctor Johnson's: as Katherine Tynan noted a few years later,

> Within twenty miles of London that part of the trees turned to London is black with soot, while the other part shows the clean bark (*The Middle Years*, pg 187).

12. This effect of colour is no kin at all to Oscar Wilde's enamellings: the purple of noon and the glimmer of midnight are simple visual facts to eyes properly trained out of doors - as were Yeats's. The dreariness of "grey" and monotonous ugliness to someone with an eye like Yeats's for his physical surroundings shouldn't be left out of count in assessing "Innisfree"; and the delighted evocation of the sounds of linnet wings and cricket

song indicate an exceptionally alert ear, too. (We could note Yeats's recording his own sense of the defects of Wilde's style when the two first met, two years before Yeats wrote "Innisfree":

> Like us all it was from Pater that (Wilde) had learned, but in him the cadence became over-elaborate and swelling, the diction a little lacked in exactness [*Memoirs* pg 22];

and there is also what he says in the essay on Swedenborg about his knowing "we make a false beauty by a denial of ugliness" - see *Explorations* pg 31 - to reinforce the conviction that Yeats didn't go in for the "false beauty" that is simply the negative idealist's "denial of ugliness".)

13. In the Sephirothic Scheme - or Kabbalistic Tree of Life - there are ten Sephirah that together comprise the ordering of all that emanates from the triad of "intelligent principles" that themselves arise from the triad of "unthinkable principles" (see J.F.C. Fuller, *The Secret Wisdom of the Qabalah*, pg 57, in Chapter 2, "The Cosmogony of the Qabalah": this whole chapter is important to our theme). These Sephiroth radiate through successive layers of triads - like rain seeping down branches towards earth - until the tenth and "lowest" Sephirah, Malkuth, "the material world ... the feet of the Heavenly Adam" (*ibid.* pg 61; Fuller's diagram of the Kabbalistic Tree is reproduced as an accompanyment to note 155 below) is reached.

So Malkuth - Nature herself, the world available to what Blake calls "your senses five" (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plates 6 - 7) - has standing above it a great Tree of nine branches that lifts to lose its head in the clouds of the primal beginning in the Ayin, the "No-Thing" that is "a Something which, transcending the human intellect, can only be described negatively" (*op.cit.* pg 54). Yeats's "nine bean-rows" image in a pattern upon the very bones of Malkuth the nine immaterial Sephiroth that cast "the material world" as a radiant shadow; and the total image of an island marked in its very soil with the signs of the Tree's layered branches is a wonderful symbol of the self connected in proper religious clarity with the ultimate Things of the Cosmos. The "nine bean-rows" Yeats knows would have to be part of his perfected personal space draw Heaven down to Earth and connect the two together like Jack's beanstalk - which possibly contains within it an old folk-memory of something like the sort of doctrine the Kabbalistic Tree expresses, anyway, with the magic vine that becomes a great Tree leading to the domain of the Giant of the Skies.

Which means that Yeats's little bean-patch would actually be a simple and potent shrine; and this reflects an absolutely typical certainty that the sacred is perfectly at home within the most mundane details of the everyday and the ordinary. (There are not many idealists who could turn a kitchen garden into a meditational structure that has its distant affinities with the Zen sand gardens of Japan, either.)

14. Added to his own boyhood experience of the actual place is, of course, the model of Thoreau's Walden Pond, which gives its own edge of discipline to the dream - it being obviously guided

by the example of a chosen Master, and not simply some irritable quirk of discontent with "actuality".

15. As the account we have noted - in Chapter 4 - of the night tramp to sleep in Slish Wood "opposite" Innisfree has it, Yeats, after a sleepless night,

> could watch my island in the early dawn and notice the order of the cries of the birds (*Autobiographies*, pg 89).

Such concern with exact details was typical of him - as the account of his later "freak" of getting "a cousin" to take him out by yacht

> towards midnight ... for I wanted to know what sea birds began to stir before dawn (*Autobiographies*, pp 89 - 90)

confirms for us.

16. See *Autobiographies*, pg 73. He also at this stage "had some theory of my own ... about as to the colour of sea-anemones" (*ibid.* pg 73).

There is also Yeats's recollection that, at school, he

> was known to collect moths and butterflies and to get into no worse mischief than hiding now and then an old tailless white rat in my coat-pocket or my desk (*ibid.* pg 50);

and memories of times when he and some friends would

> set out for Richmond Park, for Comb Wood or Twyford Abbey to look for butterflies and moths and beetles (*Ibid. pg 59*).

On such occasions, Yeats was " a mine of information" for his friends, and admits that

> Sometimes today I meet people at a lunch or dinner whose address sounds familiar and I remember of a sudden that a gamekeeper chased me from the plant -ation behind their house, or that I turned over the cow-dung in their paddock in search of some rare beetle believed to haunt the spot (*ibid.*).

He also eventually quarrelled with one of the friends of these expeditions over "natural history", because he

> collected his butterflies for the adventure's sake, and with no curiosity but for their names. I began to doubt his intelligence, and to tell him that his natural history had as little to do with science as his collection of postage stamps (*ibid.* pp 73 -4).

And, if any clincher is needed, there's the recollection that, by the time he was fifteen, Yeats

> had begun to think of my school work as an interruption of my natural history studies (*ibid.* pg 69).

Certainly, when we keep all this in mind, we can in no way see the evocation of either the linnet in "Innisfree" or of "the hapless faun" - the forgotten natural spirit of a place - at the end of "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" (*C.P.* pg 8) as being merely conventional formulations offered by a sentimentalist of the sort that my colleague Cathal Lagan tells me Edward Thomas satirised when he said in a review that

we are not fit to comment on the verse of someone
who can hear a nightingale in November:
when Yeats expressed longing for such things, it was a longing for what he closely knew and deeply missed in his exile from them.

17. It never sings, for instance, except from a lowly and obscure position: which has great bearing on the values that "A Prayer for My Daughter" is exploring. To be aware of Yeats the naturalist as a critical aspect of Yeats the poet obviously often adds important dimensions to one's appreciation of the nuances of the verse: the "Daddy-long-legs upon his timber toes" that appears to such effect as image of the imaginative stylist amongst modern poets in "High Talk" (*C.P.* pp 386 - 87) is in fact a metamorphosis of "the long-legged fly upon the stream" that is Yeats's image of the imagination as it stirs counter to all currents of time in "Long-Legged Fly" (C.P. pp 381 - 82): the crane-fly - one of the Tipulidae - is also known as the daddy-long-legs. "High Talk" was written only a few months after "Long-Legged Fly"; and the Yeats who hunted trout "in boyhood ... with rod and fly,/ Or the humbler worm" - as Section I of "The Tower" tells us (see *C.P.* pg 218 and *Autobiographies*, pg 63) - would certainly have known the fly at first hand: if he was canny enough to know when to use "the humbler worm" rather than a fly, he was reading the waters to see what the fish were taking - like any practised fisherman.

So there's even just the shade of a chance that somewhere - on the level "Where stone is dark under froth" - Yeats's own emblematical fisherman might have been at work in the complex of his imagination as it made the images central to both "Long-Legged Fly" and "High Talk" out of the crane-fly of his boyhood streams: the deft-wristed fisherman, as image of the skilled writer, certainly surfaces explicitly for him among the *Last Poems* in "Why should not Old Men be Mad?", when he speaks of the "likely lad/ That had a sound fly-fisher's wrist" whom he'd seen "Turn to a drunken journalist" (*C.P.* pg 388).

18. See *C.P.* pg 211.

19. I admit in this my prejudice as sometime Education Officer for the Natal Parks Board.

20. See "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", *C.P.* pg 7.

21. For consideration of other dimensions to the poem, see the discussion of it that is offered in various places above.

22. The punctuation alone - as an index of the crispness and entire lack of loosening sentimentality to the tone of the poem - makes a sobering study. (Note, for instance, how the colon at the end of line 2 impels one's attention onwards into the remainder of the initial catalogue of intents that form the first stanza: this reflects an un-fakeable deftness of manner that indicates quite precisely just how surely Yeats is in full intellectual command of his matter.)

23. The story is given in *Autobiographies*, pg 103, and has its companion in Dorothy Wellesley's recollection of her butler coming to her one day "rather worried" because "Mr Yeats seems to be a-moaning to hisself", and her reassuring him by saying

> O that's all right, Cornish. He is writing, and is reading his own poems aloud to himself. Haven't you ever heard me doing the same? ... We have to do that to hear how the writing sounds when it is read aloud (*Letters from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, pg 175).

We could also perhaps recall the memory of Yeats's company in later life recorded by Cecil Salkeld, in which he says that Yeats

> was at all times a man dominated - sometimes for weeks on end - by a single phrase (see Hone, *W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 327;

and Yeats himself has left us a splendid image of his being held enthraled by "a single phrase" even as a young child, when he speaks of how

> One day some one spoke to me of the voice of the conscience, and as I brooded over the phrase I came to think that my soul, because I could not hear an articulate voice, was lost (*Autobiographies*, pg 13);

and there is George Moore's anecdote about once finding Yeats at Coole when he had been puzzling over a single line for a week: Martin Gilkes says of the tale that it

> may be apocryphal, like a great deal else in *Hail and Farewell*; but accurate lying was one of Moore's most remarkable gifts (see "*Countess Cathleen* by the Avon", *English*, vol. III. no. 16. 1941, pg 160).

So what might seem mere words to some were to Yeats actual calls to undertake tasks of comprehension and of ultimate formulation to which he obviously gave the most sustained and careful practical attention.

24. See *W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939* pg 227, where Hone says:

> At the beginning of his career as a dramatist George Moore remarked upon the assiduity of his attendances at his own play. A probable explanation lies in the fact that even at an early age Yeats realised that he must use the theatre as a workshop.

And there is also the comment Yeats himself makes about his

> re-writing of *The Countess Cathleen* as a result perhaps of my practical stage experience with (the 1894 production of) *The Land of Heart's Desire*, see *Memoirs*, pg 77;

and we also could recall the midnight excursion he took out to sea with a gloomy cousin because

> I wanted to find what sea birds began to stir before dawn ... I had wanted the birds' cries for the poem that became fifteen years afterwards "The Shadowy Waters", and it had been full of observation had I been able to write it when I first planned it (*Autobiographies*, pg 90).

When he wanted to achieve something, he not only knew what he wanted, but he also knew how to get it - and certainly didn't begrudge the labour the getting took.

25. See Hone, *W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939* pg 421. (Mrs Yeats assured the Headmaster Yeats was only showing off, which Yeats apparently took with great good humour.)

26. See *The Senate Speeches of W.B. Yeats*.

27. See Hone, *W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 124.

28. See *ibid.* pg 352; and see also the note to the letter reproduced on pp 352 - 53, in which Hone says that Cosgrave's Government "might still be in power" (in 1943) if it "had adopted Yeats's suggestion" regarding negotiations "which would result in the elimination of the oath".

We could also consider Yeats's comments on Roman military tactics in *A Vision*, pg 71: the grasp of practical detail, again, is striking.

While on the subject of Yeats's dealings with the practical politics of his day, it might be worth saying something at least about the "episode" that R.F. Foster has in mind when he speaks of what he calls "the Blueshirt flirtation" as having been

> an embarrassing episode in the pedigree of Fine Gael (and in that of several sympathetic intellectuals, including W.B. Yeats): see *Modern Ireland 1600 - 1972*, pg 549.

The "Blueshirt flirtation" is what Foster makes of Yeats's brief involvement in 1933 - 34 (very much to suit his own political purposes as a cultural leader in Ireland) with the United Ireland Party - a party that included in its ranks Eoin O'Duffy's Irish fascist organisation. Yeats met O'Duffy once in mid 1933, and wrote some songs for United Ireland in February of the next year - and then, as Hone puts it,

> when politics went on very much as before ... he rewrote his songs increasing their fantasy, their extravagance, so that no party could sing them (*W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 436).

The whole "episode" is very well dealt with by a number of writers; Elizabeth Cullingford's *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* gives a very full and shrewd account; Hone provides a cogent few pages that gives a very clear outline in brief (see *W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pp 434 - 36); Jeffares has a note on O'Duffy in his commentary on "Parnell's Funeral" that cites letters that help to show something of Yeats's assessment of O'Duffy (see *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pp 412 - 13); and Richard Ellman has a number of points of interest to make in his *Yeats: the Man and the Masks* - as when he recalls Mrs Yeats telling him

> of how people wrongly assumed that (Yeats) wore blue shirts in sympathy with the Irish Fascist organisation ... when in fact blue went well with his white hair. It was true he had met with General Eoin O'Duffy, the Blue Shirt leader, but she noticed that "they spoke on different lines and neither listened to the other" (*ibid.* pg xxi).

But perhaps the sort of implication that Yeats was out of his depth in his dealings with O'Duffy that arises from Foster's view of this "episode" - the implication that he was actually rather politically inept and prone to be taken in by pretenders lacking substance - needs to met a bit more fully, seeing we are on the question of the practical competence that went with Yeats's capacity for a certain sort of idealism.

And we could start with Hone's saying that Yeats invited O'Duffy to his house in the spirit of one who "never grew cynical or despairing of Ireland as a nation" (*W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 435). As Hone adds to his account of the "episode",

> Someone had said to Yeats that the new party (United Ireland) had, or was about to have, or might be persuaded to have, some such aim as his (*ibid.* pg 434),

and Yeats tried the water to see if he *could* further his "aim" of encouraging in Ireland

> some Government (that) sought unity of culture not less than economic unity (*ibid.* pg 434; see also Ellmann, *Yeats: the Man and the Masks*, pg 281).

Hone also offers a very illuminating glimpse into the attitude that Yeats brought to trying to establish the rights and realities of complex situations, when he quotes from a letter Yeats wrote about his first meeting with De Valera early in 1932, in which he says

> "A hair divides the false and the true" - one should never be satisfied in any controversy until one has found the hair - one is liable to think it must look like a ship's cable (*W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 426).

So we have no grounds to assume that Yeats wasn't giving United Ireland - O'Duffy and all - its chance in full knowledge that its true quality and meaning within the breaking story of the hour could reveal itself only when that "hair that divides the false from the true" had been allowed to show itself for what it really was in the dialectic of its action. Yeats had to help find out that "hair" that hindsight has made seem for Foster so like a "cable" - the Nuremburg Trials adding a good many turns of ply all on their own.

But even if there had been something of the brief "flirtation" with actual Fascist ideas that Foster seems to feel took place in Yeats, we should also remember that the psychic ground-swell of the 'Thirties raised revered dictators all across Europe. As in every age, there was something mythic going on - as is recognised in Stephan Korner saying that

> Hitler and many of his followers were often guided by confused, mystical goals which they did not identify with their selfish interests and which in fact were not identical with them (see *Fundamental Questions in Philosophy*, pg 145)

- which is a point made by Laurens van der Post, too, in his speaking of his own feelings in the 'Thirties as he watched

> the rise of Hitler ... with terrible foreboding ... All the reasons Hitler advanced to excuse, justify and explain himself and his movement made no sense. In the course of the slow, impervious and sullen pre-war years of ranting he seemed always to be speaking out of a tranced, mediumistic state.

> Hitler said only one thing that struck me as real, and that was, "I go the way fate has pointed me like a man walking in his sleep" (*Jung and the Story of Our Time*, pg 17).

And it was a sort of fated somnambulism that millions of other people seemed to share in, too - and not just in Germany or in Italy, either.

So if there was actually such a strange sort of psychic undertow running in the *Zeitgeist*, for Yeats to have sensed there was something happening and to have set himself near enough to the edge to see what it was - and to have allowed himself a few months on site before publicly packing up and going home in disgust - seems rather what one would expect of the poet, if the poet is one of "the antennae of the race", as Pound said, and then went and fell for Mussolini, as a reminder of how vulnerable to contamination by mythic movements being an antenna might make you. As Douglas Livingston puts it in "Gentling a Wildcat", the experience he recounts in this poem came to him because he was

> ... towed by the faculty
> I cannot understand, that has got me
> into too many situations;

we expect a poet to get himself into "situations".

29. See Hone pg 332. The sort of grasp on significant detail involved here is like the crispness of typification there when Yeats describes Lionel Johnson in *The Trembling of the Veil*:

> He had the delicate strong features of a certain filleted head of a Greek athlete in the British Museum, an archaistic Graeco-Roman copy of a masterpiece of the fourth century (*Autobiographies*, pg 274)

- a formulation which shows a clear eye tutored by a sure sense of the features of an evolving tradition. Like his "travelled man" in "Politics", (*C.P.* pg 392), one can tell by simple tone that Yeats "knows/ What he talks about".

30. One of the most touching of these indications of the very down-to-earth way in which Yeats saw and addressed practical details is seen in his lending detective stories to the young guards who kept an eye on his door, during the civil war's targeting of senators: he said it helped them learn the principles of their calling (see Hone, *W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 351.)

31. See *Autobiographies*, pg 116.

32. The Rhymer's Club grew out of Yeats's saying to Ernest Rhys

> I am growing jealous of other poets and we will all grow jealous of each other unless we know each other and so feel a share in each other's triumph (*Autobiographies*, pg 204)

- which again shows a remarkably astute registering of the details of a complex human problem in its first stirrings that is working in combination with a shrewd capacity for timeously mending what he sees as going awry in himself and in others.

We could note also that Yeats's attitude towards jealousy is remarkably un-moralistic: it is not a sin, but a natural emotion that will inevitably arise unless certain very definite steps are taken to prevent its developing - which implies an attitude very different from that of the sort of idealist who would pretend that such an emotion is a sort of evil external visitant; and Yeats's amendment of the situation is entirely without the sort of self-righteousness that the negative idealist uses to maintain the illusion that such potentially disagreeable emotions are both wrong in themselves and unreal in comparison with the Good in us. Yeats deals with jealousy, in other words, through wisdom - not by means of the sort of excommunication that implies that the emotion wouldn't be a reality in a suitably ideal world; and the manner of the dealing says a lot about his own sort of quickness to try to mend what he found going wrong about him.

33. See *C.P.* pg 223, and the discussion offered in Chapter 4 above.

34. As Yeats had noted of Shelley's thought,

> the exterior real things are just thoughts that differ only in regularity from hallucinations, dreams and the ideas of madness (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 77);

and we have also noted him saying of Balzac that he "did not know that things exist in being perceived" (*ibid.* pg 439).

35. As Jeffares says in mentioning the close to "The Tower",

> But though Yeats momentarily contemplated the attraction of the artificial bird's immortality (the "artificial bird" of "Sailing to Byzantium")

he still

> had to face the mortal lot: it included more than any escape into a world of unaging intellect:

see *Yeats's Poems*, Introduction, pg xxviii.

36. See *C.P.* pg 223.

37. It is interesting to note that "all" is "made up" out of "man's *bitter* soul": suffering isn't - in this view - an extraneous, inflicted unreality, but a direct expression of the soul's nature. If, in other words, mortal life is "the blind man's ditch", this is so because something in man is fulfilled in such a brew. This view in itself, of course, speaks volumes about Yeats's particular sort of idealism.

It is also interesting to recall again in this context something we have already found Jung saying about how much "psyche and matter" really do seem at last to form one complex:

> Since psyche and matter are contained in one and the same world, and are moreover in continuous contact with one another and ultimately rest on irrepresentable, transcendent factors, it is not only possible but fairly probable, even, that psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing ... Our present knowledge does not allow us to do much more than compare the relation of the

> psychic to the material world with two cones, whose apices, meeting in a point without extension - a real zero-point - touch and do not touch ("On the Nature of the Psyche", *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, pg 215).

If "present knowledge" circa 1946 made it seem "fairly probable" that "psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing", then "sun and moon and star" really would seem "all" intimate parts of the drama of "man's bitter soul" - just as Yeats represents them as being in "The Tower". What might at first glance seem pure idealism (or the idealistic "subjectivism" that Ellman calls it in *The Identity of Yeats*, pg 225) ends up then looking very like what "present knowledge" twenty years down the line prompted a careful scientist to think "fairly probable" as a defensible model of "the relation of the psychic to the material world".

38. See *The Republic*, Part VII, section 7.

39. Keats's might be writing a letter when he uses these terms (see that to George and Georgiana Keats, Feb. 14 - May 3, 1819: *John Keats*, ed. Elizabeth Cook, pg 473) and Yeats his will; but the views of life each embodies certainly move much in the same direction.

40. See *A Vision*, pg 271.

41. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 102.

42. A study of the context from which this extract is taken will show that Yeats is making a point that makes his use of the qualificatory "but" quite understandable.

43. See Section IV, stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 399.

44. Though we should keep in mind, perhaps, the aspect to Plato's idealism suggested by Martin Versfeld when he says we shouldn't "make facile conclusions about Plato's or about the Greek character" from such reaching after "an eternal and unchanging beauty" lying beyond "the vicissitudes of history":

> This constant character (that Plato required of his guardians), this ideal beauty, is what the Athenians wanted to have because they suffered greatly from the inconvenience of not having it. The Platonic guardian is the actual Athenian turned upside down. To write the *Symposium* Plato must have listened to a flute-girl with the flowing bowl between his hands, and perhaps he celebrated Socrates's freedom from hangovers with a touch of mortal envy (*Pots and Poetry*, pg 73).

To such a view, Plato and Yeats are much closer fellows than Yeats' own response to Plato's formulated thoughts would seem to suggest; and Plato might well have felt a pang of sympathy with the "Bitter and violent men" Yeats shows struggling to

> ... rear in stone
> The sweetness that all longed for night and day,

The gentleness none there had ever known
in "Meditations in Time of Civil War" (*C.P.* pg 225) - however much the "stone" with which they struggled might seem to him too clayey to bear the eternal impress that he himself - for Versfeld - "longed for night and day".

45. See "Under Ben Bulben", Section IV, *C.P.* pp 399 - 400.

46. See Section IV, stanza 2, *C.P.* pg 399.

47. Perhaps this "secret working mind" is the "archetypal ideas" to which "nature" forms a "looking-glass"?

48. We might remember here how Yeats spoke - with great compassion - of Lionel Johnson's drunken quest for a "measureless consummation": of a life made a into a type of "desert", and of a death made a sort of "Stoic suicide", by what was finally an unbalanced idealism (see "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory", stanza III, *C.P.* pp 148 - 49).

49. See "Tom O'Roughley", *C.P.* pp 158 - 59, and the discussion offered in Chapter 4 above.

50. See *C.P.* pg 298.

51. See *C.P.* pg 295.

52. Using these terms as relatives, and not absolutes, of course.

53. See stanza IV, lines 13 - 14, *C.P.* pg 228.

54. See "Sailing to Byzantium", *C.P.* pg 217.
A reading of the poem "Words" (*C.P.* pg 100) in this context adds to the point being made: even Yeats the "poet born" (see "Vacillation", Section VII, *C.P.* pg 285) couldn't be sure he mightn't "have thrown poor words away/ And been content to live", if he had won Maud Gonne's understanding.
So again it was the imperfect within the pattern of his life that made it possible for Yeats to say, at life's end,

I swerved in naught,
Something to perfection brought
(see "What Then?", *C.P.* pp 347 - 48.)

And we could recall, too - on the subject of Yeats's sense of the nature of the human spirit's eternal and necessary entanglement in the imperfect - his saying in *The Celtic Twilight* that Irish folklore believed that "the soul cannot live without sorrow" (see *Mythologies*, pp 70 -71).

55. We could recall here, perhaps, Yeats's saying in *A Vision* that

> My imagination was for a time haunted by figures that, muttering 'The great systems', held out to me the sun-dried skeletons of birds, and it seemed to me that this image was meant to turn my thoughts to the living bird. That bird signifies truth when it eats, evacuates, builds its nest, engenders,

feeds its young; do not all intelligible truths
lie in its passage from egg to dust? (see pg 214);

where all we can know of truth lies in the "passage" from one concrete detail of experience to the next - which isn't any sort of materialism, but a reverence for the stuff of our lives no materialism could imagine.

56. See "A Prayer for My Daughter", stanza 9, *C.P.* pg 214, where the soul's "Own sweet will is Heaven's will".

57. He says, in *The Trembling of the Veil*,

> The wholeness of the supernatural world can only express itself in personal form, because it has no epitome but man (*Autobiographies*, pg 306)

- which is possibly heir to the doctrine that he gained from Irish folklore that the Sidhe need the mediation of living people before they can act so as mortals can recognise their presence.

58. See *Autobiographies*, pg 14.
There is also the reference later to how his father's reading of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*

> gave me a wish to turn magician that competed for years with the dream of being killed upon the sea-shore (*ibid.* pg 57),

which shows the sort of tenacity with which these dreams acted within the dynamics of Yeats's imagination: they were certainly no fleeting or idle fancies, but actual commitments - as his actually going on to "turn magician" in fact should remind us.

59. This is, of course, a recollection from years ahead; but there is no reason to assume that Yeats has improved on the facts in putting the recollection into mature prose. In fact, for someone who revered his memories as did Yeats, such falsification - even Moore's "accurate lying" - would have defeated the object he had in mind in recollecting these phases in his experience in the first place.

60. The boy dreaming by his log of how to make his future crew "brave and handsome" through continual athletic training is a remarkable prefiguration, too, of the Yeats who was convinced that it was Phidias's "measurement" that had "begun the might" of Greece: see "Under Ben Bulben", Section IV, *C.P.* pg 399.

61. See *C.P.* pg 347.

62. See *C.P.* pg 337.

63. See the discussion of the influence on Yeats of *Walden* that is offered above.

64. See *C.P.* pg 158, and the discussion offered above.

65. See "Easter 1916", *C.P.* pg 202.

66. See "Sparkles from the Wheel".

67. See *C.P.* pg 246.

The sort of amendment that Yeats is talking about isn't really the moulding of the mind to an abstract pattern, but the discovery of a pattern that suits the mind better than history itself could manage to do. As one of the Marx Brothers' biographers has said about his struggle to get at the truth about their early days,

> The truth, if it ever existed, has gone through its customary transformation into something more easily digested by the human mind (see Joe Adamson, *Groucho, Harpo, Chico and sometimes Zeppo*, pg 43).

The working of the details of Christ's life into a proper "playtime" for "Miracle" - remote from the "sawdust" on a "working-carpenter('s) floor" - actually suits the natural bias of the human mind's prejudices about Gods better than the facts themselves could ever do.

68. See pg 273.

69. One feels that Yeats would have had a quick eye for the effects of dispossession from land upon the social realities engendered by - for instance - colonial and Apartheid South Africa.

70. We could recall here the note offered a few pages back in which Yeats says that "The wholeness of the supernatural world ... has no epitome but man" (*Autobiographies*, pg 306): "man" therefore becomes the focusing term in the total process, with incarnate humanity providing the only chance that "the supernatural world" has to achieve "wholeness" - which is very near to Yeats's vision of man making up "the whole" of everything at the end of "The Tower".

71.See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 341.

72. It's tempting to recall here also Yeats's praise of a poem of Dorothy Wellesley's, that he called

> the most moving philosophic poem of our time, and the most moving precisely because its wisdom bulked animal below the waist: *Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, pg 25.

So it is by what from his earliest thinking he called Unity of Being - the marriage of all above with all "below the waist" - that even cultural unity is made. The abiding feeling one gets from Yeats's idealism - his quickness to see the moment as clay awaiting its shaping - is how entirely embodied in the actual substances of life that eye for the soil's desiring really is: Wellesley's poem is such a "moving philosophical poem" for him precisely because it offers "wisdom" and not just some abstract knowledge: the wisdom that reveres the total claims of the moment and is itself the harmony that right understanding can give those claims. (One can see why Yeats had such respect for the Indian philosophy he knew, with its emphasis on a wisdom that is a state of being, rather than the possession of a certain store of structured information.)

73. There is a fascinating slant on this vision of the nature of the "soil" of everyday life that underlies the notion that Yeats when young deduced from the "esoteric teachings" of Madame Blavatsky's followers to the effect that "all natural scenery must be divided into seven types" according to

> the seven principles into which (these "teachings") divided human nature (*Autobiographies*, pg 225).

From his early twenties, in other words, Yeats saw the very "natural scenery" that is available to us - the physical world itself - as being made what it is to each person in terms of type of sensibility. The world we can each sense is a personal variation on one among a finite range of human constructs; and the "human nature" referred to here is the grounding of spirit in a "natural" setting: in a late essay, for instance, Yeats notes in full sympathy the conviction of Irish folk belief that the dead "but retreated ... into the hidden nature of their neighbourhood" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 518): which is a thought that finds in the physical world the shimmer of the "perfection" out of which all "things ... sail" into our ken. (See "Old Tom Again", *C.P.* pg 306.)

And we can also find a more mature recurrence of the young man's intuition that types of "natural scenery" are kin with "principles (of) ... human nature" in a statement such as that in which Yeats says that Balzac's

> powerful body, his imagination which saw everywhere weight and magnitude, the science of his day, made him, like Descartes, consider matter as independent of mind (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 439).

74. See *C.P.* pg 214 and pg 231, respectively.

75. See "Adam's Curse", *C.P.* pg 88.

76. See Hone, *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939*, pg 260. As Edith Lyttelton continues:

> It is curious a few words like these can reverberate in one's being for the whole of life. How often have I admonished myself when starting on some very distasteful job, "Remember, this is an occasion which requires great skill" - at once the occasion is invested with dignity, and one's powers, whatever they may be, are called upon.

So the example of Yeats's own habitual ceremoniousness in dealing with even the seeming dross of everyday circumstances could "reverberate in (another's) being for the whole of life": it wasn't just his own immediate personal "soil" that he managed to spiritualise by living out his vision of things as well as he did.

Hone also records the effects of Yeats's company upon someone who regularly attended the Monday evening "At Homes" that the Yeatses held - mainly for Oxford undergraduates - during 1921:

> I seldom left the house till midnight or after, and would walk up the Banbury Road to the school where I was teaching, exhilarated, walking on air, upheld and inspired by the knowledge, which rapidly became incredible during the week, that life could

be lived on such a plane of thought and at such a pitch (*ibid.* pp 332 - 33).

One wonders what spin-offs there were "during the week" from the "plane" and "pitch" of the example Yeats gave of the art of living in what happened in at least one classroom in that school "up the Banbury Road"?

77. See *C.P.* pg 214.

78. Is this also echoed in the "rich horn" that "trumpeter Michael" blows in "Tom O'Roughley" (*C.P.* pg 158)?

79. We could recall Yeats's criticism of Todhunter, for not making his thoughts into leaves on a single branch, but always a set of new beginnings (see *Autobiographies*, pg 144). What he felt about Todhunter's failure to make an intellectual life that was whole was also what lay at the bottom of his objection to social revolution: all "new beginnings" of the wrong sort simply break the threads of the actual weave of life; and he would see the revolutionary assumption that the past can be erased without harm to the future as being a desperately unwise and idealistic belief in the insignificance of the human soil as compared with the constructs of abstract reason. He was too modern in his own idealism - too "Existentialist" - to believe in mechanist revolutions.

And while on the subject of Yeats's need to deliberately craft life itself into a meaningful whole, we could recall his ending the fourth section of his essay in *The Cutting of an Agate* called "Certain Noble Plays of Japan" by saying

> Europe is very old and has seen many arts run through the circle and has learned the fruit of every flower and known what this fruit sends up, and now it is time to copy the East and live deliberately (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 228)

- an echo, perhaps, of the emphasis Thoreau's *Walden* lays on living deliberately that in April, 1916 (just three months before the start of the first battle of the Somme) rings with an uncanny, almost prophetic urgency

But whatever we make of that, Yeats's attempt to shape life into ceremony and pattern was pretty certainly a deliberate swimming against the modern tide of fragmentation he was convinced even in his early days with the Rhymers had been the dominant mood of the European experience from "a little before Shakespeare's birth" (*Autobiographies*, pg 237) - the same "falling asunder of the human mind" of which he spoke "A couple of years before the death of Parnell" to "The Southwark Irish Literary Society" (*ibid.* pp 245 - 46: the whole of the three last sections of "Four years: 1887 - 1891" in *The Trembling of the Veil* [*ibid.* pp 234 - 42] is in fact apposite here.)

80. Even Yeats's "scorn" of "the sort now growing up" with their "unremembering hearts and heads" ("Under Ben Bulben", Section V, *C.P.* pg 400) is - seen from a certain slant - simply the expression of a concern with the attempt to make the practical streets of life more open to the influence of the creative than

of the mechanical influences that are always at work upon human experience: if we adopt the sort of perspective on the potentials of that experience that is invited by the overall thrust of Jung's conception of the structure and contents of the human psyche, then the "unremembering hearts and heads" that Yeats rejects as fit subject for poetry would raise the problem that the more we allow our history to lapse into unconsciousness - to be "unremember(ed)" - the more fatally the shadow of the past is likely to mechanically determine our sense of the shape and needs of the present.

Taking Jung's terms, Yeats's call upon Irish poets to turn away from the "unremembering" present towards an imaginative embodiment of the recollected past would amount to an insistence upon the importance of taking for theme not those forces that have become mechanisms within the unconscious, but those aspects of the psyche's contents that are more creative in their being capable of being disposed into patterns that offer extension of both the conscious and unconscious orbits within that psyche towards greater balance and harmony - towards something of what Jung meant by "individuation", in fact.

81. See Section IV, *C.P.* pg 399.

82. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 339.

83. "A Meditation in Time of War", *C.P.* pg 214.

84. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 172. (We could also note Yeats's recalling that Aquinas said that "Eternity is the possession of one's self, as in a single moment" (*Explorations*, pg 37).

85. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 341.

86. We could recall here Cecil Salkeld's memory of a walk with Yeats in September 1920, when (after "nearly half an hour" in which "no word was spoken" but in which "Yeats kept up a persistent murmur - under his breath") Yeats suddenly "pulled up short" to say "Do you realise that eternity is not a long time but a *short* time ...?" (see Hone, *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939*, pg 327). So eternity - whatever it may be in itself, if it *is* anything in itself - makes itself known to us only as "the glitter on the beetle's wing" of the example Yeats gave Salkeld in explanation (*ibid.*): as a fleeting glimpse of significance that is worlds away from the materialist notion of eternity as being Newtonian time infinitely extended - a matter of duration only. This means that Yeats's "eternity" is no Pi in the sky, but the shimmer on the fleeting moment itself - on the real wings of time - that sometimes it is given to us to glimpse.

This again shows how quick Yeats always was to see ultimate things as being naturally ready to impress themselves upon the flux of everyday experience - and how much truth for him was a state of being and not a proposition.

87. It is this dimension to Yeats's thinking about the dealings that eternity has with time that shows in poems like "Leda and the Swan" (*C.P.* pg 241) and "The Mother of God" (*C.P.* pg 281) - his pagan and his Christian annunciations - that each captures a moment in which the seeds of the future are "laid in (a) white rush" within the womb of the present.

88. See *Explorations*, pg 434.
The sense of paradox is entirely characteristic: in section IV of "Under Ben Bulben" (*C.P.* pg 399) "measurement began our might"; yet here "Nature or reality" shows that "nothing is measurable": the "measurement" of which we dream is a necessary fiction, a tool suited to serve a further end - not a supreme value in itself.

89. See *Explorations*, pg 435.
Ellman (*The Identity of Yeats*, pg 225) says that Yeats is speaking here "with more vehemence than accuracy", and that in Berkeley he is merely finding someone he "thought ... an ally for his most extreme positions" - which overlooks the "ally" Yeats had in his estimation of what Berkeley was after in

> The Russian mathematician Vasiliev ... (who) calls Berkeley "one of the most profound thinkers of all time" and adds, "It was Berkeley's immortal service that he rejected the external reality of space" (see Yeats's note to *Essays and Introductions*, pg 401).

One feels Yeats would be content to have "his most extreme positions" seem good science to a theoretical mathematician he respected.

90. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 429.

91. See "The Tower", Section III *C.P.* pp 222 - 23.
The notion of "matter as independent of mind" - in being produced in its originators by the sort of "powerful ... imagination" which "saw everywhere weight and magnitude" - was thus actually created for Yeats by a confident but insufficiently critical imaginative process; which would actually make it a product of the same idle fancy that rationalist philosophy found in the "superstitions" about things immaterial that it dismissed out of hand.

92. Taking what Yeats says of him in "Blood and the Moon", *C.P.* pg 268, that is.

93. We have the authority of "Those images that waken in the blood" in "Hound Voice" (*C.P.* pg 385) to help back this, too.

94. A point which is also nicely made by Shakespeare's setting Falstaff and Hotspur (the Manningtree ox and the firebrand) to typify Honour so differently as they act within the perspectives of the same play: see *Henry* IV Pt I (I.iii.199 -206 for Hotspur; V.i.127 - 41 and V.iii.32 - 33 for Falstaff.)

95. See *Explorations* pg 436 (and, of course, Section II of "Under Ben Bulben", *C.P.* pg 398).

96. One recalls here Yeats's saying that in Ireland

> there are times when the worlds (of the living and the dead) are so close together that it seems as if our earthly chattels were no more than the shadows of things beyond. (*Mythologies* pg 98.)

And we have also noted above Jung's saying that it seems to him "fairly probable" that "psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing" ("On the Nature of the Psyche", *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, pg 215); which is an hypothesis - offered in the light of what Jung calls "Our present knowledge" about seven years on from Yeats's death - that one feels sure Yeats would have been quite at home with.

97. John Wilkes recalled Garrick telling him that Johnson said he would

> come no more behind your scenes, David; for the silk stockings and white bosoms of your actresses do make my genitals to quiver (see *The Frank Muir Book*, pg 238).

98. As Jung says in the essay "On the Nature of the Psyche",

> every science is a function of the psyche, and all knowledge is rooted in it. The psyche is the greatest of all cosmic wonders and the *sine qua non* of the world as an object. It is in the highest degree odd that Western man, with but a few - and ever fewer - exceptions, apparently pays so little regard to this fact. Swamped by the knowledge of external objects, the subject of all knowledge has been temporarily eclipsed to the point of seeming non-existence (*The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, pg 169).

99. It was in fact because of the creation of material space that machines became so urgently necessary so soon after the Enlightenment: once given a space in which the mind's magic kinship with the elements has been banished into superstition, how can thought engage with matter except *via* mechanical mediation?

If we take the doctrine of the subjectivity of space on one of its more mundane levels of application - that what is, is what it is because of the constitution of its perceiver - then it's amusing to think that if Johnson had been gouty when he offered his refutation of Berkeley's idealism, he might have suffered an instant conversion!

100. Jung says - in talking about the "possibility that there are stages in the development of consciousness" that "plays no role in our (Western) thinking" -

> there is a tremendous psychological difference between consciousness of the existence of an object and "consciousness of the consciousness" ("Foreword to 'Introduction to Zen Buddhism'",

Psychology and Religion: West and East, pg 545).

In these terms, the English eighteenth century outlook that suited Johnson's intentions upon the world would have made the "consciousness of the consciousness" of "the existence of an object" that is the key to Berkeley's idealism an awareness involving such "tremendous psychological differences" from his own as to make its postulates seem absurd. As Yeats would probably have felt, Johnson and Berkeley each spoke from a different "stage" of self-awareness, in which Berkeley could comprehend - and reject - Johnson's position while Johnson could only reject Berkeley's without being able to comprehend it.

101. See *C.P.* pg 244.

102. I am not really trying to push the good Doctor himself - his genitals all a-quiver over Garrick's ladies' "silk stockings and white bosoms" - too far into any mechanist camp, though.

103. Given the doctrine of the subjectivity of space, thoughts and emotions are part of the same continuum as rocks. As we have already found Yeats saying in an essay that comments with approval on the philosophy of Shri Purohit Swami, the table he sat at and his thoughts were not that different in essential nature: see *Essays and Introductions*, pg 461, where he says

> If I think of the table on which I am writing, my mental image is as much Matter as the table itself, though of a "subtler kind", and I am able to think correctly, because the Matter I call Mind takes the shape of this or that physical object

and then adds as a note that this mental "Matter" is

> "Subtler", "finer", because it penetrates all things. Ordinary matter cannot go through the wall, mind can.

104. See *the opening to "The Autumn of the Body", Essays and Introductions*, pg 189.

105. We might not know what the "moon" is - or the "tides" of unconscious complexity it arouses within us; but for Yeats the "spray" we can feel is our immediate human reality and not a mere mist of frustrating illusion.

106. See "A Prayer for Old Age", *C.P.* pg 326: "He that sings a lasting song/ Thinks in a marrow-bone".

107. See, for instance, the fascinating formulation in *Pages from a Diary in 1930* that says

> Light then - colour, light and shade - fabricated by the intellect and changed with its forms is perception, that which gives a visible unity to the multiple Passionate Body. The "perception" may be considered as a circle or space of light encircling each man, and it is the Husk. The dead past thrown off by the living present

(*Explorations*, pg 332).

So "perception" is forever already of "The dead past" by the time that it can ever be known, and is left lagging by the on-flowing "living present" - as is confirmed by the parallel formulation in *A Vision* to the effect that

> *Husk* is the past, deriving its name from the husk that is abandoned by the seed. *Husk* is the past ... because the objects (of sense) are passed before we can know their images (pg 191).

108. See "Those images that waken in the blood" as bearers of ultimate spiritual meanings in "Hound Voice", *C.P.* 385.

109.1 We might recall here Yeats's noting in *The Celtic Twilight* the belief amongst the Irish countryfolk that

> Blood is a great gatherer of evil spirits. To cut your hand on a stone on going into a fort is said to be very dangerous (*Mythologies*, pg 93.)

Was this a memory of the old intuition Homer used of the blood that has to be spilt before the shades can speak - symbol of the route the supernatural has through the veins of the living? (There was, after all, the old wood-cutter's wife who was "full of old talk" and who had a tale for Yeats about "Aristotle of the Books": see *ibid.* pg 66.)

110. See *"Ancestral Houses"*, *C.P.* pg 225.

When Paul Scott Stanfield talks about

> Yeats's immense admiration for such external shows as Georgian fronts

as something that stands in need of defence and qualification (see *Yeats and Politics in the 1930's*, pp 44 - 5), he seems to have missed the fact that Yeats himself obviously saw those "external shows" exactly as that: stage scenery that is meant to help human actors learn their lines - and that don't always work for every actor, anyway.

(Stanfield's attitude towards "external shows" itself exhibits a type of idealism rather like that of the young Isabel Archer in James' *A Portrait of a Lady*: the assumption that what is striking to the eye is purely "external" to the spirit. Yeats's own sense of the need for the "spiritualisation of the soil" grows from a different attitude towards sensible reality than the rather transcendentalist one expressed here.)

111. See *C.P.* pp 232 - 37, particularly the first Section, with its evocation of the "ingenious lovely things" of Athens that "incendiary" and "bigot" brought down.

112. See *C.P.* pp 210 - 11, and the discussion offered in Chapter 2 above.

113. This is something approaching a common ground for the land of the forgetful young and for what Byzantium means to "old men" of Yeats's sort.

114. See "To a Wealthy Man Who Promised ...", *C.P.* pp 119 - 20.

115. It is a thought Yeats finally contained in a harmony in "The Gyres", with its conviction that "beauty dies of beauty" as part of an unending waxing and waning of human achievement: which is a rhythm that is caught also in the frailty of Callimachus' "long lamp-chimney shaped like/ The stem of a slender palm" that "stood but a day" in stanza three of "Lapis Lazuli" (*C.P.* pp 338 - 39).

116. See *My Descendants*, stanza 1, *C.P.* pp 228 - 29.

117. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 172:

> Progress is miracle, and it is sudden, because miracles are the work of an all-powerful energy, and Nature has in herself no power except to die and to forget.

There is a sort of humility involved in such a view of the place that one's own ideal aspirations have within the greater scheme of things that is again well caught - for instance - in the last stanza of Section IV of "Meditations in Time of Civil War": "Whatever flourish and decline/ These stones" (the "house" that Yeats has chosen "For an old neighbour's friendship .../ And decked and altered ... for a girl's love") will "remain their monument and mine", "Seeing that love and friendship are enough" (*C.P.* pg 229). All plans for his descendants end in this acceptance of what is possible, of "Whatever (may) flourish or decline" among his dearest dreams.

118. See *C.P.* pg 327.

119. The poem being dated August, 1934 gives it an interesting interface with matters authoritarian developing in Europe at the time.

120. See *C.P.* pp 288 - 89.

121. See "Vacillation" V, *C.P.* pg 284:

> Although the summer sunlight gild
> Cloudy leafage of the sky,
> Or wintry moonlight sink the field
> In storm-scattered intricacy,
> I cannot look thereon,
> Responsibility so weighs me down.
>
> Things said or done long years ago,
> Or things I did not do or say
> But thought that I might say or do,
> Weigh me down, and not a day
> But something is recalled,
> My conscience or my vanity appalled.

122. See the Man's first speech in "The Man and the Echo", *C.P.* pg 393.

123. Yeats uses the term as a verb in "Stream and Sun at Glendalough", but - as a noun - it becomes a key element in the catalogue of ills Yeats sets before us in the opening lines to the last stanza of "The Gyres", when he says "Conduct and work

grow coarse, and coarse the soul" (*C.P.* pg 337): honourable conduct obviously was important to him, if his account of its coarsening should not only precede that of "the soul" in the lines quoted above, but should at least leave ground to suspect that the sequence (from conduct to soul) could be taken to imply a causal link: from coarse conduct *comes* coarsening of the soul.

124. See the companion experiences of this grace in the "certain minutes at the least" of "freedom won" in "Demon and Beast" (*C.P.* pg 209) and in the "twenty minutes more or less" in the "crowded London shop", during which Yeats felt he "was blessed and could bless", of "Vacillation", Section IV (*C.P.* pp 283 - 84).

125. See "Tom O'Roughley", *C.P.* pg 158.

126. See "The Hawk", *C.P.* pg 167.

127. See *C.P.* pp 265 - 67.

128. See "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931", stanza 4, *C.P.* pg 276.

129. See "Are You Content?", *C.P.* pp 370 - 71.

130. See last stanza, Section I, *C.P.* pg 266.

131. See, for instance, "Remorse for Intemperate Speech" (*C.P.* pp 287 - 88), "Stream and Sun at Glendalough" (*C.P.* pp 288 - 89), "The Cold Heaven" (*C.P.* pg 140), and "The Man and the Echo" (*C.P.* pp 393 - 95).

132. See *C.P.* pg 394.

133. We could recall here Yeats's saying - after speaking of that "consenting of all our faculties" that "may be the one thing germane" to what "we would offer God" -

> Not but that I doubt at times, with that animal doubt of the Middle Ages that I have found even in pious countrywomen when they have seen some life come to an end like the stopping of a clock, or that all the perceptions of the soul, or the weightiest intellectual deductions, are not at whiles but a feather in the daily show (*Explorations*, pg 31).

134. See *C.P.* pg 255.

135. John Steinbeck, in his version of the *Morte d'Arthur*, has his Merlin say - when asked why he cannot evade the doom he knows he must suffer - "In the combat between wisdom and feeling, wisdom never wins" (*The Acts of King Arthur and his Noble Knights*, pg 109). Such a Merlin - an image of human wit that even at its most aquiline must still bow to what common human nature decrees - offers a shrewd embodiment of a good deal of what I have been trying to formulate about Yeats's own characteristic lack of idealist hubris.

136. See stanza 6, *C.P.* pg 358.

137. See *C.P.* pg 232.

138. *Ibid.*

139. See *C.P.* pg 285.
"Isiah's coal" of course refers to the "live coal" that one of the seraphim in Isiah's vision (Is. vi) laid on his "unclean lips" (Is. vi. 5), thus leaving him free of "iniquity" (Is. vi. 7) and able to speak. Yeats is Isiah's deliberate antitype: to be purged of uncleanness ("original sin") would strike him dumb.
Another point of deliberate difference between the stance Yeats develops in this poem and the general tenor of Isiah's teachings would lie in Isiah's condemnation of "soothsayers like the Philistines" (Is. ii. 6) and of "them that have familiar spirits" and of "wizards that peep and that mutter" (Is. viii. 19). Such suspicion of "the mystical life" that Yeats once told O'Leary was "the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write" (see Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pp 210 - 11, and Hone, *W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 86) would have been just too Cromwellian for him.

140. A human one, however much a poet like Yeats might take his theme at times from the confusion that the supernatural can bring down about human ears - as in "Leda and the Swan" (*C.P.* pg 241) or "The Mother of God" (*C.P.* pp 281 - 82) or "A Stick of Incense" (*C.P.* pg 383) - or even in "The Magi" (*C.P.* 141), in which "the pale unsatisfied ones" who followed the star, "Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied", are left always "hoping to find once more.../ The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor" of their first glimpse of the still-unassimilated miracle that once called them over more than just earthly frontiers. (As such, this poem is, in its way, a counter-truth to Yeats's concern with the long process of amendment of the immediate work-a-day details of this miracle into the "Miracle" of the traditional iconography of Christ's life that is to be found in "Wisdom" [*C.P.*pp 246 - 47]).

141. See *C.P.* pg 21.

142. See "Blood and the Moon", Section IV, *C.P.* pg 269.

143. See "Under Ben Bulben" generally for the register of the terms here used: *C.P.* pp 397 - 401.

144. See "The Lady's Second Song", stanza 2, *C.P.* pg 344:

He shall love my soul as though
Body were not at all,
He shall love your body
Untroubled by the soul,
Love cram love's two divisions
Yet keep his substance whole.
The Lord have mercy upon us.

Should anyone find the Lady's agenda in these songs disquieting, they should add the wonderfully flexible diction she is given - sure sign of a "soul" untrammelled by emotional and imaginative dogmatisms - to the poignancy of the refrain, which makes it quite clear that every step in the stratagems she is developing in this Song leaves her troubled and helpless before the urgency of her own passionate need to find ways to keep both her own "chastity" and her lover's "substance whole". There is nothing prim or fanatical about her sense of herself as the conflicting necessities of her situation call her into action.

145. See "The Statues", stanza 2, where Yeats talks of Phidias having caused the final putting-off of "All Asiatic vague immensities" when he "Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass" (*C.P.* pg 375).

146. See *C.P.* pp 341 - 46.

147. See the discussion of these poems that is offered above.

148. *C.P.* pg 345.

149. I've a suspicion that Yeats would have been pleased to find that the "Lover's Song" appears in a modern book of erotica: see Charlotte Hill and William Wallace, *The Second Illustrated Anthology of Erotica*, pg 127.

He might well also have been amused to find himself appearing in the section called "Matters of Love" in *The Penguin Book of Unrespectable Verse*, in the company of such seamy masters as John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester: see "News for the Delphic Oracle" (*C.P.* pp 376 -77) on pp 89 - 90 and "A Last Confession" from *A Woman Young and Old* (*ibid.* pp 313 - 14) on pp 134 - 35.

150. We could recall here Yeats's comment that "The tragedy of sexual intercourse is the perpetual virginity of the soul" (*Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, pg 174) - which certainly fits the dilemma of the Lady in this cycle of poems, in which she becomes an emblem of the soul, that can never slip its tragic solitariness, even in love.

151. See "King and No King", *C.P.* pg 102, and the echo in "Among School Children", stanza VIII *C.P.* pg 245:

> Labour is blossoming or dancing where
> The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
> Nor beauty born out of its own despair.

152. See pg 11.

This "something ancestral in ourselves" that lives in the symbolic East of our prayers recalls the dawn of "victory amid the encircling hounds" of the ancient, aboriginal sensitivities of "Hound Voice", as well as the dead that the grave-diggers simply put back "in the human mind again" in "Under Ben Bulben".

When he speaks of the "religious instinct that for the first time in our civilisation demands the satisfaction of the whole man", could he have in mind something of what he meant when he

said, many years before, in talking about William Morris's "broad vigorous body", that

> Shakespeare himself foreshadowed a symbolic change, that is a change in the whole temperament of the world, for though he called his Hamlet "fat" and even "scant of breath", he thrust between his fingers agile rapier and dagger (*Autobiographies*, pg 175)?

In being really so far from "the wavering, lean image of hungry speculation" that "certain famous Hamlets of our stage" have mistakenly established, Shakespeare's conception seems, for Yeats, to rather embody something closer to "the dreamer of the middle ages" (*ibid.*) - an image of the person fulfilled in body and spirit together, a state in which Apollo doesn't starve Dionysus. (We might also recall at this point Yeats's recollection of the "ballad" by Nettleship called "Christ the Less", in which

> the half of Christ sacrificed to the divine half "that fled to seek felicity" wanders wailing through Golgotha [*Autobiographies*, pg 198].

One feels that such a sacrifice of part to part was a problem to Yeats from early in his thought, as the amusing picture he gives of himself as a young man in London shows:

> Sometimes I told myself very adventurous love-stories with myself for hero, and at other times I planned out a life of lonely austerity, and at other times mixed the ideals and planned a life of lonely austerity mitigated by periodical lapses [*ibid.* pg 189].

The need to have "mixed the ideals" looks forward then to the acuteness that can recognise the new "religious instinct" of "the whole man" in old age.)

153. See *The Ten Principle Upanishads*, pg 16.

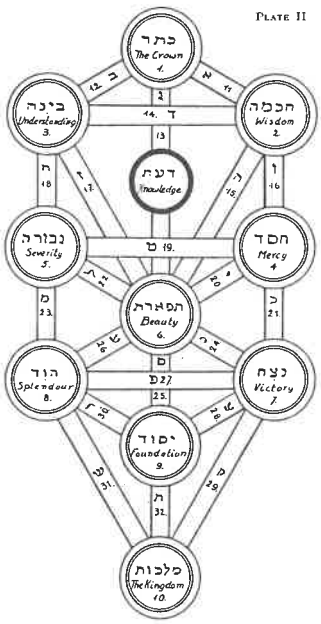
For all the fact that Yeats found such a fulfilment of his life's explorations in the formulated philosophy of Shri Purohit Swami's book *An Indian Monk* (see *Essays and Introductions*, pp 428 - 29,) he still set the Indian way of liberation from maya as much at arms' length, finally, as he did the "abstract Greek absurdity" of the Christian "masculine Trinity" (see '*Ribh denounces Patrick*' in "Supernatural Songs": *C.P.* pp 328 - 29). Both the masculine abstraction and the union with the "Primordial Motherhood" of the Indian goal (see '*What Magic Drum?*', "Supernatural Songs" VII, *C.P.* pg 332) are held in question - as we have seen in the rejection of the very Indian formulation in "From 'Oedipus at Colonus"' of the ideal of withdrawal and detachment so that the persona may follow the more integrally human way that he calls "The second best" (*C.P.* pg 255).

This is a stance that is closely echoed in a Christian context by the wild old man of the *Last Poems*, who knows that "the old man in the skies/ Can burn out (mortal) suffering" with "some stream of lightening", and who yet chooses "the second-best": to "forget it all awhile/ Upon a woman's breast" (see "The Wild Old Wicked Man", stanzas 6 and 7, *C.P.* pg 358). "Primordial Motherhood" and the power of "the old man in the skies" are both acknowledged, but Yeats himself took the way that is reflected in Hone's paraphrase of a critic's finding that "at the end (Yeats) saw the mystical as the sexual life" (*W.B. Yeats, 1865 -*

YEATS'S EARLY SYMBOLISM

The cover design of *The Secret Rose*, designed for Yeats by Althea Gyles (and here copied by Mary Gelb), showing the conjunction of Rose and Cross, and of man and woman, in the midst of the serpentine folds of the Tree of Life. The three roses at the top represent the three principal states of being (Sephiroth) of the Kabbalistic Tree, and the skeleton at the bottom represents the lowest state of being or nature.

PLATE II



THE TREE OF LIFE

1939, pg 465). Though this formulation falls short in suggesting that Yeats had merely come to reduce the spiritual to the physical - where he really maintained the paradox and ambivalence of their claims upon human attention intact - the feeling that Yeats expresses a remarkably incarnate spirituality is quite true.

154. *C.P.* pg 343.

155. It is interesting that the three bushes motif picks up suggestions from one of Yeats's early symbols. If we note the cover design for *The Secret Rose* that is reproduced (from Ellmann's *The Identity of Yeats*, pg 65, Ellmann's note included) on the page opposite, it will be seen that "the Kabbalistic Tree" to which Ellmann refers is formed of three main roots, which knot above the matrix into a Celtic maze of "conjunction(s)" of contrary principles within life and within the self to end in the three roses that represent the triad of Ellmann's "three principle states of being (Sephiroth) of the Kabbalistic Tree"; and the structuring of the maze of the branches is such that it would certainly be hard to "Know where (each rose's) roots began" (see the last stanza of "The Three Bushes", *C.P.* pg 343). I offer an image of the classical "Kabbalistic Tree" from J.F.C. Fuller, *The Secret Wisdom of the Qabalah*, opposite pg 60, for comparison.

As will be seen from the Yeats design, these first three Sephiroth (which Fuller says in traditional Kabbalism "constitute the Intelligible or Intellectual World", *ibid.* pg 60) grow from the male and female principles that are themselves being united by the Rose at the heart of the Tree, which stands in the place of what in the traditional Kabbalistic Tree is the sixth Sephirah, Tiphereth or Beauty (*ibid.*)

But one of the interesting things about Yeats's version of the Sephirotic Scheme or Tree of Life - though it was another person's design, it arose from his philosophy and had his approval - is how much emphasis it places on the upward thrust from the quiet skeleton of the questing Knight towards the Supernal Triad of the roses. In the classical Tree of the Kabbala, the Sephirotic Scheme is a meditation that - as a piece of Hebrew alchemy - sees the ten Sephiroth that make up the Tree as flowing from the Ain Soph Aur (the "Light" that is the first emanation as "a vibration" of "life-giving energy" that constitutes "the centripetal and centrifugal energies of creation"; *ibid.* pp 55 - 6) down through the various triads of Sephiroth to the last Sephirah, Malkuth - "the material world" (*ibid.* pg 61). Malkuth then becomes a final radiation of the Ain Soph Aur; and though the whole structure of the Tree as a symbol for meditation implies the upward flow of the aspiration of the human spirit towards its re-union with the mystery from which the Ain Soph Aur originally separated itself, the tendency of the classical pattern is one rather like that of the baobab of early African legend, that has been planted with its roots in the air.

Yeats's Bush of Roses lays the emphasis very much the other way, though: the ascent from earth to flower is pure aspiration upwards - from the self-defeated questing Knight whose bones give the roots a firm and succouring grip, up to the radiant roses of unified being.

Which is also an important indicator of Yeats's own particular brand of idealism. Though his vision reflects an upward aspiration, it begins quite surely with the roots of the Tree firmly wrapped in the earth - in Malkuth; and the Supernal Triad of the Roses still draws life from the skeleton: from the substance of Malkuth that has been alchemised in the process of transformation that is symbolised by the death in battle indicated in the design by the questing Knight's spear and helm. And this reflects a subtle but significant difference of emphasis in Yeats's thought from the classical Kabbalistic model: the relationship between the Ain Soph Aur and Malkuth might be essentially the same - even the final "synthetic" triad formed vertically up the axis of the classical Tree by linking Malkuth, Tiphereth and Kether, the first Sephirah of the Supernal Triad (see *ibid. pp 61 - 2*) is maintained, in the design Yeats approved, in the skeleton, the Rose on the Rood of Time, and the topmost Rose of all - but Yeats's emphasis is on the aspiration upwards of the human spirit, not on the radiation downwards of the Ain Soph Aur. And though Yeats's own emphasis might still embody a profound idealism, it is a vision that sees all of Malkuth being consumed towards the Ain Soph Aur, and the human condition in its fulfilment as being a Unity of Fuel and Flame.

In other words, where another sort of mind could easily have been led - like Plato - to find in the Tree an image of the human world as a poor, pale shadow of what lies forever hidden *in the primal Ayin or "No-Thing"* that is hidden behind the itself-hidden Ain Soph - the "Ancient of Ancients", or the "Eternality of No-Thing" (see *ibid. pp 54 - 5)* from which the Ain Soph Aur itself radiates - then Yeats quite naturally found that world to be a single flame of desire. Just to compare the imagery of the two representations of the Tree - the classical geometrical form and the organic Celtic maze - makes something of the same point about the livingness of Yeats's own conception of the realities to which the emblems refer. As Fuller puts it, the six Sephiroth that form a pentangle with Tiphereth as centre - those numbered 4 to 9 in his diagram -

> Together ... form the six faces of a perfect cube (the Stone of the Wise) (*ibid.* pg 60);

so these Sepiroth form a perfect "Stone" - the Philosopher's Stone of the Alchemists, in fact; while in the Yeats design the classical Kabbalist conjunction of these Sephiroth - a conjunction that "refer(s) to the dimensions of the universe" (*ibid.* pg 59) - isn't a "perfect" stone but his Rose - that in one of its emphases was "The Rose of the World", too. Add to this that the circle of "Knowledge" in Fuller's diagram becomes the kissing lovers of the Yeats design, and the alchemy of Yeats's own very incarnate spirituality shows itself complete.

156. We could remember that when Descartes found "he could think better in bed than out of it" he was fragmenting himself - by the exercise of a perversely ideal wilfulness - away from the outlook of "the ordinary active man": materialism was born in an idealist bed no lover had lain in - which is why the body of our senses could be reduced to a mechanism.

157. *C.P.* pg 100.

158. *The Tempest*, V.i.50 - 51.

159. See *Sum*, pg 67.

160. *Ibid.*

161. *Ibid.* pg 68.
We could also note the "celebrated Thomist thesis" that Versfeld discusses in his essay called "Reflections on Evolutionary Knowledge" (*Our Selves*, pg 130) that states that

> the thing known is in the knower according to the way of being of the knower

- which is a clear fellow-traveller with Yeats's conviction in the last letter, of January 4th 1939, that "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it" (see Hone, *W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939* pg 476, and Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 922).
(Someone else who exhibits "The grand virtue of *prudentia*" to a superlative degree is Esther Summerson in Dickens's *Bleak House*).

162. Yeats's formulation of the notion of "the spiritualisation of the soil" is itself of course a statement of something very much like this *prudentia*.

163. Cited by Hone, *W.B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 47.
The father's insight into the son's particularly incarnate spirituality captures a central truth about Yeats's special brand of "idealism" - his way of imagining the nature of intellectual and spiritual potentialities - which is worth commenting upon at this point.
When he spoke about Shri Purohit Swami's book *An Indian Monk* as it lay before him in 1932, "complete" after his collaboration with the Swami, Yeats said

> it seems something I have waited for since I was seventeen years old. At that age, bored by an Irish Protestant point of view that suggested by its blank abstraction chloride of lime, I began to question the countrypeople about apparitions. Some dozen years later Lady Gregory collected with my help the stories in her *Visions and Beliefs*. Again and again, she and I felt that we had got down, as it were, into some fibrous darkness, into some matrix out of which everything has come, some condition that brought together as though into a single scheme "exultations, agonies", and the apparitions seen by dogs and horses; but always there was something lacking. We came upon visionaries of whom it was impossible to say whether they were Christian or Pagan, found memories of jugglers like those of India, found fragments of a belief that associated Eternity with field and road, not with buildings; but these visionaries, memories, fragments, were eccentric, alien, shut off, as it were, under the plate glass of a museum; I had found something of what I wanted but not all, the explanatory intellect had disappeared..When Shri Purohit Swami described his journey up those seven

> thousand steps at Mount Girnar, that creaking bed, that sound of pattens in the little old half -forgotten temple, and fitted everything into an ancient discipline, a philosophy that satisfied the intellect, I found all I wanted see (*Essays and Introductions*, pp 428 - 29).

So the quest into the occult began out of a boredom with the deathly "blank abstraction" of a religious "point of view" that stripped the flesh off the bones of reality, and led Yeats into the soil (see "The Municipal Gallery Revisited", stanza VI, *C.P.* pg 369) of "some fibrous darkness", full of ancient spiritual roots, that seems a synonym for the

> dim unconscious nature, the world of instinct, which (if there is any truth in Darwin) is the accumulated wisdom of all living things from the monera to man

of which Yeats spoke in a letter written something like a dozen years before Freud published his work on dreams (see Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 31).

Yeats's sense of the implications of Darwin's doctrine would have been heightened by his encounter with Mathers and his "friends" of the Golden Dawn, who - as he says in recalling his own thought in his "twenty second year", the probable year of the letter cited above -

> believed that the dark portion of the mind - the subconscious - had an incalculable power, and even over events (*Autobiographies*, pg 457).

Yeats's occult studies - far from being eccentric and marginal - were thus signs of a mind far ahead of its times. If we recall here that William James spoke of Frederick W.H. Meyers's "discovery" in 1886 of "an addition" to "consciousness of the ordinary field, with its usual centre and margin" - an addition that comprised

> a set of memories, thoughts and feelings which are extramarginal and outside of the primary consciousness altogether,

but which yet are

> able to reveal their presence by unmistakable signs

- and if we note that James saw this discovery as being

> the most important step forward that (had) occurred in psychology

in his own time (see *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pg 233; as cited by Jung in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, pg 167), we should also remember that Meyers was one of the founder members of the British Society for Psychical Research (see Jung's note to page 185 of the same book). Yeats's reference to "the dim unconscious nature" is from a letter probably written in early 1887 - only months after the "discovery" James speaks of had taken place: a discovery that Jung sees as having "as much revolutionised" psychology "as classical physics had been by the discovery of radioactivity" (*ibid.* pg 167). Yeats grasped this vital new insight at its very dawning, and within a few months had integrated its implications into his own perspectives on Darwin with the precocious clarity shown in the objection to George Eliot's Stendhalian *Weltanschauing* offered in the same letter - an objection that was still at work in the rejection of

the "actors lacking music" of "The Old Stone Cross", at the other end of life.)

This "matrix" to which Yeats refers - that seemed to Lady Gregory and himself to include in "a single scheme" both the entire range of human experience ("exultations, agonies") and the psychic life of the animals that the Irish "countrypeople" knew best, horse and hound - led away from the sort of quicklime and abstract ideas about God of his boyhood Protestantism into "some condition" "out of which everything has come" and in which "Eternity" is abroad in "field and road". Yet all this "rich, dark nothing" (see "The Gyres", stanza 3, *C.P.* pg 337) that he found as compensation for the "abstract" theologising was "not all" he wanted: that was only found when all such "fragments of belief" were finally "fitted ... into an ancient discipline, a philosophy that satisfied the intellect", by the Swami's book.

Which means that Yeats's turning aside from the "blank abstraction" of the religious ideas that he had inherited wasn't an attempt merely to lose himself in the irrationally numinous, by way of reaction. For all the excitement of the discoveries made in this "matrix out of which everything has come", what he found remained "shut off, as it were, under the plate glass of a museum" until its contents were finally "fitted" into an intellectual framework that both related them to "an ancient discipline" and created "a philosophy" that could satisfy his own "intellect" as an historical person. The Swami had finally made these contents fully contemporary, and removed them from their "museum" in the fragmented folk-memory into a fully concrete present of awareness. The "explanatory intellect" that "had disappeared" from Ireland's "fragments of ... belief" had to be itself re-discovered, before their human meaning could be complete. A conscious tradition had to be wedded to the abiding psychic data before the picture could stand fully in the round. Conscious and "unconscious nature(s)" had to be brought into accord.

And this says volumes about the sort of mind Yeats had. Before he could feel that the numinous had been satisfactorily accommodated within a fully human framework, it had to have been "fitted" within "a philosophy": it had to have been brought satisfactorily into very the world of understanding in which all abstraction begins. If Yeats began his search for what the "blank abstraction" of the "Irish Protestant point of view" had bled out of mind by adventuring into "the dim unconscious nature" with which such "abstraction" had lost touch, he only came to rest at last once this "dim unconscious nature" had been brought into the clearest possible traditional and critical perspectives. Before he could be "satisfied" at last, the numinous had to be accommodated within the best possible constructs that the embodied human intellect could provide: spirit had to be given a fully satisfactory habitation within the conscious mind - which is a way of re-phrasing what Yeats's father said about his son's sense of "heaven". Before Yeats could be content, "the explanatory intellect" had to have housed Eternity within a fitting set of productions of Time.

Which is really what we might expect from the person who wrote poems like "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" (*C.P.* pp 265 - 67) and "Vacillation" (*C.P.* pp 285 - 86) and "From 'Oedipus at Colonus'"

(*C.P.* pg 255). When the call of "ancestral night" or of "reality ... Isiah's coal... that fire, (that) salvation walks within" are set in negation against "the day" or "man's blood-sodden heart" or "the breath of life", this claim of absolute primacy by what is only a part of the whole human spectrum is quite typically resisted. As he said in "Among School Children" (*C.P.* pp 242 - 25),

> Labour is blossoming or dancing where
> The body is not bruised to pleasure soul;

and - as this poem ends - "How can we know the dancer from the dance?": how can we disinter the historical life from the "matrix out of which everything has come" and elevate this "matrix" at the expense of the "intellect" in which that "dark portion of the mind" finds its contemporary completion, its embodiment in a new moment of human consciousness?

164. See "To a Young Beauty", *C.P.* pg 157.

165. See Martin Versfeld:

> St. Thomas Aquinas finds an analogy between the body's reception of food, the sense organs' reception of impressions, and the intellect's reception of essences. These are all instances of *assimilation*, of becoming like, and perhaps there is a connection between the majesty of St. Thomas's intellect and the half-moon that had to be cut into the refectory table to accommodate his belly (*Pots and Poetry*, pg 3).

166. *C.P.* pg 202.

167. See "To a Wealthy Man who promised a Second Subscription ...", *C.P.* pp 119 - 20:

> Let Paudeeens play at pitch and toss,
> Look up in the sun's eye and give
> What the exultant heart calls good
> That some new day may breed the best
> Because you gave, not what they would,
> But the right twigs for an eagle's nest!

168. *C.P.* pg 370. There is also the delightful glimpse Dorothy Richardson recorded of Yeats in his regular friendship with the cobbler who shared space with him in Woburn Buildings - her lodgings being exactly opposite to his. As Hone has the recollection,

> He never knew himself observed, she has told us, "in his daytime talks with the bent old cobbler, no mere passing of the time of day with a fellow tenant ... but long confabulations, wherein the two stood obviously in an equality of communication, discussing, agreeing, disagreeing, never at a loss and frequently amused" (*W.B.Yeats, 1865 - 1939*, pg 178).

As Hone indicates (*ibid.* pg 124) the cobbler had been there on the ground floor when Yeats first moved in, so their "equality of communication" was one of long standing.

So, like his mother before him, Yeats had a way of making friends of his neighbours: as Hone puts it,

> The Middletons ... took the nearest for friends, and were always in and out of the cottages of pilots and tenants. The poet's mother resembled them in her tastes, *ibid.* pg 21);

and he found the first objective intimations that he had of eternity's trystings with time when he started asking the simple "countrypeople" about their "apparitions" when he was seventeen and "bored" by the established "Irish Protestant point of view" (see "An Indian Monk", Section II, *Essays and Introductions*. pp 428 - 29). His instinct was to reach towards what was close to hand; and he revered and explored and "spiritualised" what he found there all his life.

If we add to these thoughts Yeats's conviction that "Ireland's history" was to be "trace(d)" in portraits that captured the quality and energy of some of its leading people - history as biography - we can see also just how entirely he had escaped the idealist assumption that is one of the most unquestioned psychic mechanisms of modern times: the assumption that Cyril Aldred touches with satire when he speaks of

> Those thinkers who choose to see modern pressures operating even in the Bronze Age (who) have been eager to assert that the general trend of events (of Akhenaten's reign) would have been no different if Akhenaten had been a mere sack of sawdust (*Akhenaten: Pharoah of Egypt*, pg 13).

169. G.S. Fraser puts it well, when he says

> All great poets tend to overawe us. They speak with "something above a mortal mouth"... But it is as a lover, as a friend, and as a patriot, as a "very social man", that Yeats would like us to remember him. It is his broad and deep humanity that provides the substance of his art (*W.B. Yeats*, pg 30).

170. See Section V of "Under Ben Bulben", *C.P.* pg 400.

171. See *C.P.* pp 375 - 76.

172. See *C.P.* pg 400:

> Irish poets, learn your trade,
> Sing whatever is well made,
> Scorn the sort now growing up
> All out of shape from toe to top,
> Their unremembering hearts and heads
> Base-born products of base beads.

173. L.T.C. Holt talks of the problem of the artist who has eschewed

> the traditional language of art, (and who therefore) can only work between the narrow limits imposed by the current level of popular entertainment and compulsory education. To attempt to create a work of art with this material is like trying to make

pottery without clay, and all the sincere artist
can do is to become teacher and propagandist
(see *High Horse Riderless*, pp 100 - 101).

Holt was an engineer, who worked in agricultural, automotive and locomotive manufacture, and who had made the tools of his trade with his own hands as part of his apprenticeship as a craftsman in metal during the 1920's. He went on to write about the problem of work; about the modern mass-produced material culture as it impacts on

the simple truth that the creative instinct in
humankind finds satisfaction in the process of
creation and not in the result

- a truth that "The modernist fails to recognise" (*ibid.* pg 4; we could match this with Yeats's saying that Spenser

was of the time before undelighted labour had
made the business of men a desecration: see
Essays and Introductions, pg 377.

Holt distilled his views in *High Horse Riderless*, which takes its title from the last stanza of Yeats's "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931", in which Yeats speaks of his school as being "the last romantics", who

chose for theme
Traditional sanctity and loveliness;
Whatever's written in what poets name
The book of the people; whatever most can bless
The mind of man or elevate a rhyme;
But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.
(*C.P.* pg 276)

And that Holt should have written as a craftsman moulded in the traditional mode about the impact of "modernist" views upon his own "trade" and thus upon the materials of contemporary living places him in a striking synchronicity with Yeats as craftsman in another line: *High Horse Riderless* - as the crystallisation of Holt's outlook on the problems of modernity - was written between 1942 and 1944; and the fact that Holt's perceptiveness was such that he saw so long ago such of the gigantic shadows that futurity was casting upon his present as the destruction of the resources of unindustrialised nations to pay for the "goods" that the industrialised would make them believe they needed - together with the waste of natural resources that would be caused by the creation of artificial desires by mass advertising in the industrialised nations themselves - helps to make his endorsement of Yeats's stance as a craftsman and as a "cultural theorist" - as we consider the claims of that stance to being seen as more than just a great man's idiosyncrasy - all the more telling.

174. See *C.P.* pg 400:

Cast your mind on other days
That we in coming days may be
Still the indomitable Irishry.

175. Hone has the story that when Swinburne died - soon after Yeats's *Collected Works* was published to a good reception by the English press - Yeats stopped his sister in the street to say "I am the King of the Cats": see *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939*, pg 230.

176. We shouldn't let the differences hide the common ground Larkin shares with Yeats, though.

Beyond the early, direct influence that Larkin admits to Yeats being upon his verse - and his deliberate choice of a different manner from Yeats's "High Talk" (see *C.P.* pp 385 - 86) - a style like Larkin's (that can efface itself by controlling its rhythms so well that its rhymes draw attention away from themselves so chastely that they can still create unobtrusive musical patterns without losing the casualness a certain sort of modern ear demands (the off-rhyme of "surprising" and "grow wise in" to lines 5 and 8 of the last stanza of "Church Going" being a good example: a less crisp command of rhythm and tone would have made this just a bit silly, rather than just right) is a style that can only have been nurtured through the most rigorous and painstaking and sustained craftsmanship slowly shaping into communicative competence the sensitivities of an ear that was unusually attuned to unobtrusive musical patternings, anyway. Larkin - like Yeats - was both a poet born, and a poet made.

And Larkin's use of throw-away terms in this poem - like calling the altar "the holy end" in line 6 of the first stanza - is equally the result of a studied skill in catching an attitude in a phrase that comes only with considerable practice in comic characterisation. (He was, after all, one of Kingsley Amis's warmest "hearer's and hearteners".) For all his subject being in a sense "more human" than Yeats's old warrior under "The Old Stone Cross" might approve, there is no way the old Celt would be tempted to think Larkin a poet "lacking music" of his own: in fact, the sheer, simple beauty of the music in which the blankness of Mr Bleaney's life is evoked has the effect of actual satire - which is an effect that Larkin's mode of speech seems to have upon the banal tenor of modern life wherever it touches it.

Larkin is actually very far from being the sort of realist that Yeats scorned: his images of modern life are exactly that - images that leave their originals forever changed by being subtly reflected within a medium that is itself charged with the very significances and meanings that those originals so often lack. The Byron who took Pope for his master might well be content to dine with Larkin as a fellow English satirist whose newness of manner worked in an old tradition: the finding of ways to lure an audience so deep into the game that when it realises that the quarry is actually itself, it is already too late for escape.

But perhaps the key to Larkin simply sounding so different from Yeats in so many ways lies in the simple fact that Yeats is such a monolith, his voice is just so strikingly recognisable. Taking the style as the man, perhaps Larkin's need to renounce Yeats as a model at a certain stage comes from the fact that the only way to take Yeats for master is to be as much one's own person as he was himself: true imitation - as Jung says of the imitation of Christ - involves discovering one's own individual path as truly as did the person who has inspired the desire to

imitate. Larkin perhaps most clearly expresses his sense of his debt to Yeats in not being content to keep on growing in Yeats's shadow.

After all, one of Yeats's objections to the modern collective world that he saw as having been born in seventeenth century science - that chose to follow a line of thought that led into mechanism - was that it was bent on

> substituting for the old humanity with its unique irreplaceable individuals something that can be chopped and measured like a piece of cheese (*Explorations*, pg 436).

Yeats's allegiance was to "the old humanity" - to a culture grounded in reverence for individual energy and for the quality of personal experience - rather than to any mass humanism. When he wrote of this "old humanity" being swept out of mind, he was taking his own swing at the intellectual forces that encouraged the system that allowed Mr Bleany's "Bodies" to have the say over his life that it did. Yeats would surely have sympathised with Larkin's "humanity" - expressing itself as it does in a style that is proof of a "unique irreplaceable" individuality?

Because there obviously was a profound difference in temperament and in fundamental outlook between Yeats and Larkin that was bound to show itself in the differences there are between their poetic manner. Larkin turned away from Yeats's sort of "High Talk" under the influence of Hardy, "who taught him that he 'needn't jack himself up to a concept of poetry that lay beyond his own life'" (Edward Neill, "Modernism and Englishness: Reflections on Auden and Larkin", *Essays and Studies 1983*, pg 88, quoting Larkin from "The Pleasure Principal", *Listen*, II [summer-autumn 1957], pg 28.) So what is centrally the issue is a difference in the sense each poet had of what constituted "his own life".

In taking the track he did for himself, Larkin obviously felt that Yeats's manner - and even matter - were alien to what he felt himself, as a person, to be; and in turning from Yeats to Hardy, Larkin seems to have been affirming a conception of himself that he felt differed greatly from Yeats's own self-imaging.

And it is easy to see why Larkin felt Yeats was talking about things - and talking in a manner - that "lay beyond his own life". The person musing in "Church Going" has a sense of himself that - for all its shrewdness and self-awareness - is of a very different sort to Yeats's. When Yeats talks about style in *A General Introduction for My Work*, he says at one point

> Talk to me of originality, and I will turn on you with rage. I am a crowd, I am a lonely man, I am nothing (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 522);

and this sense of his self as being a perplexing complexity of personae is typical of him. As he put it in an early poem, he was very aware of

> ... the dark folk who live in souls
> Of passionate men, like bats in the dead trees
> (see "To Some I have Talked with by the Fire", *C.P.* pg 56);

so strange beings inhabit the depths of the self, as in the glimpse we get of his readiness to admit the real presence of

such "beings" about him that is offered in the passage from the meditation in *The Celtic Twilight* called "Earth, Fire and Water", in which he says

> I am certain that the water, the water of the seas and of lakes and of mist and rain, has all but made the Irish after its image. Images form themselves in our minds perpetually as if they were reflected in some pool. We gave ourselves up in old times to mythology, and saw the gods everywhere ... We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us that they may see, it may be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer life because of our quiet (*Mythologies* pg 80).

Whether or not Yeats's generalisation about the Irish spirit is accurate, what he says here certainly shows a great deal about his conception of the dynamics of his own being; and that being is a remarkably unbounded sort of reality, a meeting-place for not only "Images" that "form themselves" of their own volition out of some mysterious frontier where psyche and physical landscape melt into one another, but in which Yeats is quite ready to believe actual "beings" might gather to know themselves in - and even to perhaps draw "life" from - human moods; and since - as he came to formulate the situation in "Under Ben Bulben" and in *On the Boiler* - not even the grave-diggers can lay spade to anything but the human mind itself, then those "beings" Yeats talks of that "gather about us" are within the self he is defining, too. What he is in himself, to such a view, is not only a strange mansion of intangible energies, but one that has also been given its specific architecture by the very quality of earth that he walks; and all this is in action even before the complex of cultural tradition - in which his people had given themselves up "in old times" to a particular view of heaven and earth - begins to add its own influences to the tone of the place. Yeats would not have felt that his approach was one that involved the need to "jack himself up to a concept of poetry that lay beyond his own life": with a concept of the potentials of the self such as his, what he was reaching after - even in his most esoteric notions - was well within what he saw as being the natural ambit of human life; was well within the bounds his experience led him to draw for what he saw the self to be as a human phenomenon.

So where Larkin seems to define the self more in the sort of modern terms that have descended from Descartes, Yeats was always aware of the ego as being a sort of stage upon which unearthly stuff mingles with the thoughts our habits have made familiar personae to us: which is a view very much in accord with what Jung's experience led him to hold of it, too - especially his conviction that the ego complex is a recently evolved and very imperfect state that he likens somewhere to a loose-tied bundle of sticks, that then acts within the greater context of the energies that constitute not only a personal, Freudian unconscious but also of those that constitute a collective unconscious that ultimately - as we have seen Yeats himself saying in a letter from his twenty second year - contains within it

> the accumulated wisdom of all living things from

the monera to man (Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 31).

Yeats's view of the self was avowedly metaphysical; Larkin's deliberately not so; but the very fact that Larkin came so clearly to feel the radical difference between Yeats's view and his own is still a sign of debt and of continuity. When Larkin came to feel that Yeats - as poetic master - was tempting him to move off what he had come to define to himself as his own legitimate base of personal identity, he was implicitly acknowledging that the master had done for him all a master can do: he had outgrown Yeats to become Larkin - which is exactly the sort of pattern Yeats himself would have felt constituted a properly traditional linkage.

Yeats might well have also thought Larkin was simply discovering his own Englishness, too: was finding an Irish tincture of outlook finally too alien to reflect his own real perspectives, given what had shaped the sort of complex of being that constituted him as a reflection of English soil and waters, and as host to English patterns of cultural expectations. He might, in other words, have approved what he would probably have seen as Larkin's having found at work within himself one of the "eternities" between which he saw human life as forever living and dying - that of his "race".

All of which is really to say that Yeats was ready to include within his range of concerns a rather different set of possibilities to those with which Larkin himself felt at home; though it is worth noting that, even as Larkin rejected what he called "tradition or a common myth-kitty", he still had his own transcendent aspiration - at least in the eyes of Edward Neill, when he says

> ... though he may not believe in a "myth-kitty", he certainly has his "mythologies", which do have more of Roland Barthes than Yeats about them, whether they take the form of advertisement hoardings or glamorous store clothing - he knows the hunger for "transcendence" that is the permanent impulse to myth ("Modernism and Englishness: Reflections on Auden and Larkin", *Essays and Studies 1983*, pg 88).

So the differences between the two poets' choice of matter - and of manner - might well arise from a mere difference of specific mythical contents within their programmes, and not as much from such differing structures of purpose as might at first seem to be at work: after all, the notion of the self that Larkin seems to have in mind in turning away from Yeats's stance is itself a myth that established certain notions about the integrity of the human personality that then gave theme to the convictions that set the Enlightenment up as a dramatic dominant within modern history. Yeats and Larkin were following different myths of personality, but that doesn't stop the quest of both being mythic; and Yeats knew that life is a matter of "Blind men battering blind men", anyway - so would he have had much problem with Larkin, knowing they were both in the same ditch of dreams?

It is also interesting that Larkin uses a word in "Church Going" that tantalisingly recalls Yeats's great romantic edifice in Section V of "Under Ben Bulben". When Larkin speaks - in the sixth line of stanza five - of "Some ruin-bibber, randy for the

antique" who might be "the last" to seek out the church he stands in "for what it was", it is hard not to catch an echo from the rood-loft of the "Porter-drinkers' randy laughter" Yeats sets as his antiphon to "The holiness of monks": it was Yeats, after all, who began to use as high poetry such racy, rather slangy terms as the "Assault and battery of the wind" of "A Prayer for my Daughter (*C.P.* pg 213) and "Black out" - as in an air-raid - in "Lapis Lazuli" (*C.P.* pg 338); and a good deal of the basis of Larkin's style lies in the shrouding of intensity in the casual until the casual becomes irradiated with intensity. That surely has its affinities as a broad strategy with what Yeats was doing in using such racy colloquialisms: could Larkin have picked up the clue to the trick from Yeats - just as Ted Hughes may have caught a glimpse from "The Circus Animals' Desertion" of how you can push the brush so the outlines of your images only just contain their energy?

177. An incident also referred to by Yeats in *Essays and Introductions*, pg 460, and earlier defined by him as the attainment of "pure personality", *ibid.* pg 457.

178. See *ibid. pg 485.*

179. This notion of a specific "race-memory" seems a refinement on "the Great Memory" of Section II of "The Tower" (see stanza 9, *C.P.* pg 221): to such a view, the "Great Memory" itself would be tapped by way of the activation of patterns laid down in the individual psyche as that psyche has evolved *via* its own history under the influence of the lore gathered by ancestral accumulation and stored as heritage in the marrow.

180. *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 922.

181. This behaviour is most vigorously defined in the Familiar Chat, *Cercomela familiaris*, but is also found in the Stonechat, *Saxicola torquata* and in the Southern Anteating Chat, *Myrmecochla formicivora*. Seeing the different birds habitually enact forms of the same ritual gives a rather eerie sense of some ancient pattern still throwing shadows on the nape of one's neck.

If this diversion into natural science seems a bit odd, it would be worth consulting Section VIII of "Hodos Chameliontos", in which Yeats - now "a settled man (having) many birds" - finds in the innate skills of his canaries as nest-builders and parents a reminder of "the problem that Locke waved aside": finds signs of an inherited lore that lead him to ask

> When a man writes any work of genius, or invents
> some creative action, is it not because some knowledge
> or power has come into his mind from beyond his mind?:
> see *Autobiographies*, pp 335 - 37.

182. Yeats expresses the certainty that the Indian philosophy he had studied gave him that the mode of thinking that this philosophy represented could have made little "of Hegel's optimism": *Essays and Introductions*, pg 471.

183. Seeing that what Yeats means by "race" and what the liberal humanist means by a universal human mind are both aspects of the same truth - are statements of perspective that define the outer limits of the same continuum, the Heracleitean "two eternities" of "race" and of "soul" between which Yeats sees that "man lives and dies" in Section II of "Under Ben Bulben" - then the wisdom of the emphasis that one might lay upon one extremity or the other depends upon the extent to which that extremity needs to be clearly established at any particular moment within the public mind. In a context such as the attempt to create a harmonious society out of disparate cultural elements, it is wise to emphasise the universal mind; in a context in which it seems necessary to form or to restore a sense of cultural identity out of the ruins of some sort of cultural dispossession - as Yeats was trying to do in Ireland - the wise thing is to bring the complex that Yeats called "race" to mind. (Part of the problem of the New South Africa is juggling these very needs.)

After all, there is Engels's letter in which he says

> Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that younger writers sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise this main principle in opposition to our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place, or the opportunity to allow the other events involved in the interaction to come into their rights ... And I cannot exempt many of the more recent "Marxists" from this reproach, for the most wonderful rubbish has been produced from this quarter too (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Correspondence 1846 - 1895, A Selection* [Martin Lawrence] pg 477, cited in L.C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, note to pp 14 - 15).

So even Marx's thought was just one side of a penthouse that implied the pitch of its anti-mode in its own slant of emphasis - and not the absolute revelation of an eternal truth that some have chosen to try to make it. This being so, should we forget that Yeats too - in talking of the significance of what he called "race" - had to deal with "adversaries" who had long "denied" anything so un-Enlightened as the notion that there's still a good leaven of Nature mixed with our Nurture - even in the most Modern of times? If there seems something a shade rhetorical about the stance he adopts in "Under Ben Bulben" and in "The Statues" in speaking of Irishness as he does, didn't he, too, have "to emphasise this main principle in opposition" to those who "denied" it?

After all, letting Marx get away with it and Yeats not would be putting Marx in a position he would himself probably find deeply embarrassing: would the man who thought of thought so much as a dialectical process that his disciple Engels naturally speaks in the fragment of his letter cited above of economics as being one of "the events" that are "involved in the (social) interaction" have wanted his ideas set up in a shrine?

184. See *Explorations*, pg 435, and also the parallel formulation in Section IV of the essay on Berkeley, *Essays and Introductions*, pp 400 - 401.

185. See *Essays and Introductions*, pg 396.

186. *Ibid.*

187. See *Autobiographies*, pg 33.

188. *Ibid.* pg 37.

189. Perhaps his memories of these days of boyhood exile may have helped crystallise the wish he has for his own child, when he says

> O may she live like some green laurel
> Rooted in one dear perpetual place
> ("A Prayer for my Daughter" stanza 6, *C.P.* pg 213).

190. Interestingly enough, both the "associations from childhood" and the "race-memory" that Yeats speaks of as acting within Bhagwan Shri Hamsa's spiritual progress (see above) are already implicitly present in the formulation that he offers in analysing this emotion.

191. See *Autobiographies*, pp 59 - 60.

192. Yeats had found a similar sense of being on foreign ground in his reading of English books while at school. As he says of his Hammersmith Road years

> I was divided from those boys, not merely by the anecdotes that are everywhere perhaps a chief expression of the distrust of races, but because our mental images were different. I read their boys' books and they excited me, but if I read of some English victory, I did not believe that I read of my own people (*Autobiographies*, pp 42 - 3).

So, while he could share the common ground of boyhood romance with the others in his school, the division he felt from them came not only from the sort of prejudices formulated in the "anecdotes" of "distrust" to which he refers - and of which he has just given examples: see, for instance, *ibid.* pp 40 to 42 - but from an even deeper dissonance of actual "mental images": the materials out of which their thoughts were made were in important ways made of different substances.

And it is interesting to note here that Edward Engelberg finds that his attempts to understand what Yeats means by "passion" have led him to include in his definition the presence of

> a primordial feeling, surging from the ancestral soil, the memory of myth and mythology (*The Vast Design, Patterns in W.B. Yeats's Aesthetic*, pg 152)

- so presumably he would find in this difference of "mental images" to which Yeats here refers something of the very fibre of what made Yeats's particular "passion" (or sense of belonging to a specific field of human soil) what it was?

193. It is interesting how consistently Yeats held to the view that "modern" Europe had been "wrecked" in a "tide" of false philosophy and that Ireland had been caught in the storm too. When he speaks of the dead "woods of Arcady" in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", it is significant that this death - symbolic of the withering of certain sensitivities in the European soul - should be quite explicitly linked to the "cold star-bane" of the "starry men" whose Newtonian abstractions have brought death to "all their human truth" (*C.P.* pp 7 - 8), while the Arcadian "faun" who is the astronomers' antitype is himself the prototype of the Irish fairies who were to become part of the antidote Yeats found to the "blank abstraction" of an "Irish Protestant point of view" that was heir to Cromwell's invasion (see *Essays and Introductions*, pp 428 - 29).

And the image of the storm of things modernly European shows too in the turn of phrase Yeats uses at one point in the essay on Edmund Spenser of 1902, where he speaks of Ireland in Spenser's day as being "in the midst of the last struggle of the old Celtic order with England", which was - significantly - "itself about to turn bottom upward" (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 362): the image of England as a ship about to capsize is surely a premonition of the storm of materialism that is later formulated fully in the "formless spawning fury" of the "filthy modern tide" of attitudes and ideas that is depicted in "The Statues"?

194. See *Explorations*, pg 436.

195. When Yeats formulates his sense of difference between the Irish and the English mind once again in the third section of "A General Introduction to my Work", he says

> The English mind is meditative, rich, deliberate: it may remember the Thames valley,

while his own feeling that "Contemporary lyric poems ... seemed too long" reflects "an Irish feeling for a swift current" that

> might be mere indolence, yet Burns may have felt the same when he read Thomson and Cowper (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 521).

The Irish sense of things he has in mind here - like the rush and bubble of water "where stone is dark under froth" - as compared with the rich meditativeness of a broad lowland river as it winds to the sea surely has his Fisherman somewhere in mind (see "The Fisherman", *C.P.* pp 166 - 67); and this "man who is but a dream" (but who is yet a personification of the Irish spirit untouched by modern materialist taints) is actually an image of what Yeats saw as being the distinctly Irish substrate under the layer of mercantilist ways he accused Cromwell of having brought to Ireland when he replaced the old ways of "neighbourly content and easy talk" with "money's rant" (see "The Curse of Cromwell", *C.P.* pp 350 - 51).

Timothy Webb says of Yeats's reservations about Wordsworth that the

> diagnosis may owe something to an Irishman's feeling that there was something cumbrously moralistic in nineteenth century English literature (*W.B. Yeats Selected Poetry* pg xxi)

- which offers an interesting gloss on the sort of notion we have just heard Yeats express about the "Irish feeling for a swift current" in preference to the "meditative, rich, deliberate" way of the English manner: a glance that reflects Webb's own readiness to take for granted a distinctively Irish temperament and its tastes as a major factor to be seriously considered in thinking of Yeats's attitudes as thinker and poet.

196. As Stead says,

> Yeats's position grows more and more clearly that of an Irish poet, who speaks to the world on Ireland's behalf (see *The New Poetic*, pg 27).

But because his stance may be geographically "more local" and may eschew a broad European pose doesn't mean that Yeats is necessarily being provincial: in fact, from the way in which we have see him speak of the still-prevalent power of "popular science" - the off-spring of Newton's and Locke's philosophy - in European thinking as being what amounts to a perverse choice of the narrow and the false over the wisdom he approves in Berkeley's "modern philosophy", it is pretty certain that he actually felt the pattern of English philosophy since the seventeenth century to be itself unwittingly *passe* and therefore provincial. As he puts it at the end of his essay prompted by a re-reading of Hone's book on Berkeley, Yeats sees Hone as drawing the attention of "intellectual young men" in Ireland

> to that eighteenth century when (Ireland's) mind became so clear that it changed the world (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 411);

and this clarity of mind to which he refers is a state he contrasted strongly with the mind-set of the eighteenth century England that could accept what Berkeley had refuted.

197. See the refrain to "September, 1913", *C.P.* 120 - 21.

198. I find that the perspective I have been trying to present has been ably expressed by Timothy Webb in the introduction to his *W.B. Yeats Selected Poetry*, in which he speaks of Yeats as being - though "born a subject of Queen Victoria" - thoroughly "implicated ... in a cultural dilemma", due to his also being "by birth, by choice and by temperament an Irishman"; which meant that

> One of his main objectives was not only to find an appropriate utterance for himself but to give a voice to Irishness (see pg xxxi).

As Webb continues,

> In the 1880's when Yeats was beginning his poetic career, the tradition of poetry written in the English language by Irishmen was thin and the poetry was often derivative or marginal. Irish poetry was not yet strong enough to attain to its own identity or to claim its rights with sufficient assurance ... It is one of Yeats's greatest achievements as a poet that he ... opened the doors of possibility for the rich and confident expression of later Irish poetry, even in the case of those poets who resisted or resist his direct

influence. Together with Joyce, Yeats made modern Irish poetry possible ... The challenge was great and required titanic energies ... The prevailing suggestion is of a heroism which involves a conclusive struggle to restore the values of a civilisation which have been lost ... Yeats looks towards a disregarded past or a set of disinherited values ... (and recognises) a major cultural opportunity and an undertaking of national importance which was not to be shirked. And such an undertaking involved a calculated antagonism and resistance towards the prevailing values of contemporary English culture and contemporary English literature (*ibid.* pp xxxi - xxxiv).

The whole of the section of Webb's introduction from which these extracts have been taken is in fact well worth reading - particularly his saying of "The Statues" that Yeats

claimed that "We Irish" can resist the "formless, spawning, fury" of "this filthy modern tide" by paying proper homage to "The lineaments of a plummet-measured face". The emphasis here is on potential, on a new beginning (*ibid.* pg xxxiii)

- which is a comment that puts its finger surely on the importance of our recognising that what might seem to some a nostalgia for past, romantic things is actually part of a shrewdly forward-looking cultural strategy.

199. Rolt is acutely alert to the fact that the "modernist" - or realist - artist is working as much within a set of artificial conventions as is the traditionalist: as he puts it,

the poet of the so-called Pylon School, no less than the older exponent of traditional forms, writes for the clique and the coterie (see *High Horse Riderless*, pg 101).

200. *Ibid.* pp 101 - 102.

In talking of

that ebb of the spirit which coincided with the flow of reason from the Renaissance onwards,

Rolt probably had in mind the poem called "Three Movements":

Shakespearean fish swam the sea, far away from land;
Romantic fish swam in nets coming to the hand;
What are all those fish that lie gasping on the sand?
(*C.P.* pg 271);

and for the sense he has of Yeats's conviction that it was the

individual qualities that are the inspiration of all art, and which alone can make men great,

he may well have been thinking of something like the opening to Section V of the essay on Berkeley, which runs

The sense for what is permanent, as distinct from what is useful, for what is unique and different, for the truth that shall prevail ... comes from solitaries or from communities where solitaries flourish (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 401).

201. The call upon Irish poets to re-focus the Irish mind upon the peasantry' and then

> Hard-riding country gentlemen,
> The holiness of monks, and after
> Porter-drinkers' randy laughter

- as well as on "the lords and ladies gay" - finds an interesting earlier statement at the end of the essay called "Prophet, Priest and King" from "Discoveries" (in *The Cutting of an Agate*) where Yeats says

> If we poets are to move the people, we must reintegrate the human spirit in our imagination. The English have driven away the kings, and turned the prophets into demagogues, and you cannot have health among a people if you have not prophet, priest and king (*Essays and Introductions*, pg 264)

- which underscores the sense we gain from the *Last Poems* of "the filthy modern tide" having neglected or debased institutions that are of vital importance (in Yeats's view, at least) in encouraging "health among a people".

And it is worth noting that Yeats's image of a romance world inhabited by types who helped people the European stage before the "modern tide" began to run doesn't necessarily mean that he is encouraging the construction of an idealised, rose-coloured and sentimental picture to foist on his people. As Webb notes, Yeats from the first recognised and resisted the temptation

> to be charmingly provincial, to collaborate in the marginalising of the Irish imagination (*W.B. Yeats Selected Poetry*, pg xxxii);

and this neo-medieval matter that Yeats is offering as fit subject for Irish verse is equally not an encouragement of his poetic heirs to be "charmingly" anything. The fact that the holiness of his monks is to be recreated in mesh with the "randy laughter" of an entirely more earthy group of celebrants - and that the "hard-riding country gentlemen" are offered with no attempt to whitewash their privilege and their possible un-seriousness - leaves all the room in the world for poets to sing in satire when needs be: which is something that the Yeats who knew his Chaucer as well as he did would never have doubted. After all, Chaucer's own Monk is himself really not much more than a hard-riding country gentleman, and Chaucer handles this man's "holiness" with an irony that is no less sharp for its being so very urbane.

202. See the opening to R.M. Kain's essay "Yeats and Nationalism", in which he says

> For the emerging nations of today the case of Ireland is of considerable significance. Her role as the first country to achieve independence in this century was pointed out by President Kennedy in his speech at Dublin. Irish literature has a comparable significance. In addition to its great intrinsic value, this literature reflects the cultural problems which beset a new nation. The progress from cultural colonialism is even more difficult than the change from political colonialism. As a country

> achieves independence, it faces the question of its own identity (*W.B. Yeats Centenary Essays*, pg 54).

With Ireland having gained her own independence less than twenty years before Yeats wrote "The Statues" and "Under Ben Bulben", one could quite certainly see him as trying to help his countrymen - people on the hard road of "The progress from cultural colonialism" - to "face() the question of (their) own identity". (The fact that Kain is writing from the University of Ibadan in 1965 adds its own edge of authority to his views, as well.)

203. To look at what Brendan Kennelley says, as an Irishman, in justifying his using "The Statues" as the only late poem of Yeats's that he includes in his selection for *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse* is to have this point driven home. Kenneley says:

> Yeats played his part in the uncertain, exciting creation of the young state (the new Ireland, that had stumbled into existence). (And) in "The Statues" he applauds the heroism that made this birth possible and asserts Ireland's dignity in the face of the overwhelming "filthy modern tide". Yeats is Ireland's greatest poet, not least because he learned to confront the challenging complexities of Irish life. He re-cognised that Ireland is always capable of treachery and squalor, but he was also aware of its capacity for heroism and nobility. He witnessed and experienced "the weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth". Yet he exhorted later generations to be, and to continue to be the "indomitable Irishry" (*ibid.* pg 37).

One couldn't wish for a statement that better shows just how much what concerned Yeats in poems that have given a good deal of the central focus to this thesis were not just part of the mainstream of the modern Irish experience but were actually part of what has allowed that experience to know itself for what it has been.

204. See for instance what Achebe has to say in his essay called "Colonialist Criticism" (based on a paper read in 1974), when he speaks of "The colonialist critic" who is "unwilling to accept the validity of sensibilities other than his own," and who therefore "has made a point of dismissing the African novel". Achebe ends the paragraph by saying

> Let every people bring their gifts to the great festival of the world's cultural harvest and mankind will be all the richer for the variety and distinctness of the offerings (see *Hopes and Impediments*, pg 60).

So if we should choose to see Yeats as being suspect and not quite Politically Correct in asserting the importance of recognising and serving the "distinctness" of the Irish mind amongst all those "sensibilities other than" the European or the English, then we would have to view Achebe - who, of course, found Yeats fellow-traveller enough to find the title for the bench-mark "African novel" in "The Second Coming" - in the same light.

In fact, Achebe's beautiful image of "the great festival of the world's cultural harvest" - that gains its greatness

precisely because "the offerings" are made by various and distinct "sensibilities" - chimes well with Yeats's sense of the "two eternities" of "race" and of "soul" between which "man lives and dies" in "Under Ben Bulben": if we take Yeats's "soul" to point at least in the direction of the greater, universal mind of humanity of Achebe's "world's cultural harvest" - and then take what he means by "race" to represent the "distinctness" of "every people('s)" sensibility - then one feels that the notion that arises from Achebe's image of "the world's cultural harvest" as being best cultivated by the recognition and celebration of "the distinctness of the offering()" each "people" brings to the "festival" has nothing in it with which Yeats would not have felt at home.

205. See "A Prayer for Old Age", *C.P.* pg 326.

206. After all, what Yeats is saying in weighing wisdom and foolish passion in "A Prayer for Old Age" has its thoughtful echo in what he says in the section in *The Celtic Twilight* called "The Queen and the Fool"

> What else can death be but the beginning of wisdom and power and beauty? and foolishness may be a kind of death ... The self, which is the foundation of our knowledge, is broken in pieces by foolishness ... and therefore fools may get ... glimpses of much that sanctity finds at the end of its painful journey (see *Mythologies*, pg 115).

So the "fool" Yeats will risk playing is often wiser than some would know; and we could recall Reg Skene saying that

> The Zen Buddhist doctrines which underlay (the *Noh* plays) did not differ significantly from the doctrines propounded by Madame Blavatsky and the knowledge lectures of the Golden Dawn (*The Cuchulain Plays of W.B. Yeats*, pg 14),

then we might recognise that this rather Zen sense of shaking the "foundation" of "The self" so that we may glimpse now "much that" otherwise could come only to the saint "at the end of (his) painful journey" - beatitude as got by banditry - must have been at least in the air that even the young man was thinking.

207. As Reg Skene says in his study of the Cuchulain story as a recurrent theme in Yeats's plays

> Yeats, like Padraic Pearse, saw himself in the image of Cuchulain. His letters reveal the extent to which the story of Cuchulain absorbed his time and energy during some of the most creative periods of his life. At times of crisis he turned ever to the figure of Cuchulain ... In the Cuchulain plays Yeats created a kind of psychological biography. At each of the major crisis points in his own life he wrote another Cuchulain play (see *The Cuchulain Plays of W.B. Yeats*, pg 74).

208. See *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, pg 922. The last lines to this letter that Hone - who is its source, see *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939* pg 476 - records read:

The abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel,but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence.

209. We could recall Yeats speaking of Spenser and of how even his lost and long lamented love seems to have become "but ... the mythology of his imagination" (see *Essays and Introductions*, pg 358): the mythology of Yeats's own imagination was what he most centrally had to embody into truth in his life.

210. See *C.P.* pp 395 - 96. As Reg Skene also notes,

The last two works (Yeats) completed before his death in 1939 were a play and a poem about the death of Cuchulain (see *The Cuchulain Plays of W.B. Yeats*, pg 74),

where the reference to the "play" is to *The Death of Cuchulain*, (*The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, pp 691 - 705), in which the haunting image of Cuchulain's "first shape" waiting to be "The shape I shall take when I am dead" floats before him (see *ibid.* pg 702).

211. See Section I of "Under Ben Bulben", *C.P.* pp 397 - 98, particularly:

Swear by those horsemen, by those women
Complexion and form prove superhuman,
That pale, long-visaged company
That air in immortality
Completeness of their passions won.

It is also interesting - in thinking of the rounding of the life into completeness that we find expressed in the letter to Lady Pelham - that Yeats ends off what he has to say in the fragment Hone quotes with "you can refute Hegel, but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence": one would not wish to try to push the notion too far; but for Yeats to have the Song of Sixpence come to mind as a clinching example of abiding human truth - just then - offers a truly tantalising reminder of an earlier moment in the pattern of the life's work. For the person who once was sure that "Once out of nature" he would never "take" his "form" from anything but the golden birds

set upon a golden bough to sing
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake

(see stanza IV, "Sailing to Byzantium", *C.P.* pg 218)

to be thinking in such a context as this letter of a song about a rather miraculous pie baked full of singing blackbirds - a "dainty dish" someone has made to pleasantly startle a king at his supper - seems a great touch of harmony. Was Yeats - so close at last to being actually "out of nature" - wandering somewhere within earshot of ground he had visited before only in an impassioned imaginative projection?

212. Jeffares says that "Under Ben Bulben" was "completed by 4 September 1938" (*A Commentary*, pg 514); Hone however records that Yeats gave his wife "corrections" to its text "towards nightfall" on Thursday, January 26th - less than 48 hours from his death (see *W.B. Yeats 1865 - 1939, pg 477)*. He may already have set Cuchulain off into the next phase in another poem, but Yeats was

still mulling over his own contest with the modern tide right to the end. (As the poem appeared in the press less than a week after Yeats's death - on February 3rd, see Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pg 514 - the call upon Irish poets to learn their trade must have fallen on solemn ears with a dramatic effect that the old ringmaster would surely have relished - and might well have anticipated.)

213. See D.H. Lawrence, "Song of a Man who has Come Through" (*The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*, Vol, 1, pg 250), where he speaks of "the wind that blows through me.../ A fine wind...blowing the new direction of Time".

Lawrence's disavowal of the personal in this poem - it is "Not I, not I, but the wind" of which he speaks that is the true power behind his art - would have struck a familiar chord in the Yeats who could speak in "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" of

> Whatever's written in what poet's name
> The book of the people (*C.P.* pg 276).

214. See "The Statesman's Holiday", *C. P.* pp 389 - 90.

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