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LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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AFFINITIES BETWEEN
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS AND JACOB BOEHME

by

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph.D. degree
in English.

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ABSTRACT

The writings of Jacob Boehme, a sixteenth-century German mystic, have had a profound effect upon the theology, philosophy, science, and art of the world in the four hundred years since his birth. William Butler Yeats acknowledged Boehme as one of his "chief mystical authorities," giving 1887 as the year he began his study of the German mystic. Yeats's references to Boehme span most of the poet's artistic life, revealing a deep understanding and appreciation of Boehme's work.

This study focuses upon the relationship between the poetry of Yeats and the works of Boehme. Through analysis of those direct references of Yeats to Boehme, correspondences which a close study of each suggests, and statements of critics as to possible connections between Yeats and Boehme, a pattern emerges of three areas of importance to Yeats's poetry. These three major affinities are the belief in the creative power of the imagination, a view of the universe which holds that all things operate through a system of opposites, and an appreciation of the momentary synthesis of the mystical experience.

These three elements formed the basis of existence for Boehme, who believed that the life of all beings, including the infinite Deity, depends upon the imagination creating contraries which struggle in opposition to each other until a moment of

resolution is reached. Perhaps because Yeats's interest in Boehme was early, intensive, and sustained, those elements which are essential to Boehme's cosmology may also be discerned at the basis of Yeats's poetic process. This study examines the three elements individually, considering each in relation to the theory and the practice of both Yeats and Boehme.

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PREFACE

"THAT INVISIBLE GATES WOULD OPEN"

In the opening paragraph of the "Hodos Cameliontos" section of his autobiography, William Butler Yeats recalled a time in the mid-1890's when he had discovered a castle on an island in Lough Kay and the romantic aspect of the deserted castle had inspired him to plan a mystical order which would have its retreat on that island. As Yeats remembered, for the next ten years his "most impassioned thought was a vain attempt to find philosophy and to create ritual for that Order."¹ His hope was that his efforts would be rewarded with a special mystical insight. "I had an unshakable conviction, arising how or whence I cannot tell," he wrote, "that invisible gates would open as they opened for Blake, as they opened for Swedenborg, as they opened for Boehme."²

The earliest of these mystics, Jacob Boehme, a German who lived from 1575 to 1624, had used the image of "invisible gates" opening in accounts of the insight granted to him during his personal crisis of faith. In Aurora, his first published work, employing terms strongly reminiscent of Ecclesiastes, a favorite book of Yeats in his childhood,³ Boehme wrote that he had difficulty accepting "that good and evil were in all things . . . and that it went as well in this world with the impious as with the pious" In Boehme's account, the moment of resolution,

the moment of mystical recognition of oneness with the divine, came in an instant after long struggle. As Boehme graphically expressed the experience: "Suddenly, after some violent storms made, my spirit did break through hell's gates into the inmost birth of the Godhead, and there I was embraced with Love, as a bridegroom embraces his dear bride."⁴

The Epistles of Jacob Boehme, a collection of the mystic's letters which was first published in 1649 and was reprinted in Glasgow in 1886, contains a letter to Casper Lindern giving a similar account of the same experience. Boehme related that he had relied entirely upon Christ for his understanding. "In my earnest Christian seeking and desire . . .," Boehme wrote, "the gate was opened unto me, that in one quarter of an hour I saw and knew more than if I had been many years together at an University."⁵ Undoubtedly Yeats had hoped for a similar all-embracing vision when the gates opened for him.

The three mystics for whom invisible gates had opened were mentioned again in Yeats's 1934 Preface to Letters to the New Island. Recalling the background for the pieces collected in that volume, most of which had first appeared in the 1880's and 1890's, Yeats wrote, "I knew Blake thoroughly, I had read much Swedenborg, had only ceased my study of Boehme for fear I might do nothing else."⁶ While this remembrance reveals the strength of Yeats's attraction to Boehme, it also provides an illuminating contrast to the devotion of Saint-Martin, a noted French mystic who was reported to have begun to study German when he was in his fifties, expressly so that he could spend the rest of his life

studying Boehme.⁷ Yeats provided a clue to the difference of his approach in the last month of his life. "Am I a mystic?" he questioned in a letter to Ethel Mannin. His answer was "No, I am a practical man."⁸

The most revealing facet of Yeats's expressed desire for revelation was that he intended to utilize the philosophy which unfolded before him when the invisible gates opened to "set before Irishmen for special manual an Irish literature which, though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind"⁹ As a practical man Yeats labored during the last decade of the nineteenth century to "create ritual" for his Irish Order. Virginia Moore examined unpublished notebooks outlining a series of twelve rituals which Yeats was then developing. The summary Moore has since provided in The Unicorn shows that the underlying concepts of Yeats's rituals corresponded to the system of organization of the universe Yeats found in both Blake and Boehme. Moore concluded that the Irish theater established by Yeats "was his Castle of Heroes transposed and transformed."¹⁰ It is possible to view not only his work for the Irish theater but also Yeats's entire artistic output as his "special manual for an Irish literature" and to consider the view of the nature of existence which shaped the rituals as the "philosophy" which underlies all his art.

Although "invisible gates" were never to open to provide Yeats with one overwhelming mystical experience, he did write A Vision, a schematism which allowed him "to hold in a single thought reality and justice."¹¹ Boehme related that after his

moment of revelation, "I began to write like a schoolboy, and so I wrote continuously, but only for myself."¹² And Yeats ended a 1937 essay tracing his own thoughts on art, which was intended as the introduction to a complete edition of his work, with a parenthetical explanation: "(I have written of all these things in A Vision, but that book is intended, to use a phrase of Jacob Boehme's, for my 'schoolmates only')."¹³

Between the earlier and later reference to Boehme, one announcing the young poet's devotion to the foundation of a national literature and the other introducing the product of a life spent in the creation of such a body of literature, lies the major portion of Yeats's writing. Is it not reasonable to assume that what is bracketed by references to Jacob Boehme's vision somehow bears a relationship to that vision?

The first mention of Boehme in A Vision provides the key to the way in which Yeats's reading of Boehme was integrated into the system the poet himself developed. Arguments with his father, Yeats related, "had destroyed my confidence and driven me from speculation to the direct experience of the Mystics." Yeats singled out Boehme, Blake, and Swedenborg as the mystics whose experiences he had studied.¹⁴ An investigation of the relation of Yeats to any mystic must take into account, therefore, this distinction between speculative and experiential knowledge.

Boehme had frequently cautioned readers to acquiesce to the different approach necessary for a valid understanding of his mystical writing. In The Treatise of the Incarnation Boehme had

maintained that a man cannot know the mysteries of existence by application of human learning:

He must enter within the Circle, and cast away the skin of Reason: and then he attains human Wit or Ingenuity, and Understanding and divine Skill and Knowledge: No learning does it, but to be born or regenerated in it.¹⁵

Similarly, G.W. Allen instructed the reader in an Introduction to a 1909 edition of Boehme's The Threefold Life of Man:

You, my friend, who are about to study an aspect of truth hidden from the world, remember you cannot open this mystery and yet remain in the same relation to the world as you were before For these are not matters of intellectual interest merely; but eternal verities that touch and colour every department of life and are endowed with the divine creative force.¹⁶

In 1893, perhaps influenced by the mental preparation necessary to read Boehme, Yeats had insisted upon a similar immersion for proper understanding of Blake's prophetic books. The distinctive quality of mystical literature is that the symbols of mysticism "are woven together into a complete system," Yeats explained.¹⁷ Yeats believed that Blake had established a complete system for use in his poetry. In "William Blake and the Imagination" (1903) Yeats described his predecessor as "a man crying out for a mythology, and trying to make one because he could not find one to his hand."¹⁸ Yeats's interpretation in the 1893 Works of William Blake was based on an analysis of parallels between the system Blake developed and other occult systems, including that of Jacob Boehme.

Perhaps inspired by the example of Blake, whom he had admired from an early age,¹⁹ Yeats also set about constructing a personal myth, an objective which he believed was achieved with the publication of A Vision. In 1931, writing to Olivia Shakespeare of the completion of the second version of A Vision, Yeats announced, "I have constructed a myth, but then one can believe in a myth--one only assents to philosophy."²⁰ Yeats's myth had developed organically throughout the course of his creative writings; A Vision, which defies generic classification, represents his attempt to order the elements of that myth in a unified system, in what Yeats called "stylistic arrangements of experience."²¹

Just as a proper understanding of Boehme assumes a special immersion into his entire corpus, so a full appreciation of Yeats demands a focus upon the works of art which embody his system, not upon the skeletal framework which supports it. Thus, an appraisal of affinities between Yeats and Boehme can be achieved best by highlighting the points of correspondence between the Weltanschauung of each, not by setting up correlations between separate ideas. In graphic terms, the process of comparison resembles superimposing one spherical figure on another and noting the areas of intersection rather than drawing connecting points between two parallel lines.

Justification for suggesting that Yeats probably integrated elements of Boehme's work into his own art lies in the fact that Yeats's knowledge of Boehme can be demonstrated to have been early, intensive, and lasting. Yeats himself gave 1887 as the year he began his study of Boehme. In response to questions

posed by Ernest Boyd in 1915 concerning the origins of his symbolism, Yeats wrote that he had been studying medieval mystics since 1887, and he attested to the significance of Boehme by saying, "My chief mystical authorities have been Boehme, Blake and Swedenborg."²² But the most direct acknowledgment of Boehme's influence upon his writings appears in Pages from a Diary Written in 1930, where Yeats castigated the early stories of The Celtic Twilight (1893) as pieces of "ornamental trivial needlework sown on a prophetic fury got by Blake and Boehme."²³

A further indication that Yeats had conducted most of his research on Boehme by the early 1890's is the fact that the majority of Yeats's references to the German mystic are contained within the three-volume study The Works of William Blake, on which Yeats collaborated with Edwin Ellis from 1889 to 1893. The depth of Yeats's appreciation of Boehme can be seen by Yeats's inclusion of Boehme as one of his own three "mystical authorities"²⁴ and by Yeats's admission that he feared the power of his attraction to Boehme.²⁵ In his analysis of Blake's poetry, Yeats showed that references to Boehme grew increasingly sparse as Blake's own system developed. In Blake's later poetry "we no longer hear" of Boehme and Paracelsus, Yeats noted, "though we can trace their influence."²⁶ Oddly enough, a similar progression is apparent in Yeats's own writing; in fact, there are no direct references to Boehme in any of Yeats's poems, though internal correspondences can be traced throughout. But Yeats retained and elaborated upon his early knowledge of Boehme. References

to the German mystic appear periodically in Yeats's prose, the last mention being in the 1937 Introduction cited above.²⁷

William Blake is the only one of the "chief mystical authorities" whose connection with Yeats has been well established. There are several critical works dealing exclusively with the relationship between Yeats's work and Blake's. To date there have been, however, no full length studies of possible affinities between Yeats and Boehme or Yeats and Swedenborg. The lack of scholarship on the uses Yeats may have made of these other two mystics may be explained in part by the unusual nature of their work. William Blake, as a fellow artist, provides more obvious parallels with the poet Yeats than do the theologically-oriented mystics, Boehme and Swedenborg.

Thomas Dume suggested in "W.B. Yeats: A Study of His Reading" that Yeats frequently mentioned Boehme and Swedenborg in connection with Blake during the 1880's and '90's "because they were the most poetic" mystics Yeats was studying at that time and therefore were the most interesting for the young man at the outset of his own poetic career.²⁸

Dume's suggestion is corroborated by the evaluation in the Preface to The Works of William Blake, where the editors call Boehme and Swedenborg the "only other European mystics worthy to stand by his side," although their works are judged less valuable than Blake's from the standpoint that they "were to a large extent sectaries."²⁹

Of the two "sectaries," Boehme seems to provide the most fruitful area of research. Yeats apparently valued the poetic

grandeur of Boehme's style over the rigid structure of Swedenborg's writing, which was assessed as "depressing through a lack of anything stimulative or suggestive."³⁰ In his Introduction to The Poems of William Blake, also published in 1893, Yeats suggested that Blake had found Jacob Boehme's work more conducive to poetry:

It is probable that the reading of The Morning Redness, Mysterium Magnum, and stray fragments of medieval magical philosophy . . . delivered his intellect from the spectral and formal intellect of Swedenborg, and taught him to think about the meaning of his own visions.³¹

Much later, in "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places," the essay which Yeats contributed to Lady Gregory's 1920 Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland, Yeats wrote of his own rediscovery of Swedenborg, indicating that his interest in the Swedish mystic had been superseded by his reading of Boehme: "It was strange I should have forgotten so completely a writer I had read with some care before the fascination of Blake and Boehme had led me away."³² It is possible then to infer that Yeats might have found the same relief that Blake did in reading Boehme.

Another reason for my choosing the German mystic is that Boehme predated Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688--1772) by almost half a century. Virginia Moore, discussing the shared doctrines of Boehme, Swedenborg, and Blake, raised the question of whether Boehme could be considered "the progenitor of the line."³³ While noting that Swedenborg denied having read Boehme, Moore

claimed that he had read William Law on Boehme and that Boehme's ideas were available from other sources.³⁴ But Yeats's biographer, Joseph Hone, stressed that Yeats always tried to follow a concept back to its earliest expression. "Whenever a philosophical idea interested him," Hone found, "he wanted to trace it to images out of old time."³⁵ It would be consistent with Yeats's general practice to concentrate on the beginning of the line. Whatever Swedenborg and Blake may have derived from Boehme, it is certain that Boehme derived nothing from them. If an idea appears in two or more of Yeats's chief mystical authorities, logic dictates that Boehme was the first of the three to have that idea.

Yeats considered Boehme the first of a line of continuously reinforced tradition which included Blake and Swedenborg. Discussing the relative merits and contributions of the three mystics in an 1896 review of Richard Garnett's William Blake, Yeats assigned the highest place to Blake in terms of method, but he acknowledged Boehme as the originator of many of the ideas Blake presented:

Blake is, to the bulk of students, the most representative of seers. . . . Swedenborg had perhaps as great an original genius . . . while Boehme, who had possibly a greater genius, was much of a theologian and something of an alchemist. . . . I have said that Boehme had possibly a greater original genius, not because he seems to me so important to our time, but because he first taught in the modern world the principles which Blake first expressed in the language of poetry. . . .³⁶

The difficulty in dealing with mystical material is that one cannot presume that antecedence implies influence: If Boehme and Blake share an idea, the fact that Boehme did not get that idea from Blake does not establish that Blake got it from Boehme. Yeats was careful to say only that Boehme was the first to have the idea, not that he was Blake's source for the idea. There is the possibility, inherent in the mystical experience, that each mystic received an original and uninfluenced insight. That these personal insights correspond is not proof of influence. Rather, the correspondences can be used, as Yeats used them, as proof of a corpus of universal truths, which can be perceived independently by certain gifted individuals.

In addition to the personal inspirational aspect of Boehme's work, Yeats's deliberate eclecticism and voracious consumption of widely diverse material precludes treatment of the relationship between Yeats's poetry and the works of Boehme as a formal source study. In W.B. Yeats and Tradition F.A.C. Wilson discussed a typical example of Yeats's synergistic method in relation to the underlying ideas of The Herne's Egg. Referring to the Yoga practice of self-induced trance, Wilson wrote, "Having accepted this discipline, Yeats ranges through history to find parallels to it in heterodox mysticism." Wilson proved that Yeats used Boehme and Swedenborg as his western authorities and concluded, "In The Herne's Egg, they are as much in his mind as the Upanishads."³⁷ In a chapter entitled "Alchemical Search" in Sunrise to Eternity: A Study in Jacob Boehme's Life and Thought John Joseph Stoudt dealt similarly with the research

undertaken by Boehme immediately after he was banned from publishing his ideas. Stoudt's description of Boehme's method of studying could have been applied with equal validity to Yeats's habitual practice: "Eclectic, synthesizing, he learned only what suited him, retracing in each book the old ground."³⁸ Since Yeats proceeded in the same way, both Yeats and Boehme could have come to the same source independently and adapted it to their individual needs.

The best possible model for the delicacy of approach necessary in relating a major poet to a major mystic is, conveniently, Yeats's own study of Blake. Early in the first volume of the Quaritch edition of The Works of William Blake the editors acknowledged that the extent of Blake's familiarity with Boehme was uncertain. They established the literature on Boehme and the works by Boehme which were available to Blake, cited what references Blake made to Boehme, but refused to attribute positively any single idea in Blake solely to Boehme. The place in which Yeats and Ellis most nearly approached directly identifying Boehme as the source for Blake was in a discussion of Blake's use of animal forms associated with human passions. "This doctrine came to Blake," the editors wrote, "perhaps from Boehmen, who believed that there are not animals enough in the world to give men their symbolic forms, some men needing a combination of two or three beasts." Even with the qualifying "perhaps," Yeats and Ellis hastened to add, however, that this doctrine was not uniquely Boehme's; that many visionaries are said to have seen men's passions materialize in animal shapes. The

editors concluded, "The last mystics who claim that they possess this type of vision are an old Irish priest and a circle of five Bavarian peasants."³⁹

As an established authority, Boehme might be preferred over the circle of Bavarian peasants, but Yeats's awareness of the existence of analogous experiences demonstrates the difficulty in one's positively attributing any direct influence on Yeats solely to Boehme. Yeats himself skirted the issue of who got what from whom by treating his authorities as equals, each an individual recipient of special insight. In the beginning of the Yeats-Ellis edition, Blake, Boehme, and Swedenborg are referred to as "men who have overheard and recorded a few words spoken by the spiritual forms among themselves for their own delight."⁴⁰ As Denis Saurat explained in Literature and the Occult Tradition, "We are not seeking a source so much as a witness."⁴¹

While care must be taken to avoid attribution of any idea or image of Yeats exclusively to Boehme, the danger of the other extreme must also be circumvented. There is a certain validity behind the joke of an inverse source study; for example, given any two major writers with broad enough scope and large enough literary output, a skillful manipulator of words could make a case for "The Elements of William Faulkner Apparent in Geoffrey Chaucer." Boehme is particularly vulnerable to such manipulation. Stephen Hobhouse, in his Introduction to Bishop Martensen's study of Jacob Boehme, noted the similarity between Boehme's work

and the Bible in the way in which the sheer bulk of diverse material lends itself to every possible interpretation:

Boehme's seven large volumes, with their 30 odd works, in which are mingled, often in an obscure language, expositions, exhortations, and personal confessions, form such a bewildering though fruitful 'chaos,' that a number of distinct philosophies and interpretations, some profound, some superficial, can be and have been extracted from them by diverse types of thinkers (and is not this also true of the Bible?).⁴²

Again, the Yeats-Ellis study of Blake can provide an example of how to achieve the delicate balance of suggesting all possible associations between poet and mystic yet remaining true to each. In a discussion of the importance of the mystic number three in the Book of Urizen Yeats noted,

It also indicates what Boehmen calls 'three dark creations.' But the examination of this closely would lead to the study of a mysticism other than Blake's, and not endorsed by him in its absolute completeness.⁴³

A study of Yeats's poetry in relation to the work of Jacob Boehme is valuable only insofar as it remains limited to correspondences of which Yeats was probably, or at least possibly, aware. Any other treatment would constitute mere academic exercise. For that reason care has been taken to establish what Yeats was most likely to have encountered of Boehme.

Yeats must have read Boehme in translation, since he admitted to Sturge Moore, "I cannot read German."⁴⁴ Thomas Dume speculated, "It is possible that most of Yeats's reading was in William Law's The Works of Jacob Behmen."⁴⁵ Yeats himself referred

to the Law edition in his Introduction to The Poems of William Blake⁴⁶ and in A Vision.⁴⁷ Yeats once wrote to his father that he was reading the works of Balzac (in translation). "In my usual way," Yeats wrote, "I shall read him all."⁴⁸ Ten months later Yeats wrote that he had only "four or five of the forty volumes" left to read, so he may indeed have carried out his intent.⁴⁹ If Yeats followed his "usual way" in his study of Boehme, it would be logical for him to have read through Law's edition, as that was the most complete edition of Boehme's works available in English at the time. Accordingly, to assure as close a correspondence as possible, I chose the Law edition as the principal primary source for Boehme's writings.

The four-volume collection, The Works of Jacob Behmen, commonly called the Law edition, is actually a compilation of various translations. The entry for this work in the British Museum catalogue notes:

The translations, except in the case of the "Weg zu Christo," where the version from the 1775 edition has been used, are those by J. Sparrow, J. Ellistone and H. Blunden, with the phraseology occasionally slightly altered.⁵⁰

The Works of Jacob Behmen was published between 1764 and 1781 by friends of William Law as a memorial to the English mystic, who had intended to produce a translation of Boehme's works. It includes two works by Law, "An Illustration of the Deep Principles of Jacob Behmen in Thirteen Figures" in Volume One and "An Illustration of the Deep Principles of Jacob Behmen" in Volume Two.

One of the singular aspects of the Law edition is that the translators followed the German practice of capitalizing substantives. I have retained these capitalizations, as well as the translator's parenthetical suggestions of alternate wording, italicized passages, and occasional archaic usages, in an attempt to preserve the flavor of the work as Yeats would have read it. The writing style, which falls so strangely on the ears of a modern reader, has the advantage of being faithful to Boehme's belief that words are "signatures," true expressions of the essences they represent.⁵¹ The various books within the Law edition are cited by chapter and verse within the text and are abbreviated as follows: from Volume I (1764)--The Aurora, 1612 (Aurora); The Three Principles, 1619 (3 Prin.); from Volume II (1764)--The Threefold Life of Man, 1620 (Threefold Life); The Answers to Forty Questions concerning the Soul, 1620 (40 Ques.); The Treatise of the Incarnation: In Three Parts, 1620 (Incar. I [or II or III]); The Clavis, n.d. (Clavis); from Volume III (1772)--The Mysterium Magnum, 1623 (Mys. Mag.); Four Tables of Divine Revelation, 1624 (4 Tables); from Volume IV (1781)--Signatura Rerum, 1621 (Sig. Rerum); Of the Election of Grace, 1623 (Grace); The Way to Christ, 1622 (Way to Christ). [The Way to Christ has four books which are frequently treated as individual works. They are cited under their titles--Of True Repentance (True Repen.), Of True Resignation (True Resig.), Of Regeneration (Regen.), and Of the Supersensual Life (Super. Life)]; A Discourse between a Soul hungry and thirsty after the Fountain of Life, the sweet Love of Jesus Christ; and a Soul

enlightened, 1624 (Discourse); Of the Four Complexions, 1621 (4 Complexions); and Of Christ's Testaments, Baptism, and the Supper, 1624 (Christ's Testaments). Quotations from works by Boehme not included in the Law edition have been used only if they were available in the British Museum during the period when Yeats was pursuing his study of Boehme.

As the spelling of the mystic's name in the title of the Law edition indicates, there are several variant spellings of the German Böhme. The one used throughout this study, "Boehme," has been the preferred English spelling since 1900 and was the spelling used most frequently by Yeats. Where another variation was used, as in the 1893 Yeats-Ellis Blake, I have retained the spelling of the original.

Another difficulty I have tried to avoid is the temptation to draw up merely a list of interesting parallels. In order to derive significance from this study, I have followed a unifying thread through the various correspondences between Yeats and Boehme with the purpose of providing fresh insight into the work of Yeats from the perspective of what he might have gained from Boehme. To facilitate this objective, I have focused on the relationship between the poetry of Yeats and the works of Boehme. Although many elements of correspondence can be discovered between Boehme's work and Yeats's other writings, such correspondences have been used as support rather than as studies in themselves.

Quotations from Yeats's poetry are taken from The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats and are cited in the text.⁵²

Unless otherwise noted, the final form of a poem as it appears in the Variorum is the version quoted, but the date given is the earliest date of publication, in order to place its composition in Yeats's theorizing. The only exceptions to this procedure were made when the final form differed substantially from the original. Given Yeats's penchant for revision, any decision on what version to use must be arbitrary. Once the decision to use the last form is made, the decision to ignore a rigid chronological approach is made also. Yeats first encountered the works of Boehme early in his literary career, but his interest in the mystic, as evidenced in his poetry and prose works, waxed and waned periodically during his life. Because Yeats's reading of Boehme was early and intensive, and because Yeats was interested in core principles, not in facts, no element of Boehme appears in pure isolation in Yeats's poetry. Always what might be attributed to Boehme is enhanced and enriched by all that Yeats supplied to make the poetry truly his own work of art. Thus, it has been necessary sometimes to deviate from strict chronology to make a line of reasoning clear and accurate. Care has been taken never to distort deliberately through these deviations.

Chapter One examines the similarities between William Butler Yeats and Jacob Boehme. Through analysis of direct references of Yeats to Boehme, correspondences which a close study of each suggests, and statements of critics as to possible connections between Yeats and Boehme, a pattern emerges of three areas of importance to Yeats's poetry. These three major areas of affinity are the belief in the creative power of the imagination,

a view of the universe which holds that all things operate through a system of opposites, and an appreciation of the momentary synthesis of the mystical experience. These three elements formed the basis of Boehme's thought. He believed that the life of all things, including the infinite Deity, depends upon the Imagination's creating contraries which struggle in opposition to each other until, as in a flash of lightning, a moment of resolution is reached. Such a process seems to underlie Yeats's poetry. Ideally, in both the mysticism and the poetry, this process is spontaneous and instantaneous. The best way to discuss the steps, however, is individually and progressively. Accordingly, Chapters Two, Three, and Four deal respectively with the imagination, the contraries, and the moment of resolution. Each element will be discussed in terms of Yeats's and Boehme's theories regarding it, the use of it in Yeats's poetry, and a shared symbol through which Yeats and Boehme expressed it in their writings.

FOOTNOTES

¹William Butler Yeats, The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 218.

²Autobiography, p. 218.

³Autobiography, p. 23.

⁴Jacob Boehme, The Aurora (19-8) in The Works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher, trans. and ed. William Law, Vol. I (London: G. Robinson for M. Richardson, 1764).

⁵Jacob Boehme, The Epistles of Jacob Boehme (M. Simmons for Gyles Calvert, 1649; rpt. Glasgow: John Thomson, 1886), p. 29. Epistle 2-7. Hereafter referred to as Epistles and cited by number, verse, recipient, and date (if available).

⁶William Butler Yeats, Letters to the New Island, ed. Horace Reynolds (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), pp. xi-xii.

⁷A[nne] J[udith] Penny. Studies in Jacob Boehme (London: John M. Watkins, 1912), p. 18.

⁸William Butler Yeats, The Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 921. Letter to Ethel Mannin, December 23, 1938. Hereafter referred to as Letters and cited by page number, recipient, and date.

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¹⁰Virginia Moore, The Unicorn (New York: Macmillan, 1954), pp. 81-2.

¹¹William Butler Yeats, A Vision, A reissue with the author's final revisions (1956; rpt. New York: Collier, 1966), p. 25.

¹²Jacob Boehme, The First Apologie in Answer to Balthazar Tylcken, Preface, 26-28 in The Remainder of Books written by Jacob Boehme, trans. John Sparrow (London: Gyles Calvert, 1662). Also quoted in John Joseph Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity: A Study in Jacob Boehme's Life and Thought (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), p. 107.

¹³William Butler Yeats, Introduction to Essays and Introductions (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. xi.

¹⁴A Vision, p. 12.

¹⁵Incarnation I 4-72, in The Works of Jacob Behmen.

¹⁶G.W. Allen, Introduction to Jacob Boehme, The Threefold Life of Man, trans. J. Sparrow, ed. C.J. Barker (London: John M. Watkins, 1909), p. xl.

¹⁷Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats, eds., The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic and Critical (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1893), I, 238. Hereafter referred to as Yeats-Ellis Blake.

¹⁸Essays and Introductions, p. 114.

¹⁹Yeats wrote, "When I was fifteen or sixteen my father had told me about Rossetti and Blake and given me their poetry to read." Autobiography, p. 100.

²⁰Letters, p. 781. To Olivia Shakespear, February 9, 1931.

²¹A Vision, p. 25.

²²Letters, p. 592. To Ernest Boyd, February, 1915.

²³William Butler Yeats, Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1944), p. 50.

²⁴Letters, p. 592. To Ernest Boyd, February, 1915.

²⁵See page ii above.

²⁶Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 23.

²⁷See page iv.

²⁸Thomas Leslie Dume, "William Butler Yeats: A Survey of His Reading," Diss. Temple 1950, p. 6.

²⁹Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, xi.

³⁰Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 23.

³¹William Butler Yeats, Introduction to The Poems of William Blake (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893), p. xxxiii.

³²William Butler Yeats, "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places," in Isabella Augusta Gregory, Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), II, 297.

³³Moore, The Unicorn, p. 97.

³⁴Moore, The Unicorn, pp. 97-98.

³⁵Joseph Hone, W.B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1943), p. 121.

³⁶William Butler Yeats, Uncollected Prose, ed. John P. Frayne and C. Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), I, 400.

³⁷F.A.C. Wilson, W.B. Yeats and Tradition (London: Methuen, 1958; rpt. University Paperbacks, 1968), pp. 98-99.

³⁸John Joseph Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity: A Study in Jacob Boehme's Life and Thought (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), p. 107.

³⁹Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 319.

⁴⁰Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 48.

⁴¹Denis Saurat, Literature and Occult Tradition, trans. Dorothy Bolton (New York: Dial Press, 1930), p. 75.

⁴²Stephen Hobhouse, Introduction to Hans L. Martensen, Jacob Boehme, trans. T. Rhys Evans, ed. Stephen Hobhouse (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. xxi.

⁴³Yeats-Ellis, Blake, II, 135.

⁴⁴William Butler Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence 1901-1937, ed. Ursula Bridge (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 154. Letter of April 17, 1929.

⁴⁵Dume, p. 120.

⁴⁶Yeats, Intro., Poems of William Blake, p. xviii.

⁴⁷A Vision, p. 23.

⁴⁸Letters, p. 513. To John B. Yeats, December 27, 1908.

⁴⁹Letters, p. 536. To J.B. Yeats, October 10, 1909.

⁵⁰Jacob Boehme: An Extract from the Catalogue of Printed Books of the British Museum (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1922), p. 1.

⁵¹See Signatura Rerum, the first book of Volume IV of the Law edition.

⁵²William Butler Yeats, The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats, ed. Peter Alt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

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CHAPTER I

"CERTAINLY THE GREATEST OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTICS"

"An Ungovernable Craving"

In 1896 Yeats wrote to W.T. Horton, a visionary friend who was having difficulty with the teachings of the Order of the Golden Dawn, exhorting him to "read or study in some unemotional and difficult school."¹ The course of study Yeats suggested was the writings of Jacob Boehme. "Jacob Boehme is certainly the greatest of the Christian mystics since the middle ages," Yeats wrote, "and none but an athletic student can get to the heart of his mystery."² Evidence of Yeats's study of Boehme indicates that Yeats was himself such an "athletic student," possessed of the interest and stamina to delve into Boehme's complex mysticism. Yeats's references to Boehme reveal the poet's fascination with the German mystic and suggest possible implications of that interest for Yeats's art. But in order to establish accurately the relationship between the modern Irish poet and the sixteenth-century German, one must follow the course of Yeats's developing interest, which falls into a pattern more closely resembling his famous gyres than a straight line. References to Jacob Boehme which appear throughout Yeats's writings can be used as indications of the way in which the poet progressed.

Whatever Yeats may have gained from his interest in Boehme, nourished by the fertile imagination of a poetic genius, "Grew in mind, but," one must ask, "out of what began?" ("The Circus Animals' Desertion," Var., p. 630). What was the background into which Yeats assimilated Boehme's contribution? In his Autobiography, Yeats discussed the research he undertook to investigate extrasensory phenomena and accounts of visionary experiences. "I had not taken up these subjects willfully, nor through love of strangeness," Yeats remembered, "but because unaccountable things had happened even in my childhood, and because of an ungovernable craving."³ Before investigating the subjects Yeats studied to assuage this craving one must follow the poet's lead by establishing the background which formed the intellectual and psychological framework into which those studies were fitted.

The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats, published in 1938 but including Yeats's earliest memories, can be considered a kind of journal of the artist's soul. The picture which emerges from the first section, "Reveries over Childhood and Youth," is of the poet as a young boy remarkably sensitive to intimations of a spiritual life. If one gives credence to astrological predictions (which in light of Yeats's interests must be given at least passing consideration), the poet's penchant for mysticism was established even before he was born. An uncannily apt horoscope cast for the poet by a friend of his uncle George Pollexfen described a person born under Yeats's signs as "a searcher into, and delighter in, strange studies and novelties . . . subject to see visions and dream dreams."⁴ The tendency to dream visions

must have been manifest from an early age; in the "Reveries" section Yeats recalled hearing voices, seeing a "supernatural bird in the corner of the room," and foretelling his grandfather's shipwreck through a dream.⁵ By 1907 Yeats was writing to Florence Farr, "Astrology grows more and more wonderful every day. I have some astonishingly irrefutable things to show you."⁶ Boehme also credited horoscopic predictions. In one passage he stated, "The kind of child born is determined by the stars when the seed is sown and when the creature first draws breath in its Mother's body" (3 Prin. 8-45).

Much critical attention has been focused upon what Virginia Moore called "The Problem of Yeats' Religion."⁷ Most studies of Yeats's "religion" are largely attempts to extricate from Yeats's writings doctrines which can be analyzed by comparison with orthodox Christianity. This "problem" falls beyond the scope of an investigation of affinities between Yeats and Boehme. Neither the poet nor the mystic is to be examined as a theologian; each is considered an original genius who waged a personal struggle to devise a system to satisfy his own "ungovernable craving." In this context Yeats's relation to orthodox Christianity is important only insofar as his religious heritage contributed to his approach to a belief.

Richard Ellmann has provided the most valuable insights into Yeats's religious background in his study Yeats: The Man and the Masks. He characterized the Pollexfens, Yeats's maternal relatives, as "Protestants, though not devout,"⁸ and indicated that the poet's mother communicated her faith through action, not

argument. Susan Pollexfen Yeats had her children baptized, taught them their prayers, and took them to church regularly, but she preferred the ghost stories and fairy tales of her native Sligo to theology.⁹

The poet's father was the person most responsible for his son's complex attitude toward religion. John Butler Yeats, the son and grandson of Protestant ministers, revolted against the orthodoxy of the Church of Ireland. But, Ellmann contended, "John Butler Yeats could reject his father's religion but not his temperament."¹⁰ This dictum might apply to his son as well. William Butler Yeats could reject his father's skepticism, but not his habitual spirit of inquiry. In 1869 J.B. Yeats wrote: "A doctrine or idea with Catholicity [sic] in it is food to all the feelings, . . . and every other nature is quickened by it."¹¹ A similar reliance upon the validity of universally acknowledged principles probably underlay the poet's wide-ranging study of diverse religions and occult systems.

Even before he knew the biological facts of life, Yeats was searching for clues to spiritual realities. He recalled, "My father's unbelief had set me thinking about the evidences of religion and I weighed the matter perpetually with great anxiety, for I did not think I could live without religion."¹² This concern was deeply rooted by the time Yeats was eight years old, when his "religious emotions were . . . connected with clouds and cloudy glimpses of luminous sky, perhaps because of some Bible picture of God's speaking to Abraham or the like."¹³ Yeats's favorite biblical passages at that age were those of the Apocalypse

and Ecclesiastes.¹⁴ This early interest in the most poetical and visionary parts of the Bible and the perception of religion as an instant of God's "speaking" to man deepened into a lifelong interest in mystical experiences like the ones Yeats later encountered in his reading of Boehme.

It is significant as well that Yeats's autobiography probes the development of "religious emotions," not theological concepts. In a frequently quoted passage from the 1922 section of his autobiography entitled "The Trembling of the Veil," Yeats again attested to the strength of his religious feelings and lamented the fact that the intellectual current of his boyhood had made it impossible for him to hold a simple faith. "I am very religious," Yeats declared, "and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion. . . ."¹⁵

Yeats's early education, overseen by his skeptic father, included little formal theological training. While Yeats's intellectual development was nourished by such thinkers as John Stuart Mill, his religious nature was rooted at the deeper level of emotions and yearnings ingrained in childhood. Perhaps nothing demonstrates the importance of this side of Yeats more strongly than does his choice of the churchyard of the Drumcliff church where his grandfather had been rector for his own final resting place.

The theology available in the established churches of Ireland could not satisfy Yeats's "ungovernable craving." In 1914, indignant over the controversies, at once petty and yet violently

hostile, surrounding Parnell, the Lane pictures, and The Playboy of the Western World, Yeats castigated institutional religion in Ireland, singling out "the pious Protestants of my childhood" as prime examples of failure to integrate the ethics they preached with the essentials of their Christianity. "Religious Ireland," Yeats complained, "thinks of divine things as a round of duties separated from life and not as an element that may be discovered in all circumstances and emotion."¹⁶ Boehme had condemned the established churches of his day in similarly harsh tones, writing, "The Cainical Church drives a subtle trade with external Ceremonies, and will appease God with some external Thing or other" (Mys. Mag. 28-27).

Yeats's insistence on the value of emotions, the necessity for feeling the truth as well as perceiving it intellectually, was probably influenced by the atmosphere in which he spent his childhood. T.R. Henn characterized the region where Yeats lived as a boy as being particularly permeated by an aura of the supernatural:

The West of Ireland is a country of ruins, of traces of old faiths, of legends, and of a great reverence for the dead. To its peasantry the supernatural is vivid and real, but in the main spasmodic and without continuity in narrative.¹⁷

And Yeats himself acknowledged the peculiar feeling of the Irish countryside in the short 1892 essay "Concerning the Nearness Together of Heaven, Earth, and Purgatory." Referring to the numerous stories of the presence of spirits among the country folk, Yeats wrote, "In Ireland this world and the world we go to

after death are not far apart Indeed there are times when the worlds are so near together that it seems as if our earthly chattels were no more than the shadows of things beyond."¹⁸

The power of this early influence is apparent in the unskeptical acceptance of psychic phenomena which pervades the first section of Yeats's autobiography as well as the collection of writings published in 1893 as The Celtic Twilight. Yeats had heard his first tales of fairies as a young child visiting the cottagers near the Middletons' home in the enchanted region of the West of Ireland.¹⁹ The most remarkable aspect of the folk tales was the matter-of-fact attitude of those relating the experiences. Yeats's own eager espousal of ancient folklore must have had its roots in the predisposition gained from early influences. When George Pollexfen, Yeats's "supporter" whom he characterized as "strangely beset by the romance of Ireland,"²⁰ died, Yeats wrote to his sister with convincing sincerity: "I am glad the Banshee cried (at George's death)--it seems a fitting thing. He had one of those instinctive natures that are close to the supernatural."²¹

Yeats considered the perception of the "nearness together of heaven and earth" one of the dominant characteristics of the Irish. In the Foreword to Lady Gregory's Gods and Fighting Men (1904) Yeats wrote of his countrymen, "They have no asceticism, but they are more visionary than any ascetic, and their invisible life is but the life about them made more perfect and more lasting, and the invisible people are their own images in the water."²²

In his investigations of Irish folklore, Yeats made his chief concern the connections between the country stories and occult teachings from other sources. In his contribution to Visions and Beliefs of the West of Ireland Yeats repeated a comment made by Lady Gregory as they passed an old man in the woods. "That old man," Lady Gregory said, "may know the secret of the ages."²³ Evidently Yeats sought to discover those secrets and also to relate them to his other studies. Reflecting upon Lady Gregory's remark, Yeats commented, "I had noticed many analogies in modern spiritism and began a more careful comparison."²⁴

This comparison of various traditions provides valuable insight into the synergistic method by which Yeats followed the dictum which had been conveyed to him mysteriously as a young man--"Hammer your thoughts into unity."²⁵ While in Ireland in 1891 he wrote, "I am here looking for stories of the fairies and the phantoms, and are not these spiritual beings of Plato but the phantoms and fairies of philosophy?"²⁶ In the Preface to the 1893 edition of William Blake's poems Yeats quoted Blake's asking some woman, "Did you ever see a fairy's funeral?" Yeats then noted, "Jacob Boehme is also said to have had a vision of the fairies."²⁷ And in an 1899 review of The Dominion of Dreams Yeats praised Jacob Boehme for the beginning of a return to the simplicity of fairy tales, saying, "Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme have begun to cast off the manners of the schools, and to talk the fairy tales of children."²⁸

Yeats gave no source for his statement that Boehme had seen fairies, nor did he provide any illustration of what he considered Boehme's use of a fairy tale style. It is possible that Yeats invented the incident out of his desire to draw his various studies into unity and to lend authenticity to his interests. Perhaps Yeats was interpreting fairies very loosely as spiritual beings and extending what he had read by what he believed. Yeats believed that there is a life beyond what we perceive through our five senses and that there are beings who inhabited the world beyond. There must, therefore, be mortals--Yeats would have it that these were the magicians, the mystics, and the artists--who have made contact with these supernatural beings. In "Enchanted Woods" (1902) Yeats affirmed that "they are surely there, the divine people . . . and the simple of all times and the wise men of ancient times have seen them and even spoken to them."²⁹ Boehme gave similar credence to the folk wisdom of the ages in a passage in Three Principles: "The mysteries of nature were not so deeply hidden to [ancient] peoples as they are to us, because they were not so deeply hidden (immersed) in materiality and sin" (3 Prin. 21-8).

When Yeats set about establishing a "new religion,"³⁰ therefore, one which would satisfy the requirements of universality, simplicity, and fidelity to the emotional side of the human character, he turned first to fairy tales and folklore,³¹ returning in a sense to the roots of his religious feelings, to the tales of the cottagers of Sligo. Indeed, the fairies and leprechauns of folk stories were perhaps more closely tied to the

spiritual nature of his country than the sectarian dogmas which have long divided the Irish nation. In the 1893 piece "Belief and Unbelief" Yeats captured the essence of religious feelings of the peasants of his childhood. These folk may not have accepted the theological concepts of their pastors, but, Yeats wrote, "No matter what one doubts, one never doubts the fairies."³²

Earlier, in an article on Browning published in the Boston Pilot on May 17, 1890, Yeats had praised scholars like Joubainville and Rhys for their efforts in demonstrating that folk stories and fairy tales were remnants of "once famous religions" which Yeats described as "fallen into ruin and turned into old wives' tales, but still luminous from the rosy dawn of human reverie."³³

Yeats's reference to the "rosy dawn," reminiscent of Boehme's first work, The Aurora or the Morning Redness, provides the key to the way in which Yeats approached the foundations of his beliefs. Yeats was looking for fundamental truths, for core concepts which men had held throughout the ages. In his search for incontrovertibles, however, Yeats was literally of two minds. One part of him longed to satisfy the inborn "ungovernable craving" fostered by the experiences of his childhood. The other side, imbued with his father's spirit of skepticism, demanded the certainty of demonstrable facts. In many ways Yeats, whom Dwight Eddins called "The Nineteenth-Century Matrix,"³⁴ was reacting to his age, a period of cataclysmic changes as intense as those which had rocked the world of Jacob Boehme three hundred years earlier.

"That Unfashionable Gyre"

An overview of the dissemination of Boehme's works during the three hundred years between his death and the birth of Yeats reveals an intriguing phenomenon. For example, in the revised edition of Jacob Boehme by Hans Martensen, his editor Stephen Hobhouse noted:

Almost all of Jacob Boehme's 31 works were well translated and published in England between 1647 and 1663. Many of those translations were re-printed in 1764-81 and some again in 1909-24.³⁵

The dates of publication differ in other countries, but the pattern of waxing and waning popularity for Boehme's ideas remains constant. The fluctuations in public attention to the outpourings of the German mystic are a concrete example of the cyclical view of history Yeats expounded in his 1938 poem "The Gyres," and the periodic resurgence of Boehme's work gives historical precedence for Yeats's hope that the future will bring "that unfashionable gyre again" (Var., p. 565).

Boehme's writings have lain virtually untouched for decades only to be discovered anew and accepted eagerly by some succeeding generation. When the emphasis of a society is upon conformity and adherence to strict codes of orthodoxy, Boehme's works are largely ignored, if not actively suppressed, while any movement which seeks to break through old strictures tends to embrace Boehme's teachings enthusiastically. An interesting sidelight to history is the fact that in 1941 Nazi authorities banned Boehme's writings and locked a collection of his original

manuscripts in the same building in his native Görlitz where they had been held after they were confiscated in the seventeenth century.³⁶

There are many affinities between the age of Yeats and the age of Boehme which could have attracted the poet. During the last quarter of the sixteenth century Germany was moving from the thought patterns and beliefs of the Middle Ages to those of the Renaissance, and Yeats was also born into an "Age of Transition." The unity of the Middle Ages was giving way in Boehme's time to the diversity of the Renaissance, which eventually resulted in the dissociation of sensibility in the twentieth century. Where before, the study of life was the province of the priests and any study led to God, scholarship was breaking into separate disciplines in the sixteenth century. Theology became primarily concerned with God as revealed in the Scriptures and the scriptural explications of recognized authorities. Philosophy began to focus upon "natural means" for exploring the meaning of existence. Modern science, the focus of attack by writers in Yeats's age, was forming at the point of divergence of theology and philosophy in Boehme's era. Jacob Boehme was affected as deeply by the lack of terminology and means of approaching the new science as William Yeats and his contemporaries were distressed by the over-emphasis in their own age on technology and the scientific approach.

Boehme was not immune to the pressures of these social upheavals. Despite the intensely inward quality of his mystical writings, Boehme, like Yeats, served his time as a "smiling

public man" ("Among School Children" (1927), Var., p. 443).

Boehme worked at the shoemaker's trade through much of his life, and his efforts as negotiator during conflicts between the tanners' and the shoemakers' guilds³⁷ could be compared to Yeats's efforts in the Irish Senate.

The changes within society, intensified by the gathering clouds of the Thirty Years' War which broke out in Germany in 1618, contributed to the apocalyptic tone of the mystic's writings much as social forces in Yeats's time, culminating in the cataclysm of World War I, affected Yeats's poetry. Yeats and Boehme, each in his forties when war began, reacted similarly to their intimations of approaching disaster. In Three Principles Boehme used flower imagery in a warning of the impending time when "Heaven thunders, (and passes away with a Noise)":

Truly the Time of the Rose brings it forth, and
it is high Time to awake, for the sleep is at
an end, there shall a great Rent be before the
Lily; therefore let every one take Heed to his
Ways. (3 Prin. 15-26)

In "The Secret Rose," written in 1896, the young Irish poet proclaimed in similar imagery an approaching change:

I, too, await
The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.
When shall the stars be blown about the sky,
Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?
Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,
Far-off, most secret, and inviolate Rose?
(Var., p. 170)

The lines from Yeats's 1923 poem "The Road at my Door" could have been spoken by Boehme in 1620:

A brown Lieutenant and his men,
Half dressed in national uniform,
Stand at my door. . . . (Var., p. 424)

For in August of that year English and Scottish mercenaries marched into Görlitz, bringing with them a virulent fever with which Boehme, who had been pressed into service in the citizens' army, was infected.³⁸ Boehme's response to the horrors of war in his village was evident in the prophecy added as a postscript to a letter written February 20, 1623: "The Oriental beast getteth an human heart . . . ; and ere this cometh to pass, he helpth to tear down the Tower of Babel with his claws."³⁹ Three hundred years later, Yeats's own tower fell under the same kind of siege. And in "The Second Coming" (1920) Yeats also evoked an image of a terrible, alien beast in his announcement of a forthcoming apocalypse:

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born? (Var., p. 402)

"Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world," Yeats wrote in the first stanza of that prophetic poem; "The blood-dimmed tide is loosed" (Var., p. 402). Boehme likewise saw impending collapse in his time. In 1624, when he was being attacked with "passionate intensity" for his "conviction" (Var., p. 402), he wrote, "Babel burneth in the whole world, and there is woe in every street."⁴⁰

Boehme, like Yeats, struggled to achieve a position of unity in a world filled with dissensions and divisions. His lifelong aspiration was expressed in the little verse he used to write in the commonplace books of his friends--

To whom Time and Eternity
Harmoniously as One agree;
His Soul is safe, his Life's amended,
His Battle's o'er, his strife is ended.⁴¹

Because of the time and place of Boehme's birth, he stood at the point where the fissures were widening and his genius afforded him the unusual ability to hold diverging elements in unity. In The Mystic Will Howard Brinton called Boehme the "inheritor of that tremendous legacy" contributed to by the Neo-Platonists, the writers of the Jewish Kabbalah, the mystics, the alchemists, the spiritual reformers of the Reformation, and the humanists of the Renaissance. In Brinton's assessment, "Boehme is the most vital single transmissive organ of this blend or fusion of thought-currents."⁴² This evaluation echoes the opinion Yeats expressed in "High Crosses of Ireland" (1896) of Jacob Boehme as the one "who gathered into himself the dying mysticism of the Middle Ages."⁴³

The unique characteristics of Protestant mysticism can be traced directly to Boehme's moment in history. Prior to the Reformation, mystics were concerned primarily with the abstract; in the Platonic sense, the more abstract a concept was, the more real it was.⁴⁴ The mystical experience was one soul's experience of his own oneness with God,⁴⁵ and the emphasis was upon loss of personality, upon total identification with the One.⁴⁶ Protestantism brought the concept of the primary importance of man's individuality.⁴⁷ Boehme's mystical experience made him see more clearly the things of this world. Repeatedly he insisted that the pull is from within, not from above. Yeats recognized this aspect when he recommended Boehme's works to W.T. Horton in that friend's crisis of faith. Yeats told Horton, "For you progress lies not in dependence upon a Christ outside yourself but upon the Christ in your own breast."⁴⁸ Yeats may have been aware also of the protestations Boehme made in the Second Apologie in Answer to Balthazar Tylcken, where he affirmed his reliance on the Christ within himself:

If I had no other book except the book which I myself am, I should have book enough. The entire Bible lies in me if I have Christ's Spirit in me. What do I need of more books? Shall I quarrel over what is outside me before I have learned what is within me?⁴⁹

And in the Epistles Boehme had counseled a follower much as Yeats instructed Horton: "The true understanding must flow from the inward ground out of the living word of God (which must before be opened and revealed in man), and enter into the written word."⁵⁰ In the Introduction to his 1953 translation of The Way to Christ

John J. Stoudt identified this shift from the concept of man's ascent toward God to the concept of God's penetration of man's soul as the "revolution in mysticism wrought by Boehme."⁵¹

Stoudt expressed the importance of Boehme's particular mysticism more fully in Sunrise to Eternity: "Conceived in its broadest aspect, Boehme's experience was the sunrise to an eternity within the world, something undreamed of in medieval thought."⁵²

W. Windelband, author of A History of Philosophy (1893), related the resurgence of interest in mysticism in sixteenth-century Germany to a reaction against the increasing rigidity in the Protestant State Church.⁵³ Windelband's claim that Boehme attempted "to transcend the dogmatic, fixed form of Protestantism, and to solve the problems of the new science with the aid of a Christian metaphysics"⁵⁴ corresponds to the rationale William James ascribed to modern interest in mystical states in his 1902 study, The Varieties of Religious Experience. According to James, mystical states "break down the authority of nonmystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone."⁵⁵ Boehme and Yeats probably valued evidences of mystical insight for the same reason, because, as James wrote, "They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith."⁵⁶

A related contribution of Boehme to his age was a renewal of interest in speculative theology. The Reformation had begun from disagreements over the means of individual salvation, and for many years soteriology remained the focus of attention.

Boehme turned his insights to speculative dogma, such as the mysteries of the Incarnation and the inner life of the Trinity, which Protestantism had accepted from Catholicism. One of Boehme's strongest influences upon theology derived from the attention he turned to the mysteries, chiefly the Trinity. "In this respect," Martensen wrote, "Boehme pointed back to the Eastern Church which has absorbed itself in the mysteries of the Trinity and of the Incarnation."⁵⁷ In his 1938 introduction to Aphorisms of Yoga Yeats also linked the German mystic to Eastern mysticism and claimed, "Boehme had great influence upon the theology of the seventeenth century."⁵⁸

The difference in Boehme's approach stemmed from the fusion of ancient problems and the new approach initiated by Luther. Stoudt credited Lutheranism with the fact that Boehme's mystical experience did not involve loss of self. "The mystical heart of Lutheranism" was, Stoudt said, the concept that God's love must first be in man.⁵⁹ Brinton also attributed the major differences between Eckhart, an earlier, Catholic mystic, and Boehme to the intervention of Luther. Emphasis upon the prime importance of man made Protestant mysticism more subjective and changed the thrust of the mystical experience from emphasis on the intellect to emphasis on the will.⁶⁰

Yeats had been predisposed, by temperament and background, to rely upon self-discovery as the basis for belief. He too stressed the importance of will. In a 1904 letter to his friend George Russell, Yeats declared the individual will preeminent and extolled its value for directing man's life as well as his art.

In a postscript to that letter Yeats demanded, "Let us have no emotions, however abstract, in which there is not an athletic joy."⁶¹

This concept of "joy" as a crucial element became much more pronounced in Yeats's later poetry, and it too was tied to the teachings of Boehme. In a 1936 letter to Dorothy Wellesley, Yeats wrote, "A Dutch mystic has said, 'I must rejoyce, I must rejoyce without ceasing, though the whole world shudder at my joy.'"⁶² This "Dutch mystic" was identified as Jacob Boehme by B.L. Reid, author of William Butler Yeats: The Lyric of Tragedy.⁶³ In his Last Poems Yeats found this terrible joy in the consolation of his cyclical theory of history. For example, in "Lapis Lazuli" (1938) he wrote, "All things fall and are built again, / And those that build them again are gay" (Var., p. 566). And in the 1938 poem that provided the title for this section Yeats presented his joyous approach to "The Gyres"--"Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy; / We that look on but laugh in tragic joy" (Var., p. 564).

Boehme likewise believed in the vindication of history. Six months before his death, in the midst of a furor over his latest publication, Boehme wrote to a friend, "That which my native country casteth away, other nations shall take up."⁶⁴ In Novalis Frederick Heibel explained how the gyres of history had turned in Boehme's favor during the Romantic Age. The works of Boehme, Heibel wrote,

had been in constant circulation, though the Age of Enlightenment and rationalism were utterly hostile to them. The onset of early Romanticism was linked as a matter of course with a renaissance of the world of Jacob Boehme.⁶⁵

Novalis himself praised Goethe, whom Yeats admired, by calling him the "Boehme of Weimar."⁶⁶

The English romantics drew likewise upon the teachings of Boehme. In Currents and Eddies in the English Romantic Generation Frederick Pierce stated, "This Austrian shoemaker and visionary, a belated survival of the medieval mystics, left his trail across most of the German Romantiker," and claimed also that William Blake's "chief tie" to the Romantics "is through his discipleship to Jacob Boehme."⁶⁷ Frank Kermode named Swedenborg, Boehme, and his successors, the eighteenth-century Germans, the "ultimate sources" of the Romantic Image.⁶⁸ Pierce noted that Coleridge had planned to write a life of Boehme,⁶⁹ and David Erdman, editor of Coleridge's Essays on His Times, claimed, "One of the most heavily annotated of Coleridge's books is his copy of The Works of Jacob Boehme, his notes continuing from 1808 to 1826."⁷⁰ In The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry Joseph Beach revealed that Wordsworth had two of Boehme's books in his library, but Beach found "no reason for thinking that Wordsworth's thought was in any appreciable degree affected by Boehme."⁷¹ In Mysticism in English Literature Caroline Spurgeon credited Coleridge with bringing Boehme to the attention of the English Romantics. "Through Coleridge," Spurgeon wrote, "some of his root-ideas returned again to England in the nineteenth

century, thus preparing the way for a better understanding of mystical thought."⁷²

Yeats, who considered himself one of "the last romantics" ("Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," Var., p. 491), was probably drawn to many of the same "root-ideas." In Undercurrents of Influence in English Romantic Poetry Margaret Sherwood discussed Boehme's contributions to the Romantic Movement. The central ideas she listed were the concept of the indwelling life of the divine in nature and man, the adherence to a transcendent deity which differentiated Boehme's thought from the pantheistic doctrine of total imminence, the view of the origins of the world "as the self-differentiation and self-externalization of the absolute spirit," and the idea of human life as a groping return from this earthly division to the original One.⁷³

The English Romantics went to Boehme through the German Idealists, the same channel through which came the influence which Yeats recognized on modern German philosophy.⁷⁴ The Idealists had reacted against Immanuel Kant's "critical" philosophy, which held that the human mind cannot penetrate beyond the realm of sense experience.⁷⁵ Yeats would have rejected such teaching on the same basis as that one by which Berkeley, whom he admired, refuted Locke's contention that all knowledge derives from experience--"We Irishmen think otherwise."⁷⁶ Boehme had appealed to the German Idealists, as he probably later appealed to Yeats, for the apparently infused quality of his insights into mysteries beyond the scope of unaided intellect. Berdyaev credited Boehme's insights with the Romantic revolt against pure

reason: "Without his brilliant intuitions, the rationalism of modern philosophy, of Descartes and Spinoza, could not have been overcome."⁷⁷

A direct line of descent runs from the German Idealists--Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel--through Schopenhauer, to Nietzsche.⁷⁸ Schopenhauer, of whom Yeats wrote in his later life, "Schopenhauer can do no wrong in my eyes,"⁷⁹ saw Boehme's thought as the foundation of the Idealists. Schopenhauer claimed that Schelling's works "are almost nothing except a remodeling of Jacob Boehme's 'Mysterium Magnum,' in which almost every sentence of Hegel's book is represented."⁸⁰ But like his Irish admirer, Schopenhauer found Boehme's ideas distasteful when he encountered them in Hegel. He asked, "Why are in Hegel's writings the same figures and forms insupportable and ridiculous to me, which in Boehme's works fill me with admiration and awe?"⁸¹ Yeats could have explained Schopenhauer's quandary as he explained the problem to Lady Elizabeth Pelham in the last known letter of his life. "The abstract is not life," Yeats wrote. "You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence" ⁸²

"Discoverers of Forgotten Truth"

In 1887, shaped by his own heritage and the spirit of the age into which he was born, Yeats had traveled to London, where he found others who were seeking irrefutable experience. Later, Yeats was to begin the reminiscences of the 1918 poem "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" with the mention of "Discoverers of

forgotten truth" who had been companions in his youth (Var., p. 324). These were the acquaintances from the four years which began in 1887, men and women groping like the young poet through experimentations of all types for proofs of spiritual verities perhaps lost to their generation.

In approaching the studies which Yeats began in 1887, studies which the poet credited with enabling him to break away from his father's influence,⁸³ one must take into account that until the rise in popularity of the arcane, which has been distinctly a phenomenon of the 1970's, Yeats's interest in secret societies and mystics had been largely ignored or treated as an unfortunate aberration.⁸⁴ Daniel Albright's reference in The Myth against Myth to Yeats's "intellectually scandalous youth"⁸⁵ is typical of the general response to Yeats's early studies. In The Identity of Yeats Richard Ellmann aptly characterized the prevailing critical attitude towards Yeats's heterodox pursuits as one of discomfort or uneasiness;⁸⁶ Ellmann himself referred to Yeats's studies as the "dingy back entrances" of philosophy.⁸⁷ The assumption implied in this reference, that a hierarchy of respectability can be established among the various disciplines which deal with the unknown, is a pervasive attitude which serves only to muddy the waters of an already cloudy fount of knowledge. Akin to the practice of labeling one's own religious beliefs "theology" and all other traditions "myth," such rankings detract from Yeats's serious study of universal truths rooted in man's deepest experience where, as his mentor Blake preached, "All Religions are One." No attempt has been made in this study

to assign precise labels to any of Yeats's interests except in instances where he himself made differentiations.

Oliver St. John Gogarty, a contemporary and friend of Yeats, indicated that Yeats's interests not only embarrassed his admirers, but also handicapped his public works for the arts. In his memoir of Yeats, Gogarty wrote, "Apart from the farcical situations which arose from time to time, Yeats's association with the occult retarded the acceptance of the dramatic movement in Ireland and caused active opposition afterwards, such as the near riots at the Abbey Theatre."⁸⁸ Yeats himself had admitted as much at the turn of the century, when he wrote to Lady Gregory, "Between my politics and my mysticism I shall hardly have my head turned with popularity."⁸⁹

In general, those scholars who did not simply ignore Yeats's eccentric interests adopted a pragmatic stance designed to demonstrate the utility of his findings. Horace Reynolds' analysis was typical of this approach. He explained that Yeats's interests, which Reynolds treated rather playfully, served only to further the art. In the Introduction to Letters to the New Island, he wrote, "By these toyings and dabblings around the edges of magic and theosophy and mysticism, Yeats loosened his imagination, thickening the cloud of dreams about him out of which he was to summon the images of his poetry."⁹⁰ In The Golden Nightingale Donald Stauffer defended Yeats's esoteric activities as a "golden extreme to balance the extreme of science" and added, "To cure a poisoned world, he offers excessive and amazing antitoxins."⁹¹ Similarly, in Blake and Yeats: The

Contrary Vision, Hazard Adams blamed the "lack of spiritual community" in the society of Yeats's youth as the impetus for his turning to the occult. "The world was 'pragmatical, preposterous;' and Yeats, transvaluating all enlightenment values in a Swinburnean manner," Adams wrote, "took the side of dream in a false dream-reality dichotomy."⁹² T.R. Henn considered Yeats's "taste for the recondite as source material may well have been another device to achieve a certain remoteness, a defended position."⁹³

Two factors have mitigated against a proper evaluation of Yeats's involvement with mysticism and related areas. One was the veil of secrecy which shrouded many of the coteries and experiments popular among intellectuals of the late nineteenth century. Consequently, those things which came to be known were only fragments of ritual or pieces of doctrine. There has been no way of discovering how Yeats understood the system as a whole. The problems which arose from Yeats's reluctance to break the code of silence were compounded by the poet's deliberately ambiguous attitude toward whatever an outsider might have found open to ridicule.

Yeats himself often downplayed the importance of his connections with occultists and magicians. Elements of the arcane which were obvious in his poetry appeared detached from the main body of belief and did not provide an adequate measure of what Yeats had accepted from any set of teachings. Because such references appear outside the context of their sources, critics have inferred that Yeats used selected elements of heterodox

tradition as tools which could be chosen or discarded as the occasion warranted. But Yeats's active participation in various occult groups and his extensive reading on mysticism and magic occurred during a highly formative period of his artistic life. His studies and his experimentation must have influenced how he thought and wrote, not just the words he used or the symbols he picked. A deep influence should be assumed from Yeats's own admission that he turned to occult studies to fill a fundamental void within himself.⁹⁴

Yeats mentioned specifically that his initial attraction to the Theosophists was their opposition to Huxley and Tyndall,⁹⁵ the men whom he blamed for the loss of "the simple-minded religion" of his childhood.⁹⁶ The ambiguity of Yeats's association with the group was epitomized in his account of his first meeting with their leader, Madame Blavatsky, in 1887. His first impression of her was of a "sort of old Irish peasant woman with an air of humour and audacious power," but while he awaited his first interview with her Yeats examined a clock which had inexplicably cuckooed at him. Perhaps the whole history of Yeats's relationship with the Theosophical Society could have been summed up by his reaction to the apparent miracle of the clock: "I wondered if there was some hidden mechanism," Yeats remembered, "and I should have been put out, I suppose, had I found any. . . ."⁹⁷ Always the poet's fervent desire to believe was tempered by a need for demonstrable proof.

Difficulties arose from Yeats's need to test the theories propounded by the Society. One experiment, which failed to evoke

the spirit of a burnt flower,' resulted in an official reprimand from the organization.⁹⁸ Yeats wrote to O'Leary late in 1890 that he had been forced to resign from the inner section of the Society because he had written a critical review of the official organ, the publication called Lucifer. With his resignation Yeats offered the opinion that "they [the Theosophists] were turning a good philosophy into a bad religion."⁹⁹ This tendency toward a fixed dogma had to be counter to the very qualities which had originally attracted Yeats to the Theosophists.

Bishop Martensen, who considered Boehme a Theosophist, defined Theosophy as mysticism, but distinguished it as "objective, theoretical mysticism."¹⁰⁰ Theosophy traditionally dealt with the mysteries of divinity, but it used the rigors of the mind, not just the emotions of the heart. The intellectualism of approach in Theosophy was undoubtedly an aspect which Yeats had appreciated until he was reprimanded for bringing his early training in skepticism to the enclaves of the Theosophists.

A related aspect, which must have also appealed to Yeats, was the universality of approach of the Theosophical Society. In his study W.B. Yeats and Occultism Harbans Bachchan explained, "So long as a thought was ancient, idealistic, mysterious, anti-materialistic, and supralogical it could be freely expressed" by Theosophists.¹⁰¹ Martensen provided a rationale for such a liberal outlook. In his analysis, "Theosophy, as such, is super-confessional, precisely because it moves in super-historical principles, in the radical conceptions which Scripture postulates rather than expresses, or from which it only partially

lifts the veil in isolated passages."¹⁰² Even without the coincidence of the metaphor of the veil the appeal of Theosophy for Yeats would have been obvious. The complete freedom from sectarianism and the broad view afforded by a system which transcended the barriers of a particular time and place was bound to be attractive to a young man who sought universals.

The antiquity and catholicity of Theosophy were points stressed with pride by Madame Blavatsky. Theosophy affirmed for its adherents the existence of an unbroken, all-inclusive mystic tradition. For the first issue of The Theosophist (October, 1879) Madame Blavatsky had written an article entitled "Who are the Theosophists?" in which she explained: "The line of philosophical heredity, from Kapila through Epicurus to James Mill, from Patanjali through Plotinus to Jacob Boehme, can be traced like the course of a river through a landscape."¹⁰³ Yeats was to trace that river backward through his studies, since he claimed to have been a student of Boehme's work by 1887,¹⁰⁴ while his work on Patanjali's Aphorisms of Yoga did not appear until 1939.

Yeats may also have shared Blavatsky's opinion of Boehme's contribution to the line of hereditary wisdom. In 1889, while Yeats was still a member of the London Theosophical Society, Madame Blavatsky published her major work, The Key to Theosophy. In the beginning of that book, Jacob Boehme was compared to the founder of the original Theosophical System. Blavatsky wrote that Ammonius Saccas, "like Jacob Boehme and other great seers

and mystics, is said to have had divine wisdom revealed to him in dreams and visions."¹⁰⁵

In the glossary of that work, Blavatsky credited Boehme with threefold powers. Boehme was identified as "A mystic and great philosopher, one of the most prominent Theosophers of the medieval ages." Blavatsky evaluated Boehme as one of the few men who managed to fuse the intellect and emotions so that there was no conflict, no division of "self" and "soul." Quoting from The Aurora, she described the German as a man who "had 'a thorough view of the universe, as in chaos,' which opened itself in him, from time to time, 'as in a young plant.'" Blavatsky called Boehme "a thorough born mystic . . . one of those fine natures whose material envelope impedes in no way the direct . . . intercommunication between the intellectual and spiritual Ego."¹⁰⁶ Even if Yeats had had no previous knowledge of Boehme, such a description would probably have whetted his curiosity, for the methods and messages of such intercommunications were a major interest of the young poet.

Another reference to Boehme in the glossary to The Key to Theosophy linked him to an allied area of study which also fascinated Yeats at the time--the powers of clairvoyance. Blavatsky defined clairvoyance as "A faculty of seeing with the inner eye or spiritual sight." She mentioned that it was a faculty at which Jacob Boehme excelled. Yet she felt that he and Swedenborg, "these two great seers, since they could never rise superior to the general spirit of the Jewish Bible and Sectarian teachings, have sadly confused what they saw, and

fallen far short of true clairvoyance."¹⁰⁷ Four years later in The Works of William Blake Yeats likewise labeled Boehme and Swedenborg "sectaries" and implied that their usefulness was limited for poets because they employed "the language of the Churches."¹⁰⁸

Within the environment of the Theosophical Society, however, teachings connected to Boehme could have provided a key to the "forgotten truth" Yeats sought. Several authorities have explicitly labeled Boehme a Theosophist. In Historical Studies in Philosophy, Émile Boutroux wrote, "It is not the custom, even in Germany, to assign a place of importance in the history of philosophy to Jacob Boehme, the shoemaker theosophist of the Renaissance."¹⁰⁹ G.W. Allen thought Boehme "the man of theosophical first principles."¹¹⁰ William Law, the most prominent English mystic to follow Boehme, directly linked the German mystic to Theosophy. In his "Address to the Earnest Lovers of Wisdom" Law claimed, "[Boehme's] Ground discovers the Way to attain, not only the deepest Mysteries of Nature, but Divine Wisdom, Theosophy, the Wisdom of Faith, which is the Substance of Things hoped for, and the Evidence of Things not seen with the outward Eyes."¹¹¹ This claim accorded well with the report of James Cousins, also a member of the Theosophical Society, who reported that Yeats's particular interest within the Society was occultism, the study of hidden wisdom and the investigation of the powers latent in man. Ellmann, recognizing the correspondences between Boehme's thought and the teachings of Blavatsky's Theosophy, provided the most plausible explanation of the way Yeats would have related

them. Although Yeats "accepted tacitly most of what the Theosophists believed," Ellmann said, "he understandably preferred to attribute the doctrines to Boehme, Swedenborg, and other reputable sources. . . ."112

Another "discoverer of forgotten truth" whom Yeats met in 1887 was Samuel Liddell Mathers, for several years a close associate in tests of the magical potential of man. Yeats had been intrigued by Mathers even before he met him. The poet had seen Mathers at work in the British Museum. Yeats related that Mathers "had copied many manuscripts on magic ceremonial and doctrine in the British Museum, and was to copy many more in Continental libraries."113 One of the manuscripts which Mathers copied was Boehme's Mysterium Magnum.114 Thus, some of Boehme's ideas may have been absorbed into the teachings of the Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn, a group of which Mathers served, according to Yeats, as the "governing mind."115

It would not have been inconsistent with the practices of the Golden Dawn for some of Boehme's thought to have been incorporated with the teachings of that group. In Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn Kathleen Raine explained the open philosophy of the Hermetic students: "The practice of the Golden Dawn, like that of the Theosophical Society, was an unbounded eclecticism; if several alternatives exist, accept all."116 Such freedom from restrictions must have appealed to the young man searching for any and all records of man's experiences with powers beyond the norm.

As with the Theosophists, Yeats's relations with the Hermeticists were ambiguous. There were quarrels within the group,¹¹⁷ and Yeats's precise position was difficult to assess, not only because of the oaths of secrecy protecting the Order, but also because of Yeats's tendency to underplay or ridicule his involvement. In April, 1900, legal battles arose between factions. Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory on April 25:

The trouble is my Kabbalists are hopelessly un-businesslike and thus minutes and the like are in complete confusion. I have had to take the whole responsibility for everything, to decide on every step.¹¹⁸

Later that week he wrote again,

I have had to go through this worry for the sake of old friends, and perhaps above all for my uncle('s) sake. If I had not the whole system of teaching would have gone to wrack and this would have been a great grief to him and others, whose whole religious life depends on it.¹¹⁹

The tone of these letters was quite detached and businesslike, even paternalistic and patronizing in the reference to "my Kabbalists." But the fact remains that Yeats did work hard for the Order.

Furthermore, he devoted a great deal of time to learning what was demanded of the Hermetic Students. Virginia Moore maintained that Yeats was particularly impressed by the formulas and rituals of the Golden Dawn. She considered the ceremony of initiation to the grade of Adeptus Minor "a powerful influence upon his life; a gallery of pictures imprinted upon his soul, with enormous consequences for his art and doctrine."¹²⁰ As John

Senior in The Way Down and Out succinctly phrased the consideration of possible influence of this order of which Yeats was long a member, "There should be little doubt that there was influence. Twenty-five years is not a weekend."¹²¹

Because of the policy of eclecticism of the Hermetic Students, it would be difficult to attribute any one element in Yeats's art to the sole influence of the Golden Dawn. It would serve little purpose to identify an isolated symbol or piece of ritual which Yeats may have gleaned from his association with that group. What mattered most was the contact with the "Kabbalists" and with the Masons, Rosicrucians, magicians, and mystics who clustered around the Order, all those seekers and scholars whom Yeats classed as "Discoverers of forgotten truth."

Yeats's study of magic was closely related to his connection with the Hermeticists, since Mathers was deeply involved with magic, as were other members of the Golden Dawn. The period of the late nineteenth century during which Yeats was pursuing his investigations was characterized by a resurgence of interest in psychic phenomena among intellectuals. Henn noted the prevalence of what he termed "a diffuse and esoteric mysticism that looked to magic for its support."¹²² In "W.B. Yeats: Magician" Richard Ellmann traced the rise of spiritualist cults during the 1880's and 1890's in western Europe. He claimed that the magic inherent in the teachings and rituals of these secret societies held particular appeal for artists who identified themselves with the magicians in their power with words.¹²³

Yeats's attitude toward magic was as ambivalent as his views on Theosophy and Hermeticism. Jack Yeats provided a graphic and accurate assessment of his brother's commitment to magic. According to him, W.B. Yeats "was like a man on a moving staircase, perpetually putting one foot off the staircase on to the ground."¹²⁴ Yeats related an incident in his autobiography which stressed the prevalence of magic as a fad among intellectuals and which revealed the mixed feelings with which Yeats treated magic in discussions with his contemporaries. Someone (Yeats labeled him "the dull man") announced at a gathering that Yeats believed in the nonsense of magic. Henley jumped to Yeats's defense, claiming that it might not be nonsense and that "black magic" was "all the go" in Paris. Then Henley turned to Yeats "with a changed sound in his voice" and asked the poet, "It is just a game, isn't it?" One can imagine how a roomful of Yeats scholars would have hushed in anticipation, waiting for a clear denial or a spirited affirmation. But Yeats refused to commit himself publicly, or else the matter was as simple as he stated it. "One has had a vision, one wants to have another," Yeats shrugged, "that is all."¹²⁵

Hazard Adams has proposed a theory of the use to which Yeats was putting magic which perhaps explains more precisely the relationship between the artist's writing and his experiments. In Adams' view, Yeats combined his study of Blake's symbolism with the study of magic, because magic was a means of testing empirically the symbolism Blake used artistically.¹²⁶ In Boehme's

time, magic was a serious study closely allied to alchemy and not as yet declared anathema by theology or science. Martensen, using the same rationale as Adams, related magic to Boehme's mysticism:

What Mysticism is with regard to the soul's relation to God, Magic is with regard to the mind's relation to Nature. Just as Mysticism seeks to place itself in direct relation to God without means, so Magic seeks to penetrate the mysteries of Nature without material means.¹²⁷

Following the doctrines of Paracelsus, a sixteenth-century physician, Boehme believed that men could discover a universal cure, a "philosopher's stone" which could effect magical transformations. Boehme called such men "magi" and maintained that the way to discovery of the magic cure lay in living an exemplary Christian life. In Signatura Rerum Boehme questioned the reader, "Now wilt thou become a Magus?" He counseled that the man who would be a magus must first love his neighbor: "Thou must become the Samaritan, otherwise, thou canst not heal the wounded and decayed" (Sig. Rerum 7-36). Next Boehme queries, "Now wilt thou be a Magus? Thou must understand how to change the Night against the Day; for the Source of the Night . . . is the Anguish-Source of Death; ~~and~~ the Source of the Day . . . is the Life" (Sig. Rerum 7-38). Finally, Boehme decreed that the magus must be baptized and do wonders in Christ (Sig. Rerum 7-43). According to Windelband's assessment: "The introduction of this magical view of Nature into the subtle religious system of German Mysticism constitutes the peculiar feature of Boehme's philosophy."¹²⁸

This doctrine of the "philosopher's stone" links Boehme's ideas to alchemy, another interest of Yeats during the period beginning in 1887. One of the probable sources of the poet's knowledge of this arcane art was the works of Arthur E. Waite, a fellow member of the Golden Dawn¹²⁹ and author of a number of books on occult and mystical subjects, including Elfin Magic: An Anthology of English Fairy Poetry (1888), The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Aureolus Phillipus Theophrastus Bombast (1894), Studies in Mysticism (1906), The Pictorial Key to the Tarot (1911), and The Holy Kabbalah (1929).¹³⁰ T.L. Dume substantiated Yeats's reading in Waite's works The Mysteries of Magic (1886) and Lives of the Alchemystical Philosophers (1888).¹³¹ The latter book, which includes a section on Boehme, indicates by the title the direction from which both Yeats and Boehme approached alchemy. Waite explained that Boehme's knowledge of alchemy derived from the smattering of contemporary chemical theory acquired during his apprenticeship at Görlitz, which by 1580 had become a center of alchemy,¹³² but the shoemaker conveyed his vision by using "Hermetic terminology" in a transformed, spiritual sense.¹³³ Waite actually credited Boehme with opening the archives of alchemy to succeeding ages:

After the publication of the psycho-chemical philosophy of the illuminated shoemaker of Görlitz, the adepts are believed to have despaired of any longer retaining their secrets, and in their own writings they began to speak more freely.¹³⁴

Following a similar line of reasoning Stoudt concluded, "The inner decay of alchemy began, not with the Enlightenment, but with Jacob Boehme."¹³⁵

Because of the common sources of alchemical information which Yeats and Boehme shared, it is impossible to do more than speculate on what elements Yeats encountered first in Boehme. In Swan and Shadow Thomas Whitaker, for instance, credited Yeats's reading of Boehme with the growth of the poet's understanding that "Oisín's journey was a symbol for the alchemical rota or opus circulatorium, the cyclical transformation of the four elements, the four seasons, and other quaternities."¹³⁶ This perception of the possibility of the perfectibility of human life is an example of a concept which both the mystic and the poet could have reached independently, prior to any specific knowledge of alchemical theories. In A Vision Yeats acknowledged Boehme as his source for the term "tincture,"¹³⁷ an alchemical term which was not original to Boehme.¹³⁸ Like Yeats, Boehme adapted the vocabulary of this forerunner of modern science to his own purposes.

"Do not take me for an alchymist," Boehme admonished in Aurora (22-104), but many passages of his writings lean heavily upon alchemical concepts. For example, in Clavis the mystic explained the system of the "ancients:"

They understand by Salt, the sharp Magnetical Desire of Nature; and by Mercury, they mean the Motion and Separation of Nature, by which every thing is figured with its own signature; and by Sulphur, they mean the perceiving (sensible) willing, and growing Life. (Clavis 83)

Boehme's reliance on alchemical terminology led one Lutheran theologian to the accusation that Boehme's God was nothing but sulphuric acid.¹³⁹

Boehme's difficulty, which Yeats could well have appreciated, lay in the absence of a suitable vocabulary to express his individual vision. Examining Yeats's alchemical references in an article entitled "W.B. Yeats: Artist or Alchemist?" Robert Schuler concluded that Yeats, like Boehme, adopted the terminology and some of the underlying assumptions of traditional alchemy only insofar as they confirmed his own perceptions.¹⁴⁰

Stoudt referred to Carl Jung's evaluation of alchemy for an explanation of Boehme's connection with that ancient wisdom. Jung maintained that alchemy provided an alternative to theological orthodoxy. He asserted that alchemy had existed for seventeen hundred years as what Stoudt called "a dialectical undercurrent to dominant rational theology." Stoudt analyzed the attraction of alchemy for Boehme as related to this freedom it afforded from the strictures of the increasing formalization and codification of the Lutheran Church of the sixteenth century.¹⁴¹ Thus, it is possible to infer that the fragments of arcane wisdom which Boehme, like Yeats, extracted from various associations with traditions such as Theosophy, alchemy, and cabalism provided both the mystic and the poet with what Ellmann characterized as "a point of view which had the virtue of warring with accepted beliefs, and of warring enthusiastically and authoritatively."¹⁴²

Waite inserted into his edition of Lives of Alchemystical Philosophers a poem by an unidentified author which credits Boehme with powers of synthesis of diverse traditions which Yeats could not have failed to appreciate, since most of the arcane disciplines into which Yeats delved during the "Trembling of the Veil" period are drawn together:

Whate'er the Eastern Magi sought
 Or Orpheus sung, or Hermes taught,
 Whate'er Confucious could inspire,
 Or Zoraster's mystic fire;
 The symbols that Pythagoras drew
 The wisdom God-like Plato knew;
 What Socrates debating proved,
 Or Epictetus lived and loved;
 The sacred fire of saint and sage
 Through every clime, in every age,
 In Behmen's wondrous page we view
 Discovered and revealed anew.
 'Aurora' dawned the coming day:
 Succeeding books meridian light display.
 Ten thousand depths his works explore,
 Ten thousand truths unknown before.
 Through all his books profound we trace
 The abyss of nature, GOD, and grace;
 The seals are broke, the mystery's past,
 And all is now revealed at last.
 The trumpet sounds, the Spirit's given,
 And Behmen is the voice from Heaven.¹⁴³

Franz Hartmann, a contemporary of Yeats whose similarity of interests is shown by the studies he published, including Report of Observations Made During a Nine Months' Stay at the Headquarters of the Theosophical Society (1884), Magic, White and Black (1886), Adventures among the Rosicrucians (1887), Cosmology (1888), and The Life and Doctrines of Phillippus Theophrastus (1891), discovered points of correspondence between Boehme and diverse esoteric traditions. In his 1891 work The Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme, claiming to have "carefully

compared the doctrines of Boehme with those of the Eastern sages, as laid down in the 'Secret Doctrine,'" Hartmann noted "the most remarkable harmony between them."¹⁴⁵

Boehme held an advantage over many of the "Discoverers of forgotten truth" whom Yeats encountered during the last part of the nineteenth century in that he remained an established figure within the mainstream of Western thought. In 1929 Yeats wrote of the necessity of maintaining associations with respected schools of thought. "I feel that an imaginative writer whose work draws him to philosophy must attach himself to some great historic school," Yeats told T. Sturge Moore. "My dreams and much psychic phenomena force me into a certain little-trodden way," he admitted, "but I must not go too far from the main European track,"¹⁴⁶ and C. Maurice Bowra remembered Yeats's insistence that "one can only explain oneself if one draws one's illustrations from accepted schools of thought." In Memories Bowra quoted Yeats as saying, "Unaccepted schools, however profound, are incomplete because isolated from the rest of knowledge."¹⁴⁷ Jacob Boehme was apparently one explicator of "forgotten truth" whom Yeats considered both "acceptable" and profound.

"A Great Book Beautifully Named"

Besides being one of the most inclusive and respectable sources, Boehme had the additional virtue of having communicated his ideas in a form Yeats could readily appreciate. In his study

of Yeats's readings during the 1880's and 1890's, Thomas Dume speculated,

Perhaps because Boehme and Swedenborg were the most reputable--or the most poetic--mystics, from a literary standpoint, whom Yeats was reading during those years, we find their names mentioned by him most frequently.¹⁴⁸

In 1894 Yeats named Boehme's seminal work in a letter to Olivia Shakespear. He evaluated "The Morning Redness by Jacob Boehme" as "a great book beautifully named."¹⁴⁹ This assessment suggests that Yeats's reading of Boehme had satisfied two major criteria--that it measured up to the poet's standard for both content and form.

"Beautiful" is hardly the first word that comes to mind to describe Boehme's writing. All commentators on Boehme begin by bemoaning the irregularity and obscurity of his style, but most conclude, as Yeats did, that Boehme's insights are worth the "athletic" effort required to reach them.¹⁵⁰ In a Preface to one edition of True Resignation Hermann Neander speculated that Boehme's "obscure" style and his "antique scientific nomenclature" accounted for the lack of general interest in his works. But, Neander offered, "Those who take the trouble to wade through the depths will feel well repaid."¹⁵¹ William Fairweather, author of Among the Mystics, enumerated the "recognized defects" in Boehme--"his verbose and turgid style, his impetuous vehemence, his singular nomenclature, his speculative and theosophic extravagances, his incoherent jumbling together of chemical and astrological processes with religious truths." Yet Fairweather

concluded too, "He certainly rendered signal service by his sincere endeavour to quicken the spiritual life of the Church of the Reformation, and to furnish it with a philosophic basis."¹⁵²

It is interesting to note that many who attempt to describe Boehme's writing do so by comparing it to solid physical objects or places, an unusual way of conceptualizing a piece of writing. Boutroux called Boehme's work "a dazzling chaos."¹⁵³ Brinton compared it to a Gothic cathedral, "elaborate, irregular, exquisite, grotesque, but always towering over men's common habitations and pointing to the sky."¹⁵⁴ In The Meaning of Mysticism Woodbridge Riley compared Boehme's works to a Dürer etching and a "Wagnerian nightmare," saying the works were "about as far away . . . from the Greek quest of the absolute good, true and beautiful, as a madhouse is from the groves of Academe."¹⁵⁵ Yeats, who denounced "abstract Greek absurdity" ("Ribh Denounces Patrick," Var., p. 556), may have found the difference refreshing. Martensen wrote: "Amid [Boehme's] diffuse explanations and descriptions the reader gains only too frequently the impression of a vast, wind-swept, and roaring forest, wherein he can neither understand nor hear a word."¹⁵⁶

The consensus is that reading Boehme is an experience unlike that of reading any other writer. This distinction arises from the fact that the sixteenth-century shoemaker was attempting something innovative, something which apparently appealed to Yeats himself as a young poet trying to forge new paths. Unlike Swedenborg and other mystics who were concerned primarily with conveying information gained through their special insights,

Boehme conveyed not only the content but also the sense of his experience. Stoudt wrote, "Even though his theology was gained as gnosis in mystical experience, what Boehme sought to share was not the knowledge but the experience which had produced it."¹⁵⁷ In Biographia Literaria Coleridge defended Boehme and his followers against those who attacked their style: "They could write orthographically, make smooth periods, and had fashions of authorship almost literally at their fingers' ends, while [Boehme and the others], in simplicity of soul made their words immediate echoes of their feelings."¹⁵⁸

This attempt to convey feeling accounts for the impression noted by Boehme's readers of having been transported to strange regions. There are moments in Boehme's works in which the reader sees as in a lightning flash, where familiar territory grows strange because illuminated by the light of another world. Brinton explained that the difference arose from the unique way in which Boehme used language. Using the term "empsychosis," borrowed from George Stratton's Psychology of Religious Life (1911), to describe Boehme's technique, he explained, "Boehme's writings are ideographic rather than graphic."¹⁵⁹ "Empsychosis," as Stratton defined it, "is different from imagination in the technical meaning of the word, since the materials used for its products are drawn not from the senses, but from our invisible life of sentiment and purpose."¹⁶⁰ Thus, it is possible to understand empsychosis as a kind of "imageless imagination."¹⁶¹ Few writers have mastered the technique of evoking a region which a receptive reader recognizes, not because it is related to his



experiences in the physical world, but because of the aspects it shares with worlds he has visited in dreams. Dante achieved this feat, Milton approached it in some passages of Paradise Lost. Coleridge's Kubla Khan and Christabel transport the reader to other realms, and certain of Blake's works produce this effect of a waking dream world. The best examples of such an effect in Yeats are the Byzantium poems (1927 and 1929), "The Second Coming" (1920), and "Supernatural Songs" (1934). In "What Magic Drum?," Part VII of "Supernatural Songs," for example, the poet asks,

Through light-obliterating garden foliage what
magic drum?
Down limb and breast or down that glimmering
belly move his mouth and sinewy tongue.
What from the forest came? What beast has
licked its young? (Var., p. 560)

Yeats certainly had the painter's ability to depict a forest scene in vivid visual detail had that been his purpose. "What Magic Drum?" presents no picture to the eye of the reader's mind; instead the dominant impression is of conflicting feelings, an awareness of a mixture of terror, wonder and awe.

Not coincidentally, all the poets listed above (with the possible exception of Coleridge), who share with Boehme an ability to leap beyond the physical into the realm of spiritual awareness, were also the poets who shaped an entire mythology from which to people and structure their newly created worlds. In A History of Modern Philosophy (1955) Harold Höffding explained that Boehme used "Biblical and alchymectic ideas, often in quaint, but frequently also in fine, poetical combinations" to

produce "a whole world drama."¹⁶² Hartmann used a footnote to explain the special way in which Boehme's writing must be approached, not as a literal account but as a mythological rendering of his world view:

If we take of the history of redemption the ordinary theological view, and regard it as the work of an extracosmic God, . . . it becomes at once absurd and incredible; but if we look at it in its true light; namely, as an allegory describing an intracosmic process going on in the body of macrocosmic and microcosmic man, it then becomes intelligible.¹⁶³

With the same reasoning by which Hartmann concluded that Boehme's works were not theology in its strictest sense, Berdyaev concluded that they were not traditional philosophy: "He was never a philosopher in the school sense of the word; above all else he was a visionary theosopher and a creator of myths."¹⁶⁴

Fredrick Schlegel, one of the chain of German philosophers influenced by Boehme,¹⁶⁵ placed the mystic's handling of mythology above Plato's, saying, "Boehme throughout adopted the poetic point of view; in this respect no other philosophy compares with his; none has such a wealth of allegory and symbolic meaning."¹⁶⁶ Similarly, Paul Tillich, a leading theologian of the twentieth century, praised Boehme for his innovative use of language, which "mirrors speculative vision, mystical experience, psychological insight, and alchemist traditions." Tillich advised Protestant theologians that they would be better able "to penetrate the ontological implications of the Christian symbols"

through a study of Boehme's writings than by the traditional approach through Aristotle.¹⁶⁷

In the 1903 essay "William Blake and the Imagination" Yeats called Blake "a man crying out for a mythology, and trying to make one because he could not find one to his hand."¹⁶⁸ Yeats must have recognized this struggle for a mythology as a common element in Boehme and Blake, for in 1893 he connected the seers as two "of those great artificers of God." Boehme and Swedenborg, Yeats wrote, "drew their symbols from theology and alchemy and [Blake drew his] from the flowers of spring and the leaves of summer; but the message is the same." The message Yeats read in Boehme and Blake was "the truth God spake to the red clay at the beginning of the world."¹⁶⁹

The essence of Boehme's symbolism, the way by which he developed his mythology, is his theory of the "language of nature." Franz Hartmann attributed Boehme's command of the "language of nature" to "occult powers."¹⁷⁰ Boehme himself gave credence to such a supernatural source in a letter to Dr. Christianus Steenberger:

Concerning the language of nature, I certify to you that it is so; but what I understand in it, I cannot teach or give another; indeed I can give a signification thereof, how it is to be understood; but it requireth much room, and there must be a personal conference and intercourse in it, it is not to be set down in writing.¹⁷¹

Yeats recognized this element in Blake and based his analysis of that poet's Prophetic Books upon Boehme's "symbolic alphabet."

In The Works of William Blake Yeats explained:

The symbolic meaning of the words is, however, a question of greater importance [than their derivation]. It is possible to discover in them a symbolic alphabet such as could hardly help suggesting itself to a student of Boehme and his "language of nature. . . ."172

Kermode extended Boehme's influence to the French Symbolists on the basis that "The whole poetic movement was to a striking degree hermetic; the occult tradition, notably as mediated by Boehme and Swedenborg, lies behind it as it lies behind Blake."173 Kermode's connection of the French Symbolist movement with Blake and Boehme substantiates both Robert O'Driscoll's contention in Symbolism and Some Implications of the Symbolic Approach that Yeats "found in symboliste theory and practice only the corroboration for discoveries he had already made in his study of Blake and the occult"174 and Yeats's 1915 statement that his "interest in mystic symbolism" dated from 1887, when he started studying the medieval mystics, not from "Arthur Symonds or any other contemporary writer."175

Yeats's approach to Blake through this mystical language was the basis of critical attacks on the Yeats-Ellis edition of The Works of William Blake. Estimations of the Blake work suffered from the same critical prejudices which affected evaluations of the mystical and occult elements of Yeats's creative writing. An interpretation of a poet through reference to arcane systems was outside the usual province of literary scholarship, which has a language of its own for literary criticism. In Yeats's account of the inception of the idea to co-edit the works of Blake he recalled that Ellis had shown him an interpretation

of one of Blake's poems. Yeats recognized Ellis' insight as "the foundation of all study of the philosophy of William Blake that requires an exact knowledge for its pursuit and that traces the connection between his system and that of Swedenborg or Boehme."¹⁷⁶

The problem was, as Kathleen Raine wrote in Defending Ancient Springs, that the "exact knowledge" to which Yeats referred was a "learning of the imagination."¹⁷⁷

Yeats differed from most literary scholars, moreover, in that he was primarily a creative artist. In 1935 Yeats refused Maurice Wollman's request for an interpretation of "The Death of the Hare" on the grounds that an author's interpretation would limit the "suggestibility" of the poem.¹⁷⁸ This view that a work of art should be autonomous, allowing freedom of individual interpretation, underlay Yeats's approach to the work of a fellow poet as early as 1893. Thus, Yeats's use of Boehme's "language of nature" as the key to Blake's work should not draw such criticism as that of Northrop Frye, who in "Yeats and the Language of Symbolism" called the Yeats-Ellis Blake "an over-schematized commentary . . . still further confused by centrifugal expositions of Boehme and Swedenborg."¹⁷⁹ The references to Boehme are integral parts of the overall work, which help to develop a unified thesis by which to illuminate Blake's work and which also provide valuable insights into the system which Yeats developed for himself.

Boehme's mystic language works from a system of correspondences. In his interpretation of Blake, Yeats provided the clearest differentiation of Boehme's theory of correspondences:

A "correspondence," for the very reason that it is implicit rather than explicit, says far more than a syllogism or a scientific observation. The chief difference between metaphors of poetry and the symbols of mysticism is that the latter are woven together into a complete system.¹⁸⁰

Yeats's treatment of the language of nature in the Blake study is based upon two ways in which correspondence operates-- through the essence of the word itself and by association of a natural object with the spiritual reality it signifies. Boehme complained of the misunderstandings which result from literal, or purely rational, interpretations of the Bible:

Our learned Ones term themselves Doctors and Masters, and yet none of them understands his Mother Tongue . . . they use only the bare contrived Form of the gross compounded Words, and understand not what the Word is in its Sense.
(Mys. Mag. 35-61)

Full comprehension of the meaning of a word requires attention to the sound of the word as well as knowledge of its definition. Yeats explained, "Sound is the least material of the symbols, because it exists in time only, not in space, that is why it is the most natural expression of emotional nature." He gave this quality of sound as the basis for the "doctrine of incantation" and noted, "The names of Blake's personages are incantations of this nature, as are also the various Hebrew names of God and of the angels according both [sic] to Boehmen, Swedenborg, and the Kabalists."¹⁸¹

In Clavis Boehme worked through the significance of the name Jehova on the basis of this symbolism of sound:

- 33. For I is the Effluence of the Eternal indivisible Unity, or the sweet grace and fullness of the ground of the Divine Power of becoming something.
- 34. E is a threefold I, where the Trinity shuts itself up in the Unity,; for the I goes into E, and joineth IE; which is an outbreathing of the Unity in itself.
- 35. H is the Word, or breathing of the Trinity of God.
- 36. O is the Circumference, or the Son of God, through which the IE and the H, or breathing, speaks forth from the compressed Delight of the Power and Virtue.
- 37. V is the joyful Effluence from the breathing, that is, the proceeding Spirit of God.
- 38. A is that which is proceeded from the power and virtue, viz. the wisdom; a Subject of the Trinity; wherein the Trinity works, and wherein the Trinity is also manifest.
(Clavis 33-38)

Similarly, Yeats suggested the implications of some of the letter sounds in Blake:

M or N or on - maternal or at least dark sound
 Th. L - water, with all symbolic uses
 S. Z. - between water and fire;--light fire
 o. u. - dark vowels
 a, e, i - light vowels. 182

Yeats may have had such a sound system in mind when he considered the title of "An Alphabet" for Per Amica Silentia Lunae. 183

The second aspect of Boehme's language of nature as Yeats understood it is based on the theory expounded in The Signature of All Things, which begins, "All whatever is spoken, written, or taught of God, without the Knowledge of the Signature is dumb and void of Understanding; for it proceeds only from an historical

Conjecture, from the Mouth of another" (Sig. Rerum 1-1). And the Author's Preface to Mysterium Magnum begins, "When we consider the visible World, with its Essence, and the Life of the Creatures, then we find therein the Likeness of the invisible spiritual world" (Mys. Mag., Preface, v. 1). In "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places" Yeats likewise used the term "signature" for "the forms that we see and which are related to the realities we cannot see."¹⁸⁴

Yeats's most significant use of the term "signature" appeared in his 1897 essay "William Blake and his Illustrations to the Divine Comedy." In this essay Yeats proclaimed, "True art is expensive and symbolic, and makes every form, every sound, every colour, every gesture, a signature of some unanalysable imaginative essence."¹⁸⁵ The similarities between Yeats's definition of art and Boehme's defense of the language of nature are inescapable. In Mysterium Magnum Boehme had written:

All the Powers, Colours, and Virtues lie in one: and it is a distinct, mutual, well-tuned Pregnant Harmony; or, as I might say, a Speaking Word. In which Word or Speaking all Speeches, Powers, Colours, and Virtues are contained, and with the Pronouncing or Speaking they unfold themselves, and bring themselves into Sight and Observation. (Mys. Mag. 1-7)

Both Boehme and Yeats considered recognition of the language of nature the essential component of a work of the imagination. In the first chapter of The Signature of All Things Boehme wrote:

Therefore the greatest Understanding lies in the Signature, wherein Man . . . may not only learn to know himself, but therein also he may learn to know the Essence of all Essences; for by the external Form of all Creatures . . . the hidden Spirit is known; for Nature has given to every Thing its Language according to its Essence and Form.

Every Thing has its Mouth to Manifestation; and this is the Language of Nature, whence every Thing speaks out of its Property. (Sig. Rerum 1-14-15)

Boehme's insistence on the living word sounds remarkably like the explanation Yeats gave in the first volume of the Blake study--"Poetry puts on nature that nature may be revealed as the great storehouse of symbolism, without which language is dumb."¹⁸⁶

Although Yeats used Boehme's language of nature for his interpretation of Blake, he understandably preferred the form of his fellow poet over that of the sixteenth-century German. In an 1893 review of Laurence Housman's Selections from the Writings of William Blake Yeats defended Blake's style by comparing the poet's writings with Boehme's Mysterium Magnum. In this review Yeats praised Blake's expression over that of the German mystic, saying that Blake "cast his mysticism into a form which, however chaotic . . . , was in every way more beautiful than the form chosen by Swedenborg or Boehme."¹⁸⁷ In 1896, however, Yeats again compared Blake's work with Boehme's, in this instance apparently valuing the content, if not the technique, of Boehme's writing above that of Blake. In a review of Richard Garnett's William Blake, Yeats declared that Blake's "Urizen" was "page by page a transformation, according to Blake's peculiar illumination,

of the doctrines set forth in the opening chapters of the 'Mysterium Magnum' of Jacob Boehme; yet none so certain of their opinion as they, none so sweeping in statement."¹⁸⁸

The most comprehensive treatment of Boehme's doctrines in The Works of William Blake which Ellis and Yeats edited is contained in the section entitled "The Symbolic System." It would appear from claims made by Yeats that he was the one responsible for the material in that section. In January, 1891, Yeats wrote to John O'Leary that he was working hard on the Blake study and that he had to keep up with it so that Ellis would not "attack [Yeats's] province with horse, foot, and artillery." Apparently, the links with Boehme's mysticism were Yeats's "province," for he told O'Leary: "Ellis is magnificent within his limits but threatens to overthrow them, and beyond them he is useless through lack of mystical knowledge."¹⁸⁹ And in June of that year Yeats informed Katharine Tynan that he had written "a very important essay called 'The necessity of symbolism' for the book on Blake."¹⁹⁰ That claim corroborates Yeats's assertion written into his personal copy of the Blake edition in 1900 that the "greater part of the 'symbolic system'" was authored by him.

Yeats's fullest exposition of Boehme's system is contained in the second section of "The Symbolic System," five pages entitled "The Three Persons and the Mirror." Beginning from the premise that Blake's understanding of the foundation and functioning of the universe is "almost identical" to that of Boehme,¹⁹¹ Yeats presented an outline of their shared system which is as

much an explanation of Boehme as of Blake and which details in embryonic form the organization which underlies Yeats's poetry.

As Yeats explained, Boehme held that the universe "arose from the divine unity, . . . by a process of division and subdivision." Boehme conceived of the beginning of all life as a dark chaos, an abyss, an unground. This root of all things, Yeats wrote, "is that represented by the circle containing the triangle of the ancient mystics."¹⁹² Although Yeats did not mention it in the Blake work, he must have been aware of the particular significance of the way the concept is represented in Boehme's work. Law's first diagram shows the triangle enclosed in a spiral, a "vortex,"¹⁹³ emphasizing the dynamic element of Boehme's evolutionary process. (See Appendix, Figure I.) In this abyss there was originally nothing but a Will, which is directed nowhere, for there is nothing other than itself to aid consciousness. The most concise statement of this insight could be the revelation spoken by Martin Hearn in Unicorn from the Stars: "Where there is nothing--there is God!"¹⁹⁴

Yeats explained that the view of Blake and Boehme differed from the traditional Christian view of the first cause in their postulation of "besides the Trinity a fourth principle." This principle, a female figure, is identified by Boehme as a mirror or "looking-glass" of God.¹⁹⁵ Yeats's outline of Boehme's theogonic process by which the directionless Will diversifies into a Triune Unity rivals any other summary of Boehme's thought in conciseness, clarity, and accuracy. Yeats explained that

God looking into this mirror [the fourth principle] ceases to be mere will, beholds Himself as the Son, His love for his own unity, His self-consciousness, and enters on that eternal meditation about Himself which is called the Holy Spirit.¹⁹⁶

Yeats's explanation of the inner life of the Trinity parallels, in rhythms and spacing as well as terminology, the way in which Boehme detailed the process in Clavis:

The Will is the Father, that is, the stirring desire, and the Delight is the Son, that is, the virtue and the working of the will, with which the will worketh, and the Holy Ghost is the proceeding will through the Delight of the virtue, that is, a Life of the will, and of the virtue and delight. (Clavis 22)

At this point all is as yet potentiality. As Yeats expressed it, "At first the thought-forms subsist and move in this universal 'imagination which liveth for ever' without being manifest to themselves and each other as separate individualities, not being lives but thoughts of the universal life."¹⁹⁷ Just as the original will required a mirror image to desire, so this universal life must fashion a contrary, through the mirror, so that manifestation can be possible through the interaction between the two. Yeats wrote that Boehme called this contrary of the universal life "Desire" and that Boehme blamed this desire for the fall into physical life.¹⁹⁸ Actually, Boehme placed an intermediate stage between the Trinity and physical nature. The triad representing the universal life forms a contrary known as eternal nature. These two triads plus their conjunction form Boehme's "Seven Properties of God." These whirling triads plus the lightning flash, the quality which binds them, form one

eternal unit. This unit in turn generates its own contrary, and it is within that entity that Boehme admits the possibility of evil. This is the sphere of the "reaction of man against God" to which Yeats referred.¹⁹⁹ Yielding to what Boehme called the "astringent Desire" on this level causes a drawing inward. The results Yeats described are a withdrawal from the universal life and immersion in physicality, a closing off from the "freedom" of the imagination, and multiplicity in place of unity.²⁰⁰ "The Second Coming" (1920) could be an apt diagrammatic representation of the process if the falcon is read as the errant desire of physical nature which spirals into uncontrolled diversity:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. . . .
(Var., pp. 401-2)

As Yeats explained, Boehme viewed all existence as a constant struggle between this urge toward multiplicity and the counter urge toward unity.²⁰¹ The process Yeats outlined in "The Three Persons and the Mirror" operates both eternally and infinitely. Every life process duplicates the contrary pulls and resultant motion of the original first triad. The initial step in the process is the projection of the imagination upon the mirror of wisdom.

FOOTNOTES

¹Letters, p. 262. To W.T. Horton, April 30, 1896.

²Letters, p. 262.

³Autobiography, p. 226.

⁴Quoted in Michael MacLiammoir and Eavan Boland, W.B. Yeats and His World (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 11.

⁵Autobiography, p. 13.

⁶Letters, p. 499. To Florence Farr, October 7, 1907.

⁷Moore, The Unicorn, Title of Chapter I, pp. 1-5.

⁸Richard Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Masks (New York: Macmillan, 1948; rpt. New York: E.P. Dutton, n.d.), p. 24.

⁹Ellmann, The Man and the Masks, p. 23.

¹⁰Ellmann, The Man and the Masks, p. 11.

¹¹John Butler Yeats, Letters to His Son W.B. Yeats and Others, 1869-1922, ed. Joseph Hone (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1946), p. 48.

¹²Autobiography, p. 25.

¹³Autobiography, p. 25.

¹⁴Autobiography, p. 23.

¹⁵Autobiography, p. 101.

¹⁶Variorum Poems, p. 819.

¹⁷T.R. Henn, The Lonely Tower, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 111.

¹⁸W.B. Yeats, Mythologies (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1959), p. 98.

¹⁹Autobiography, p. 17.

²⁰Autobiography, p. 219.

²¹Letters, p. 552. To Lily Yeats, September 26, 1910.

²²W.B. Yeats, "Gods and Fighting Men" in Explorations, ed. Mrs. W.B. Yeats (1962; rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1973), p. 23.

²³"Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places," p. 295.

²⁴"Swedenborg," p. 296.

²⁵"If I were Four-and-Twenty" in Explorations, p. 263.

²⁶"A Ballad Singer" in Letters to the New Island, p. 138.

²⁷W.B. Yeats, ed., Poems of William Blake (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893), p. xli-ii.

²⁸"The Dominion of Dreams" in Uncollected Prose, II, 165.

²⁹Mythologies, p. 64.

³⁰Autobiography, p. 101. See page 5 above.

³¹Autobiography, p. 101.

³²Mythologies, p. 7.

³³Letters to the New Island, p. 101.

³⁴Dwight Eddins, Yeats: The Nineteenth Century Matrix (University: University of Alabama Press, 1971).

³⁵Hans L. Martensen, Jacob Boehme, trans. T. Rhys Evans, (1885), rev. ed., Stephen Hobhouse (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 3.

³⁶Martensen, p. xxiv.

³⁷Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, p. 70.

³⁸Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, p. 126.

³⁹Epistles, p. 161. Epistle 20-29.

⁴⁰Epistles, p. 213. Epistle 35-7.

⁴¹Quoted in Law's account of Boehme's life in The Works of Jacob Boehme, p. xii.

⁴²Howard H. Brinton, The Mystic Will: Based on a Study of the Philosophy of Jacob Boehme (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. x.

⁴³Uncollected Prose, II, 144.

⁴⁴Brinton, p. 41.

⁴⁵Nicolas Berdyaev, "Unground and Freedom," Introductory essay to Jacob Boehme, Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings, trans. John R. Earle (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), p. v.

⁴⁶Brinton, p. 41.

⁴⁷Brinton, p. 41.

⁴⁸Letters, p. 261. To W.T. Horton, April 30, 1896.

⁴⁹The Second Apologie in Answer to Balthazar Tylcken 2-298, in Remainder of Books written by Jacob Boehme, p. 53, also quoted in Rufus M. Jones, Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries (New York: Macmillan Co., 1914; rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 170.

⁵⁰Epistles, p. 128. Epistle 12-7.

- 51 John Joseph Stoudt, Intro., The Way to Christ, by Jacob Boehme, trans. John Joseph Stoudt (London: John M. Watkins, 1953), p. xxxvi.
- 52 Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, p. 67.
- 53 W. Windelband, A History of Philosophy, trans. James H. Tufts (New York: Macmillan Co., 1893), p. 365.
- 54 Windelband, p. 374.
- 55 William James, The Varieties of Religious Experiences (1902, Longmans, Green and Company; rpt. New York: Modern Library, 1936), p. 414.
- 56 James, p. 422.
- 57 Martensen, p. 27.
- 58 W.B. Yeats, Intro., Patanjali, Aphorisms of Yoga, trans. Swami Shri Purohit (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), p. 20.
- 59 Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, p. 61.
- 60 Brinton, p. 41.
- 61 Letters, p. 434. To A.E. (George Russell), April, 1904.
- 62 W.B. Yeats, Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 126. Letter of December 23, 1936.
- 63 B.L. Reid, William Butler Yeats: The Lyric of Tragedy (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), p. 161.
- 64 Epistles, p. 207. Epistle 33-25.
- 65 Frederick Heibel, Novalis (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), p. 33.
- 66 Quoted in Heibel, p. 45.
- 67 Frederick E. Pierce, Currents and Eddies in the English Romantic Generation (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1972), p. 307.

⁶⁸Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 5.

⁶⁹Pierce, p. 55.

⁷⁰Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Essays on His Times, ed. David Erdman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), I, 345.

⁷¹Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 573.

⁷²Caroline Spurgeon, Mysticism in English Literature (Cambridge: University Press, 1913), p. 28.

⁷³Margaret Sherwood, Undercurrents of Influence in English Romantic Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), pp. 37 & 168, 169, 130, 348-9.

⁷⁴"Boehme had great influence upon the theology of the seventeenth century and some on modern German philosophy." Yeats, Introduction to Aphorisms of Yoga, p. 20.

⁷⁵Samuel Enoch Stumpf, Socrates to Sartre (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 328-9.

⁷⁶George Berkeley, Commonplace Book, quoted in James Hall and Martin Steinmann, The Permanence of Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950), p. 55. Yeats expressed his admiration for this line from Berkeley in Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1944), p. 14.

⁷⁷Berdyaev, p. xxxiii.

⁷⁸Stumpf, pp. 327-44, 375-85.

⁷⁹Yeats-Moore Correspondence, p. 117. Letter written shortly after December 23, 1927.

⁸⁰Quoted in Franz Hartmann, The Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme, the God-Taught Philosopher (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1891), p. 31.

⁸¹Quoted in Hartmann, pp. 31-2.

⁸²Yeats, Letters, p. 922. To Lady Elizabeth Pelham, January 4, 1939.

⁸³Autobiography, p. 79.

⁸⁴One notable exception is Virginia Moore's The Unicorn. Moore stated in her foreword that the areas she investigated were "virgin territory" in 1953. Despite her extensive research, the regions she explored remained virtually undeveloped for the following twenty years.

⁸⁵Daniel Albright, The Myth against Myth (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 39.

⁸⁶Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 3.

⁸⁷Ellmann, Identity, p. 216.

⁸⁸Oliver St. John Gogarty, William Butler Yeats: A Memoir (Dublin: Dolman Press, 1963), p. 12.

⁸⁹Letters, p. 351. To Lady Gregory, May 21, 1901.

⁹⁰Letters to the New Island, p. 40.

⁹¹Donald Stauffer, The Golden Nightingale (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), pp. 8-9.

⁹²Hazard Adams, Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision (Ithaca, New York: Cornell U. Press, 1955; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1968), p. 141.

⁹³Henn, p. 149.

⁹⁴See page 2 above.

⁹⁵Autobiography, p. 151.

⁹⁶See page 5 above.

⁹⁷Autobiography, pp. 151-2.

⁹⁸Autobiography, pp. 158-9.

⁹⁹Letters, p. 160. To John O'Leary, November, 1890.

¹⁰⁰Martensen, p. 16.

¹⁰¹Harbans Rai Bachchan, W.B. Yeats and Occultism (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), p. 21.

¹⁰²Martensen, p. 19.

¹⁰³Helena P. Blavatsky, Collected Writings 1879-1880 (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1950), I, 99.

¹⁰⁴See page vii above.

¹⁰⁵Helena P. Blavatsky, The Key to Theosophy (Covina, California: Theosophical University Press, 1889), p. 3.

¹⁰⁶Blavatsky, Key to Theosophy, p. 321.

¹⁰⁷Blavatsky, Key to Theosophy, p. 323.

¹⁰⁸Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, xi.

¹⁰⁹Emile Boutroux, Historical Studies in Philosophy (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), p. 169.

¹¹⁰G.W. Allen, Intro., The Threefold Life of Man, trans. J. Sparrow, p. xiv.

¹¹¹William Law, Introductory material to The Works of Jacob Boehme, I, p. viii.

¹¹²Ellmann, The Man and the Masks, p. 68.

¹¹³Autobiography, p. 160.

¹¹⁴Hone, p. 75.

¹¹⁵Autobiography, p. 160.

¹¹⁶Kathleen Raine, Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn, New Yeats Papers, II (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1972), p. 6.

¹¹⁷For a complete account, see George Mills Harper, Yeats's Golden Dawn (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

¹¹⁸Letters, p. 340. To Lady Gregory, April 25, 1900.

¹¹⁹Letters, p. 341. To Lady Gregory, April 28, 1900.

¹²⁰Moore, The Unicorn, p. 147.

¹²¹John Senior, The Way Down and Out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1959), p. 157.

¹²²Henn, p. 157.

¹²³Richard Ellmann, "W.B. Yeats, Magician," Western Review, 12 (Summer, 1948), 232-240.

¹²⁴Quoted in Henn, p. 150.

¹²⁵Autobiography, p. 254.

¹²⁶Adams, p. 55.

¹²⁷Martensen, p. 22.

¹²⁸Windelband, pp. 373-4.

¹²⁹Moore documented Waite's membership in the Golden Dawn beginning "around 1900," The Unicorn, p. 133.

¹³⁰Arthur Edward Waite, Elfin Magic: An Anthology of English Fairy Poetry (London: W. Scott, 1888); The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Aureolus Phillipus Theophrastus Bombast (London: J. Elliott, 1894); Studies in Mysticism (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906); The Pictorial Key to the Tarot (London: W. Rider, 1911); The Holy Kabbalah (London: Williams and Norgate, 1929).

¹³¹Arthur E. Waite, The Mysteries of Magic (London: n.p., 1886); Lives of the Alchemistical Philosophers (London: G. Redway, 1887). Cited in Dume, pp. 131-2.

¹³²Stoudt, p. 95.

¹³³Waite, p. 165.

¹³⁴Waite, pp. 161-2.

¹³⁵Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, pp. 99-100.

¹³⁶Thomas R. Whitaker, Swan and Shadow (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 26.

¹³⁷A Vision, p. 72..

¹³⁸Martensen named "tinctures" as an example of the "barbarous terminology" which Boehme borrowed from Paracelsus (pp. 23-24). Yeats's habitual disregard for strict source identification can be demonstrated from the fact that, while he was probably familiar with the prior use in Paracelsus, he remembered Boehme's use and therefore credited it to the mystic.

¹³⁹Harless, Jacob Boehme und die Alchemisten, 1870, quoted in translation by Branton, p. 89.

¹⁴⁰Robert M. Schuler, "W.B. Yeats: Artist or Alchemist?" Review of English Studies, New Series 22 (February, 1971), pp. 37-53.

¹⁴¹Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, pp. 96-97. The references to Jung are from C.G. Jung, Psychologie und Alchemie (Zurich, 1944), pp. 39, 42, 43, and 57.

¹⁴²Ellmann, Identity, p. 3.

¹⁴³Waite, pp. 165-6.

¹⁴⁴Franz Hartmann, Report of Observations Made during a Nine Months' Stay at the Headquarters of the Theosophical Society (Scotland: Graves, Cookson, 1884); Magic, White and Black (London: G. Redway, 1886); An Adventure among the Rosicrucians (Boston: Occult Publishing Company, 1887); ed. and trans. Cosmology (Boston: Occult Publishing Company, 1888); The Life and Doctrines of Phillipus Theophrastus (New York: American Publishers, 1891).

¹⁴⁵ Franz Hartmann, The Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme, The God-Taught Philosopher (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., 1891), p. vi.

¹⁴⁶ W.B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, p. 149. Letter of April 9, 1929.

¹⁴⁷ Cecil Maurice Bowra, Memories (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 240-1.

¹⁴⁸ Dume, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ Letters, p. 234.. Letter to Olivia Shakespear, August 6, 1894.

¹⁵⁰ Letters, p. 262. See page 1 above.

¹⁵¹ Hermann Neander, Preface to Jacob Boehme, True Resignation (London: Whiting and Co., n.d.), pp. iv-v.

¹⁵² William Fairweather, Among the Mystics (1938; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), pp. 98-9.

¹⁵³ Boutroux, p. 171.

¹⁵⁴ Brinton, p. 61.

¹⁵⁵ Woodbridge Riley, The Meaning of Mysticism (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930), p. 79.

¹⁵⁶ Martensen, p. 34.

¹⁵⁷ Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, p. 107.

¹⁵⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), p. 97.

¹⁵⁹ Brinton, p. 62.

¹⁶⁰ George Malcolm Stratton, Psychology of the Religious Life (London: George Allen & Co., 1911), pp. 246-7.

¹⁶¹ Stratton, p. 246.

¹⁶²Harold Höffding, A History of Modern Philosophy, trans. B.E. Meyer (Dover Publications, 1955), I, 72.

¹⁶³Hartmann, pp. 242-3.

¹⁶⁴Berdyaev, p. vi.

¹⁶⁵Spurgeon, p. 28.

¹⁶⁶Quoted in Oskar Walzel, German Romanticism, trans. Alma Lussy (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), p. 67.

¹⁶⁷Paul Tillich, Preface to Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, p. 7.

¹⁶⁸Essays and Introductions, p. 114.

¹⁶⁹Yeats, Intro., Poems of William Blake, p. xxxv-vi.

¹⁷⁰Hartmann, p. 19.

¹⁷¹Epistles, p. 173. Epistle 23-14.

¹⁷²Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 329.

¹⁷³Kermode, p. 111.

¹⁷⁴Robert O'Driscoll, Symbolism and Some Implications of the Symbolic Approach: W.B. Yeats during the Eighteen-Nineties (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1975), p. 9.

¹⁷⁵Letters, p. 592. To Ernest Boyd, February, 1915.

¹⁷⁶Autobiography, p. 141.

¹⁷⁷Kathleen Raine, Defending Ancient Springs (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 69.

¹⁷⁸Letters, p. 840. To Maurice Wollmann, September 23, 1935.

¹⁷⁹Northrop Frye, "Yeats and the Language of Symbolism," University of Toronto Quarterly, 17 (October, 1947), 12.

- 180 Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 238.
- 181 Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 327.
- 182 Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 339.
- 183 Wade in Yeats, Letters, p. 521.
- 184 "Swedenborg," p. 301.
- 185 Essays and Introductions, p. 140.
- 186 Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 357.
- 187 Uncollected Prose, I, 282-3.
- 188 Uncollected Prose, I, 402.
- 189 Letters, pp. 162-3. To John O'Leary, January 21, 1891.
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- 191 Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 246.
- 192 Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 246.
- 193 Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 249.
- 194 W.B. Yeats, The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats, ed. Russell Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 709.
- 195 Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 246-7.
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- 197 Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 247.
- 198 Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 247.
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²⁰⁰Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 247, 248, 249.

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CHAPTER II

"SEND IMAGINATION FORTH"

"The Magical Powers"

In his 1896 review of Richard Garnett's William Blake, Yeats posited that Jacob Boehme "had possibly a greater genius" than William Blake "because he first taught in the modern world the principles which Blake first expressed in the language of poetry." Among Boehme's principles, Yeats found "the most important, and the one from which the others spring, is that the imagination is the means whereby we communicate with God."¹

Following this evaluation of the German mystic's contribution to a theory of the imagination, Yeats provided a passage from Boehme's The Way to Christ which illustrated Yeats's own position on the imagination. In The Identity of Yeats, Richard Ellmann called this passage, which Yeats acknowledged as a quotation from a work by Boehme, Yeats's "first important statement about the image."² Yeats had written:

"The word image," says "The Way of Christ," a compilation from Boehme and Law's interpretation of Boehme, published at Bath when Blake was eighteen, "meaneth not only a creaturely resemblance, in which sense man is said to be the Image of God; but it signifieth also a spiritual substance, a birth or effect of a will, wrought in and by a

spiritual being or power. 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 greatest power in nature."³

The article in Bookman proves that as early as 1896 Yeats valued Boehme's theory of the imagination. The quotation demonstrates, moreover, that Yeats was cognizant of Boehme's views on the imagination from primary material, not merely as filtered through Blake. And the passage which Yeats quoted from Boehme's work contained important elements to be discerned in Yeats's own early concept of the imagination. The imagination is connected with magic and proclaimed the supreme power in nature; it is defined as a spiritual faculty with divine powers; and it is established as a function of the will.

The connection between imagination and magic seems to have come first chronologically in the development of the Yeatsian aesthetic. In the essay "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places," Yeats wrote of the investigations he had pursued in the 1880's and early 1890's into secret societies of the occult, magic rituals, and psychic phenomena. He explained that his experiences had led him to an understanding of why "Visionaries like Boehme and Paracelsus confused imagination with magic, and why Boehme will have it that it 'creates and substantiates as it goes.'"⁴

Yeats's perception of the relationship between magic and the imagination in the writings of Boehme has been supported by commentators on Boehme. Émile Boutroux explained that according to Boehme's system, "Imagination makes the will into a magician."⁵ Bishop Martensen characterized Boehme's view of the universe as one in which "The whole of nature is pervaded by magic."⁶ He explained that Boehme considered the magic of the imagination to be the creative force of the universe:

The generation of the eternal Nature depends upon the magic of desire, and is the power of summoning non-existence into existence, without the use of material means. All effective magic depends upon desire and imagination; and whatever is born and comes into being arises, in the last resort, from desire and imagination.⁷

John Stoudt recognized the combination of medieval scholar and magician in Boehme by comparing him to Faust,⁸ while Nicolas Berdyaev stated simply, "The magic of the imagination plays a considerable part in Boehme's philosophy."⁹

Boehme's most explicit delineation of the creative relationship between magic and the imagination appeared as the fifth point in a small work entitled Six Mystical Points. The fifth section, labeled "On Magic," began with an enumeration of principles. In his opening statements Boehme identified magic with the original will and explained that magic creates through the force of the imagination:

1. Magic is the mother of eternity, of the being of all beings; for it creates itself, and is understood in desire.

2. It is in itself nothing but a will, and this will is the great mystery of all wonders and secrets, but brings itself by the imagination of the desireful hunger into being.
3. It is the original state of Nature.¹⁰

Both the title and the format of Boehme's treatment of magic invite comparison with Yeats's 1901 essay, "Magic," in which the poet began with a statement of belief in the efficacy of magic and enumerated the principles by which the imagination functions as a magical force:

- (1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.
- (2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory; the memory of Nature herself.
- (3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.¹¹

To substantiate his theory of magic Yeats described experiments in which his imagination had seemed to function from a power beyond that of the poet himself. He speculated about the origins of poetry: "Have not poetry and music arisen, as it seems, out of the sounds the enchanters made to help their imagination to enchant, to charm, to bind with a spell themselves and the passers-by?"¹² Linking poetry to the ritualistic formulas chanted by magicians, he noted a common purpose in their use of symbols: "I cannot now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half unconsciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist."¹³

In Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn, Kathleen Raine identified Yeats's early concept of poetry as a magic force:

"For Yeats magic was not so much a kind of poetry, as poetry a kind of magic, and the object of both alike was evocation of energies and knowledge beyond normal consciousness."¹⁴

Perhaps nothing attests to the high regard with which Yeats held the magical aspects of the imagination as much as his inclusion of the idea of magical powers in an early poem dedicating his work to Ireland. In the first printing of "Apologia Addressed to Ireland in the Coming Days" (1892), Yeats attributed his craft to magic--"For round about my table go / The magical powers to and fro" (Var., p. 138). Yeats claimed here a position among the Irish patriot poets, though his work dealt less obviously with political subjects. In later versions of that poem Yeats substituted the word "elemental" for "magic," but he retained his belief in the power of the imagination. And near the close of his life Yeats indicated tacitly that the cause to which he had dedicated his poetry in early manhood was still a major concern. In the introspective poem "The Man and the Echo," published in 1939, Yeats questions the effects of his use of the magic power of the imagination for the cause of Ireland:

Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?
Did words of mine put too great strain
On that woman's reeling brain?
Could my spoken words have checked
That whereby a house lay wrecked? (Var., p. 632)

The poet-magician appears in the second section of "The Tower" to summon the characters from that period of Yeats's writings which was most steeped in magic rituals and occult practices, the time before 1900. There is something of Prospero in the figure of the poet pacing the battlements at twilight and preparing "to send imagination forth" to call up images and memories from his early writings. Here the poet is a conjurer, using the imagination as a power to evoke images, as did the younger Yeats, who experimented with imagining symbols and communicating his imagination to others.¹⁵ The figures Yeats first calls forth to question in "The Tower" are those who used their imaginations like magic, the conjurer whom Hanrahan met, or Rafferty, the blind poet. Rafferty, who saw the beauty of Mary Hynes through the eyes of his imagination, cast a spell like that of the ancient enchanters and drove his listeners mad:

And certain men, being maddened by those rhymes,
 Or else by toasting her a score of times,
 Rose from the table and declared it right
 To test their fancy by their sight;
 But they mistook the brightness of the moon
 For the prosaic light of day--
 Music had driven their wits astray--
 And one was drowned in the great bog of Cloone.
 (Var., pp. 410-1)

Further on in that section of "The Tower," the poet allies himself with the poet-magician by acknowledging, "If I triumph I must make men mad" (Var., p. 411).

While he was writing stories and poems steeped in magic lore Yeats sent a letter to John O'Leary in 1892 vehemently

defending his espousal of magic. "It is surely absurd to hold me 'weak' or otherwise," he wrote, "because I chose to persist in a study which I decided deliberately four or five years ago to make, next to my poetry, the most important pursuit of my life."¹⁶ But even in the midst of his indignation, the poet admitted, "I sometimes forget that the word 'magic' which sounds so familiar to my ears has a very outlandish sound to other ears." In that same letter he defended "the mystical life," acknowledging it as "the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write."¹⁷

The implicit treatment in this letter of magic and mysticism as interchangeable is perhaps confusing because of the current association of magic with show business and circus tricks. Magic as practiced by associates of Yeats was part of a tradition which reached back into antiquity. The supposition that the worn formula "hocus pocus" derived originally from the words for consecration of the Mass, "Hoc est corpus,"¹⁸ suggests the sacred roots of the secret art. This etymological link also points to the basic assumption of magic which may have been what appealed most strongly to Yeats the poet--that words and the arrangement of words in patterns could actually exert a spiritual force upon the physical universe. In his Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion Hegel, considered by many to have been a follower of Boehme, called magic "the absolutely primary form of religion" and stressed the element of consciousness of power over nature.¹⁹

The kind of magic which Yeats identified with the poetic faculty seems to resemble most closely Druidic magic, in which the practice of magic was allied to the practice of religion, and the magician and the priest were one. For example, in "Fergus and the Druid" (1892) Fergus, whom Yeats identified as the poet of the Red Branch cycle (Var., p. 795), received his poetic faculty from the Druid in trade for his kingship (Var., pp. 102-4). And in "The Dedication to a Book of Stories selected from the Irish Novelists" (1890) Yeats alludes to a golden age of Ireland when magic, religion, and literature functioned as one:

There was a green branch hung with many a bell
When her own people ruled this tragic Eire;
And from its murmuring greenness, calm of Faery,
A Druid kindness, on all hearers fell.
(Var., p. 129)

A 1900 poem which serves as a prelude to The Shadowy Waters relates the history of the making of "The Harp of Aengus," who was god of poetry (Var., pp. 219-20). That the harp was made of Druid apple-wood perhaps accounted in part for its magical powers. The spells cast by that harp in the hands of Forgael were such that Dectora proclaimed,

You have a Druid craft of wicked sound
A magic that can call a demon up. (Var., pp. 237-8)

Altogether, there are few passages in Yeats's poetry which associate his "Druid craft" with black magic, with the power to call up "a demon"; Yeats more frequently identified poetry as a kind of white magic, linking it with the religious practices of ages past.

"The Sacret Cruse"

The earliest letter in Wade's collection of Yeats's letters contains a short poem which illustrates the curious blend of mysterious and mystical in Yeats's appreciation of the process of poetry. The poem can be read, like so many of Yeats's early poems, as a reference to human love or to the creative process of art:

A flower has blossomed, the world heart core
 The petal and leves were a moon white flame
 U gathered the flower, the colourless lore
 The abundant measure of youth and fame
 Many men gather and few may use
 T(he) şacret oil and the sacret cruse. 20

Wade did not verify a date for the letter, but he concluded that it could not have been written later than 1894. Wade noted also that this was the only instance in which he had adhered to Yeats's spelling. It is fortunate that the editor did not alter the last line, for what letters would he have changed? The amalgam, intentional or not, of "sacred" and "secret" demonstrated a transition which was taking place in Yeats's perspective during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century.

Yeats's emphasis shifted gradually from the secret to the sacred, from a fascination with various occult sects and magic rituals to investigations of a more cosmic nature, and moved closer to orthodox religion in the sense that the investigations were concerned with the mysteries at the root of life itself, rather than with the phenomena through which those mysteries

are given expression. The direction of Yeats's development was perhaps due in part to his study of William Blake. Through his efforts to unravel the secrets of Blake's symbolism, Yeats may have found preliminary justification for the sanctification of the imagination, as well as a guide from one who had gleaned his own theory of the imagination from occultists and mystics like Jacob Boehme.

Yeats's introduction to his 1893 edition of Blake credits Blake with a position near Boehme as "one of those great artificers of God who uttered mysterious truths to a little clan." The difference, Yeats wrote, was that mystics like Boehme had drawn upon magic and theology for their symbols, whereas Blake used nature symbolism, which afforded greater appeal for artists.²¹ The preference for nature as a source of symbolism presaged the shift in Yeats's poetry away from arcane symbolism. But Yeats was not to announce such a change in his own poetry until 1914 in "A Coat":

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked. (Var., p. 320)

The difference between Boehme and Blake, as well as between them and Yeats himself, in their treatment of the imagination was primarily, the poet seemed to recognize, a reflection of the difference between the worlds they had inhabited. In "The Autumn

of the Body" Yeats had early affirmed his belief that the old order was changing, that art was to assume the functions formerly assigned to established religions. "The Autumn of the Body" (1892) predated the essay "Magic" by four years, but the latter essay precedes the earlier in the "Ideas of Good and Evil" section of Essays and Introductions. This placement seems truer to the course of development in Yeats's perception of the origins of art and its role in the modern world. In "Magic" Yeats had written of the magicians as the predecessors of artists,²² whereas in "The Autumn of the Body" it was priests whose role the artist was to assume. The arts, Yeats announced, were "about to take upon their shoulders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of priests." Furthermore, Yeats said, "We are about to substitute once more the distillation of alchemy for the analyses of chemistry and for some other sciences; and certain of us are looking everywhere for the perfect alembic that no silver or golden drop may escape,"²³

Boehme, himself somewhat of a priest and alchemist both, wrote frequently of the "perfect alembic," the philosopher's stone, and may well have precipitated the split between orthodox religion and occult interests through his propagation of a profoundly Christian, alchemical mysticism. Chapter XI of Signatura Rerum is an explanation, in transformed alchemical terms, of man's salvation through the life and passion of Christ. In Boehme's schema, Christ is the philosopher's stone, or, as expressed in Signatura Rerum, the "tincture" which transforms

corrupt man into redeemed humanity. "Tincture," a term borrowed from alchemy, was, as Yeats acknowledged when he adapted it to his own use in A Vision, "a common word in Boehme."²⁴ A typical use of the concept is a passage in Boehme's Incarnation which explained that gold, silver, and precious metals were from the "Heavenly Magia," but they were hidden from man after the Fall. Those who seek the "Metalline Tincture" must look for new birth in Christ if they want to apprehend the "Philosopher's Stone" (Incar. 4:30-5).

In the 1897 essay "William Blake and the Imagination," Yeats affirmed that Blake "had learned from Jacob Boehme and from old alchemist writers that imagination was the first emanation of divinity, 'the body of God,' 'the Divine members.'" Yeats explained that Blake had come to the conclusion, which Boehme had not reached, that "the imaginative arts were therefore the greatest of Divine revelations."²⁵ After his work on Blake, Yeats related the imagination less often to magic and wrote increasingly of the imagination in terms of the divine. In "A Literary Causerie," a review of T.F. Thistelton Dyer's The Ghost World written in 1893, the year the Blake study was published, Yeats wrote, "Imagination is God in the world of art, and may well desire to have us come to an issue with the atheists who would make us naught but 'realists,' 'naturalists,' or the like."²⁶

John Frayne, who included this review in Uncollected Prose of W.B. Yeats, referred to Yeats's deification of the imagination as an example of "majestic ambiguity." Frayne

qualified Yeats's declaration, perhaps to make it more palatable to orthodox tastes: "It is more probable that he meant that the imagination is divine power manifested in art rather than that the imagination holds a place in art analogous to that of God in creation." Frayne's discussion of Yeats's theory of the imagination ended with the critic's assertion that Yeats was following Jacob Boehme in positing the divinity of the imagination. "Yeats's tradition of imagination was certainly a divine one," he said, "more mystical than Coleridge's even though both men were deeply influenced by the writings of the German mystic Jacob Boehme."²⁷

Since Yeats had referred to Boehme's concept of the imagination as that mystic's "most important" contribution to modern literature,²⁸ it seems unlikely that, as a practicing poet, he would relegate the imagination to a lesser position than Boehme had given to it. It was consistent, furthermore, with his increasing emphasis on the sacred role of art in the modern world that Yeats attributed the powers of the Trinity--creation, salvation, and sanctification--to the poetic imagination.

In presenting Boehme's theory in 1896 Yeats had cited his view of the imagination as "the magia or power of raising . . . images or substances, and the greatest power in nature."²⁹ And five years later Yeats ended the essay "Magic" by exhorting in almost evangelistic tones: "We must cry out that imagination is always seeking to remake the world. . . ."³⁰ He must have connected this creative goal of the imagination with the teachings of Boehme, for in a review of William Morris' romance The Well at the World's End, which appeared shortly after that writer's death

in 1896, Yeats had eulogized Morris as a similar prophet: "It was his vision of that perfect life, which the world is always trying, as Jacob Boehme taught, to bring forth, that awakened every activity of his laborious life."³¹

Yeats's first reference to the imagination as an autonomous power was in connection with William Blake. In "Chevalier Burke," which appeared in the Boston Pilot on December 28, 1889, Yeats quoted from a letter of Blake:

I have been very near the gates of death and have returned very weak, and an old man feeble and tottering, but not in spirits and life, not in the real man, the imagination which liveth forever. In that I am stronger and stronger as this foolish body decays.³²

Years later, in "The Tower" (1927), Yeats echoed Blake's affirmation of the power of the imagination in his own reflections on approaching old age:

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 (Var., p. 409)

In the third section of "The Tower," following a reference to "the sudden shower," an image of Boehme's which Yeats called "a beautiful phrase,"³³ the poet announces a religion of art, complete with "Credo." Repudiating Plato and Plotinus, whom, he explained in a note, he had inaccurately associated with the

idea of pure transcendence,³⁴ the poet expresses his belief in the primacy of the creative powers of man's imagination:

And I declare my faith:

Death and life were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul
(Var., pp. 414-5)

Similarly, in the short 1929 poem "Death," Yeats speculates over the fact that animals die without experiencing either hope or dread about what is to come, while "A man awaits his end / Dreading and hoping all." The difference must be that man has the power of imagination to envision many possibilities. That is why, the poem ends, "Man has created death" (Var., p. 476).

In addition to the power to create, the imagination has the divine power of sanctification, according to both Yeats and Boehme. "For Blake, and after him Yeats," Kermode pointed out, "it is more usual to think of the Imagination as divine, and as conferring symbolic concreteness, by means of what we call art, on the fallen world."³⁵ And Helen Requerio, in her work on Wordsworth, Yeats, and Stevens entitled The Limits of Imagination said, "Yeats affirms the capacity of poetry to sacralize profane time and to turn the gratuitous aridity of history into a landscape of imaginative redemption."³⁶ Looking back in "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," Yeats remembered his own work and that of some fellow artists and upheld the tradition that the works of the imagination can sanctify:

We were the last romantics--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
 (Var., pp. 491-2)

In his Foreword to Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirtheme (1902) Yeats had written of this ability of the imagination to elevate the mind: "When one thinks imagination can do no more, [a particular story] suddenly lifts romance into prophecy."³⁷ And later, in "Certain Noble Plays of Japan" (1916), he associates the arts with divinity:

It is still true that the Deity gives us, according to His promise, not His thoughts or His convictions but His flesh and blood, and I believe that the elaborate technique of the arts, seeming to create out of itself a superhuman life, has taught more men to die than oratory or the Prayer Book. We only believe in those thoughts which have been conceived not in the brain but in the whole body.³⁸

Boehme's explanation of the concept of the Eucharist placed similar emphasis upon the importance of the imagination in sanctification: "The animal flesh which was sacrificed to the Lord and afterwards eaten was sanctified for man, because the imagination of God entered therein, and therefore Moses called it a holy flesh, and there was also a holy bread."³⁹ Just as ordinary bread is made holy by the imagination of God, so man is sanctified through the imagination. In a 1620 epistle to Paul Keym Boehme explained, "Through imagination; and an earnest serious desire, we become again impregnated of the Deity, and receive the new body, in the old" ⁴⁰ The imagination is all powerful;

as it can sanctify, it can also damn. In Incarnation, Book III, Boehme delineated the process by which the imagination turns from God. "Lust is an Imagining," Boehme wrote, "where the Imagination winds or insinuates itself into all Forms of Nature, so that they all become Impregnated with the Thing, out of which the Lust exists" (Incar. 6-2).

Closely allied to the concept of the imagination as the agent of sanctification was the idea, also shared by Boehme and Yeats, of the imagination as the agent of salvation. Yeats was quite explicit about the relationship between the imagination and salvation in the work of Blake. In the Introduction to the Yeats-Ellis edition of Blake, Yeats wrote, "Imagination is thus the philosophic name of the Saviour, whose symbolic name is Christ, just as Nature is the philosophic name of Satan and Adam."⁴¹ Yeats may have carried that concept of the imagination as saviour through all his poetry, since in "A General Introduction for my Work" prepared in 1937, Yeats identified his Christ with "Blake's 'Imagination'" and expressed the belief that the imagination took on the sufferings of man.⁴²

In "What is 'Popular Poetry'?" (1901) Yeats quoted a couplet from Blake to draw an implicit comparison between the imagination and the Saviour. The condition of the world would not improve, Yeats wrote,

. . . till that ten thousand have gone hither
and thither to preach their faith that 'the
imagination is the man himself,' and that the
world as imagination sees it is the durable
world, and have won men as did the disciples of
Him who--

His seventy disciples sent
Against religion and government.⁴³

This mission of the imagination seems to have been an ideal which Yeats pursued throughout his creative life, for in the final poem, "Under Ben Bulbin" (1939), Yeats left what could only be considered a deathbed admonishment to his successors to continue using their creative faculties for the sanctification of mankind:

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.
(Var., p. 638)

The juxtaposition of references to birth and death in the above poem relates to another way in which Yeats viewed the imagination as a saving force. Writing of Blake's Book of Thel for the Yeats-Ellis edition of Blake, Yeats claimed that in Blake's system "It is only when man accepts imagination that he ceases to circle about the wheel of birth." This doctrine, according to Yeats, demonstrated a higher view of the imagination than that held by Boehme and linked Blake to Eastern thought. Yeats theorized, "Blake's doctrine of reincarnation contained in this luminous symbol, divides his teaching from that of Swedenborg and Boehmen, and unites it with that of the Eastern mystics and the medieval kabalists."⁴⁴ In "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" (1929) Yeats expressed this idea of man's salvation through imagination in poetry. The soul questions the proper province of the imagination. Here, as in "The Tower," the disparity between the unfaltering imagination and the aging body is emphasized. The soul asks:

Why should the imagination of a man
 Long past his prime remember things that are
 Emblematical of love and war?
 Think of ancestral night that can,
 If but imagination scorn the earth
 And intellect its wandering
 To this and that and t'other thing,
 Deliver from the crime of death and birth.
 (Var., pp. 477-8)

Since "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" contains explicit references to the Japanese Sato, it was logical for Yeats to connect the doctrine with Eastern mysticism. Boehme expressed the same theory, however, in terms strikingly similar to those of Blake which Yeats quoted and to the lines of poetry written by Yeats himself. Explaining that the soul casts its lot for eternity during man's time on earth in The Threefold Life of Man, Boehme wrote:

Only in the time of the Body it (the soul) can break off that thing which it has wrapped up in its will, and that stands afterwards as a broken wheel, which is broken and useless, and no soul enters into it any more, neither does it seek any more therein. (Threefold Life 12-27)

There is more than a hint of the same doctrine in Yeats's assertion in "The Tower":

That, being dead, we rise,
 Dream and so create
 Translunar Paradise. (Var., p. 415)

The concept of the imagination as man's means of salvation could account for the fatalistic tone of Section III of "The Tower" as the poet formulates his legacy and prepares to give up his image-forming faculty. There is a tone of resignation

and renunciation in the aging poet's statement, "I have prepared my peace" (Var., p. 415). What the poet seems to be renouncing are the products of Western man's artistic imagination, "learned Italian things / And the proud stones of Greece." To these representatives of artistic achievement the poet adds less tangible products of the imagination,

Poet's imaginings
and memories of love,
Memories of the words of women.

The poet appears to be relinquishing his creative power, or his imagination itself. He is giving up

All those things whereof
Man makes a superhuman
Mirror-resembling dream.
(Var., p. 415)

"Nothing but a Will"

As Yeats's quotation from The Way to Christ showed, Boehme considered the image, the projection of the divine imagination, "a birth or effect of a will."⁴⁵ The Mystic Will, Howard Brinton's study of Boehme, focused upon this idea of the imagination as a creative force of the will, calling it the major innovation of Boehme's philosophy:

As life is Boehme's organizing concept so is will his ultimate. All things are either wills or the imagination that is the objectification of wills. Matter is will contracted on itself. Imagination is will going forth to create. Life is the higher unity arising out of the opposition of will to itself.

Brinton labeled Boehme's doctrine of the supremacy of the will "voluntarism" and noted that the voluntarist school of thought was a major influence upon the Romantics. "If the classic spirit is the influence of thought on will," he wrote, "the romantic is the influence of will on thought."⁴⁶

Windelband's History of Philosophy, published the same year as Yeats's work on Blake, credited Boehme as the pivotal figure in the shift of emphasis from intellect to will. In Boehme's writings, the historian explained,

the intellectualistic features of the older Mysticism retreat. While with Eckhart, the world-process both in its arising and in its passing was regarded as a knowing process, with Boehme it is rather a struggling of the will between good and evil.⁴⁷

Similarly, Brinton maintained that it was this adherence to the primacy of the will which marked Boehme as the first great Protestant mystic. In Brinton's analysis, the fundamental difference between Catholic mysticism and Protestant mysticism is that the former is abstractive, following Plato and Thomas Aquinas in adherence to an intellectual approach. Protestant mysticism, in line with the emphasis on the individual fostered by Luther and the spirit of the Reformation, is more irrational and subjective.⁴⁸

Boehme's high regard for the will was demonstrated at the beginning of The Mysterium Magnum where he referred to God as "the Will of the Abyss" (Mys. Mag. 1-2). His strongest

statement on the importance of the individual will was in the third part of The Treatise of the Incarnation:

Thus we give you to Consider, what the will and aim or confidence is, viz., that it is the Master and Leader, which introduces the Image of Man both into God's Love, and also into God's anger. (Incar. III, 4-22)

Boehme's approach, which centers man's struggle for salvation upon actions directed by his will, not his intellect, is highly compatible with the contention Yeats expressed in "J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910) that "arguments and statistics" destroyed literature "for literature is a child of experience always, of knowledge never."⁴⁹ Yeats's strongest statement regarding the predominance of the will was in a letter to his friend, the mystic George Russell. "We possess nothing but the will," Yeats wrote, "and we must never let the children of vague desires breathe upon it nor the waters of sentiment rust the terrible mirror of its blade."⁵⁰

The idea of the individual will as the strongest force in nature with the imagination as the active agent of that force appears to correlate with the restricted definition of the term "romantic" postulated by Frank Kermode in Romantic Image. Kermode's definition, by which he justifies including Yeats among the Romantics, refers "to the high evaluation . . . placed . . . upon the image-making powers of the mind at the expense of its rational powers."⁵¹ In the 1900 essay "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," Yeats, who labeled himself one of "the last romantics" in the poem "Coole Park and Ballylee,

1931" (Var., p. 491), affirmed the supremacy of the imagination over the rational faculty in terms most commonly associated with religious teachings. "[I] am now certain," Yeats wrote, "that the imagination has some way of lighting on the truth that the reason has not, and that its commandments, delivered when the body is still and the reason silent, are the most binding we can ever know."⁵² Similarly, in the 1903 essay "William Blake and the Imagination" Yeats connected Blake to Boehme through the English poet's insistence that "The reason . . . binds us to mortality because it binds us to the senses . . . ; but imagination divides us from mortality by the immortality of beauty, and binds us to each other by opening the secret doors of all hearts."⁵³

In "The Tower" Yeats, like Boehme, seems to consider the imagination an element of the will, not the intellect, and to repudiate the Platonic abstractive approach as inimical to the workings of the imagination. He indicates that turning the imagination to abstraction would, in effect, mean the loss of the faculty for poetry. The poet, pondering the paradox of his vital imagination and senescent body, says:

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.
(Var., p. 409)

The imagination deals with the concrete, shaping it into symbols of the supernatural. To turn the power of the imagination upon abstraction would be an ontological impossibility.

"A Girl Arose"

When a mystic seeks to present his vision in writing he, like the poet, faces the difficulty of making the abstract, the spiritual, concrete. Like Yeats, Boehme eschewed abstraction in the expression of his ideas. This aversion to abstraction was not merely a stylistic matter for Boehme; it was an integral part of his life view. Martensen held that the two major differences between Boehme and other religious writers were his view of the imagination as an essential component of the divine nature and his refusal to consider the Deity as a purely abstract Being:

It is one of Boehme's most characteristic features that he interprets Spirit--even the absolute Spirit of God--as desire and imagination, will and fancy. He is here in diametrical opposition to those who entirely exclude fancy from God. A God, destitute of fancy, who is only pure reason, pure thought, bare and blank intelligence, is, for Boehme, an abstract being and not an actual living Spirit.⁵⁴

One recalls the words with which Ribh denounced Patrick in Yeats's 1934 poem by that name:

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.
(Var., p. 556)

In his early (1892) poem "The Sorrow of Love" Yeats's despair over the loss of "man's image and his cry" could be read as the struggle of the artist to realize the vision of his imagination. But in the midst of the poet's sorrow "A girl arose" and creation became possible:

Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,
A climbing moon upon an empty sky,
And all that lamentation of the leaves,
Could but compose man's image and his cry.
(Var., p. 120)

The natural pause resulting from the word order which emphasizes the verb suggests that "arose" may also convey a hint of Yeats's flower symbolism. Read aloud, the word could sound like an appositive--"A girl, a rose"--introducing the female figure and allied rose imagery which were important to both Yeats's and Boehme's expressions of the functioning of the imagination.

Like Yeats, Boehme had also displayed a preference for an understanding of the divine life which did not exclude the female element. Stoudt considered Boehme's development of the female figure a counterbalance, albeit an unconscious one, to Rationalism, which was the predominant philosophical school of Boehme's era. According to Stoudt's analysis,

Rational dogma made the Father-Son important; in the unconscious this is symbolized by the mother-daughter myth; in Boehme's later works this 'male' Trinity stands 'opposite' the Virgin Sophia, and that Sophia plays so important a role in Boehme's mature system shows that the unconscious . . . is consciousness' helper and aid.⁵⁵

Sophia, Boehme's mystic female, shares many of the characteristics Yeats ascribed to the ideal female, and her role within the creative process is similar to that of the female figures in Yeats's poetry. For both Boehme and Yeats the ideal female is eternal, almost divine, passive, and always sought after but never fully possessed by her mortal suitor. Both Yeats and Boehme frequently associate their female with the symbols of the rose and the mirror, which are important symbols for each. Finally, the female figure functions in the same way within the systems of each--she is the receptacle of Divine communication, the vessel in which the Imagination becomes the Word Incarnate.

Boehme was unique among those mystics writing largely within an orthodox Christian theology in that he afforded a female figure a position within the inner workings of the Divine Life. As Boehme explained the theogonistic process, the original force, or God the Father, was a directionless will, an undifferentiated desire. In order to manifest Himself, He formed an image of Himself in the mirror of His Imagination. Boehme personified this mirror as the female principle, the Maiden, or Sophia. The original will then desires that the image which the imagination has formed with the cooperation of the female become actualized. The consummation of the union between desire and mirror-image results in the birth of the Son. The force of actualization between Father and Son is the Spirit. This is the power of the imagination within the interior life of God. Yeats referred to this use of the Virgin Wisdom, or mirror of God, in Boehme's works, saying in "The High Crosses of Ireland" (1899)

that Boehme had made the mirror "almost a fourth person of the Trinity."⁵⁶

Martensen's study of Jacob Boehme, containing a summary of the process by which God generates Himself and through which all creation came into being, drew a comparison which would almost certainly have appealed to Yeats if he had read that work, which was translated into English in 1885. Martensen compared the process described by Boehme to the way in which an artist creates:

When God, in the tranquil delight of contemplation, beholds Himself and His wonders, as the Maiden displays them to Him in the mirror, the Will grows eager, and desires that what it sees in the mirror shall become something more than an image, shall become actual, as when an artist longs to realize the vision, the image that reveals itself to him in his inward soul. And not only does the Will become eager but Wisdom, Sophia, thrills with rapture and yearns for the manifestation of the marvels of Wisdom, although she herself is all these marvels.⁵⁷

Brinton cited passages like this one, which used the terminology of human sexuality to explain the theogonistic process, as one of the impediments to full acceptance of Boehme by theological authorities of his time. According to Brinton, "The theory which holds that mysticism is in many instances an auto-erotic phenomenon, as it often uses the vocabulary of sexual passion, would seem to find occasional support in Boehme's rhapsodies to Sophia, the Virgin Wisdom of God."⁵⁸

Similarly, Yeats once wrote to Olivia Shakespear that his poetry, no matter what the subject (he mentioned that he was working on a play about Christ and Dionysus at the time), always

became love poetry. "One feels at moments as if one could with a touch convey a vision," Yeats wrote, "that the mystic way and sexual love use the same means--opposed yet parallel existences."⁵⁹

A concise example of the combination and commingling of mystic vision and sexual experience is the small poem "Ribh in Ecstasy."

The eight lines describe one moment of ecstasy:

What matter that you understood no word!
Doubtless I spoke or sang what I had heard
In broken sentences. My soul had found
All happiness in its own cause or ground.
Godhead on Godhead in sexual spasm begot
Godhead. Some shadow fell. My soul forgot
Those amorous cries that out of quiet come
And must the common round of day resume.
(Var., p. 557)

Actually, Boehme's somewhat erotic use of the female figure was within the Judeo-Christian tradition of mystical symbolism. The authority for Boehme's Sophia probably came originally from a few references in Scripture which the mystic expanded greatly in presenting his own insights. And Yeats mythologized female figures like Helen of Troy in his poetry by a similar method of expansion and elaboration.

The fullest Biblical reference to Sophia is in the apocryphal book The Wisdom of Solomon, long a favorite study of occultists. In this book, the writer, in the persona of King Solomon, presents the attributes of Wisdom, to whom he relates as a male to a female. Among the most significant for the present discussion are the verses which describe Wisdom and name her the mirror and emanation of God, and those which demonstrate her

operations among men. Solomon affirmed that he had become initiated into the secrets of nature through the agency of Wisdom, "for Wisdom, the artificer of all, taught me."⁶⁰ In this section, the author described Wisdom as "an aura of the might of God and a pure effusion of the glory of God," as "the refulgence of eternal light," and as "the spotless mirror of the power of God."⁶¹ Chapter 9 beseeches God to send Wisdom to Solomon:

10. Send her forth from your holy heavens and from your glorious throne dispatch her that she may be with me and work with me, that I may know what is pleasing to you.

11. For she knows and understands all things and will guide me discreetly in my affairs and safeguard me by her glory.⁶²

Chapter 10 is devoted to the past services of Wisdom and the way she has worked with men in the past to bring them to salvation.

There is a link through the imagery and the attribution of authorship between the figure of Wisdom in this Wisdom of Solomon and the Maiden in the Song of Solomon. In The Wisdom of Solomon, the King says, "Her I loved and sought after from my youth: I sought to take her for my bride and was enamored of her beauty."⁶³ King Solomon has been accepted traditionally as the bridegroom in The Song of Solomon. The Bride is identified in one passage as "the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valley."⁶⁴

In The Way to Christ, from which Yeats cited a passage as the first annunciation of the Romantic theory of the imagination,

Boehme specifically linked the traditions, identifying his Sophia, the Wisdom of God, with the Wisdom and Rose of Solomon. Sophia, Boehme wrote, "is the flower of Sharon, the Rose in the Valley, of which Solomon sings and calls [it] his dear Love and chaste Virgin" (True Repen. 1-29).

Yeats quite possibly drew upon this tradition himself. The association of the rose imagery with a mystic female was an important element in Yeats's early poetry, and in at least two later poems, "Solomon to Sheba" (1918) and "Solomon and the Witch" (1921), Yeats treated the insights gained by Solomon through union with a female. In the second poem, "Solomon and the Witch," the female suddenly cries out in a strange tongue, like one possessed. It is she who speaks the communication from the divine. The situation presented in "Solomon and the Witch" paralleled the automatic writings of Yeats's bride on his honeymoon:

And thus declared the Arab lady:
 'Last night, where under the wild moon
 On grassy mattress I had laid me,
 Within my arms great Solomon,
 I suddenly cried out in a strange tongue
 Not his, not mine.' (Var., p. 387)

In "The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid" (1924) Yeats once again used Arabian characters, this time to present allegorically the story of his marriage to the spiritualist. Yeats credited his wife's automatic writing as being his source for A Vision and so, by extension, for the mystical-based poetry which was connected with A Vision. In the Introduction to A Vision, Yeats

related the story that four days after their marriage his new bride began automatic writing. The unseen communicators had come, they said, to give Yeats "metaphors for poetry."⁶⁵ In "The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid" this experience was allegorized as follows:

Upon a moonless night
I saw where I could watch her sleeping form,
And wrote by candle-light; but her form moved,
And fearing that my light disturbed her sleep
I rose that I might screen it with a cloth.
I heard her voice, 'Turn that I may expound
What's bowed your shoulder and made pale your
cheek';
And saw her sitting upright on the bed;
Or was it she that spoke or some great Djinn?
I say that a Djinn spoke. A livelong hour
She seemed the learned man and I the child;
Truths without father came, truths that no book
Of all the uncounted books that I have read,
Nor thought out of her mind or mine begot,
Self-born, high-born, and solitary truths,
Those terrible implacable straight lines
Drawn through the wandering vegetative dream.
Even those truths that when my bones are dust
Must drive the Arabian host. (Var., p. 467)

If the experience of automatic writing as depicted here was valid, it was a case of life imitating art, for the woman presented in "The Gift" functions substantially in the same way as most of the female figures do in Yeats's poetry--as the passive receptacle of expression.

Most critics who discuss women in the poetry of Yeats focus on the frustration of the poet's pursuit of Maud Gonne and infer from that a kind of sublimation in his idealization of woman. A. Norman Jeffares is one of the few who approaches Yeats's view of women from an opposite stance. In W.B. Yeats:

Man and Poet, he maintained, "[Yeats's] love was of a manufactured ideal, fabricated in the workshops of his brain which had before them the blue-print of what a poet's love should be."⁶⁶

Certainly Niamh, companion of Oisín and the first female to appear in the Collected Poems, is more an archetype than a woman. As she is described in The Wanderings of Oisín (1889), Niamh has seminal characteristics of all the later developments of Yeats's female figures. From the first vague reference to her as "A pearl-pale, high-born lady" (Var., p. 3), it is clear that she is more than a mortal woman. There is a hint of Yeats's later interest in Helen in the metaphor "And like a sunset were her lips; / A stormy sunset on doomed ships" (Var., p. 3). She is dressed as the eternal female in "To Ireland in the Coming Times" (1892) in a flowing gown rich with red embroidery, which may be roses. Linked to the Roman goddess of love by the idea that she "came / Through bitter tide on foam-wet feet" (Var., p. 5), she claims Aengus, the Irish god of poetry, as her father (Var., p. 5). Like Wisdom of the apocrypha and Boehme's Sophia, Niamh is a virgin, for she tells Finn, "I have not yet, war-weary king, / Been spoken of with any man" (Var., p. 6). What changes in the later poetry is that in this poem Oisín takes the passive role and emphasis is on escape. The Wanderings of Oisín might be considered a kind of young man's rite of passage. From this point forward the female assumes a more passive role in the poetry of Yeats.

Yeats's Rose poems (1892-1896) have perhaps the greatest number of references to an explicitly mystical female. Yeats's

personified Rose has all the qualities of Sophia, whom Boehme also associated with the symbol of the rose. In a passage already cited, Boehme identified his Sophia with the Rose of Solomon.⁶⁷ In another work, Boehme spoke of Sophia as bestowing a rose upon him, thus enabling him to express his vision:

For the Virgin (the Wisdom of God) has graciously bestowed a Rose upon us, of which we will write in such Words as we behold in that Wonder; and we cannot write otherwise, but our Pen is broke, and the Rose taken from us, and then we are as we were before the Time (of our knowledge).
(3 Prin. 18.58)

In the above passage Sophia is credited with the guardianship of the Rose, which is not the knowledge itself, but the means of bringing Boehme's infused knowledge into outward expression.

If Boehme had been primarily a poet he might have called Sophia his muse, but her relation to the mystic is deeper than that. One is reminded of "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time" (1892), the poem which, like an invocation to the muse, introduces the Rose poetry. In this poem Yeats personifies the Rose, beseeching her for the balance needed for the delicate craft of poetry. Like Boehme, Yeats seemed to feel that he could not write if the rose were taken from him. The poet pleads, "Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days! / Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways" (Var., p. 100). It is through the Rose that the poet hopes to find "Eternal beauty wandering on her way." The poet pleads in a triple invocation which hints of mounting ardor, "Come near, come near, come near." Like the eroticism Brinton discovered in

Boehme's addresses to Sophia, this poem could demonstrate the parallelism between sexual love and mystical vision. But in Yeats's supplication to the rose the poet breaks off, as if afraid of total involvement, or as if the poet were aware, as Boehme was, that full possession of the rose is not allowed to the human condition. "Ah, leave me still," the poet begs, "A little space for the rose-breath to fill" (Var., p. 101). A mystic may be permitted to long for "the strange things said / By God to the bright hearts of those long dead" or to "learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know" (Var., p. 101), but such a faculty would be destructive for the poet.

Boehme had recognized, before Yeats, that, however much he might desire the mystical female, she could never completely belong to a mortal man. In this life man can only hope for a brief glimpse of the Virgin Wisdom. In The Mysterium Magnum Boehme explained:

Not the mortal soul, but the inner (spiritual) soul from the eternal Word of God is to be married to Sophia. The external soul is wedded to the constellation (mental functions) and elements. This external soul only rarely obtains a glance at Sophia, for she has death and mortality within herself. After this time she has to be again transformed into the first image which God created in Adam. (Mys. Mag. 52-13)

In "The Shadowy Waters" (1906) Forgael expresses the same kind of disparity between the ideal and the actual in this life.

Referring to the love of earthly women, Forgael says,

But he that gets their love after the fashion
 Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
 And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
 The bed of love, that in the imagination
 Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,
 Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting
 And as soon finished. (Var., pp. 228-9)

Yeats's pursuit of the unattainable ideal female might be considered one of the most consistent themes in his poetry. In the retrospection of "The Tower" the poet asks, "Does the imagination dwell the most / Upon a woman won or woman lost?" (Var., p. 413). The weight of evidence in Yeats's poetry is unquestionably with the latter. In "The Song of Wandering Aengus," the poet-seeker had caught one glimpse of "a glimmering girl" who had appeared magically and who disappeared in a glistening instant. Despite the fact that this strange female wore an apple blossom in her hair, a detail which was associated in Yeats's mind with Maud Gonne, the girl in this poem is much more mystical than real. The speaker vows to spend his life in pursuit of this female:

Though I am old with wandering
 Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
 I will find out where she has gone,
 And kiss her lips and take her hands;
 And walk among long dappled grass,
 And pluck till time and times are done
 The silver apples of the moon,
 The golden apples of the sun.
 (Var., p. 150)

Perhaps the functioning of the imagination depends upon the female's remaining always unattainable. In Boehme's system, the Virgin displays before the Creator the Image of His desire. But the will which desires and the object of desire

which the will has fashioned through the imagination must never completely merge. All depends upon their remaining in proper equilibrium. Yeats may have been acknowledging much the same idea in the 1910 poem "Words." Here the writer recalls that all his art has been crafted with the intent of winning the woman he desires. He has even mastered the magic of the imagination, for he claims, "I have come into my strength, / And words obey my call" (Var., p. 256). Yet he has still not attained the object of his desire. "Words" ends on a note of resignation. Had he won the woman he had wooed with his art, the poet might have abandoned the products of his imagination. He concludes, "I might have thrown poor words away / And been content to live" (Var., p. 256).

Although both Yeats and Boehme insisted that the ideal female can never be fully possessed by mortal man, neither portrayed her as so out of touch with humanity that she was totally inaccessible. She must remain within the grasp of man's imagination. In 1937 Yeats wrote, "My Christ . . . is . . . Blake's 'Imagination,' . . . imminent, differing from man to man and age to age, taking upon itself pain and ugliness. . . ."68 The terms with which he had described the symbol of the Rose in a note on The Rose were strikingly similar. "The quality symbolised as The Rose," Yeats maintained, "differs from the Intellectual Beauty of Shelley and of Spenser in that I have imagined it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar."69

"To the Rose upon the Rood of Time," the title of the poem placed first in The Rose, reinforces these associations. By placing the rose symbol upon the "rood," Yeats brought in the element of suffering as well as the Christian associations with the cross of salvation. By making the cross "of Time," Yeats stressed the imminence of the Rose. Boehme had referred to the cross as "the first mark and sign of the noble Sophia" and specifically connected the Virgin of God, who suffered with the faithful man, with the symbol of the rose. In a letter to Christianus Steenberger, Boehme had written, "[Sophia] useth to manifest herself through the thorns of God's anger as a fair rose on the thorny bush; so far forth as the soul keepeth its vow and fidelity."⁷⁰ William Law's illustration of Boehme's mystic female, or "Looking-Glass of Wisdom," depicts a cross, with a heart in its center, at the point of union between God and creation. This diagram could serve as well as an illustration of "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time." (See Appendix, Figure II.)

"The Rose of the World" (1892), the next in Yeats's series of celebrations of the mystic rose, emphasizes her eternal quality. Through all the tribulations of mankind, the Rose has endured. In fact, like Wisdom, who in Proverbs was "set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was,"⁷¹

Yeats's mystic female predates all creation:

Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode:
Before you were, or any hearts to beat,
Weary and kind one lingered by His seat;
He made the world to be a grassy road
Before her wandering feet. (Var., p. 112)

Boehme had expressed the eternality of Sophia in much the same way, stressing that she preceded even the angels. In Clavis Boehme had written, "Wisdom is a divine imagination, wherein the ideas of the angels and souls have been seen from eternity; not as substantial, actual creatures, but non-essential, like the images in a mirror" (Clavis 10.5). Elsewhere Boehme had said, "The Eternal Wisdom or Understanding is [God's] Delight" (Mys. Mag. 1.2). Yeats again associated the eternal female, as receiver of the imagination, with the rose in "To Ireland in the Coming Times." Here the poet proclaimed that he owed allegiance to something more universal than the nation of Ireland. Yeats spoke of following

. . . the red-rose-bordered hem
Of her, whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan
(Var., pp. 137-8)

In A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats John Unterecker noted the change in the rose imagery in Yeats's next volume of poetry, The Wind Among the Reeds. He expressed the change as an increase in physicality and attributed the difference primarily to Yeats's involvement with Olivia Shakespear.⁷² Whatever the cause, the merging of the mystical eternal female with flesh-and-blood women can be noted in the 1899 volume of poetry. Characteristically, Yeats enriched his female figure to encompass both realities; he did not sacrifice one in the development of the other.

The first appearance of the transformed rose symbol was in "The Lover tells of the Rose in his Heart," a poem which first appeared in print in November, 1892, more than a year before Yeats met Mrs. Shakespear. In this poem the lover speaks to his beloved of her "image" which, he vows, "blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart" (Var., p. 143). The use of the word "image" indicates that, while the poet may have been addressing a real woman, he was also approaching her on the level of an ideal which he had formed through his imagination. The strongest reference to the Rose in The Wind Among the Reeds was the 1896 mystical poem "The Secret Rose." In this poem the Rose is portrayed as central to all the goals of man and to all the interests of Yeats's poetry to that point. The Rose is linked to religion by the mention of the Holy sepulcher, to earthly delights by the wine vats, to the occult by reference to the Magi, and to Irish folk history by the names of the legendary heroes. The final connection was the most telling, for it links the secret rose with ideal human love. From the mention of that perfect love, the poet turns to his own desire and invokes the great power and redemptive faculty of the Rose. He tells the Rose,

I, too, await
The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.
When shall the stars be blown about the sky,
Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?
Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,
Far-off, most secret, and inviolate Rose?
(Var., p. 170)

From this point forward in Yeats's poetry, the merging of these two, the eternal female who might be identified with Boehme's Sophia and the actual women whom Yeats raised to symbols in his poetry, permitted Yeats to work through theories of the functions of the imagination within his poetry itself.

"All Beautiful Women"

There is one other aspect of the ideal female which can be discerned in both Boehme and Yeats--she must be passive. As Robartes counsels in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer":

It follows from this Latin text
That blest souls are not composite,
And that all beautiful women may
Live in uncomposite blessedness,
And lead us to the like--if they
Will banish every thought, unless
The lineaments that please their view
When the long looking-glass is full,
Even from the foot-sole think it too.
(Var., pp. 386-7)

Both Boehme and Yeats held that the glory of the female was that she received and reflected the creative power. Furthermore, both the mystic and the poet frequently used mirror imagery to denote this passive role. In "High Crosses of Ireland," an essay written in the 1890's, Yeats recognized the importance of the mirror imagery in Jacob Boehme's system. Discussing the traditional uses of the symbol of the mirror, Yeats stated that Boehme had introduced the symbol into the life of God Himself:

Medieval mystics represented . . . ultimate paradise as a round mirror; and Jacob Boehmen, who gathered into himself the dying mysticism of the Middle Ages, made it almost a fourth person of the Trinity.⁷³

The "fourth person" to whom Yeats referred was Sophia, the feminine element which he appreciated in Boehme's concept of the Trinity. One of the clearest instances of Boehme's identification of the female as a mirror is in Book I of the Incarnation:

Every Looking-Glass standeth still, or quiet and steady, and generates no Image, but receives the Image: and thus the Virgin of wisdom is a Looking-Glass of the Deity, wherein the Spirit of God sees itself, as also all the wonders of the Magia. (Incar. 1-65)

In another work, Sophia was expressly designated as an element of the Divine Imagination and she is compared to a mirror in regard to her function in the creative process:

She is the true Divine Chaos, wherein all things lie, viz. a Divine Imagination, in which the Ideas of angels and Souls have been seen from Eternity, in a Divine Type and Resemblance; yet not then as Creatures, but in resemblance, as when a man beholds his face in a Glass: Therefore the Angelical and human Idea flowed forth from the wisdom, and was formed into an Image, as Moses says God created Man in his Image. (Clavis 43)

It must have been this usage of the term to which Yeats referred when he said that the word "Image" for Boehme implied a real, spiritual product of the imagination, not just an analogous being.⁷⁴

Yeats used the symbol of the mirror in connection with women primarily to emphasize the desirability of their remaining relatively passive and unintellectual. In line with his view of the opposition between the faculties of reason and the imagination, Yeats believed that education of the female intellect would prove harmful to the imagination. In 1889 Yeats wrote to Katharine Tynan that if women go through what he called "the great mill called examinations" which, in his opinion, men have set up "to destroy the imagination," the women would be molded into someone with "no repose, no peacefulness."⁷⁵

That advice to Katharine Tynan was an early instance of Yeats's association of the female with the imagination and the connection between a strong force of the imagination and female passivity. The same theme was elaborated upon in Discoveries (1896), when Yeats juxtaposed a young female guitar player with a young girl "fresh from school, where they taught her history and geography." The guitar player was perfectly in tune with her instrument, while everything about the young graduate jarred the senses. The second girl's problems clearly arose, Yeats implied, from the flaws in her education. Instead of training the intellect with subjects like geography, she should have striven for a harmony of her body. She should have learned "before all else," Yeats wrote, "the heroic discipline of the looking-glass."⁷⁶

"Michael Robartes and the Dancer" (1920) puts forth this argument through the poetry. The dialogue begins with Robartes explaining an altar carving to the dancer. In his interpretation, the

dragon which the knight is slaying represents the maiden's thought. If the knight is successful in annihilating the young girl's thought, his beloved will be able to concentrate upon the perfection of her mirror image:

The half-dead dragon was her 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 that instant would grow wise.
(Var., p. 385)

The dancer asks, "May I not put myself to college?" (Var., p. 385) in one place, and in another she questions, "Must no beautiful woman be / Learned like a man?" (Var., p. 386). Robartes' answer, complete with references to great art work of the ages, is an emphatic insistence upon the harm that could be done to the character of a woman by intellectual pursuits. He counters her questions with a question of his own:

Did God in portioning wine and bread
Give man His thought or His mere body?
(Var., p. 386)

The conclusions drawn by Robartes coincide with Yeats's contention that women who have learned "the heroic discipline" of the looking-glass can be the means of man's salvation.

One of Boehme's correspondents evidently asked the same question as Robartes did concerning the nature of the Eucharist. Boehme's answer was that the offering was the flesh and blood of Christ, sanctified, as he had explained in his work on



Communion, through the wisdom or imagination of God. The pertinent verses are from Boehme's first epistle:

38. And this essentiality [of the new will of the redeemer] is called Sophia, being the essential wisdom or the body of Christ; and in this the faith in the Holy Ghost doth consist.

40. Christ feedeth the soul with the essence of Sophia--viz., with His own flesh and blood.⁷⁷

The poem in which all the elements under discussion coalesce most obviously is the 1916 poem entitled simply "On Woman." The poem begins, "May God be praised for woman / That gives up all her mind" (Var., p. 345). The use of Solomon and Sheba as the example of a perfectly matched pair was a fortunate choice because it carries with it associations of the Wisdom figure from Boehme and the Apocrypha. As in the other Yeats poems about Solomon and Sheba, the genesis of Solomon's wisdom seems to be intimately connected in this poem with the act of sexual intercourse. In the first stanza the poet had explained that the virtue of the passive woman is that she gives a body to the thoughts that man brings to her--

A man may find in no man
A friendship of her kind
That covers all he has brought
As with her flesh and bone
(Var., p. 345)

The use of the act of human intercourse to express all types of creation is a natural outcome of the efforts to impart a mystic vision in concrete terms.

Boehme, as Yeats was later to do, emphasized the passivity of the female who corporealizes the potential image projected by the imagination. In The Second Apologie in Answer to Balthazar Tylcken Boehme explained:

Wisdom gives birth, but she would not do so if the Spirit were not acting within her. She brings forth without the power of the fire-life; she has no ardent desire, but her joy finds its perfection in the manifestation of the God-head, and therefore she is called a virgin in chastity and purity before God.⁷⁸

The principal example, from Boehme's works, of the way the Virgin gives birth to the Image is the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Yeats demonstrated that this story of the Word of God being made flesh through the body of a woman was important in the work of William Blake as well. In the introduction to the Yeats-Ellis Blake, Yeats wrote:

In mysticism the 'female principle' is of the body, and is to the male a mother under Divine fruition, not otherwise than in the symbolic story of the Virgin Mary. The Incarnation itself was none the less a symbol to Blake because he held it as an event--as the event,--of the world's history.⁷⁹

A case could be made for the idea that Yeats also used the story of the Incarnation of Christ as a symbol of what for Yeats was most important--the creation of a work of art. The Tower, published in 1928, contains two companion poems which, considered together, form an important statement about the process of artistic creation. In the first of these two poems,

the small 1927 poem "Wisdom," Yeats stressed the importance of art in the formulation of man's religious beliefs:

The true faith discovered was
When painted panel, statuary,
Glass-mosaic, window glass,
Amended what was told awry
By some peasant gospeller
(Var., p. 440)

According to this poem, Christ (here identified with Wisdom) was at least as much a product of the artist's imagination as an historical personage. Thus, the explanation of Christ's origins given in this poem can be understood on both the natural and the supernatural levels. "King Abundance" can be God the Father and "Innocence" the Virgin Mary. Or "King Abundance" could refer to the wealth of rich materials available to the Byzantine artist, or to the richness of the artist's imagination which produced this magnificent Christ from an otherwise unlikely carpenter.

The placement of "Wisdom" in Collected Poems provides an intriguing preparation for the next poem, "Leda and the Swan," which was first published in 1924. In this celebrated poem, all of the basic elements correspond to those in "Wisdom"--the Divine propagator, the virgin mother, the connection between religious myth and the artistic interpretation of the story. The juxtaposition of this poem with the preceding one demonstrates that for the artist's purposes Christ is a symbol which can be replaced with a mythological correlate. The story of "Leda and the Swan" is essentially the Incarnation story, transferred to the

framework of a different theological system, perhaps to emphasize its symbolic nature. On the symbolic level, "Leda and the Swan" can be read as an explanation of the activity of the imagination in producing a real image. With the possible exception of the violence of the encounter, what occurs corresponds in every detail with the workings of the imagination in the system of Jacob Boehme.

The octave of this sonnet presents the rape itself. Despite the violence of the scene depicted, the young girl remains primarily passive throughout the encounter with the god disguised as a swan. The contact is described by references to individual parts of Leda's body, several of which are modified by adjectives which connote submission--her "helpless breast," her "vague fingers," her "loosening thighs." The second part of the sonnet, following the climax, holds a resonance, intentional or not, to Wisdom in the Song of Solomon. The poet claims, "A shudder in the loins engenders there / The broken wall, the burning roof and tower" (Var., p. 441). These images of destruction have, of course, been read as references to the sack of Troy. But what explains the choice of those particular images? Yeats may have been alluding to the song of the virgin in the Song of Solomon. The maiden sings, "I am a wall, and my breasts like towers: then was I in his eyes as one that found favor."⁸⁰ Consciousness of the Biblical reference adds further depth to the poem as an explication of the creative process.

Helen Vendler, in Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays, viewed "Leda and the Swan" as indicative of the relationship between artist and muse.⁸¹ Certainly the poem can be interpreted, on one level, as a statement about the nature of the creative process. But there is nothing to indicate that Yeats viewed the artist-muse relationship as one akin to forcible rape. The voice of the artist in this poem is that of a third-person observer, questioning what is happening beneath the surface actions he is observing:

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?
(Var., p. 441)

The poem ends with a question, "Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?" (Var., p. 441). It is significant that the poem stops short of resolution. The act is consummated, but what are the results? The seed of the imagination has been sown within the passive female, but to what will she give birth? The poem deliberately leaves the reader anticipating the next step in the process. In Boehme's system, after the imagination has been sent forth from the creator to the female whose function it is to receive and enflesh the image, the next stage is the establishment of contraries. The interaction between opposing contraries is also a vital element in the poetry of Yeats.

FOOTNOTES

¹Uncollected Prose, I, 400.

²Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 326.

³Uncollected Prose, I, 400.

⁴"Swedenborg," p. 321.

⁵Boutroux, p. 187.

⁶Martensen, p. 25.

⁷Martensen, p. 43.

⁸Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, p. 93.

⁹Berdyaev, p. xxv.

¹⁰Jacob Boehme, Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings, trans. John Rolleston Earle ([London: Constable, 1919]; rpt. Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks of University of Michigan Press, 1958), p. 181. Six Mystical Points was also included in Several Treatises of Jacob Boehme, trans. John Sparrow (London: L. Lloyd, 1661) which was available in the British Museum.

¹¹Essays and Introductions, p. 28.

¹²Essays and Introductions, p. 43.

¹³Essays and Introductions, p. 49.

¹⁴Kathleen Raine, Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn, p. 31.

¹⁵See for example "Magic" in Essays and Introductions, pp. 28-52 or Autobiography, pp. 221-26.

¹⁶Letters, p. 210. To John O'Leary, Week ending July 23, 1892.

¹⁷Letters, p. 211.

¹⁸Dictionary of Canadian English, p. 547.

¹⁹George W.F. Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, trans. E.B. Speirs and J. Burdon Sanderson, ed. E.B. Speirs (New York: The Humanities Press, 1962), I, 290-91.

²⁰Letters, p. 30. To Mary Cronin, undated.

²¹Intro., Poems of William Blake, pp. xxxv-vi.

²²Essays and Introductions, p. 43.

²³Essays and Introductions, p. 193.

²⁴A Vision, p. 72.

²⁵Essays and Introductions, p. 112.

²⁶"The Message of the Folk-Lorist" in Uncollected Prose, I, 284.

²⁷Frayne, "Yeats as Critic-Reviewer" in Uncollected Prose, I, 67.

²⁸Uncollected Prose, I, 400.

²⁹Uncollected Prose, I, 400.

³⁰Essays and Introductions, p. 52.

³¹Uncollected Prose, I, 420.

³²Letters to the New Island, p. 94.

³³Intro., Poems of William Blake, p. xxxiv.

³⁴Variorum Poems, p. 826.

³⁵Kermode, Romantic Image, p. 101.

³⁶Helen Requierio, The Limits of Imagination (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 145.

³⁷"Cuchulain of Muirthemne" in Explorations, p. 11.

³⁸Essays and Introductions, p. 235.

³⁹Jacob Boehme, Communion 1-33, Quoted in Hartmann, p. 223.

⁴⁰Epistles, p. 78. Epistle 5-10.

⁴¹Yeats-Ellis, Blake I, p. xiii.

⁴²Essays and Introductions, p. 518.

⁴³Essays and Introductions, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁴Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 273-4.

⁴⁵Uncollected Prose, I, 400.

⁴⁶Brinton, p. 104.

⁴⁷Windelband, p. 375.

⁴⁸Brinton, pp. 41-42.

⁴⁹Essays and Introductions, p. 317.

⁵⁰Letters, pp. 434-5. To A.E. (George Russell), April, 1904.

⁵¹Kermode, p. 43.

⁵²Essays and Introductions, p. 65.

⁵³Essays and Introductions, p. 112.

- 54 Martensen, p. 43.
- 55 Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, p. 97.
- 56 Uncollected Prose, II, 144.
- 57 Martensen, p. 43.
- 58 Brinton, p. 64.
- 59 Letters, pp. 714-5. To Olivia Shakespear, May 25, 1926.
- 60 Wisdom of Solomon 7-22.
- 61 Wisdom of Solomon 7-26.
- 62 Wisdom of Solomon 9-10 and 11..
- 63 Wisdom of Solomon 8-2.
- 64 The Song of Solomon 2-1.
- 65 A Vision, p. 8.
- 66 A. Norman Jeffares, W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 121-2.
- 67 Boehme, True Repen. 1-29 in The Way to Christ. See page 99 above.
- 68 "A General Introduction for my Work" in Essays and Introductions, p. 518.
- 69 Variorum Poems, p. 842.
- 70 Epistles, p. 171. Epistle 23-2.
- 71 Proverbs 8-23.
- 72 John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1959), p. 92.
- 73 Uncollected Prose, II, 144.

⁷⁴Uncollected Prose, I, 400.

⁷⁵Letters, p. 123. To Katharine Tynan, April 21, 1889.

⁷⁶Essays and Introductions, pp. 268-70.

⁷⁷Epistles, p. 19. Epistle 1, 38 and 40.

⁷⁸Jacob Boehme, The Second Apologie in Answer to Balthazar Tylcken, v. 64, in The Remainder of Books written by Jacob Boehme, also quoted in Hartmann, p. 86.

⁷⁹Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 112.

⁸⁰Song of Solomon 8-10.

⁸¹Helen Vendler, Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 158.

CHAPTER III

"BETWEEN EXTREMITIES / MAN RUNS HIS COURSE"

"Fair Needs Foul"

The sonnet "Leda and the Swan" (1924) ended with the question of what results from the projection of the creative imagination. Yeats's philosophical treatise, A Vision (1925), which according to Yeats contained "40 pages of commentary" on this "classic enunciation,"¹ presents the answer in the first paragraph: "Love and War came from the eggs of Leda."² The result of the sending forth of the imagination is the establishment of duality, opposing contraries which both Yeats and Boehme considered essential for creation.

The amount of critical attention devoted to the concept of duality within the work of Yeats attests to the importance which Yeats scholars have placed upon this aspect of his art. Specific manifestations of the dualities pervading Yeats's work have been used as the basis of at least three books on Yeats-- John Moore's Masks of Love and Death, Thomas Whitaker's Swan and Shadow, and Charles Berryman's Design of Opposites.³ In W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction Balachandra Rajan pronounced Yeats "perhaps the most dialectical of poets."⁴ In

an article entitled "Yeats, The Book and the Image," Morton Zabel declared, "It is right to ascribe to Yeats an obsession by dialectic. His oppositions play restlessly and imperatively against one another. The antithesis is never resolved."⁵ Giorgio Melchiori in The Whole Mystery of Art identified "the inescapable attraction of the contraries" as a "basic tenet of Yeats."⁶ Richard Ellmann noted that Yeats held a "view of the world as almost incessant strife between opposites, and . . . a similar view of the poem."⁷ Frank Kermode, in Romantic Image, viewed the "reconciliation of opposites" as the very purpose of "the Yeatsian symbol."⁸ And in The Way Down and Out, John Senior maintained, "There are two alternatives everywhere in Yeats's universe; all things divide themselves into warring opposites."⁹

Most scholars and commentators on Jacob Boehme have focused also on the movement between contraries as a central doctrine to be studied, often using, as have the scholars on Yeats, the analogies of warfare to express the relationship. Émile Boutroux wrote, "Everywhere in nature Boehme finds that effective warfare being waged."¹⁰ Nicolas Berdyaev explained, "[Boehme] sees everywhere a pitched battle between contrary principles."¹¹ He elaborated, "The life of the world is a battle, a becoming, a vast process, all fire and dynamism."¹² In Boehme's system, Hans Martensen said, "Life and Manifestation can only be conceived of as a movement between contrasts."¹³

Boehme lived during a particularly divisive period of world history. In his country the Reformation had splintered the dominant Christian religion; the settled world of the Middle Ages was breaking forth into the turbulence of the Renaissance; the political entities of Europe were about to be shattered by the Thirty Years' War. Boehme scholars characteristically have maintained that Boehme was strongly influenced by the theological upheaval spearheaded by Martin Luther. Recognizing the idea of the pervasiveness of good and evil in the writings of Paracelsus, who predated Boehme by almost a century, John Stoudt said, "The difference between Paracelsus and Boehme was simply Luther."¹⁴ Through Luther's doctrine of original sin, Stoudt thought, Boehme was led to the perception of duality as having the goal of resolution in man and nature.¹⁵ Boehme was the first post-Reformation mystic to address himself to the ontological implications of the problem. The impetus behind Boehme's position might have come both from Luther's teaching on the matter of evil and the Renaissance emphasis on individual man. Windelband explained that the Renaissance Boehme viewed man as a microcosm and, since good and evil were held to be essential elements of human nature, Boehme inferred that good and evil must also be necessary components on a cosmic level:

Self-knowledge, nevertheless, is religious knowledge, which finds the opposition of good and evil as a fundamental trait of human nature. The same opposition fills the whole world; it rules in heaven as on earth, and since God is the sole cause of all, this opposition must be sought in him also.¹⁶

Yeats too was born in an age which evinced special concern over the problem of duality. According to T.R. Henn, "The doctrine of evolution by the fusion of opposites was very much part of the intellectual current of the early nineties."¹⁷ Its prevalence as a thematic concern was typified in such works as The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and The Picture of Dorian Gray. In a chapter entitled "Robartes and Aherne: Two Sides of a Penny," Richard Ellmann used the Stevenson and Wilde works to argue that the "sense of the bifurcated self" was widespread among Yeats's contemporaries.¹⁸ "Yeats," said Ellmann, "came to maturity in this atmosphere of doubling and splitting of the self. . . ."¹⁹

There is no way of determining exactly to what degree Boehme had influenced the atmosphere in which the young Yeats developed. Brinton noted the appeal of Boehme's contraries to the German romantics and, through them, to the English, but maintained that the Romantics were drawn to only one half of the duality. "Boehme saw God and escaped the Romantic subjectivity," according to Brinton's analysis: "Romanticism only discovered the out-going nature-will in Boehme."²⁰ In Blake Mark Schorer claimed, however, that the earlier poet was aware of both sides of the contraries in Boehme, being influenced by "Boehme's extraordinary pre-Hegelian dialectic."²¹ And in Coleridge the Visionary J.B. Beer wrote, "Coleridge's conception of the daemonic probably derives ultimately from his early reading of Boehme, which would have set his mind working on the idea of the devil as a twisted angelic nature, still possessing

all the materials of the true angelic but in distorted form."²² The motto Yeats chose in 1890 for his initiation into the Order of the Golden Dawn--"Demon est Deus Inversus," which so aptly captured the age's concern with duality--may have been ultimately attributable to Boehme.

Given the evidence that the problem of duality, in some manner a part of the philosophy of every age, was a dominant feature of the zeitgeist of both Boehme's and Yeats's eras, it would be presumptuous to attribute Yeats's concern with the subject to his reading of Boehme alone. But early references which reveal Yeats's familiarity with Boehme's treatment of contraries, similarities between Yeats's and Boehme's methods of expressing these contraries, and affinities between those aspects of duality stressed suggest that Yeats found in his reading of Boehme a treatment of the concept of contrariety which reinforced and enriched his own developing ideas on the subject.

Most critics who have remarked upon a possible connection between Yeats and Boehme have focused upon this shared view of contraries. Virginia Moore expressly attributed the direction of Yeats's interest in contraries to ideas he discovered in Boehme. Referring to Yeats's studies at the end of the nineteenth century, she wrote:

Meanwhile, spurred on by that symbol-master Blake, he was reading Boehme with an eye cocked for polarity. Yes, Boehme saw the principle of twoness from oneness, and was concerned about its ethical implications. Only when we confront ourselves with our experience as opposite and counterpart (Gegenwurf), he wrote, does our real consciousness spring into fire. God's counterpart, the thing

that makes Him aware of Himself, is the world; ours, experience-born conceptions. Yeats was fascinated. So consciousness itself came from the experience of opposition! Man's oscillation between extremes had value for self-development.²³

Like Moore, many of the scholars who have linked Yeats to Boehme on the theory of contraries have traced a progression through Yeats's interest in Blake. According to Henn, "The results of the impact of Blake's philosophy and poetic practice are permanent and complex" because Yeats had undertaken his study of Blake early in his career. The contribution which Henn singled out for specific mention was the doctrine of contraries: "From [Blake] comes, through Boehme, the idea of progression through contraries that justifies the doctrine of the Anti-Self."²⁴ Joseph Hone said, "Yeats had been familiarised by Jacob Boehme and by Blake with the idea of the coincidence of opposites," but, he cautioned, Yeats was never satisfied with a single source--"whenever a philosophical idea interested him he wanted to trace it to images out of old time."²⁵ Crediting Boehme with Blake's "picture of earth experience as the war of contraries,"²⁶ Virginia Moore cited the idea of "two contrary wills as the cause of all change and motion" as one of the two main doctrines which Blake could have derived from Boehme and which could be traced into Yeats's writing.²⁷ Whitaker, remarking upon the similarity between the journey in Yeats's "The Wanderings of Oisín" (1889) and the journey undertaken by Blake's Urizen, found common ground in the pattern of cyclical transformation established by Boehme.²⁸ In his collection of essays called The Circus Animals, A. Norman Jeffares, while

acknowledging that Yeats definitely found the idea of contraries in Blake, speculated that Yeats may have been familiar also with an earlier source and suggested Jacob Boehme as a possibility. Jeffares referred to a page in Yeats's copy of Denis Saurat's Blake and Modern Thought. The passage is Saurat's treatment of the doctrine of contraries in Blake, the most pertinent part being:

Without contraries there is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.

Beside this passage in the margin of his book Yeats had penciled, "I think there was no such thought known in England in Blake's day. It is fundamental in Blake." Jeffares felt that the qualification suggested that Yeats knew of an earlier exponent of such an idea. He theorized that "[Boehme] seems very likely; Yeats had studied his work with some care."²⁹

Evidence of Yeats's own study of Boehme, particularly on this matter of contraries, is most abundant in the 1893 edition of Blake's work which Yeats co-edited. Yeats's most sustained treatment of Boehme in the Yeats-Ellis Blake appeared in the section which detailed Blake's "Symbolic System." In his personal copy Yeats claimed almost exclusive authorship for this crucial section in a note (1900), "The greater part of the 'symbolic system' is my writing."³⁰ While there is no reason to doubt that all of the material on Boehme in that section was

provided originally by Yeats, there was assurance in the same note that the editors eventually shared all of the information in the Yeats-Ellis edition. "We discussed everything together," Yeats noted in regard to his method of collaboration with Ellis.³¹

Part II of "The Symbolic System," an explanation of Blake's view of the universe entitled "The Three Persons and the Mirror," is almost as fully an exploration of Boehme's system as it is of Blake's. Indeed, as Yeats explained the parallels in the views, the few points of divergence between Boehme and Blake were more a difference of word choice or the placement of emphasis than substantive issues. Yeats began with the premise that the act of creation, both on the cosmic and the human scale, was the result of division and desire for unity, explaining,

The universe, according to both seers, arose from the divine unity, and by a process of division and subdivision almost identical in both systems, so far as its earlier stages are concerned and having many analogies throughout.³²

Briefly, the beginning of the process, as Yeats outlined it, was that the Original force exists first as mere will. This will fashions for itself a mirror through emanation, or sending forth of the imagination. Yeats's summary of the process is perhaps the clearest, most concise statement ever formulated to explain Boehme's most important contribution to Christian theology, his fundamental principle of the necessity for contraries within the Godhead. By this formulation the Son, or Divine Love, is the necessary counterpart of the Father, or Divine Will. In "The Three Persons and the Mirror" Yeats explained,

God looking into this mirror, ceases to be mere will, beholds Himself as the Son, His love for His own unity, His self-consciousness, and enters on that eternal meditation about Himself which is called the Holy Spirit.³³

Yeats may have been familiar with Boehme's Three Principles, for Yeats's single sentence explanation of the theogonistic process sounds remarkably like a passage from that work. Boehme had written:

If you will meditate on God, take before you the eternal Darkness, which is without God; for God dwells in himself, and the Darkness cannot in its own Power comprehend him, which Darkness has a great (Desire of) longing after the Light caused by the *Light's beholding itself in the Darkness, and shining in it. And in this Longing or Desiring, you find the Source, and the Source takes hold of the Power or Virtue of the Light, and the Longing makes the Virtue material, and the material Virtue is the Inclosure to God, or Heaven, for in the Virtue stands the Paradise, wherein the Spirit which proceeds from the Father and the Son works. (3 Prin. 7-20)

As convoluted as the above quotation is, it has the virtue of being expressed in plain language. The greatest difficulty in examining Boehme's views on the contraries, as on other matters, is posed by his lack of an established vocabulary to express his innovative ideas. Boehme, foreshadowing Yeats, eschewed abstraction as destructive of the vitality which he wished to express; however, he sought to express the deepest mysteries of the universe.

*There is a footnote indicated at this point in the Law edition which introduces the mirror mentioned by Yeats. The footnote adds, "Speculating as in a glass."

In "The Three Persons and the Mirror" Yeats accurately ascribed Boehme's lack of "palpable images and moving affections" to his tendency to return to "the dark fountain of things," the abyss from which all creation began.³⁴ Frequently, Boehme used pseudo-scientific terms, for example, to express the elements in the first triad. Thus, the first quality can be expressed as harshness, as sharp desire, as contraction, or, in alchemical terms, as salt. In his introduction to a 1909 edition of The Three-Fold Life of Man, G.W. Allen interpreted the first quality as "that hard and strong resistance to change, which is the great primal conservative force, tending . . . to resist new combinations, and maintain the status quo."³⁵ The quality is contraction because it tends to draw in upon itself as the only available object of desiring.

In order to actualize an object of desire, the first principle fashions a mirror upon which it can project, through the imagination, an image to be desired. This image, the second component, which emanates from the astringent desire yet stands opposite to it, is an out-reaching, an attraction which holds the potential for all variety. This second quality, the outward-looking desire, has the characteristics of mildness and sweetness. Boehme labeled it with the scientific term of expansion and gave it the alchemical name of mercury. Allen understood the second principle as "that restless flux, ever seeking new combinations, which is the principle of all variety, and the causes of differences and evolution."³⁶ And H.W. Häusermann, in the article

"W.B. Yeats's Criticism of Ezra Pound," recognized the same attributes of the contraries in Yeats, saying that Yeats "considered perfection to lie in a state of balance between the 'flux' and conscious limitation, between expansion and contraction."³⁷

Yeats demonstrated a familiarity and an ease with Boehme's scientific and alchemical terminology. In the Yeats-Ellis Blake Yeats identified the structure of Urizen as following Boehme's system of creation in all essentials, his only departure from the categories used most often by Boehme being the use of the scientific term "motion" instead of "expansion" for the second quality:

Though different in expression and distribution of emphasis the main structures is [sic] in agreement with Jacob Boehmen's scheme of creation. The first triad is identical with the alchemical categories, salt, mercury and sulphur; as contraction, motion, and whirling. It must be remembered, too, that the first and second of any triad produce the third, as alchemical salt and mercury produce sulphur.³⁸

The final point of the quotation above needs to be considered here briefly. It was a basic tenet of occultism that all things come in threes, and Boehme placed heavy emphasis upon the trinitarian nature of reality. But, as Yeats explained, the third element is considered a product of the first two. Since man's finite nature cannot comprehend the process of the establishment and reconciliation of opposites as at once eternal and simultaneous, the process must be broken down into steps for analysis. The establishment and operation of contraries can be

considered as one topic for discussion of the affinities between Yeats's work and Boehme's. The product of their opposition, the third element of the triad, is best treated separately.

Boehme's theogonic development passed over immediately into the cosmogonic. The first triad established by the interaction of the original will and its mirror-image is not yet the Triune Godhead. By the doctrine of contraries, this first triad requires a counter principle for manifestation. Boehme called the first ternary, or first principle, variously the "Wheel of Life," the "Wheel of Anguish," or the "Dark Fire-root." The second principle, established through the desire of the first for its own opposite, is the "Light World, the Kingdom of Joy" (Aurora 2-20). This second principle, or wheel, likewise consists of three qualities, but, whereas the first principle is the negative ternary, and is characterized by harshness and anguish, the second principle, or positive ternary, is characterized by sweetness and joy. The point which deserves frequent reiteration is that here as elsewhere in Boehme "contraries are not negations," to use the axiom Yeats adopted from Blake.³⁹ Boehme's designation of one principle as a "negative ternary" and one as a "positive ternary" carried with it no more of a value judgment of one over the other than does the physicist's labeling of one electrical terminal as negative and the other positive. Boehme began The Three Principles with the assurance that both contraries were equally important and desirable:

For the Original of Life, and of all Mobility,
 consists in the Wrathfulness; yet if the
 (tartness) be kindled with the Light of God,
 it is then no more Tartness, but the severe
 Wrathfulness is changed into great Joy.
 (3 Prin. 1-2)

This insistence upon the necessity for the coexistence of the antinomies within the Godhead freed Boehme's teachings from the Manichean position of separate forces of good and evil. Boehme's two whirling traids, plus a seventh principle, the element of conjunction between them, form a harmonious unit which Yeats called "the universal life." As Yeats explained, however, a contrary arose to oppose this universal life. This contrary was visible nature:

At first the thought-forms subsist and move in this universal "imagination which liveth for ever" without being manifest to themselves and each other as separate individualities, not being lives but thoughts of the universal life. Then comes the contrary of the universal life, "the reaction of man against God," the longing of the shapes and thought-forms for a vivid sensation of their own existence. Desire is its name, and to it Boehmen traces the fall into physical life.⁴⁰

The entire process, as delineated so far from Yeats's treatment of "The Three Persons and the Mirror," takes place on the cosmic level. Through Boehme's theory of correspondences, the same process is repeated in infinite variety, with progression by contraries always forming the basis for manifestation.

The influence of Yeats's early critical attention to Boehme's antinomies, as evidenced by this careful study afforded to Boehme's system within his 1893 study of Blake, can be discerned

in the frequency with which Yeats's vocabulary and mode of expression echoed Boehme's, particularly when he discussed the contraries. Thirty-two years later, in A Vision, Yeats specifically attributed a term he used to express the contraries to Boehme. Yeats explained that he had offered the word "tincture," and he acknowledged that the term was "a common word in Boehme."⁴¹ Morton Seiden, in William Butler Yeats: The Poet as a Mythmaker, proposed that the word "primary," which was not accounted for in A Vision, may have been taken from Boehme also. Seiden noted that Boehme "divided human consciousness into inner and outer faculties, and he said that the latter are the prima materia of nature, the stuff out of which mortal man, when born into the temporal world, is fashioned or made." Thus, Seiden reasoned, "It may have been that term--prima materia--which first suggested to Yeats his term the primary tincture, an abstract image of the empirical as opposed to the imaginative life."⁴² After crediting to Boehme the word "tincture," Yeats claimed that the idea of the progression between contraries dated back to his reading of Blake, whose position on the contraries has been linked so frequently with Boehme's. It is reasonable, therefore, to connect Yeats's idea of the contraries to Jacob Boehme.

Yeats's explanation of Blake's contraries was indeed strongly reminiscent of Boehme's formulation of the inner and outer faculties of man. Yeats explained in the first part of "The Symbolic System" that Blake viewed the two contrary forces at work in the mind of man as the pull inward toward the self,

or the subjective urge, and the pull outward toward the world, or the objective urge. In a passage of "The Symbolic System" which Harold Bloom in his study Yeats called "the embryo of his vision of the gyres,"⁴³ Yeats wrote: "The mind or imagination or consciousness of man may be said to have two poles, the personal and impersonal, or, as Blake preferred to call them, the limit of contraction and the unlimited expansion." Yeats continued with an explanation of the implications of this theory:

When we act from the personal we tend to bind our consciousness down as to a fiery centre. When, on the other hand, we allow our imagination to expand away from this egoistic mood, we become vehicles for the universal thought and merge in the universal mood.⁴⁴

Yeats did not specifically relate Blake's thought to Boehme's in this section, but Yeats's explanation, even in its imagery, echoes Boehme. Brinton expressed Boehme's central vision as movement between two extreme expressions of the individual will. 'There is the "Vernunft," the "outwardly directed will [which] expands in order to include all things," and its counterpart, the "Verstand," the inwardly directed will which "seems to contract upon pure subjectivity, to include nothing except that which it is in its own deepest self."⁴⁵ The similarity between these opposing states and those developed by Yeats is strong. The "Verstand" corresponds to the "antithetical tincture," by which "we express more and more, as it broadens, our inner world of desire and imagination"; and the "Vernunft" is

like the "primary tincture," "that objectivity of the mind" which stresses "outward things and events . . . the actual facts, not coloured by the opinions or feelings."⁴⁶ That the antithetical tincture is "emotional and aesthetic," moreover, and the primary is "reasonable and moral," parallels Brinton's description of Boehme's inward turning will as the source of mystical experience and the outgoing will as the source of conceptual thought.⁴⁷

It is interesting as well that in establishing the theory of the opposition of the tinctures Yeats denied influence from Hegel. Hegel erred, according to Yeats, because the philosopher tried to "put the conflict in logical form," and "reality is not logical."⁴⁸ As Yeats wrote four days before his own death:

The abstract is not life and everywhere drags
out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel
but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence. . . .⁴⁹

The difference between the philosopher and the mystic or the artist, which may account for the appeal of what Mark Schorer called "Boehme's extraordinary pre-Hegelian dialectic,"⁵⁰ may lie in the differing modes of expression. Far from being abstract, Boehme's theory of the contraries often reads like an epic, with vast forces personified in a kind of private mythology. In The Mysteriorium Magnum, for instance, Boehme presented this vision of the operation of the contraries:

The Anguish-Source is thus to be understood.
The Astringent Desire conceives itself, and
draws itself into itself, and makes itself
full, hard, and rough; now the Hardness is

retentive; the Attraction is fugitive; the one will have it into itself, and the other will out of itself. But seeing they cannot separate, and part asunder one from the other, they remain in each other as a rolling Wheel; the one will ascend, the other descend.
(Mys. Mag. 3-15)

"The Two Titans" (1886), an early Blakean contribution of Yeats to The Dublin University Review, sets up a similar dramatic situation. On a desolate rock lit by lightning flashes, "Two figures crouching on the black rock, bound / To one another with a coiling chain" are presented (Var., p. 687). Because Yeats subtitled the work "A Political Poem," the two titans have been interpreted as Ireland and England, but the "grey-haired youth" and the fierce sibyl could represent a number of other contraries. Like Boehmé's Anguish and Desire, they alternately repel each other and try to devour one another, all the while remaining bound together so that the final view of the pair is their intermingling in the "darkness of the whirlwind shattered deep" (Var., p. 688).

Yeats used alchemical terminology similar to Boehme's in his preface to an edition of the Poems and Translations of John M. Synge, a writer whom Yeats frequently associated with the concept of creation through contraries. In the 1909 preface, which served as a posthumous tribute to his friend, Yeats wrote of "the astringent joy and hardness that was in all he did,"⁵¹ and of "the strength that made him delight in setting the hard virtues by the soft, the bitter by the sweet, salt by mercury, the stone by the elixir, gave him a hunger for harsh facts, for

ugly surprising things, for all that defies our hope."⁵² Two years earlier, in an essay entitled "Poetry and Tradition," Yeats had expressed the same ideal for art in general terms:

. . . the nobleness of the arts is in the mingling of the contraries, the extremity of sorrow, the extremity of joy, perfection of personality, the perfection of its surrender, overflowing turbulent energy, and marmorean stillness; and its red rose opens at the meeting of the two beams of the cross, and at the trysting-place of mortal and immortal, time and eternity.⁵³

Boehme had described the central importance of contraries as the formative elements of the soul in strikingly similar terms: "The soul itself is a Globe with a Cross, and two Eyes, an Holy Divine one and a wrathful, hellish one in the Fire" (40 Ques. 5-8). As Yeats was aware,⁵⁴ the wrathful eye corresponded to temporal existence and the divine eye to the properties of eternity. In a later verse Boehme had elaborated, "The soul in the first principle, according to the Original, has the form of an Eye, and yet twofold like a Heart, wherein there is a Cross" (40 Ques. 5-19). John Stoudt, in Sunrise to Eternity, expressed the duality of Boehme's vision in phrases almost identical to those in Yeats's statement above about the nobleness of the arts. "Boehme's mysticism was bipolar," Stoudt wrote: "Boehme's mysticism embraced both joy and misery, both the mystical elevation and the mystical death. In him these two poles cannot be separated and his full mystical experience embraces both."⁵⁵



"All Creation is from Conflict"

Yeats and Boehme also shared the view that the impetus to express an individual vision of reality arose from the awareness of the pull of contraries within the self. "All creation is from conflict," Yeats wrote in his autobiography.⁵⁶ In one of his letters on poetry to Dorothy Wellesley, Yeats was even more specific in attributing the ability to create to the struggle within himself:

We have all something within ourselves to batter down and get our power from this fighting. I have never "produced" a play in verse without showing the actors that the passion of the verse comes from the fact that the speakers are holding down violence or madness--"down Hysterica passio." All depends on the completeness of the holding down, on the stirring of the beast underneath.⁵⁷

Boehme, too, had used a letter form to describe the origins of his work as a struggle with the beast within. Denying that he had any natural talent for literature, Boehme explained in

The First Apologie in Answer to Balthazar Tylcken:

Finding within myself a powerful contrarium, namely, the desires that belong to the flesh and blood, I began to fight a hard battle against my corrupted nature, and with the aid of God, I made up my mind to overcome the inherited evil will. . . .⁵⁸

This division or conflict at the origins of the works manifested itself not only in the choice of subject matter of each

author but also in the way the works were written. Stoudt discovered a "schizoid character" to Boehme's writings and found within all Boehme's works a "tension between reason and passion."⁵⁹ Richard Ellmann demonstrated the duality of Yeats's vision by examining certain of Yeats's symbols and showing that they assumed opposing meanings in different poems. "Each symbol is a kind of revolving disc, like Yeats's wheel or moon with their dark and light phases," Ellmann wrote. "Not only do the symbols turn like wheels," he continued, "but the intellectual thematic content of each poem balances two meanings contingent upon each other."⁵⁹ For Yeats as for Boehme, it would seem that the operation of the contraries pervaded every level.

A late poem, "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (1929), may be Yeats's most explicit expression of progression by contraries as an artistic technique throughout his work. Contraries crowd around the poet's account of his struggle for a theme. The first stanza counterposes the old poet's dry period with the prodigious output of his youth. The mention of winter and summer and the juxtaposition of the poet's old age and the "stilted boys" of his circus carry associations of the contraries within the physical life of man. The next two stanzas allude to the way in which one of Yeats's works may provide the contrary for another. The second stanza presents the pagan warrior Oisín; the next stanza relates the "counter-truth," the story of the self-sacrificing Christian Cathleen. The fourth stanza presents the pull of a pair of opposites which troubled Yeats throughout his creative life--the tension between the

necessity for involvement with the real world and the desire for the perfection of the world of the imagination:

It was the dream itself enchanted me:
 Character isolated by a deed
 To engross the present and dominate memory.
 Players and painted stage took all my love,
 And not those things that they were emblems of.
 (Var., p. 630)

The final stanza of "The Circus Animals' Desertion" contains one of the most masterful examples of the holding together of opposites in Yeats's poetry. Through the strong use of puns Yeats crams the language with the tension of contraries within a single word. The stanza begins, "Those masterful images because complete / Grew in pure mind." There is a double meaning of the word "pure," for it can be interpreted here as either "mere" or "chaste." Whichever interpretation of "pure mind" is considered, the next lines present immediate contrast between the place where the images grew and the squalor of their origins. The images "Grew in pure mind, but," the poem asks, "out of what began?" The answer is

A mound of refuse or the sweepings of the street,
 Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
 Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
 Who keeps the till. (Var., p. 630)

Once the pattern of opposition has been established, the possibilities of antimonies crowd forward. There is no way of determining, for instance, where Yeats intended the accent on the word "refuse." Is that a "mound of refuse," or a "mound of refuse?" Was Yeats using "can" in the slang sense to refer to

that part of the anatomy which is said to break under hard work? Even if that is pushing too far, there can be no doubt that "raving slut" was intended as the "counter-truth" to "pure mind." Mention of truth raises a question about the next line of the poem. In what sense did the poet intend to "lie down where all the ladders start?" The most satisfactory answer is that, wherever two possibilities of interpretation exist, Yeats, who was himself aware always of the dualities of life, would have been pleased to have both considered. Yeats was too careful a craftsman not to have been conscious of all the ramifications of his choice of words. The last line of the poem demonstrates this craftsmanship admirably. The "foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" provides the necessary contrary for both interpretations of the word "pure" from the beginning of the stanza, as well as setting up the conflict between mind and heart, or intellect and will, which was another large concern in the doctrine of contraries. "The Circus Animals' Desertion" does not provide an exhaustive list of the aspects of contrariety which concerned Yeats, but it does demonstrate the process Ellmann described by which the contraries operate between Yeats's poems, within the poem itself, and even within single words in a poem.

The retrospective of Yeats's artistic career provided by "The Circus Animals' Desertion" opens the way for a discussion of the various pairs of contraries treated in all of Yeats's poetry. Although one aspect may have received more emphasis than another during a particular phase in Yeats's career, his

treatment of any contrary arose from a basic tenet which he shared with Boehme--without contraries there is no progression. Reduced to its simplest form, "Vacillation" (1932), a poem which Yeats said "puts clearly an argument that has gone on in my head for years,"⁶⁰ proposed precisely that view of the necessity of contraries. The poem begins, "Between extremities / Man runs his course" (Var., p. 499). Boehme had likewise insisted, in remarkably similar language, upon the necessity for duality if there is to be life:

For from the two-fold Source, every Thing has
its great Mobility, running, springing, driving,
and growing. For Meekness in Nature is a still
Rest, but the Fierceness in every Power makes
all Things moveable, running, and generative.
(Aurora 2-4)

This view of the life process culminated in Yeats's art in his doctrine of the mask, through which Yeats expounded the theory that the artist deliberately established a persona or a situation opposite his own in order that creation might proceed from conflict. In Yeats's poetry the clearest expression of the doctrine of the mask appeared in "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1917) in the dialogue between the personified contraries "Hiç" and "Ille." Ille explains,

By the help of an image
I call to my own opposite, summon all
That I have handled least, least looked upon.
(Var., p. 367)

It is significant that in Yeats's prose explication of the theory of the mask in Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917) Yeats

introduced the subject by announcing, "It is of Boehme, maybe, that I think."⁶¹ Specifically, Yeats referred to "that country where we 'eternally solace ourselves in the excellent beautiful flourishing of all manner of flowers and forms, both trees and plants, and all kinds of fruits.'"⁶² That country is the paradise which Boehme promised in the Aurora to those who lived a righteous life. Men found that paradise by searching within themselves. In the "Address to the Reader," which prefaces his Aurora, Boehme exhorted, "Let every soul grope after God in its heart" (Aurora, p. xxxv). Likewise Ille proclaims, "Those men that in their writings are most wise / Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts" (Var., p. 370).

One of the earliest expressions of the contraries in Yeats's poetry is the longing for a remote, Edenic land. The conflict, which can be understood as the conflict between the longing for involvement and the longing for escape, was frequently expressed as the pull of an enchanted land against the demands of the real world. The young poet's position on the necessity of duality was more implied than stated. As great as the desire for total peace was in some of the poems, there was always an undercurrent of restlessness inimical to that peace. In "The Wanderings of Oisín" (1889), for instance, the protagonist longs for freedom from the conflict of daily existence, yet the stasis of un-earthly life somehow fails to satisfy the hero.

One youthful expression of this conflict was "The Stolen Child" (1886), in which the supernatural realm for which Yeats longed was expressed as the land of fairies from Irish folklore.

"Come away, O human child," the fairies plead, enticing the young mortal with the promise of unending pleasure. At first glance the appeal is perfect. As the fairies reiterate, they can offer a world of perfect happiness as opposed to the inconsistencies and flaws of earthly existence--"For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand" (Var., p. 87). But the last stanza makes the reader pause and reconsider the dream-like existence offered by the immortals. Instead of enumerating the sorrows and heartaches of the world, thereby strengthening the argument for the child to leave, the poet depicts some of the warm, homey associations of daily life which the child is forfeiting. Here is the reverse of the coin; if the changing world brings sorrow, it also holds comforts impossible to a changeless existence. The title, too, introduces a note of ambivalence. If the fairies had succeeded in persuading the child, would he be considered "stolen?" The choice of words implies something illicit, perhaps coercion rather than conversion.

"The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (1890) is probably Yeats's best known treatment of the theme of longing for escape to a magic island refuge. Yeats contributed a poem titled "The Danaan Quicken Tree" to the May, 1893, issue of The Bookman with a note that Innisfree was legendary as the site of a special fairy-tree, the fruit of which was poison to mortals but nourishment for the Tuatha de Danaan (Var., p. 742). He may also have drawn upon a vision he once had in which a supernatural presence exhorted him to "Seek the place to which the hawthorn tree is indigenous and you will find the root of Celtic magic."⁶³

The power of the appeal of the peace and solitude of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" depends upon the recognition of its opposite, the busy thoroughfare and the gray city pavements. Yeats's account of the origins of the poem was that he felt a sudden homesickness while gazing into a store window in London.⁶⁴ The popularity of the poem, even today, attests to the premise that the poem touches a far more universal chord--the longing of every harried modern for escape from the complexities of life. It must be remembered, however, that the longing for the island refuge arose from its contrary, the young man's disgust with the frantic pace of city life. Viewed from afar, the poet's vision of total peace is compelling:

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. (Var., p. 117)

Yet in an earlier poem, "The Indian to His Love" (1886), Yeats's depiction of a similar island of escape seems somehow oppressive, the slow peace shattered by a raging bird:

The island dreams under the dawn
And great boughs drop tranquillity;
The peahens dance on a smooth lawn,
A parrot sways upon a tree,
Raging at his own image in the enamelled sea.
(Var., p. 77)

The situation of "The Indian to His Love," where the young man longs for escape for himself and his beloved, is far more common in Yeats's early poetry than the theme of the solitary quest for peace. In this poem the Indian and his love are set apart as superior to the poor mortals from "the unquiet lands":

How we alone of mortals are
 Hid under quiet boughs apart,
 While our love grows an Indian star,
 A metecr of the burning heart,
 One with the tide that gleams, the wings
 that gleam and dart. . . . (Var., p. 78)

But the final stanza introduces a melancholy note, again through a bird image, and indicates that this idyllic existence leads inevitably to death:

The heavy boughs, the burnished dove
 That moans and sighs a hundred days:
 How when we die our shades will rove,
 When eve has hushed the feathered ways,
 With vapoury footsole by the water's
 drowsy blaze (Var., p. 78)

In Yeats's early poetry, the attainment of perfect love always seemed to involve the renunciation of the human condition. Oisín can abide with Niamh only in the enchanted isles; the lovers in "The White Birds" (1892) would be happy only if they are magically transformed into white birds, something inhuman. "The Pity of Love," as the young poet wrote in an 1892 poem so titled, is that the routine business of living is inimical to the mystic ecstasy of love:

The folk who are buying and selling,
 The clouds on their journey above,
 The cold wet winds ever blowing,
 And the shadowy hazel grove
 Where mouse-grey waters are flowing,
 Threaten the head that I love. (Var., p. 119)

The natural images of the air, earth, winds, and seas of the above poem all emphasize the changing and flux of life, from which the poet sought escape in order to maintain his perfect love.

It might be argued that this view of life as hostile to love arose from Yeats's personal position because he had developed an impossibly idealized picture of the love he sought. Yeats admitted in the first draft of his autobiography that as a young man he held a romantic view of woman inspired by artists like Rossetti.⁶⁵ He remembered his struggle as a young man to reconcile his natural desires with the ideal he pursued:

I had much trouble with my senses, for I am not naturally chaste and I was young. Other men that I knew lived the life Edwin Ellis told me of, but I had gathered from the Romantic poets an ideal of perfect love. Perhaps I should never marry in church, but I would love one woman all my life.⁶⁶

From this struggle within himself Yeats created some of his most memorable poetry. Certainly some of Yeats's early poems about the longings and losses of love have a universal appeal which indicates that they speak to a recognizable aspect of the human condition.

The underlying idea of Yeats's poems about the desire to escape with his love to an eternal refuge is that man cannot

find perfect love in this imperfect world; and the source of his dissatisfaction is the intuition that there is another level of existence where he may attain what he seeks. A dialogue between Forgael and Aibric in the second version of "The Shadowy Waters" (1906) makes plain the impossibility of eternal love in a changing world. Forgael tells of the restless urges that beset a man who loves in the way of the world:

But he that gets their love after the fashion
Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
The bed of love, that in the imagination
Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,
Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting,
And as soon finished. (Var., pp. 228-29)

To Aibric's statement that this brief satisfaction is all that can be expected, Forgael counters that there must be more, because mortals feel the need for more:

Yet never have two lovers kissed but they
Believed there was some other near at hand,
And almost wept because they could not find it.
What the world's million lips are thirsting for
Must be substantial somewhere. (Var., p. 229)

Forgael's insistence that mortal love contains intimations of immortal love was part of a theme which assumed increasing importance in Yeats's poetry, that the creation of the imagination was more desirable than its shadowy reflection in this world. Yeats once told John Sparrow that sexual intercourse was an expression of man's desire for the resolution of contraries which is possible only in eternity:

'The tragedy of sexual intercourse is the perpetual virginity of the soul.' Sexual intercourse is an attempt to solve the eternal antinomy, doomed to failure because it takes place only on one side of the gulf. The gulf is that which separates the one and the many, or if you like, God and man.⁶⁷

As a mystic and a religious man, Boehme was also well aware of this longing for something beyond the physical realm. Boehme was singular as a mystic, however, in the explicitly sexual terms with which he expressed the longing. A typical passage is a verse from Of the Election of Grace:

The upper desires the lower and the lower the higher. The hunger of that which is above is directed powerfully to the earth, and the hunger of the earth strives for that which is above. Thus, compared with each other, they are like body and soul, or like man and woman, generating children with each other. (Grace 19)

One is reminded of the theological perspective from which the pagan Ribh argued in Yeats's "Ribh Denounces Patrick" (1934):

Natural and supernatural with the self-same ring
are wed.
As man, as beast, as an ephemeral fly begets,
Godhead begets Godhead,
For things below are copies, the Great Smaragdine
Tablet said.

Yet all must copy copies, all increase their kind;
When the conflagration of their passion sinks, damped
by the body or the mind,
That juggling nature mounts, her coil in their
embraces twined.

The mirror-scaled serpent is multiplicity,
But all that run in couples, on earth, in flood
or air, share God that is but three,
And could beget or bear themselves could they
but love as he. (Var., p. 556)

According to Boehme, just as the Deity creates through projecting His imagination into the Divine Maiden, Sophia, the virgin wisdom of God, so man, as the image of God, originally was intended to reproduce himself. In The Mysteriorum Magnum Boehme had explained this process of mystical generation:

Not in the tincture of man, which represents the fiery essence, did the word of promise desire to become incorporated, but in the tincture of the light, in the virginal centre, which was to generate magically in Adam, in the celestial substance of the holy generatrix. (Mys. Mag. 23-43)

This is a variation of the doctrine of the androgynous Adam in which prelapsarian man combined the qualities of male and female. In Boehme's concept, the female essence was the essence of the Divine maiden and the male essence was the image of God. Together they formed what Boehme termed a "mensch" or mixed person (3 Prin. 17-15). Boehme used the term to signify the human condition after the fall as one torn between the eternal and the natural.

In Boehme's cosmology, the temptation of Adam took place in two stages. The first stage was at the time when he pressed the Virgin too hard--when man tried to possess fully the imagination of God. That attempt upset the harmony of the universe, and Sophia withdrew from man. The importance of the imagination can be seen in the way in which Boehme attributed the fall of man to the imagination of Adam:

And Adam also did not eat thereof in the Mouth, only with the Imagination or Desire he did eat thereof, whereby the heavenly Tincture disappeared,

which stood in a fiery Love; and the earthly one did awake in the outward Soul's Property, whereby the heavenly Image was obscured. (Mys. Mag. 18-31)

Eve was a dim reflection of the Eternal Female, provided for Adam that he might fall into the external world, the world of nature, but not be damned forever to the wrath of God, or Hell.

The second, or outward, temptation was Adam's choice of the fruits of this world which made him a natural creature. Given his origins as the image of God, however, man always has this longing for his spiritual side, for his share of the nature of Sophia, who is the vessel of the imagination of God. The closest man can get to attaining this re-integration of self on this earth is sexual intercourse, a pale reflection of the unity of being man once knew:

The desire for conjunction in men and women results from the separation of the fire and light tincture in Adam. These principles in their own essence are still much more noble and pure than the flesh. It is true that they are now separated, and do not contain the true life; but they are full of desire for that true life, and when they again meet with each other in the unity of all being, they then awaken the true life to which their desire is directed. They want to be again that which they were in the image of God when Adam was man and woman.⁶⁸

Yeats frequently noted this connection between sexual desires and longing for spiritual fulfillment. In 1922 he wrote to Olivia Shakespear, "One feels at moments as if one could with a touch convey a vision--that the mystic way and sexual love use the same means, opposed yet parallel existence."⁶⁹ Again, in 1927, he wrote to her of his mood "between spiritual

excitement, [sic] and the sexual torture and the knowledge that they are somehow inseparable!"⁷⁰

"The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid" (1924) presents both sides of the eros-agape antimony through the dialogue. Harun Al-Rashid admits his choice of physical satisfaction over spiritual fulfillment, saying,

'That love
Must needs be in this life and in what follows
Unchanging and at peace, and it is right
Every philosopher should praise that love.
But I being none can praise its opposite.
It makes my passion stronger but to think
Like passion stirs the peacock and his mate,
The wild stag and the doe; that mouth to mouth
Is a man's mockery of the changeless soul.'
(Var., p. 465)

But the experience of Al-Rashid's friend Kusta Ben Luka follows Yeats's own experience more closely. Having taken a young wife, thereby presumably resolving the "sexual torture," he gains "spiritual excitement" through the revelations she imparts:

I say that a Djinn spoke. A livelong hour
She seemed the learned man and I the child;
Truths without father came (Var., p. 467)

Like Boehme's Sophia, Ben Luka's young bride is the passive instrument for the wisdom of the gods.

This concept of the inseparability of two seemingly disparate emotions is an indication of Yeats's recognition of the contraries. Much as the poet may have longed for perfect eternal love, he always acknowledged the pull of its opposite. Just as the lands which promised unending peace somehow left the poet unsatisfied, so eternal spiritual love, even in Yeats's

early works, leaves a similar void. The connection is most easily seen in "Dhoya" (1891), in which the fairy maiden explains to Dhoya that total love is impossible outside the human condition:

I have left my world far off. My people--on
the floor of the lake they are dancing and singing,
and on the islands of the lake; always happy,
always young, always without change. I have left
them for thee, Dhoya, for they cannot love. Only
the changing, and moody, and angry, and weary
can love.⁷¹

The clearest expression in the poetry is in the 1913 poem "The Two Kings":

What can they know of love that do not know
She builds her nest upon a narrow ledge
Above a windy precipice? (Var., p. 285)

So the sexual torture is as important as its contrary, the spiritual excitement. The ethereal maiden identified in Yeats's earlier poetry with the mystic rose was gradually replaced in later works by bawdy sluts like Crazy Jane. Yet the portrayal of one type of woman does not negate its opposite. Full acceptance of the earthy sexuality of Jane depends upon, in fact implies, appreciation of the spiritual chastity of the idealized female. Both aspects are necessary for full human existence. As Crazy Jane said,

'Love is all
Unsatisfied
That cannot take the whole
Body and soul' (Var., p. 510)

"The Three Bushes" treats a lovers' triangle in which the contraries were divided. The story, as it evolved in this 1937 ballad and in the group of poems following it in The Collected Poems, is that a lady considered physical love a debasement.

"The Lady's First Song" (1938) ends with her confession:

I am in love
And that is my shame.
What hurts the soul
My soul adores,
No better than a beast
Upon all fours. (Var., p. 572)

"The Lady's Second Song" (1938) presents a plan whereby her maid will take her place in her lover's bed, thus satisfying love's physical desires while allowing the lady's love to remain on a spiritual level:

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.
(Var., pp. 572-3)

Yet "The Lady's Third Song" (1938) reveals her awareness that the relationship she has established is incomplete and draws both herself and her maid dangerously close to the fires of hell and the wrath of heaven as they

. . . in honour split his love
Till either neither have enough,
That I may hear if we should kiss
A contrapuntal serpent hiss,
You, should hand explore a thigh,
All the labouring heavens sigh.
(Var., p. 573)

The resolution of the eros-agape dichotomy comes in "The Three Bushes" when all three people are dead and the rose bushes above their graves so intermingle that they seem one.

And now none living can,
When they have plucked a rose there,
Know where its roots began.
(Var., p. 571)

This conventional ballad ending gains increased significance in Yeats's poetry through its association with his mystic rose.

Yeats's fullest expression of the necessity of the contraries of physical and spiritual love can be found in the group of poems titled "Words for Music Perhaps" (1930). In this series Yeats established an opposition between Jane, the epitome of worn sensuality, and the bishop, associated in these poems with the repressive sterility of what Boehme had called "stone churches." As always in a Yeats poem in which there is dialogue, particularly when there is disagreement between opposites, the reader is aware of a third person, the author, who remains as the silent mediator between the two sides. In "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop," which Yeats added in The Winding Stair and Other Poems (1938) to the poems grouped under the collective title "Words for Music Perhaps," the reader senses Yeats's assent to Jane's insistence upon the necessity for opposition. "Fair and foul are next of kin, / And fair needs foul," Jane proclaims (Var., p. 513). These are the extremities between which man runs his course. Jane's doctrine echoes the artistic credo of "The Circus Animals' Desertion"; art demands

the ideal through art. "The Lover tells of the Rose in his Heart" (1892) was a pivotal poem in this transition, as Yeats's use of the symbolism of the rose marks a blending here of the qualities of a real woman with those of Yeats's mystical, eternal female. The lament is one frequently voiced in Yeats's early poetry--that commonplace reality poses a threat to love:

All things uncomely and broken, all things worn
out and old,
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of
a lumbering cart,
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the
wintry mould,
Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in
the deeps of my heart. (Var., pp. 142-3)

In "The Lover tells of the Rose in his Heart," however, there are significant deviations from the theme. It is the "image," the product of the poet's imagination, which is threatened, and in this poem Yeats proposes a solution. He would remake the world, transform it through art, so that the image, the art object, can be secure:

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too
great to be told;
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green
knoll apart,
With the earth and the sky and the water, remade,
like a casket of gold
For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose
in the deeps of my heart. (Var., p. 143)

In his work Three Mystic Poets, Abinash Bose used part of that last line, "my dreams of your image," to illustrate Yeats's creative technique. The technique described bears a marked resemblance to Boehme's perception of the process of divine

creation. According to Bose, Yeats's method involved "the individual and the archetype standing vis-a-vis, and between them, on one side the artist's dream, and on the other images in nature."⁷³ Boehme held that God projected a realm of archetypes, called Eternal Nature, in order to provide a contrary to Himself, Eternal Spirit, that He might become manifest. In Yeats's system the creation frequently arises, as in "The Lover tells of the Rose in his Heart," from the opposition of the artist's ideal and natural disorder.

The clearest examples of the use of the conflict of art and nature as a subject for poetry are the two Byzantium poems. The opening stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927) is a provocative combination of wistfulness and distaste for the fecundity of nature:

The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies. (Var., p. 407)

Nature is portrayed in "Sailing to Byzantium" as threatening art by its very indifference to art--"Caught in that sensual music all neglect / Monuments of unageing intellect" (Var., p. 407). In addition, nature has proven hostile to the poet by aging him, thus setting another barrier between the artist and the world. As he once sought enchanted islands to escape from the complexities of life, the poet now sails to the land where art and artifice reign supreme:

Once out of nature I shall never take
 My bodily form from any natural thing,
 But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
 Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
 To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
 Or set upon a golden bough to sing
 (Var., p. 408)

"Byzantium" (1930) presents the contrary to the idea of art as eternal refuge. In this poem, the golden bird, the work of art, appears superior to nature:

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
 More miracle than bird or handiwork,
 Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
 Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
 Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
 In glory of changeless metal
 Common bird or petal
 And all complexities of mire or blood.
 (Var., p. 498)

At midnight the contrary gyres reach their extremities and a violent reversal occurs. Nature breaks forth with a vengeance, destroying the artifacts and beginning a new cycle:

Marbles of the dancing floor
 Break bitter furies of complexity,
 Those images that yet
 Fresh images beget,
 That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.
 (Var., p. 497-8)

The imagery is reminiscent of Boehme, who likewise compared natural existence to a sea:

The other Gate or Chain is the Flesh and Blood, . . .
 there the Soul is fast bound, and swims therein,
 as in a great Sea, which daily so stirs up the
 Soul (3 Prin. 25-7)

And in Clavis, Boehme had displayed the same mixture of disgust and awe that Yeats held for the natural processes:

The whole visible world is a mere spermatical working ground, every thing has an inclination and longing towards another, the uppermost towards the undermost, the undermost towards the uppermost, for they are separated one from the other; and in this hunger they embrace one another in the Desire.
(Clavis 174)

Thomas Whitaker compared the use which Yeats made of nature in his art to the way nature operated in Boehme's cosmic cycle:

According to Boehme's cosmic cycle, the unmanifest Desire becomes incarnate in the egocentric variety of Nature so that it may then transform itself into a "crystalline, clear Nature" purged of self-will. In that process, "every soul is its own Judgment." That Harmony of self-realization and self-sacrifice, of variety and unity, is the goal of Yeats's own alchemical and poetic work.⁷³

And Margaret Rudd noted that Yeats used fire and water, the dominant images for nature in the Byzantium poems, to express "the transformation of complex instincts and fury and mire into the orderly golden artifice of eternity."⁷⁴ Boehme had frequently used fire and water, favorite symbols of opposition for alchemists and occultists, to represent the contraries of man's existence. In answer to the first question in The Answers to Forty Questions concerning the Soul Boehme confirmed, "every life consists of fire and water" (40 Ques. 1-274). Next, he elaborated:

And every Essence consists of two Essences, viz., of an inward and an outward, one seeks and finds the other; the outward is Nature; the inward is Spirit above nature; and yet there is no separation but in that which is included in a Time. (40 Ques. 1-276)

There are strong resemblances to Yeats's theory in those two verses, particularly in conjunction with the diagrams which accompanied the explanation of the fire and water symbolism. The symbol shown for fire is a triangle (Δ) and the symbol for water is an inverted triangle (∇). Figure 10 of Law's "An Illustration of the Deep Principles of Jacob Behmen in Thirteen Figures" shows these two triangles in the instant of intersection at their apexes. (See Appendix, Figure III.) The accompanying commentary, linking the "fiery Triangle" to Adam's soul and the "watery Triangle" to the "Holy Name Jesus," explains:

[T]hese two Triangles, which in Adam's Fall were divorced from each other; do now touch each other again; though (in this Beginning) but in one point; that the Soul's Desire may draw down into itself more and more the ∇ and that Holy Name may draw up into itself more and more the Δ till these two make up a compleat  the most significant Character in all the Universe.⁷⁵

In 1938 Yeats wrote to Ethel Mannin of his "private philosophy," a belief that "all things are made of the conflict of two states of consciousness, beings or persons which die each other's life, live each other's death." The diagram with which Yeats illustrated his theory was the one of interlocking gyres ().⁷⁶ This 1938 statement of philosophy reads remarkably like the theory Yeats proposed in 1893 when he was studying Boehme. In the Yeats-Ellis Blake Yeats had written:

The mind or imagination or consciousness of man may be said to have two poles, the personal and impersonal, or, as Blake preferred to call them, the limit of contraction and the unlimited expansion. When we act from the personal we tend to bind our consciousness down as to a fiery centre. When, on the other hand, we allow our imagination to expand away from this egoistic mood, we become vehicles for the universal thought and merge in the universal mood.⁷⁷

Later, in the 1921 publication of Michael Robartes and the Dancer Yeats provided a note to "The Second Coming" which identified the "widening gyre" with the outward expansion and which also presented the two interlocking cones, this time in a vertical position which more closely resembled Boehme's two triangles. In this note Yeats explained that the diagram illustrated the opposing extremities of nature and the spirit:

In other words, the human soul is always moving outward into the objective world or inward into itself; & [sic] this movement is double because the human soul would not be conscious were it not suspended between contraries, the greater the contrast the more intense the consciousness.
(Var., p. 824)

In one passage of Six Theosophical Points, Boehme had likewise described man's life in terms of a wheeling motion. Anticipating Crazy Jane, who insisted, "Nothing can be sole or whole / That has not been rent" (Var., p. 513), Boehme had emphasized that defilement proceeds purification:

Man's life during his present existence is like a turning wheel, which suddenly turns uppermost what was below. It kindleth itself in every substance and defileth itself thereby; but it is purified in the water of meekness, wherein moves the heart of God, and out of that its fire-life may evolve celestial substance.
(6 Theo. Pts. 2-13)

In answer to the question of how the soul sustains its existence between nature and the spirit, Boehme had delineated the process of vacillation between extremities:

Now if we consider ourselves in the union, the outward Spirit is very profitable to us; for many souls would perish, if the Bestial Spirit were not which holds the Fire captive, and sets before the Fire-Spirit earthly bestial Labour and Joy, wherein it may busy itself, till it be able by the Wonders in the Imagination to discover somewhat of its Noble Image, that it may seek itself again. (40 Ques. 16-11)

Throughout Boehme's writings there is, as in the above quotation, a recognition of the necessity of nature as the contrary for the imagination of the spirit. The next of Boehme's Forty Questions addressed this problem of the "Contrariety between the Spirit and the Flesh":

Thus you may well understand the Contrariety of Flesh and Spirit, and apprehend very well that two Spirits are in one another, one striving against the other; for one desires God, the other desires Bread, and both are profitable and good.
(40 Ques. 17-23)

Yeats's recognition of the importance of both art and nature is implicit in the ambivalence with which he contemplates an existence of pure art. In "Byzantium," for instance, the images

of death associated with the superhuman life are as much a mixture of respect and disdain as was the depiction of nature in the companion poem:

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
May unwind the winding path;
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
Breathless mouths may summon;
I hail the superhuman;
I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.
(Var., p. 497)

But evidence of the ambiguity of Yeats's position had appeared as early as the 1889 volume Crossways, the very title of which announced the dual vision which the arrangement of poems, patterned like Blake's Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience, reinforced. "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" treats the familiar romantic longing for a world long past. Words like "restless," "changing," "dreary dancing," and "wandering earth" convey the dissatisfaction with the flux of modern life. As counterbalance to this constant shifting, the poem offers the stability of the poet's creation, "Words alone are certain good" (Var., p. 65).

"The Song of the Happy Shepherd" was first published in The Dublin University Review in October, 1885. Exactly one year later, in October, 1886, "The Sad Shepherd" appeared in the same journal. In this second poem the shepherd also goes to a seashore and also whispers a message to a seashell, but, instead of consolation, all he gains is an "inarticulate moan." Yeats used this same technique of juxtaposition of one poem against another repeatedly in his Collected Poems. By positioning one poem next

to its counter-truth Yeats created a third entity from the conflicting messages. If, as in this case, the poet professes that creation of a work of art is the only way to achieve stability in a world of flux, and yet on the other hand he demonstrates the changing world as destructive of art, the truth must be that art and nature are opposites which counter each other, but which are necessary to each other.

In The Wild Swans at Coole (1917), Yeats dealt repeatedly with nature and art as necessary contraries. All the ambiguity of his position at the time was caught in a 1916 poem titled "The Fisherman." This work treats Yeats's desire to write a poem which would capture in art the simple life of a man linked with the sea, a Yeatsian symbol for fecundity. Yeats uses a few simple details--the "grey Connemara cloth" of his clothing, the freckles on his face, the "down-turn of his wrist" as he casts his line--to sketch a realistic picture of this fisherman who lives, nonetheless, only as an image of the poet's imagination. Yeats called him "A man who does not exist, / A man who is but a dream." And the work of art the poet yearns to create is described as a "Poem maybe as cold / And passionate as the dawn" (Var., p. 348), which can be taken to mean here, as it does in Boehme's seminal work, The Aurora, the time when night and day, the contraries of nature, meet in a moment which marks the end of darkness and the beginning of new light. In "The Living Beauty" (1918) Yeats wrote of his choice of the stability of art over the uncertainties of life, but the terms of renunciation make the tone so ambiguous that the choice is unconvincing:

I bade, because the wick and oil are spent
 And frozen are the channels of the blood,
 My discontented heart to draw content
 From beauty that is cast out of a mould
 In bronze, or that in dazzling marble appears,

The living beauty is for younger men:
 We cannot pay its tribute of wild tears.
 (Var., pp. 333-34)

Through "The Scholars" (1915) Yeats had made clear his belief that the beauty of the works of art came from the "wild tears" of the young. In the 1918 poem "The Living Beauty" Yeats seems to be trying on a mask to see if he could be content to be one of the "Old, learned, respectable bald heads" described in "The Scholars" as men who

Edit and annotate the lines
 That young men, tossing on their beds,
 Rhymed out in love's despair. (Var., p. 337)

Twenty years later he was still trying to resolve the contrary demands of life and art, apparently defending himself against accusations of literary scholars in "The Spur" (1938):

You think it horrible that lust and rage
 Should dance attention upon my old age;
 They were not such a plague when I was young;
 What else have I to spur me into song? (Var., p. 591)

As Yeats had acknowledged much earlier in his career, it was his constantly thwarted pursuit of love which provided the conflict from which his art arose. In "Words" (1910) the poet had explained that he wrote from a desire to make his beloved understand, but if he had realized that goal he might have lost the impetus to create:

I had this thought a while ago,
 'My darling cannot understand
 What I have done, or what would do
 In this blind bitter land.'

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. (Var., pp. 255-56)

Just as Yeats had found that mortal desires cannot be satisfied in a dream world of changeless perfection because, as he wrote in "Dhoya," "only the changing . . . can love,"⁷⁸ so great art cannot be created unless the artist participates fully in a human existence because, as he stated in "My Table" (1923), "only an aching heart / Conceives a changeless work of art" (Var., p. 421).

All the contraries discussed in this chapter might be considered as manifestations of what Yeats in a 1932 letter to Olivia Shakespear called "the sole theme." Referring to his entire canon up to that point, Yeats wrote:

The swordsman throughout repudiates the saint,
 but not without vacillation. Is that perhaps
 the sole theme--Usheen and Patrick--'so get
 you gone Von Hügel though with blessings on
 your head'?⁷⁹

Yeats undoubtedly had in mind the last stanza of "Vacillation" (1932) in which he presented the ultimate extremities which he felt life offered, sanctification and salvation or artistic inquiry and doubt:

. . . I--though
 heart might find relief
 Did I become a Christian man and choose for my
 belief
 What seems most welcome in the tomb--play a
 predestined part.
 Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.
 The lion and the honeycomb, what has Scripture
 said?
 So get you gone, Von Hügel, though with blessings
 on your head. (Var., p. 503)

Generally, critics, recognizing the tone of unrest in poems like "Pardon, Old Fathers" (1914) and "Meditations in Time of Civil War" (1923), have established a kind of pen versus sword dichotomy with Yeats as the man of letters envying the man of action. The obvious parallel between the swordsman in Yeats's letter to Olivia Shakespear and Homer in "Vacillation" suggests a different interpretation. When contrasted to the saint, the artist is the active man, choosing the multiplicity of life over the feeling of unity achieved by merging the self with the will of God. The poem in which Yeats treats these contraries most succinctly is "The Choice" (1932):

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.
 (Var., p. 495)

In Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917) Yeats had expressed this position most fully, adding the idea that deliberate choice to withstand the conflict (involvement rather than escape) could lead to his redemption. In terms reminiscent of Boehme's Aurora, Yeats wrote of his hope that he would "find the dark grow luminous, the void fruitful."⁸⁰ Yeats continued, "The

poet, because he may not stand within the sacred house but lives amid the whirlwinds that beset its threshold, may find his pardon."⁸¹ This insistence upon the artist and the saint as the ultimate contraries lends credence to Rudd's suggestion that the mystic may have served as the mask or anti-self for Yeats the poet.⁸² As a mystic, Boehme also insisted that salvation could be achieved only through the experience of conflict:

And we may well say this also, that indeed none becomes crowned with the Virgin-like Crown, which the Woman, in the Revelation of John, wears with Twelve Stars, viz. with the six Spirits of Nature heavenly, and with the six Spirits Earthly, unless he stands in the streams of the Dragon; and flies along into AEgypt, viz. under the Cross in the Plagues of AEgypt. (Incar. I 13-98)

"Mirror on Mirror Mirrored"

Not only did Boehme and Yeats agree upon the necessity of contraries for every facet of man's existence from conception to eternal salvation, they also used the same symbol--the mirror, to represent the way in which the imagination projects its opposite or anti-self to form the contrary. As Yeats wrote in "The Statues," one of his last poems, "Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show" (Var., p. 610).

"Ego Dominus Tuus" (1917) has already been mentioned as a poetic development of Yeats's theory of the establishment of contraries for creation.⁸³ There are strong echoes of Boehme in Ille's last speech. "I seek an image, not a book," Ille proclaims, "Those men that in their writings are most wise / Own

nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts" (Var., p. 370). In the "Address to the Reader" which prefaces his Aurora, Boehme had exhorted, "Let every soul grope after God in its heart." Yeats may even have had the Aurora in mind in "Ego Dominus Tuus," for the poem ends with the intimation of the coming of the dawn, and there are associations, through the title and through the reference to "blasphemous men," with Boehme's kind of religious utterance.

Ille proclaims that he functions by calling upon his anti-self, the person least like him, who by the doctrine of contraries must therefore be the most essential to his manifestation:

I call to the mysterious one who yet
Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream;
And look most like me, being indeed my double,
And prove of all imaginable things
The most unlike, being my anti-self
(Var., p. 371)

It is possible that Yeats meant to imply that Ille found his anti-self mirrored in the wet sands, for still waters frequently replace looking glasses in Yeats's poetry as reflectors of the image. The process would be the same as that by which Boehme described God as creating by projecting the image of his opposite into the mirror.

Mirrors hold rich possibilities for symbolism inherent in their very nature. The only way man has of knowing his own face is to study his image projected onto a mirror surface. Yet the image a mirror produces is at once an exact duplicate and at the same time the complete reverse of the original.

Yeats recognized special significances in mirror imagery, however, and was familiar with its use throughout the ages. In "High Crosses of Ireland," an 1899 review which appeared in the Dublin Daily Express, Yeats noted the significance of mirror symbolism in mystical writings and singled Boehme out as the writer who placed the most stress upon that symbol:

Medieval mystics represented this ultimate paradise as a round mirror, and Jacob Boehmen, who gathered into himself the dying mysticism of the Middle Ages, made it almost a fourth person of the Trinity.⁸⁴

In that same article, Yeats explained the function of the mirror in Boehme's writings, "Jacob Boehmen describes God the Father as seeing Himself in it [the mirror] as God the Son, and meditating about what He saw, and so making God the Holy Spirit."⁸⁵

What remains perhaps the most fully developed treatment in English of Boehme's use of mirror symbolism was provided by Yeats himself in the section of the Yeats-Ellis Blake entitled "The Three Persons and the Mirror." Yeats first described the theogonic process much as in the later essay quoted above, but his liberal use of appositives here adds resonances missing from the shorter version:

God looking into this mirror, ceases to be mere will, beholds Himself as the Son, His love for His own unity, His self-consciousness, and enters on that eternal meditation about Himself which is called the Holy Spirit. "Council" it is sometimes called in Boehmen, a term which is lengthened into "The Council of God" in the "Mystical Writings." This Holy Spirit, or "Council," is the energy which wakes into being the numberless thought-forms.

of the great mirror, the immortal or typical shapes of all things, the "ideas" of Plato. It and the mirror make up together divine manifestation.⁸⁶

The process delineated in the above passage, however, was incomplete; God was not yet manifest in the universe. In order for the Deity to become manifest in the physical universe, opposition must be established with his contrary. The contrary of Eternal Spirit is nature:

At first the thought-forms subsist and move in this universal "imagination which liveth for ever" without being manifest to themselves and each other as separate individualities, not being lives but thoughts of the universal life. Then comes the contrary of the universal life, "the reaction of man against God," the longing of the shapes and thought-forms for a vivid sensation of their own existence. Desire is its name, and to it Boehme traces the fall into physical life.⁸⁷

Thus the mirror can be used in either of two ways in Boehme's writings. It is identified with the Eternal female Sophia, the passive reflector of the Imagination of God, or it is associated with the natural realm. In the latter sense the mirror can serve as the means of manifestation for the glory of God on earth or as a snare which traps man in the multiplicity of the natural world. Yeats explained how the mirror could function as an evil force of corrupted nature:

[The Holy Spirit and the mirror] between them making up the seeking and alluring, masculine and feminine, repulsive and attractive, of corporeal life; for when the lives become spectres or selfhoods, the mirror, in its turn, grows spectrous, and is changed into a "vortex," seeking to draw down and allure. It ceases to be a passive maternal power and becomes destroying.⁸⁸

Helen Requerio noted a similar transformation of the mirror symbol in Yeats's poetry: "The mirror, which initially fascinates Yeats as an instrument of totality and self-revelation, ends as a metaphysical trap that locks us in the consequences of the fall."⁸⁹ Actually, this ambiguity in the mirror symbolism can be discerned throughout Yeats's poetry; there is no clear line of demarcation between "good" mirrors and harmful ones.

The earliest appearance of the mirror in Yeats's poetry was in the dramatic poem "The Seeker," published in the September 1885 issue of The Dublin University Review. This poem, whether by intention or because of the lack of skill and the youth of the author, is quite vague, but the mirror appears in connection with two concepts which were developed in Yeats's later poetry. The seeker is an old knight who has spent his life in pursuit of an elusive female known only through a disembodied voice which called him onto his search. In the knight's imagination she is the kind of ideal female associated in the early poetry with the mystic rose. When he finally reaches her, however, she is "a bearded witch," the antinomy of the divine Sophia. Yet it is this female who, like Sophia, holds the mirror. The confrontation between the knight and his mirror image proves too much for the seeker and he dies (Var., pp. 681-85).

In another early poem, "The Indian to His Love" (1886), the effect of the mirror is also mysterious and destructive. Amidst the somewhat oppressive peace of an island refuge, a note of discord is introduced through the conjunction of a bird and a mirror image: "A parrot sways upon a tree, / Raging at his own

image in the enamelled sea" (Var., p. 77). Much later, in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" Yeats once again connected a bird and a mirror, and again the result was rage. In this poem, first published in 1921, Yeats linked the swan with antithetical man:

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 (Var., p. 430)

The "state" the mirror would reveal would seem to be the reverse of the "solitary soul." The "image" presented is more like the warrior, like the artist engaged who braves the threshold of storms:

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.
(Var., pp. 430-31)

The poet announced that this establishment of the solitary soul and its mirror image would be enough, would "satisfy," but instead a violence arose from the opposition:

The swan has leaped into the desolate heaven:
That image can bring wildness, bring a rage
To end all things (Var., p. 431)

Like the contraries it represents, Yeats's mirror symbolism is the essence of ambiguity, at once attracting and repelling.

Two scholars have commented upon this ambiguity. Whitaker related the attraction / repulsion duality of the mirror symbolism specifically to Boehme's system. Quoting from Boehme's Six Theosophic Points, he explained Yeats's adaptation of Boehme's progression by contraries:

The "craving of every essence," said Boehme, "makes in its turn a mirror, to see and to know itself in the mirror. And then the craving seizes this, (namely the mirror), brings it into its imagination, and finds that it is not of its life. Hence opposition arises and loathing, so that the craving would discard the mirror, and yet cannot. . . . the craving seeks the limit of the beginning, and passes out of the mirror. Thus the mirror is broken, and the breaking is a turba. . . .⁹⁰

As in Boehme, the mirror is generally a positive symbol in Yeats when it is associated with his ideal passive female. In "Michael Robartes and the Dancer" (1920) the mirror is used as the contrary to reason. Robartes interprets an altar carving which depicts a knight about to save his lady by slaying "the half-dead dragon" which was her thought. He argues that once the maiden is freed from the constriction of reason she will be able to devote herself to the "heroic discipline of the looking-glass" which Yeats espoused in "Discoveries" (1906).⁹¹ Yeats did not want woman to be mere body, although he was not immune to physical attractions. Rather, his poetry displays an almost sacramental reverence for the power of woman to inspire and nurture his creation. To function properly as the vessel of poetic imagination, however, the ideal female had to be passive, like a looking-glass which reflects without altering the image

projected. When she is so, she is Boehme's "passive maternal" referred to in "The Three Persons and the Mirror."

In "To a Young Beauty" (1918) Yeats had counseled a girl to hold a "mirror for a school" (Var., p. 335), implying by the name of the prophet Ezekiel that the "young beauty" might thus serve as the agent for revelation:

You may, that mirror for a school,
Be passionate, not bountiful
As common beauties may,
Who were not born to keep in trim
With old Ezekiel's cherubim
(Var., pp. 335-36)

Boehme, too, had connected the moment of revelation, his "Aurora," with a vision in a mirror:

For when the Light of God dawns, or breaks forth
in the Center of the Spirit of the Soul, then
the Spirit of the Soul sees very well the
Creation of this World, as in a clear Glass,
and nothing is far off. (3 Prin. 8-1)

Yeats referred to the dawn of the world and to a clear glass in "J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910) in defining the role of the creative artist:

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. . . .⁹²

And in "A Woman Homer Sung" (1910) Yeats used this analogy of the way in which an artist creates to express his goal of capturing the essence of the ideal female:

I dream that I have brought
 To such a pitch my thought
 That coming time can say,
 'He shadowed in a glass
 What thing her body was.' (Var., p. 255)

The problem inherent in this ideal of the artist's creating, like God, through mirroring his opposite is that there is necessarily a contrary. As Yeats explained, the mirror can cease to be "a passive maternal power" and become "a 'vortex,' seeking to draw down and allure."⁹³ Boehme had expressed this kind of downward spiral in Forty Questions:

One of the eyes of your soul looks into eternity, the other one into nature. The latter goes on continually seeking and desiring and creating one mirror after another. Let that be so. It must be so, for God wills it. (40 Ques. 12-28)

Both Yeats and Boehme associated this mirror of nature with Satan. "Beggar to Beggar Cried" (in Yeats's 1914 poem of that name), "There's a devil in a looking-glass" (Var., p. 300), and Ribh tells Patrick, "The mirror-scaled serpent is multiplicity" ("Ribh Denounces Patrick," Var., p. 556). Boehme held that man had the choice of two extremities. He could be saved by turning his imagination to the mirror of God's wisdom, which was within himself, but he could be damned through projecting his imagination upon the serpent. In A Discourse between a Soul hungry and thirsty after the Fountain of Life, the sweet Love of Jesus Christ; and a Soul enlightened the enlightened soul explains that the other soul ~~has~~ allowed her imagination to become ensnared by the serpent:

You bear the Devil's serpent-like image. By it you are circumscribed, and through it, as your property, the Devil has access to you to hinder your will so that you cannot enter into God. (Discourse 43).

In one of Law's illustrations, "where one lifts a flap of paper to discover both the human entrails and the starry heavens," as Yeats explained in A Vision,⁹⁴ one finds this multi-scaled serpent entwined about the heart of man. (See Appendix, Figure IV.) According to Law's accompanying commentary, this is

a Spire of a Serpent round about the heart; and there is written about this Serpent, Self-Love: Which is to shew that this Place, which ought to be the true and proper Place of Light, is here only darkened by Self-Love.⁹⁵

Boehme expanded upon this theme of the pull of contraries as a condition of life in his preface to Aurora. Boehme began, "Courteous Reader, I compare the whole Philosophy, Astrology, and Theology, together with their mother, to a goodly tree which groweth in a fair garden of pleasure" (Aurora, Preface, v. 1). Boehme then built an elaborate analogy based on two trees. One was the tree of Paradise. Upon this tree were "raised great tempests, with hail, thunder, lightning and rain so many a twig was torn and beaten off from the tree" (v. 28). When these did not prevail against the tree, the "prince of darkness, who is the source of wrath or fierceness, malice and perdition . . . planted a wild tree towards the north" (v. 34). This tree was planted in wild nature, what Yeats called Boehme's "vegetable glass of nature."⁹⁶ Using similar

imagery in an 1892 poem, "The Two Trees," Yeats referred to "the bitter glass" and warned of its power to deceive:

For there a fatal image grows
That the stormy night receives,
Roots half hidden under snows,
Broken boughs and blackened leaves.
(Var., p. 135)

The advice Yeats offered in "The Two Trees" could be a paraphrase of Boehme's counsel to the Christian battling earthly desires. In Book III of The Treatise of the Incarnation Boehme advised:

The more the noble Pearl-Tree is sought, the more swiftly and strongly it grows, and suffers not itself to be suppressed, though it costs the outward Life.

Thus, my dear Mind, search right after the Tree of Christian Faith, it stands not in this world.

Indeed it must be in thee
(Incar. III 6-26-28)

Yeats entreated:

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,
The holy tree is growing there;
From joy the holy branches start
(Var., p. 134)

If the accounts of the biographical origin of "The Two Trees" are to be credited, Yeats and Boehme were writing for identical purposes, allowing for the different points of interest from which each began. Boehme was pleading with the Christian to give up earthly pursuits to direct his love toward God. Yeats was supposedly entreating Maud Gonne to give up the diversion

of politics to devote her love to him. Both viewed the attraction of the "glass of outer weariness" as "fatal" (Var., p. 135).

Inevitably, by the doctrine of contraries, the mirror can be both helpful and harmful. Boehme taught that the soul must fashion a mirror to explore its own opposite so that it may resolve itself into perfect unity. According to Boehme, the soul is

. . . a thing which is without ground, but seeks and makes a ground in itself and has its origin and dwelling in the original conception in which it first conceives itself in itself; that is its innermost limit, and it goes out of itself and seeks before itself where it makes a mirror like the others, until it finds the first groundless limit again. (40 Ques. 11-1)

Whitaker recognized this process in Yeats and linked it, quite aptly, to Yeats's practice of counterbalancing poems within his collected works. Whitaker wrote, "[Yeats] discovers and measures, in a mirror of a self-reflective art, what Boehme called the 'limit of malignity,' and so transcends it."⁹⁷

The goal of the warring contraries, for both the mystic and the poet, was a new entity. Both recognized that "Between extremities / Man runs his course," but both viewed the establishment of contraries as only a necessary second step toward the moment of resolution when

A brand, or flaming breath,
Comes to destroy
All those antinomies
Of day and night
("Vacillation," Var., p. 500)

FOOTNOTES

¹Letters, p. 709. To L.A.G. Strong, June 25, 1925.

²A Vision, p. 67.

³John Rees Moore, Masks of Love and Death (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1971); Thomas R. Whitaker, Swan and Shadow (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964); Charles Berryman, W.B. Yeats: Design of Opposites (New York: Exposition Press, 1967).

⁴Balachandra Rajan, W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1965), p. 24.

⁵Morton D. Zabel, "Yeats: The Book and the Image," in The Permanence of Yeats, p. 362.

⁶Giorgio Melchiori, The Whole Mystery of Art (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 103.

⁷Ellmann, Identity, p. 8.

⁸Kermode, Romantic Image, p. 43.

⁹Senior, p. 164.

¹⁰Boutroux, p. 176.

¹¹Berdyayev, p. ix.

¹²Berdyayev, p. x.

¹³Martensen, p. 28.

¹⁴Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, p. 101.

- ¹⁵Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, p. 100.
- ¹⁶Windelband, pp. 374-75.
- ¹⁷Henn, p. 46.
- ¹⁸Ellmann, The Man and the Masks, p. 70.
- ¹⁹Ellmann, The Man and The Masks, p. 74.
- ²⁰Brinton, p. 74.
- ²¹Mark Schorer, William Blake: The Politics of Vision (New York: Holt, 1946), p. 126.
- ²²J.B. Beer, Coleridge the Visionary (London: Chatto & Windus, 1959), p. 105.
- ²³Moore, The Unicorn, p. 192.
- ²⁴Henn, p. 38.
- ²⁵Hone, p. 121.
- ²⁶Moore, The Unicorn, pp. 96-97.
- ²⁷Moore, The Unicorn, p. 98.
- ²⁸Whitaker, p. 26.
- ²⁹A. Norman Jeffares, The Circus Animals (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1970), p. 5.
- ³⁰Quoted in Margaret Rudd, Divided Image (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1953), p. 1.
- ³¹Quoted in Rudd, p. 1.
- ³²Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 246.
- ³³Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 247.
- ³⁴Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 246.

- ³⁵G.W. Allen, Intro. to The Threefold Life of Mah, p. xxv.
- ³⁶Allen, Intro. to Threefold Life, p. xxvi.
- ³⁷H.W. Häusermann, "W.B. Yeats's Criticism of Ezra Pound," English Studies, 29 (August, 1948), 101.
- ³⁸Yeats-Ellis, Blake, II, 136.
- ³⁹Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 247.
- ⁴⁰Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 247.
- ⁴¹A Vision, p. 72.
- ⁴²Morton Seiden, William Butler Yeats: The Poet as a Mythmaker (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1975), p. 32.
- ⁴³Harold Bloom, Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 72.
- ⁴⁴Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 242.
- ⁴⁵Brinton, p. 18.
- ⁴⁶A Vision, p. 73.
- ⁴⁷A Vision, p. 73, and Brinton, p. 103.
- ⁴⁸A Vision, p. 72.
- ⁴⁹Letters, p. 922. To Lady Elizabeth Pelham, January 4, 1939.
- ⁵⁰Schorer, Blake, p. 126.
- ⁵¹Essays and Introductions, p. 306.
- ⁵²Essays and Introductions, p. 308.
- ⁵³Essays and Introductions, p. 255.

⁵⁴See "The Three Persons and the Mirror" in Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 246-250.

⁵⁵Stoudt, Sunrise to Eternity, pp. 62 and 63.

⁵⁶Autobiography, p. 476.

⁵⁷Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley, p. 94.

⁵⁸The First Apologie in Answer to Balthazar Tylcken, 20-26 in The Remainder of Books written by Jacob Boehme. Also quoted in Hartmann, p. 50.

⁵⁹Ellmann, Identity, pp. xxi-ii.

⁶⁰Letters, p. 789. To Olivia Shakespear, January 3, 1932.

⁶¹Mythologies, p. 326.

⁶²Mythologies, p. 326.

⁶³Quoted in Moore, The Unicorn, p. 70.

⁶⁴W.B. Yeats, Memoirs, ed. Denis Donoghue (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1973), p. 31.

⁶⁵Memoirs, p. 33.

⁶⁶Memoirs, p. 32.

⁶⁷Quoted in Jeffares, W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet, p. 267. The first sentence was a quotation from Dryden's translation of Lucretius.

⁶⁸Jacob Boehme, An Apologie in Answer to Esaiah Stiefel, v. 388, in The Remainder of Books written by Jacob Boehme. Also quoted in Hartmann, p. 195.

⁶⁹Letters, p. 715. To Olivia Shakespear, May 25, 1926.

⁷⁰Letters, p. 731. To Olivia Shakespear, October 27, 1927.

⁷¹W.B. Yeats, John Sherman and Dhoya, ed. Richard J. Finneran (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 120.

⁷²Henn, pp. 70-71.

⁷³Abinash Bose, Three Mystic Poets (Kolhapur: School College Bookstall, 1945), p. xi and Whitaker, p. 156.

⁷⁴Rudd, p. 174.

⁷⁵Law, "An Illustration of the Deep Principles of Jacob Behmen in Thirteen Figures" in The Works of Jacob Behmen, II, 30-31.

⁷⁶Letters, pp. 917-8. To Ethel Mannin, October 20, 1938.

⁷⁷Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 242.

⁷⁸"Dhoya," p. 120.

⁷⁹Letters, p. 798. To Olivia Shakespear, June 30, 1932.

⁸⁰Mythologies, p. 332.

⁸¹Mythologies, p. 333.

⁸²Rudd, p. 53.

⁸³See page 145 above.

⁸⁴Uncollected Prose, II, 144.

⁸⁵Uncollected Prose, II, 144.

⁸⁶Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 247.

⁸⁷Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 247.

⁸⁸Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 249.

⁸⁹Requerio, p. 134.

⁹⁰Whitaker, pp. 42-43.

⁹¹Yeats, Essays and Introductions, pp. 268-270. These are the companion pieces "A Guitar Player" and "The Looking-Glass" which present the ideal female figure (associated with the looking-glass) and her contrary.

⁹²Essays and Introductions, p. 339.

⁹³Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 249.

⁹⁴A Vision, pp. 23-4.

⁹⁵Law, "An Illustration of the Deep Principles of Jacob Behmen" in The Works of Jacob Behmen, III, 29.

⁹⁶Yeats used this term frequently in his Blake study. For example, Yeats specifically attributed the term to Boehme, in identifying Tharmas with "instinct and sensation, or what Blake unites with Boehme in calling vegetative life" (Yeats-Ellis, Blake, I, 256).

⁹⁷Whitaker, p. 157.

CHAPTER IV

"WHEN VISION COMES"

"One Throb of the Artery"

Yeats's treatment of contraries always emphasized that continual conflict between the opposites was necessary for creation and that the role of poet demanded that he position himself in the midst of the conflict. In Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917) Yeats had defined the vacillation between extremities as the prerequisite for the one moment of poetic vision:

I think that we who are poets and artists,
not being permitted to shoot beyond the
tangible, must go from desire to weariness,
and so to desire again, and live but for the
moment when vision comes to our weariness
like terrible lightning, in the humility
of the brutes.¹

Boehme, for whom the doctrine of contraries was also a central concept, likewise expressed the moment of illumination which resolved the contraries as a flash of light:

When the Flash is caught in the Fountain
of the Heart, then the Holy Ghost rises
up in the seven qualifying or fountain
Spirits, into the Brain, like the Daybreak,
or Dawning of the Day, or Morning Redness.
And therein sticks the Mark, Aim, or Scope
and Knowledge. (Aurora 11-132)

Near the end of his career Yeats was still explaining the process of resolution as a series of "Initiationary Moments" which dissolved at "The Critical Moment" to provide the experience of pure unity. Men of opposing natures reach this total unity from opposite poles. "All men with subjective natures move towards a possible ecstasy, all with objective natures towards a possible wisdom," he wrote to Ethel Mannin in 1938.²

This process, which Yeats had by then schematized, bore a strong resemblance to a concept which he had probably found in his early study of Blake and had outlined in 1919. At the conclusion of "A People's Theatre" (1919) Yeats had delineated Blake's process through which every entity completes itself by an encounter with its anti-self. Suggesting that his era was about to reach the farthest extremity of objective consciousness and that the gyre of history was about to return to a period of emphasis upon subjectivity, Yeats maintained: "That counter-longing . . . can only become a conscious energy suddenly, in those moments of revelation which are as a flash of lightning."³ Perhaps because Yeats had encountered Boehme's works during his initial interest in mysticism, the poet found Boehme's initiationary moment of revelation useful as a model for mystic ecstasy. And since the instant when the "invisible gates" opened for Boehme was signaled by a flash of light, Yeats linked a sudden light with the moment of insight.

Another connection to Boehme arises from the mystic's way of expressing the revelation granted him. As discussed previously, Boehme posited to God a dual nature: two contraries

and their resultant third element, which formed a "dark" center; and two contraries plus their resultant third element, which formed a "light" center. Between these two whirling triads was a seventh element, the quality which bound the two contrary triads together as a harmoniously functioning whole. Boehme labeled this quality the "lightning flash." (See Appendix, Figure V.)

Thus the affinity between Yeats and Boehme in regard to the third and final step of the creative process can be examined from two distinct aspects--from the correspondences between their understanding of the moment itself and from the parallels in the means they used to express the moment of resolution of the contraries.

"A Meditation in Time of War," which first appeared in The Dial, November, 1920, describes a moment of mystical insight. The brevity of this poem duplicates to some extent the fleeting quality of the experience:

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 phantasy. (Var., p. 406)

Yeats later related such sudden insight afforded to the mystic with the instant of artistic creation. In a 1924 essay on William Blake's illustrations to Dante, Yeats quoted Blake's teaching on the instant of creative insight, in which the same image of the artery was used:

'Every time less than a pulsation of the artery is equal' in its tenor and value. '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.'⁴

Although modern researchers have uncovered details which dispel the traditional picture of Jacob Boehme as an unlettered peasant who was suddenly struck by the wisdom of God, those legends which surrounded the mystic apparently appealed to Yeats, for he used details from Boehme's biography to fill in fictionalized accounts of visionary experiences in his own writings. Boehme's first encounter with the supernatural, for example, reportedly occurred before he reached his teens, while he was still a young boy tending his parent's cattle. An account of this experience can be found in the sketch of Boehme's life within the Law edition of his works and in the section on Boehme in A.E. Waite's Lives of the Alchemystical Philosophers.

Near the town of Görlitz stands Lands-Krone, a mountain of Basalt which dominates the landscape of that area much as "Ben Bulben sets the scene" ("Under Ben Bulben," Var., p. 637) above the Drumcliff churchyard where Yeats is buried. According to the romanticized account, young Jacob climbed this mountain alone one day and discovered four red stones guarding the entrance to a secret cave. Inside he glimpsed a vessel filled with money. Terrified, Jacob fled from the cave, certain that the money was connected with something evil. Afterward he returned to that spot many times, always in the company of others, but he never found that cave again.

It is possible that Yeats remembered an account of this event when he wrote "The Hour before the Dawn" (1914). Some of the details coincide--the craggy, wind-swept, lonely setting, the heap of stones, the cavern they concealed. True, the vision differed, as did the central characters, but the sense of the experience remained the same. Both Boehme and Yeats's beggar were certain that there was something evil and forbidden, something associated with the devil, about their secret cave. Both beheld something specifically calculated to tempt them, and both fled from the temptation. Consciousness of the resemblance of the stories suggests additional significance for the title of Yeats's poems, for Boehme's experience took place in his childhood, in the time before he presented his first book, The Aurora, or the Morning Redness.

According to the legend, the incident of the cave was the chief impetus behind the decision of Boehme's parents to take him away from the solitary life in the fields and to set him up in a trade.⁵ His visionary tendencies reasserted themselves, however, during his years as a shoemaker's apprentice. There was one incident of particular significance. Boehme was alone in his master's shop one afternoon when a stranger entered and asked to buy a pair of shoes. The young apprentice quoted a ridiculously high price, hoping to discourage a sale he did not feel he had the authority to make, but the stranger purchased the shoes anyway. Then the stranger went outside and called Jacob by name. When Boehme went out to him, the stranger fixed the boy with a piercing look and said, "Jacob, thou art as yet

little, but the time will come when thou shall be great, and become another man, and the world shall marvel at thee." The stranger further enjoined Boehme to be pious, to read Holy Scriptures, and to be courageous even though he would suffer misery and persecution. Then the being, whom Jacob took to be a messenger of the Lord, left.⁶ This experience was of the nature of a conversion, or at least a rededication, for Boehme, who from that day became more devout, more rapt in meditation, and more ready to point out the shortcomings of his fellow workers. The latter trait led to his dismissal. Boehme's denunciations of the sinful ways of the other apprentices gave rise to dissension within the shop, and the master craftsman compelled him to leave, apparently unwilling to sponsor a journeyman cobbler who would not "stick to his last."⁷

These remarkable occurrences were preliminaries, perhaps intuitions of the marvels to come. Martensen cited them as marks of Boehme's "visionary tendency,"⁸ but these incidents did not afford young Boehme any special insights. Boehme's actual "initiationary moment," the incident to which Yeats alluded several times, did not take place until after Boehme was married and established at Görlitz as a master guildsman. According to the popular account, Boehme was in his shop one day when he happened to glance at a brightly polished pewter plate, which reflected the sunlight in such a way that he was transported into a state of ecstasy. When Boehme went out into the surrounding fields in an effort to clear his head, he realized that

he was able to comprehend the mysteries of life and had for a short time a clear perception of the harmony of the universe.

Martin Hearne, the central character of The Unicorn from the Stars (1908), seems to have been drawn in part from Yeats's knowledge of Boehme. Like the German mystic, Martin Hearne was a skilled craftsman. His uncle recalled early signs of Martin's visionary tendency. "He used to be queer as a child," Thomas Hearne explains, "going asleep in the fields, and coming back with talk of white horses he saw, and bright people like angels or whatever they were."⁹ Yeats may have woven in the details which served his purpose in this play as an elaboration of the legend that Boehme was a dreamy, visionary child who was unsuited for work in the fields. Remembering his own childhood in the dreamy landscape near Sligo, Yeats could have felt a sense of kinship with Boehme which he passed on to his character, Martin Hearne. Further on in the opening dialogue, Thomas Hearne tells Father John that Martin had seen some gold in a dream, and that this vision was the cause of his obsession with building a golden coach.¹⁰ Here again, Yeats may have used the detail of young Boehme's vision of the vessels filled with gold to add background credence.

But The Unicorn from the Stars contains one irrefutable reference to Boehme's visionary experience. Referring to the inception of The Aurora in a letter to Abraham of Sommerfield, Boehme had written that his first mystical experience was "like a sudden shower that passeth by, whatsoever it lighteth upon it hitteth, even so likewise the spirit of wonders. For the author

was an illiterate man, and of very small understanding."¹¹ And in Unicorn from the Stars, speculating that the brightly polished metal of the coach may have sent Martin into a trance, Father John named Boehme as an example of one who had had a similar experience, using, as Boehme did, the image of truth as a sudden shower striking a humble workman:

The flashing light upon [the gold of the coach] would be enough to throw one that had a disposition to it into a trance. There was a very saintly man, though he was not of our Church, he wrote a great book called Mysterium Magnum, was seven days in a trance. Truth, or whatever truth he found, fell upon him like a bursting shower, and he a poor tradesman at his work. It was a ray of sunlight on a pewter vessel that was the beginning of it all.¹²

Yeats was fond of Boehme's image of the sudden shower. In his introduction to The Poems of William Blake he had referred to Boehme's "beautiful phrase," about truth coming "'like a bursting shower.'"¹³ Yeats had also incorporated the image in a passage of the Yeats-Ellis Blake which revealed Yeats's own position on the nature of mystical insight:

It must not be forgotten that [Blake] always insisted on the valuable paradox that while vision is the fountain of truth, it comes to us not in a single stream, but in a shower of drops scattered on a hundred winds, and carried in as many directions, so that each vision appears differently to each seer.¹⁴

Echoes of Boehme's phraseology, as adapted by Yeats in the above quotation may also be traced to "The Tower" (1927), in which the poet characterizes his chosen heirs as

upstanding men
 That climb the streams until
 The fountain leap, and at dawn
 Drop their cast at the side
 of dripping stone (Var., p. 414)

Paul Ruttledge, the character in Where There is Nothing (1902) who was the prototype of Martin Hearne, also resembles Boehme, although the parallels were not made as explicit as they were in the later play. As was often the case with Yeats's early plays, there were mere suggestions of connections which could be recognized by initiates and fellow students of the arcane, but which were not necessary for comprehension of the play. Where There is Nothing opens, for example, with Paul Ruttledge clipping hedges in the shapes of animals, which he insists represent that state of mind of his neighbors. Yeats had treated this idea in the Yeats-Ellis Blake and suggested Boehme as its source. "All the states and spaces are able to put on at times the shapes of animals . . . , " Yeats wrote; "This doctrine came to Blake perhaps from Boehmen."¹⁵ The title of the play itself, derived from the line "Where there is nothing, there is God," recalls Boehme's teaching that the origins of all things are in the original Chaos, the Abyss, the "unground."

Boehme reported that after he had been struck for an instant by the flash of light he wandered in the fields, mystically aware of the secret language of nature. Robert Browning, for whom Yeats must have felt a sense of kinship when he suggested that the older poet had adopted a mask to protect his deep

interest in mysticism from public derision,¹⁶ had treated Boehme's experience in the opening segment of Men and Women (1855):

As German Boehme never cared for plants
Until it happed, a-walking in the fields,
He noticed all at once that plants could speak, ¹⁷
Nay, turned with loosened tongue to talk to him.

A.E. Waite provided the following account of the experience:

[Boehme] imagined himself to be surrounded with the divine light for several consecutive days; he beheld the virtue and nature of the vegetable world, gazing into the very heart of creation, and learning the secrets of the physical cosmos by means of the self-interpreting "signatures" which seemed to be impressed on all around him.¹⁸

Yeats made extensive revisions of Scene 2, Act IV, of Where There is Nothing between the first version, published in 1902, and the third version, published in 1903. In the earlier version, Paul Ruttledge explained his insight as arising from a flash of light. Like Boehme, he discovered the "secrets of the physical cosmos" after a period of prayer:

. . . I prayed and fasted till at last one night in my cell a sudden light enfolded me, and I had thoughts that were not thoughts, I seemed to rise above law and number. I became king and priest in my own house, and learned, I know not how, the meditations that liberate the soul and unite it to the lawless unity.¹⁹

In the final version of this play, Paul was not in his monk's cell; like Boehme, he fell into his trance in a garden setting.

Father Jerome recalled:

It was in the garden you got the trance
last time. We found you like this, and we
lifted you to the bench under the yew tree,
and then you began to speak. You spoke²⁰
about getting away from law and number.

"A Voice," a short prose piece written in 1902, contains an account of an incident in Yeats's younger years when the poet may have achieved a momentary mystical insight. Yeats recalled that he had been walking by Inchy Wood when he experienced "all of a sudden, and only for a second, an emotion which . . . was the root of Christian mysticism." The emotion he described was a feeling of utter dependence upon the Deity. During the night following that incident the poet was awakened by a voice saying, "No human soul is like any other human soul, and therefore the love of God for any human soul is infinite, for no other soul can satisfy the same need in God."²¹

Twelve years later Yeats incorporated that message in "Paudeen." The visionary moment in that 1914 poem duplicates Boehme's experience in that the poet was in a shop when the vision began and he, like Boehme, stumbled outside to collect his wits in the fields. The morning light and the "luminous wind" in "Paudeen" are reminiscent of the imagery in Boehme's Aurora. The bird cry, used here in conjunction with the visionary experience, was frequently substituted for the lightning flash in Yeats's poetry as herald of the initiatory moment:

Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure
 spite
 Of our old Paudeen in his shop, I stumbled
 blind
 Among the stones and thorn-trees, under
 morning light;
 Until a curlew cried and in the luminous wind
 A curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I
 thought
 That on the lonely height where all are in
 God's eye,
 There cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,
 A single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline
 cry. (Var., p. 291)

Yeats's most revealing reference to Boehme's first mystic experience was in a story Yeats devised for an unpublished early draft of A Vision, written in 1922 to explain the origins of that work. The information was contained in an account supposedly authored by Owen Aherne, who related a discussion between two other characters, Robartes and Mr. Yeats. In this version, Robartes asked Mr. Yeats to edit the "Arabian discoveries" of Robartes and Aherne. After studying the material for some time, Mr. Yeats "opened a large gilded Moorish wedding chest" and produced notebooks full of information which corresponded in every significant detail to the discoveries of Robartes and Aherne. Robartes maintained that such a coincidence was only possible "through the inspiration of God."²² In the Yeats-Ellis Blake Yeats had accounted for the parallels among the systems of Boehme, Blake, and Swedenborg by attributing each to individual inspiration. "Blake, Swedenborg and Boehmen," Yeats had written, "are but men who have overheard and recorded a few words spoken by the spiritual forms among themselves for their own delight."²³

In the 1922 draft for A Vision, however, the character Mr. Yeats rejects the suggestion of divine inspiration, offering instead the explanation that he was transported to a state of ecstasy through the flashing of sunlight on his canary:

"Is not [inspiration] a rather obsolete term?" said Mr. Yeats. "It came in the first instance quite suddenly. I was looking at my canary, which was darting about the cage in rather brilliant light, when I found myself in a strangely still and silent state and in that state I saw with the mind's eye symbols streaming before me."²⁴

Aherne recounted that he had been skeptical about the story of the canary, but Robartes had reassured him with the information that "Boehme had passed into what he called his walking trance while contemplating a gleam of sunlight upon a brazen pot and so found philosophy."²⁵

The details of this hypothetical situation may border on the farcical, but the reference to Boehme's experience of mystical insight links the account intended for A Vision to the serious search in which Yeats had been engrossed since before the turn of the century, when he had hoped "that invisible gates would open . . . as they opened for Boehme" that Yeats might "find a philosophy."²⁶

"The Walking Trance"

As evidenced by the time span of Yeats's references to Boehme's "walking trance," Yeats held a sustained interest in

the state of mind which set the imagination free to receive intuitions of life's deepest mysteries. Again, the technique of producing a trance-like state must be viewed from two perspectives--from the efforts of the artist to work himself into the trance from which Yeats believed inspiration arose and from the effects which Yeats wove into his creation so that the poem itself could prepare the reader for the lightning flash of resolution.

Virginia Moore examined one of Yeats's early attempts to put himself into a trance. Revealing that Yeats had kept a half-full glass of water on his table at No. 18 Woburn Buildings, Moore speculated that Yeats's practice of gazing into that glass for long periods of time was a conscious attempt to duplicate Boehme's moment of revelation.²⁷

Clarence Hamilton, author of A Psychological Interpretation of Mysticism, considered the trance which resulted from Boehme's glance at the pewter plate a typical example of a way of emptying consciousness as part of what Hamilton termed "an elaborate species of auto-hypnosis."²⁸ He added that Boehme probably did not deliberately attempt to self-induce a trance, that it arose naturally from the disciplines he practiced: "It happens that the mystic following out his ideas of escaping the world of sense desire and imagination unwittingly stumbled upon the correct conditions for the hypnotic state."²⁹ In another chapter of his work Hamilton used Boehme's experience as an example of limiting field consciousness, citing advice Boehme gave in the Second Dialogue of the Supersensual Life. "Steadfastly fixing

thine eye upon one point," Hamilton quoted as the means to achieve trance, "For this end gather in all thy thoughts and faith press in to the center."³⁰

The technique outlined by Hamilton bears a strong resemblance to the one Yeats devised for getting free from the strictures of rationality. In Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917) Yeats wrote: "The soul cannot have much knowledge till it has shaken off the habit of time and place, but till that hour it must fix attention upon what is near, thinking of objects one after another as we run the eye or finger over them." In this way, Yeats said, the "intellectual power" of the soul is increased. The goal was to build upon this power until the mystical ecstasy could be achieved. At that moment the soul's "perceptions grow simultaneous." Such disciplines could only be attained gradually, yet the practice could, even at the outset, provide momentary insights. The practitioner was granted glimpses of what was to come. "Even now," Yeats wrote, "we seem at moments to escape from time in what we call prevision and from place when we see distant things in a dream and in concurrent dreams."³¹

In The Philosophy of Plotinus William Inge linked Boehme's technique to methods of Oriental meditation. "Boehme and Blake certainly were visionaries," Inge wrote; "Boehme used to hypnotise himself by gazing intently on a bright object, a method which, with variations, has been adopted by many Oriental mystics."³² Because of Yeats's interest in Plotinus, Boehme, Blake, and Eastern mysticism, it is possible that he read The Philosophy of Plotinus, published in 1918. If Yeats had known

Inge's work, however, he enriched the ideas with the results of his life-long study when in 1938 he, too, connected Boehme's trance to Oriental meditation. In his introduction to Patanjali's translation of the Aphorisms of Yoga Yeats defined one of the stages of Yoga meditation, Samādhi, as a "self-induced hypnotic sleep." Again borrowing his favorite of Boehme's phrases, Yeats announced, "In the seventeenth century conscious Samādhi re-appeared in the 'walking trance' of Boehme, when truth fell upon him 'like a bursting shower.'" ³³ Further on in that introduction, Yeats defined Samādhi more explicitly as "that condition of illumination where union as union disappears." ³⁴ And in an earlier introduction, one written for Shri Purhoit Swami's 1934 translation of The Holy Mountain, Yeats had explained Samādhi as

a dreamless sleep that differs from that of every sleeper in some part of the night, every insect in the chrysalis, every hibernating animal, every soul between death and birth, because attained through the sacrifice of the physical senses, and through meditation upon a divine personality, a personality at once historical and yet his own spiritual Self. ³⁵

One unique aspect of Samādhi, as Yeats identified the state, was that it did not require a negation of self for the experience of unity. Boehme, due to his particular position in Post-Reformation Germany, was innovative in his insistence that revelation came from the rising up of the grace of God within him rather than from its being superimposed. In The Aurora Boehme had emphasized, "I am not climbed up into the Deity, neither is it possible for such a mean man as I am to do it;

but the Deity is climbed up into me, and from its love are these things revealed to me" (Aurora 18-9).

This movement into the soul accorded with Yeats's concept of the source of revelation. In February, 1906, he wrote to Florence Farr that he had begun "eastern meditations" as a means of discovering the force within himself:

I have myself by the by begun eastern meditations--of your sort but with the object of trying to lay hands upon some dynamic and substantialising force as distinguished from the eastern quiescent and supersensualizing state of the soul--a movement downwards upon life, not upwards out of life.³⁶

The "movement downwards," which Yeats identified with both Samādhi and Boehme's system, was the kind of meditation which could appeal to a subjective man and a poet who insisted he must remain immersed in life.

Later in February, 1906, Yeats asked Florence Farr for help with his practice of meditation. At that juncture he was having trouble sustaining the state between waking and sleeping. His rejection of the "sleepy calm" as inimical to the requisite "fiery understanding" shows that Yeats was moving toward an insistence upon a tension between contraries as a necessity for the moment of vision:

My difficulty is that I get partly hypnotized at once and that a sleepy calm makes it very difficult to get the mood of fiery understanding which must represent the spirit which is, according to the old definition, 'that which moves itself.' I have never got this mood except in absolute trance at night.³⁷

Yeats detailed the method he finally reached for inducing trance and provoking mystical ecstasy in the 1917 essay "Anima Hominus." In this essay he explicitly equated the scenes which came to him "between sleeping and waking" with the visions described by Boehme:

That which comes as complete, as minutely organized, as are those elaborate, brightly lighted buildings and sceneries appearing in a moment, as I lie between sleeping and waking, must come from above me and beyond me. . . . should those conditions come, not, as it were, in a gesture--as the image of a man--but in some fine landscape, it is of Boehme, maybe, that I think, and of that country where we 'eternally solace ourselves in the excellent beautiful flourishing of all manner of flowers and forms, both trees and plants, and all kinds of fruit.'³⁸

Yeats provided his fullest development of the doctrines of the masks in "Anima Hominus." He said, "We make . . . of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry." Only by seeking and embracing the anti-self can the poet attain "the vision . . . the revelation of reality, . . . ecstasy."³⁹ Yeats explained that he sometimes fenced for half an hour before going to bed. This physical expression of the conflict between contraries frequently released his mind to a state conducive to vision:

. . . when I close my eyes upon the pillow
I see a foil playing before me, the button
to my face. We meet always in the deep of
the mind, whatever our work, wherever our
reverie carries us, that other Will.⁴⁰

The quotation which provided the title for this chapter is also included in the treatment of the contraries in "Anima Hominus."

Yeats insisted that the poet must remain in the midst of conflict in order to bring himself to the moment "when vision comes."⁴¹ Unlike the saint, who can "renounce experience itself,"⁴² the poet must remain "amid the whirlwinds,"⁴³ for there he finds "the sudden lightning."⁴⁴

Yeats's interest in self-induced trance was directly related to his view of the poet as successor to the priests and prophets of God. In his Foreword to Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne (1902) Yeats likened the process of poetic creation to the mystic's ecstatic trance, elucidating for the first time the inducement of trance as an element of the traditional craft of the poet. "The Irish poets had also," Yeats wrote, "what seemed a supernatural sanction, for a chief poet had to understand not only innumerable kinds of poetry, but how to keep himself for nine days in a trance."⁴⁵ Again, in "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1910) Yeats equated the inspiration of the poet with the mystic's ecstatic experience:

Anyone who has any experience of any mystical state of the soul knows how there float up in the mind profound symbols, whose meaning, if they do not delude one into the dream that they are meaningless, one does not perhaps understand for years.⁴⁶

This perception of the poet as successor to the priests underlies the legacy of "The Tower," Yeats's 1927 retrospective evaluation of his creative life. Section III of that poem, beginning "It is time that I wrote my will," is replete with images of direct inspiration which echo the words Boehme used to describe his mystical experience. Yeats willed to the

generation of poets to follow him his "pride," possibly the artist's pride in the power of his imagination. He began with an image of that pride as the "Morning Redness"--"Pride, like that of the morn / When the headlong light is loose." The next probable connection to Boehme is the reference to "the sudden shower." The writing of the will concludes with the description of a swan, Yeats's image for the soul, which follows Boehme's method for inducing a trance by fixing the gaze upon a gleam of light:

When the swan must fix his eye
Upon a fading gleam,
Float out upon a long
Last reach of glittering stream
And there sing his last song.
(Var., p. 414)

The central connective was Yeats's belief that the poet, like the mystic, could set his imagination free to receive inspiration by establishing a condition of mind which was a trance state between waking and sleeping, a "walking trance." In John Sherman (1891) Yeats had referred to that moment as the time of inspiration. He wrote that his hero "was at that marchland between waking and dreaming where our thoughts begin to have a life of their own--the region where art is nurtured and inspiration born."⁴⁷ Yeats apparently continued in his belief in the validity of the insights gained through the trance state, for in 1929 he affirmed much the same opinion in his correspondence with T. Sturge Moore on the perception of reality:

If one assumes . . . that mind and matter are one in a 'prior' state, mind has still its secret entrance there. That still seems to be often bounded on the one side by waking and on the other by falling asleep. All that I know of any value has come from sleep--or, to put it otherwise, bounded by dying or being born.⁴⁸

In The Treatise of the Incarnation Boehme had revealed that the creation of the original woman, Adam's asexual reproduction which was to have been the norm for human creation had man not fallen into physicality, took place in his trance-like sleep, when his reason and will were stilled; "When Man became weary and tired, he fell into a sleep, viz. into the Magia; it was with him as if he were not in this world; for all his Senses or Thoughts ceased, the wheel of the Essences passed into a Rest" (Incar. I 4-1).

Yeats, like Boehme, recognized that the effortless creation of prelapsarian man was not afforded to the modern poet. Early in his career, guided by his study of Blake, Yeats posited the necessity of conscious effort to reach the "secret entrance" of the mind. In 1896 Yeats wrote to W.T. Horton:

I hold as Blake would have held also, that the intellect must do its utmost 'before inspiration is possible.' It clears the rubbish from the mouth of the sybil's cave but it is not the sybil.⁴⁹

"Things Discovered in the Deep"

The second aspect of Yeats's interest in Boehme's trance was his study, as a craftsman, of the means of producing the

effects of a trance in his art, so that his readers, also, could be brought to the state in which "vision comes." Yeats claimed that effect for his poetry early in his career in the dedicatory poem "To Ireland in the Coming Times" (1892). In this poem Yeats stated the purpose of his work as the imparting of knowledge like that which arises during a trance:

. . . to him who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
Of things discovered in the deep,
Where only body's laid asleep.
(Var., p. 138)

Although he has announced this goal as early as 1892, Yeats spent a lifetime of struggle to realize his intentions in his poetry. Yeats's developments toward that end are of even greater interest than his attempts at self-hypnosis. The latter could be considered a means of clearing the "rubbish" at "the mouth of the sybil's cave"; the former is tied directly to the utterance itself.

Both Yeats and Boehme recognized the distinction between the self discipline by which the mystic or poet attains the momentary illumination and the effort by which he struggles to communicate his vision. In a letter to Casper Lindern, Boehme had recalled the anguish involved in articulating his mystical experience. The insight itself was instantaneous, according to Boehme, but the "unraveling" of it took twelve years of labor. Acknowledging that he was "obliged to work out this great mystery like a child going to school." Boehme wrote:

I could clearly see it as in a great depth
 for I looked through as into a chaos where
 all lies undeveloped, but the unraveling of
 it was impossible. It opened itself within
 me from time to time like a growing thing. I
 was pregnant with it for twelve years and ex-
 perience a violent impulse to bring it out
 into expression. Finally it overwhelmed me
 like a cloudburst, what it strikes it strikes.
 Whatever I could grasp sufficiently to bring
 into outwardness that I wrote down.⁵⁰

Yeats's friend Gogarty provided a personal glimpse of the similar
 struggle by which Yeats wrote poetry:

[Yeats] composed with what appeared to be
 great mental agony. With his hands behind
 his back, his head down, or suddenly looking
 up, he would pace the floor humming and mur-
 muring to himself until the poem arose from
 the rich darkness.⁵¹

The poet's head movements, his pacing, and his humming to himself
 resemble the actions of a man attempting to self-induce hypnosis,
 but the dominant picture which emerges from Gogarty's descrip-
 tion is one of violent conflict before the light flashes in
 the darkness.

The manner of composition described by Gogarty accords
 with the advice given in Yeats's 1902 poem "Adam's Curse." The
 Biblical allusion in the title is a reminder that creation is
 no longer easy for man. The import of the poem is that the poet
 must attempt to convey the impression of sudden insight, but he
 can only do so through personal struggle:

A line will take us hours maybe;
 Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
 Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
 (Var., p. 204)

"His Dream" (1908), Yeats's attempt to render into poetry a visionary experience, demonstrates how difficult the process can be. Although Yeats included a note relating the dream origin of the poem, insisting, like Blake, that "The Authors are in Eternity" (Var., p. 253), the poem remains unconvincing. John Senior, in his study of occult poetry, denied that Yeats ever achieved the effect of recreating vision. "Yeats's poems are not visionary," Senior wrote; "Yeats talks about blinding light as he talks about passion, but he never strikes us blind, nor was he stricken, nor did he suffer that terrible, terrifying descent."⁵² The difficulty is that the mystical experience is ineffable. The momentary recognition of total unity defies any attempt at description through the linear medium of language. At best, the poet can hope to communicate some sense of the experience.

Yeats recognized this need in Plays and Controversies (1923) when he defined "Art, in its highest moments," as "not a deliberate creation, but the creation of intense feeling, of pure life."⁵³ The true mystic does not seek to analyze his experience because, as Bose noted, "The metaphysical implication of mysticism is that ultimately all reality is one."⁵⁴ Instead, he accepts it, and, if the experience is as strong as the lighting which struck Paul on the road to Damascus, he lives his life in surrender to it.

At the end of his life Yeats recognized that he was not a mystic. "No," he told Ethel Mannin, "I am a practical man. I have seen the raising of Lazarus and the loaves and fishes and

have made the usual measurements, plummet line, spirit-level and have taken the temperature by pure mathematic."⁵⁵ He had made the decision to be an artist, as he acknowledged in "The Choice" (1932), thereby committing himself to constant struggle in his effort to achieve certain moments of illumination in his poetry.

Yeats's first references to the power of the artist to produce trance through words came in the 1890's when he was experimenting with using trance on himself. An 1890 article in the Boston Pilot expressed Yeats's admiration for the quasi-religious, trance-like effect of Todhunter's play Helena in Troas. Yeats may have been originally drawn to the play by the attraction its heroine, Helen of Troy, had always held for him, but he was impressed by the hypnotic effects of the performance. As Yeats explained Todhunter's achievement, "[The play's] sonorous verse, united to the rhythmical motions of the white-robed chorus, and the solemnity of burning incense, produced a semi-religious effect new to the modern stage."⁵⁶ One year later Yeats again referred to Helena in Troas, demonstrating that he was interested in Todhunter's technique because he hoped it could serve a practical purpose in enhancing the power of the poet's imagination. "Many people have said to me that the surroundings of Helena made them feel religious," Yeats wrote. Then he added a pragmatic remark which gave the key to his interest. "Once get your audience in that mood," Yeats commented, "and you can do anything with it."⁵⁷

In "Magic" (1901) Yeats treated the connection between the trance state of the artist and the state he sought to induce in

others, saying, "the poet enchants and charms and binds with a spell his own mind when he would enchant the mind of others."

Yeats reasoned that the hypnotic power of poetry came from the fact that the words used by poets had originated in "the sounds the enchanters made to help their imagination" captivate an audience.⁵⁸

Yeats maintained this belief in the efficacy of language. In 1927 he wrote to Olivia Shakespear of a vision he had dreamed. Here, as in 1901, Yeats credited words with some magical force. As Yeats described the experience, he had been depressed when, in a moment of vision between waking and sleeping, he had seen a key and a road. At that instant he had become cheerful again. Yeats reflected that the miraculous change had resulted somehow from the symbols of his dream: "I constantly notice that change comes from some formula of words used quite lightly." He further postulated that the proper words somehow open a storehouse of previously assimilated experience. Using a revealingly violent metaphor, Yeats wrote, "I suppose the words are but the finger on the trigger and that the gun has been long loaded."⁵⁹

This version of Yeats's speculation on the nature of visionary insight added the dimension of personal accumulation of contributory experiences. It is particularly enlightening in conjunction with the views Yeats had articulated in 1901. In "Magic," as in the later letter, words were the magical key which opened the invisible gates. The difference was that by

1927 Yeats was considering the poet primarily responsible for whatever insights arose from the words he used.

In the early poetry, Yeats's interest in the arrangement of words appeared to be focused primarily on the poet's power to provoke an hypnotic trance as did his predecessors, the magicians. In "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1900) Yeats explained: "The purpose of rhythm . . . is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation. . . ." ⁶⁰ Yeats held that an analogous state could be achieved by rhythm in poetry, which induces "that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols." ⁶¹ Further on in "The Symbolism of Poetry" Yeats referred to "those . . . wavering, meditative, organic rhythms" as "the embodiment of the imagination." ⁶²

Yeats achieved a hypnotic rhythm in his early poetry through his use of long, almost languid lines, frequent alliteration, and repetitions. "Into the Twilight," first published in 1893, is typical of both the method and the mood of Yeats's early work:

Out-worn heart, in a time out-worn,
Come clear of the nets of wrong and right;
Laugh, heart, again in the grey twilight,
Sigh, heart, again in the dew of morn.
(Var., p. 147)

This poem is heavily weighted with contraries--"wrong and right," "Laugh" and "Sigh," "twilight" and "morn"--but the overall meditative tone precludes any suggestion of violent conflict between

the contraries. Here the contraries blend in a "grey twilight" rather than clashing with the force of a lightning flash. .

In the major portion of the poetry written before 1902 Yeats the magician weaves a hypnotic fabric which shrouds the world of his creation. Thinly veiled allusions to dimly remembered folk myths cast a spell of enchantment over works like The Wanderings of Oisín (1889). Only occasional flashes, like the rage of the parrot in the 1886 poem "The Indian to his Love," break the dreamlike trance of Yeats's twilight settings. The early poems induce a mood, but the mood is one of gentle melancholy. Even poems which treat of stark tragedies, like the accidental infanticide in the 1889 "The Ballad of Moll Magee," do not provoke the intense emotion of later works.

The works in "From 'The Green Helmet and Other Poems'" (1910) indicate the change in Yeats's poetry in their shortened, predominantly monosyllabic lines. The change must have been due in part to Yeats's heightened interest in drama, to which he alluded in "The Fascination of What's Difficult" (1910). Yeats's work for the theater either led to or coincided naturally with an increasingly dramatic format in his poetry. In "The Fascination of What's Difficult" the poet vows, "I swear before the dawn comes round again / I'll find the stable and pull out the bolt" (Var., p. 260). It is obvious from the context that Yeats meant the "bolt" of Pegasus' stable, but the word may assume a double meaning, for from this point on Yeats's poetry became increasingly forceful. Instead of slow alliteration and somnambulant rhythms, Yeats began to use violently clashing contraries

and strong repetitions to produce, as do the whirling contraries in Boehme's system, lightning bolts of resolution.

In 1913 Yeats wrote to his father, "Of recent years instead of 'vision,' meaning by vision the intense realization of a state of ecstatic emotion symbolized in a definite imagined region, I have tried for more self portraiture."⁶³ The twilight dream worlds of the early poetry were giving way to a poetry of new power which would keep the reader aware of the human element in the artistic creation. He still intended to capture the essence of the trance experience, but his emphasis shifted to the means of evoking that effect on the audience while leaving them a touchstone of reality through which meaning could penetrate the trance-state and thus enlarge their vision.

"Pardon, Old Fathers," the poem which prefaced Responsibilities in 1914, illustrates the change in direction of Yeats's poetry. This poem takes contraries for its subject matter, contrasting the outwardly directed careers of Yeats's ancestors with his own vocation. Yeats's list of illustrious relatives, with a capsule summary of the achievements of each, has the same vigor and hypnotic effect as a Biblical genealogy. The alliteration of bilabial plosives in the line "Pardon that for barren passion's sake" (Var., p. 270), with the apparent contradiction of the yoking of passion and barrenness, is an example of the new strength in Yeats's poetry. As before, Yeats's control of the poem leads the reader inevitably to the point the poet wishes to make at the end, but the resolve of the final line of this poem leaves the reader in a mood quite different

from the wistful longing of earlier poems. Yeats no longer wishes to lull the reader into a state of calm trance.

In the same vein, the dreams Yeats referred to in the next poem of Responsibilities, "The Grey-Rock," are dreams to leave the dreamer "dazed and terror-struck" (Var., p. 272). These visions which the poet evoked in 1914 stand in startling contrast to the fairy worlds he had conjured up in the 1895 poem "To Some I have Talked with by the Fire" (Var., p. 136).

"An Irish Airman Foresees his Death," first published in 1919, provides a concise example of the way Yeats used the contraries in conjunction with repetitions with variations to produce an hypnotic effect punctuated by the resolution of the ending of the poem. Yeats presented the airman's moment of contemplation in which all is indeed "balanced." The series of oppositions leads irrevocably and inevitably to the finality of the last lines:

I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.
(Var., p. 328)

"Byzantium" (1929) showed the alterations in the dream world Yeats created in his later poetry. The poet begins, like the hypnotist, by weaving a spell in which "unpurged images of day recede" (Var., p. 497). An unearthly vision is evoked in the second stanza by a method similar to Boehme's practice of amassing descriptions. In The Dissolving Image Bernard Levine called the technique an "evolutionary repetitiveness of image"

and noted, "The syntax . . . conspiring with the rhyme, rhythm, and alliteration of the verse line, suggests the intended mystery by a virtually hypnotic circularity of language."⁶⁴ As in Boehme's early works, the effect in "Byzantium" is to create the impression of the writer fumbling to represent accurately a vision which was not fully comprehensible. The contraries of natural life and changeless art dominate alternate stanzas of this poem. In contrast to the ungovernable complexities of "The fury and the mire of human veins," the second and fourth stanzas present the dynamic stasis of art in which the ultimate contraries are resolved:

A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
 Breathless mouths may summon;
 I hail the superhuman;
 I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.
 (Var., p. 497)

Like the apparent contradiction of the ice that burned in "The Cold Heaven" (1912), the contrary qualities of the "flames that cannot singe a sleeve" in stanza four of "Byzantium" bespeak the supernatural origins of the vision, recalling, perhaps, the "dark fire" and the "light fire" of the opposing triads of Boehme's Deity:

At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
 Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
 Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
 Where blood-begotten spirits come
 And all complexities of fury leave
 (Var., p. 498)

The mood established in "Byzantium" is no sleeplike calm; the trance involved in this vision is "An agony". (Var., p. 498), so

it is a relief when the fifth stanza brings the "turba," Boehme's term for the breaking of harmony, the sinking into natural life and the return to the ceaseless struggle of creating "Those images that yet / Fresh images beget" (Var., p. 498).

"Terrible Lightning"

As "Byzantium" illustrates, Yeats held that the greatest art could achieve only momentary stasis between warring contraries. The sudden flash of light frequently served in Yeats's poetry as the symbol of that "moment when vision comes to our weariness like terrible lightning."⁶⁵ Boehme, too, had used the lightning flash to express the fleeting illuminating glimpse of divine harmony occasionally afforded to human understanding:

As the lightning-flash arises within the centre, and disappears again in a moment, so it is with the soul. When during her battle she penetrates through the clouds, she sees the Godhead like a flash of light, but the clouds of sin soon gather again around her and cover her sight.. (Aurora 11-43)

Yeats was always interested in the occasional glimpses of superhuman existence. In the early poems he depicted the other world as a land of fairies and mythological creatures. As Ellmann noted, "In his early work Yeats conceives of the boundary line between the worlds of completeness and incompleteness as twilit, in his later work it is lit by lightning."⁶⁶

Significantly, the few references to the lightning flash in the early poems connect the lightning to the creative word. The

first reference was in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" (1885). In this poem, in the midst of typically fin-de-siecle melancholy for the past "antique joy," an image of the force of the creative "Fiat" appears like a streak of brilliant light:

The wandering earth herself may be
Only a sudden flaming word,
In clanging space a moment heard,
Troubling the endless reverie.
(Var., p. 65)

The other exception to the grey twilight of the early poetry is in "Maid Quiet" (1892). Lamenting the loss of the still center of reflection in this poem, Yeats asks, "Where has Maid Quiet gone to?" There is a suggestion of internal turmoil in the lines "The winds that awakened the stars / Are blowing through my blood." Here the lightning flash is the product of the words created by the poet's anguish--"Now words that call up the lightning / Are hurtling through my heart" (Var., p. 171). In an 1899 note to "Maid Quiet" Yeats made a significant statement on his concept of the poetic image, demonstrating that it is like Boehme's flash of lightning in its momentary illumination. "The image is an eternal act," Yeats explained, "but our understandings are temporal and understand but a little at a time" (Var., p. 807).

Boehme had emphasized that the flash of light occurred only at moments when contraries met and that it was actualized only by deliberate seeking of opposition. In The Treatise of the Incarnation the mystic explained:

There can be no life unless that form which
 life is to issue is broken up in its form,
 Everything has to enter into the state of
 anguish to attain the lightning-flash, and
 without this there will be no ignition.
 (Incar. I 2.5)⁶⁷

If one admits biographical elements in Yeats's artistic development, his awareness of lightning as the proper image for the resolution of conflict might be traced to his own awareness of human sorrow and struggle which began with his hopeless courtship of Maud Gonne. In 1910, in the poem "Reconciliation," Yeats wrote:

Some have blamed you that you took away
 The verses that could move them on the day
 When, the ears being deafened, the sight of
 the eyes blind
 With lightning, you went from me.
 (Var., p. 257)

Here the lightning heralded the poet's loss, but it resembles the flash of light in later poems in that it signaled the moment of change, when one stage (perhaps the romanticism of a young lover) ended and Yeats became wiser and more mature in his approach to life. "Reconciliation" is followed almost immediately in the Collected Poems by "The Fascination of What's Difficult" (1910), in which Yeats devoted himself resolutely to the struggle to "pull out the bolt" (Var., p. 260).

"Paudeen (1914) was the first instance of brilliant light used in Yeats's poetry in association with divine illumination. In "Paudeen" the lightning is connected with a bird cry, which Yeats had linked previously (in "The Everlasting Voices," 1896,

"He reproves the Curlew," 1896, and "He thinks of his past Greatness when a Part of the Constellations of Heaven," 1898) to intimations of the world beyond. The initiatory moment described in "Paudeen" is representative of Yeats's later poetry in that it was initiated by the clash between the greatness of Yeats's vision of the possibilities for Ireland and the small-mindedness of the Irish middle class represented by Paudeen the shopkeeper. From "Paudeen" onward the bird cry and the flashing light were used interchangeably in Yeats's poetry to signal the moment of mystical ecstasy, the "sudden blow" which marks the interpenetration of the human and the supernatural.

In "An Image from a Past Life" (1920), the flash of light and the scream of a bird are joined again. This poem begins with the male speaker setting the scene for the sudden arising of the image:

The elaborate starlight throws a reflection
On the dark stream,
Till all the eddies gleam;
And thereupon there comes that scream
From terrified, invisible beast or bird.
(Var., p. 389)

Both are associated in the poem with the sudden "Image of poignant reflection" (Var., p. 389).

Like the revelations granted to Boehme and like the "eternal act" which is Yeats's image, this "Image from a Past Life" is not immediately comprehensible. The female speaker experiences the intense feeling the poetic image is meant to evoke, but she cannot explain the origins of her emotion--"I do not

know, that know I am afraid / Of the hovering thing night brought me" (Var., p. 390).

"Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" was another instance of the connection between Yeats's bird symbol and the flash of light. Here, as in the earlier "An Image from a Past Life," Yeats specifically declared the bird and the light emblematic without unduly prolonging the moment by analyzing the significance of the image:

At sudden thunder of the mounting swan
I turned about and looked where branches
break
The glittering reaches of the flooded lake.

Another emblem there! (Var., p. 490)

Boehme had used a similar image of sunlight flashing on water to express Adam's prelapsarian reproduction. In The Mysterium Magnum the mystic explained that if Adam had resisted temptation, birth would have been "not by a sundry peculiar Issue from Adam's Body, as now, but as the Sun shines entirely through the water, and rends (or tears) it not" (Mys. Mag 18-10).

In "Supernatural Songs" (1934) Yeats used a flash of light or a bird cry for that moment of sexual union which was for him a correspondent of the "spiritual excitement" of the resolution of contraries. He announced the significance of the light in the first poem, "Ribh at the Tomb of Baile and Aillinn," probably following Swedenborg's description of the coupling of angels as a flame to make the sudden light the product of perfect union:

There is no touching here, nor touching there,
 Nor straining joy, but whole is joined to whole;
 For the intercourse of angels is a light
 Where for its moment both seem lost, consumed.
 (Var., p. 555)

"Ribh Denounces Patrick," the second of "The Supernatural Songs," advances the concept that the intercourse of man and woman is a "copy" of the way "Godhead begets Godhead." Their union is a blaze of fire, a "conflagration" which imitates the unity of the Deity (Var., p. 556). The ecstasy of Ribh, a subject of the third song, is like Boehme's mystical experience and like Yeats's account of the origins of A Vision in its ineffability. Like Boehme, Ribh claims sudden insight into the inner harmony of God. When "Godhead on Godhead in sexual spasm begot / Godhead" the moment was announced again by supernatural cries (Var., p. 557). The fourth poem of this series, "There," is a concise expression of the final resolution of the contraries:

There all the barrel-hoops are knit,
 There all the serpent-tails are bit,
 There all the gyres converge in one,
 There all the planets drop in the Sun.
 (Var., p. 557)

The second line of the above poem is reminiscent of the "Spire of a Serpent" which Law used in one of his illustrations of Boehme's principles. (See Appendix, Figure IV.)

A symbol related to the lightning flash in Yeats's poetry is a star, as used, for example, in the opening lines of "The Mother of God" (1932), where the "fallen flare / Through the hollow of an ear" (Var., p. 499) signals the joining of God

and mortal, the instant when the antinomies of eternal nature and physical nature merge to usher in a new age. In a 1934 note to "The Mother of God" Yeats explained the opening image as a reference to the Incarnation drawn from his memory of a Byzantium mosaic which represented the Annunciation by a "line drawn from a star to the ear of the Virgin." Yeats placed a poet's emphasis on John's account of the Incarnation, saying, "She (the Virgin) conceived the Word, and therefore through the ear a star fell and was born" (Var., p. 832).

This shooting star was a complex symbol for Yeats, carrying associations with several diverse traditions. In The Identity of Yeats Ellmann provided a concise analysis of "Two Songs from a Play" (1926, except the last stanza of the second song, which was written in 1931). In the first of these two poems, taken from the play The Resurrection (1927), Yeats's reference to "that fierce virgin and her Star" (Var., p. 437) suggests what Ellmann called "a parallelism and even identity between the three pairs, Astraea and Spica, Athena and Dionysus, and Mary and Christ."⁶⁸ In this poem Yeats uses the virgin and the star, common elements in all three stories, to reinforce his cyclical view of history by showing the correspondences among the events which announced each new revolution of the gyres.

The second poem of "Two Songs from a Play," as Unterecker pointed out, "draws parallels between the cycles each man experiences in his life and those large historical ones."⁶⁹ The final stanza of this poem (1932) proposes Yeats's theory that every entity completes itself by an encounter with its anti-self

and the result of these warring contraries within "Man's own resinous heart" is a sudden flash of light in the darkness:

Everything that man esteems
Endures a moment or a day.
Love's pleasure drives his love away,
The painter's brush consumes his dreams;
The herald's cry, the soldier's tread
Exhaust his glory and his might:
Whatever flames upon the night
Man's own resinous heart has fed.
(Var., p. 438)

An allied use is Yeats's reference in the 1935 poem "Parnell's Funeral" to the shooting star confirmed by mourners at the burial of the Irish leader. Like the star depicted in Byzantine mosaics, the star that pierced the clouds above Parnell's grave signaled the "reversal of an age" for Yeats (Var., p. 541).

Also, Yeats may have been aware of the legend that a new star "mystically appeared" as a herald of Boehme's birth, because this information is in the Law edition.⁷⁰

"Vacillation," the 1932 poem discussed in Chapter III as being replete with examples of the oscillation between contraries, also has several images of the flash of light with which the various contraries are momentarily resolved. Just as Yeats ranged through history to provide examples in this poem of violent conflict between opposites, so he may have drawn upon various mystic traditions for his images of fire and light as the illumination of revelation. The first reference in "Vacillation" is a direct statement:

A brand, or flaming breath,
 Comes to destroy
 All those antinomies
 Of day and night : . . .
 (Var., p. 500)

The contrast of this fiery resolution with the end of the 1897 poem "The Blessed," where the end of the world was presented as an "ebbing away / In twilights of dew and of the fire" (Var., p. 168), shows the development of Yeats's light imagery.

The next reference to flashing light in "Vacillation" is to the "glittering flame" that forms one-half of the double tree familiar to occultists and folklorists. The poet hangs an image at the meeting place of these two extremities. A final light image appears in the seventh section of the poem which uses in a dialogue between Soul and Heart the Biblical image of the burning coal as the brand which purified Isaiah and marked him as a chosen man of God. The ineffable fire of the prophet's vision is the means of redemption. Soul proclaims, "Look on that fire, salvation walks within" (Var., p. 502). But the poet faces "The Choice" between giving himself over to mystical ecstasy--"Struck dumb in the simplicity of fire!" (Var., p. 502)--or remaining "unchristened" and following Homer in the poet's search for a theme. / The poem ends with the regretful renunciation of the way of the saint. Presumably the poet will resume instead the vacillation between extremities which provides his "theme" (Var., p. 503).

"Vacillation" also contains an account of a personal visionary experience reminiscent of Boehme's moment when the

sunlight gleamed on the pewter plate in his cobbler's shop.
In this instance, the image of lightning is evoked by the
description of the poet's body, which "of a sudden blazed":

While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless.
(Var., p. 501)

"Stream and Sun at Glendalough" recounts a similar visionary experience. Here the poet, like Boehme, seems to have accepted the ecstasy wrought in the flash of light^s as a sign of election. The flash of light was produced by the "intricate motions" of the natural contraries of "Stream and gliding sun" (Var., p. 506). Perhaps this poem offers the poet's alternative to the "born again" confidence of the saint, for Yeats asks:

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? (Var., p. 507)

In the "Last Poems" there is a final development in Yeats's use of the image of sudden light. In these poems, published between 1936 and 1939, the flash of light indicates something deeper than sudden inspiration or momentary reconciliation of opposites. At the end of his career Yeats used the sudden blaze as an image of the hard-won "tragic joy" born of an old man's knowledge of the constant oscillation between extremes. Such is



the implication of the reference in "Lapis Lazuli" (1938). This treatment of the nature of great art is one of the most perfectly realized demonstrations of the method under discussion.

Yeats's use of the voice of an artist regarding a stone carving of wisemen contemplating the art of a musician aptly illustrates that "mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show" (Var., p. 610).

"Lapis Lazuli" celebrates the triumph of art over the pendulum swings of history. Here Yeats used the image of "Heaven blazing into the head" for the "tragic joy" achieved through art (Var., p. 566). Yeats's piece of lapis lazuli is no Grecian urn: this poem does not celebrate the permanence of art; rather it proclaims the glory of art in its ability to hold the contraries in momentary stasis--"All things fall and are built again, / And those that build them again are gay" (Var., p. 566).

The ultimate exaltation in his life as an artist may well be Yeats's depiction of himself as the carnival character Malachi Stilt-Jack in "High Talk," a poem written in December, 1938. The name Malachi, adopted by the anonymous author of the last book of the Old Testament from the Hebrew expression for "My Messenger," recalls that transitional figure from the Bible who concludes the revelations of the old order and anticipates the coming of the new order of Christ. By using the name in "High Talk" Yeats may have been alluding to an ending and new beginning in his own existence. The comic persona of this poem carries more of the gaiety of final resolution than the horseman from Yeats's epitaph, who is admonished to "cast a cold eye" on the contraries of life and death (Var., p. 640). Here, in glory,

the poet proclaims his own "Aurora"--"night splits and the dawn breaks loose" (Var., p. 623). One month before his death Yeats was finally at the center of the lightning flash as he strode on the "high stalks" of his art. Although the doctrine of contraries demanded that the imagination establish another and yet another reversal, "High Talk" is a fitting final view of the poet advancing exultant "through the terrible novelty of light" (Var., p. 623).

FOOTNOTES

¹Mythologies, p. 340.

²Letters, p. 917. To Ethel Mannin, October 9, 1938.

³Explorations, pp. 258-9.

⁴Essays and Introductions, p. 135.

⁵Stoudt produced legal records which established Jacob's youngest brother, Michael, as the inheritor of his father's property upon the senior Boehme's demise in 1618. Since the custom at that time was to have the youngest son inherit, it seems logical that Jacob was guided toward the shoemaker's trade because his brother would receive the farming property. (Stoudt, p. 44).

⁶Martensen, p. 4.

⁷A more prosaic reason for Boehme's departure has been provided by Stoudt. He explained that it was the guild practice for a young man, upon completion of a number of years of apprenticeship, to journey to other locations to gain more varied experience. (Stoudt, p. 46.)

⁸Martensen, p. 4.

⁹Variorum Plays, p. 649.

¹⁰Variorum Plays, p. 651.

¹¹Epistles, p. 46. Epistle 3-5 and 6.

¹²Variorum Plays, p. 650.

¹³Intro., Poems of William Blake, p. xxxiv.

- ¹⁴Yeats-Ellis, Blake I, 335.
- ¹⁵Yeats-Ellis, Blake I, 319.
- ¹⁶W.B. Yeats, "Browning," an article from The Boston Pilot, February 22, 1890, in Letters to the New Island, p. 98.
- ¹⁷The Complete Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1895), p. 336.
- ¹⁸Waite, Lives of the Alchemystical Philosophers, p. 163.
- ¹⁹Variorum Plays, p. 1125.
- ²⁰Variorum Plays, p. 1131.
- ²¹Mythologies, p. 68.
- ²²Yeats, Unpublished manuscript, quoted in Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 322.
- ²³Yeats-Ellis, Blake I, 48.
- ²⁴Unpublished manuscript quoted in Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 322.
- ²⁵Unpublished manuscript quoted in Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 323.
- ²⁶Autobiography, p. 218.
- ²⁷Moore, The Unicorn, p. 65.
- ²⁸Clarence Herbert Hamilton, A Psychological Interpretation of Mysticism, Diss. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1916), p. 20.
- ²⁹Hamilton, p. 21.
- ³⁰Hamilton, p. 25. The reference given for the quotation from Boehme was Second Dialogue on the Supersensual Life (Everyman Library), p. 248.

³¹William Butler Yeats, Per Amica Silentia Lunae (New York: Macmillan, 1918), p. 78.

³²William Ralph Inge, The Philosophy of Plotinus (London: Longmans, Green, 1918), II, 153.

³³Yeats, Introd., Aphorisms of Yoga, p. 19.

³⁴Introd., Aphorisms of Yoga, p. 61.

³⁵Essays and Introductions, p. 452.

³⁶Letters, p. 469. To Florence Farr, February, 1906.

³⁷Letters, p. 472. To Florence Farr, February 16, 1906.

³⁸Mythologies, p. 326.

³⁹Mythologies, p. 331.

⁴⁰Mythologies, p. 337.

⁴¹Mythologies, p. 340.

⁴²Mythologies, p. 340.

⁴³Mythologies, p. 333.

⁴⁴Mythologies, p. 340. Yeats identifies the lightning imagery here with the imagery of the Christian Cabbala.

⁴⁵Explorations, p. 7.

⁴⁶Essays and Introductions, pp. 78-9.

⁴⁷John Sherman and Dhoya, p. 85.

⁴⁸W.B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, pp. 146-7. Letter of March 24, 1929.

⁴⁹Letters, p. 262. Letter to W.T. Horton, May 5, 1896.

⁵⁰Epistles, p. 30. Epistle 2-9 and 10.

- ⁵¹Gogarty, p. 23.
- ⁵²Senior, p. 169.
- ⁵³William Butler Yeats, Plays and Controversies (London: Macmillan, 1923), p. 102.
- ⁵⁴Bose, p. 3.
- ⁵⁵Letters, p. 921. To Ethel Mannin, December 23, 1938.
- ⁵⁶Letters to the New Island, pp. 113-4.
- ⁵⁷Letters to the New Island, p. 134.
- ⁵⁸Essays and Introductions, p. 43.
- ⁵⁹Letters, p. 728. To Olivia Shakespear, September 7, 1927.
- ⁶⁰Essays and Introductions, p. 159.
- ⁶¹Essays and Introductions, p. 159.
- ⁶²Essays and Introductions, p. 163.
- ⁶³Letters, p. 583. To J.B. Yeats, August 5, 1913.
- ⁶⁴Bernard Levine, The Dissolving Image (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), p. 141.
- ⁶⁵Mythologies, p. 340.
- ⁶⁶Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. xvii.
- ⁶⁷For similar use of lightning imagery in Boehme's works see Threefold Life 5-19 and Three Principles (p. 19).
- ⁶⁸Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 261.
- ⁶⁹Unterecker, p. 187.
- ⁷⁰Law, Pref., The Works of Jacob Boehme, p. xii.

A P P E N D I X

Figure I

The Eternal Unity, or Oneness

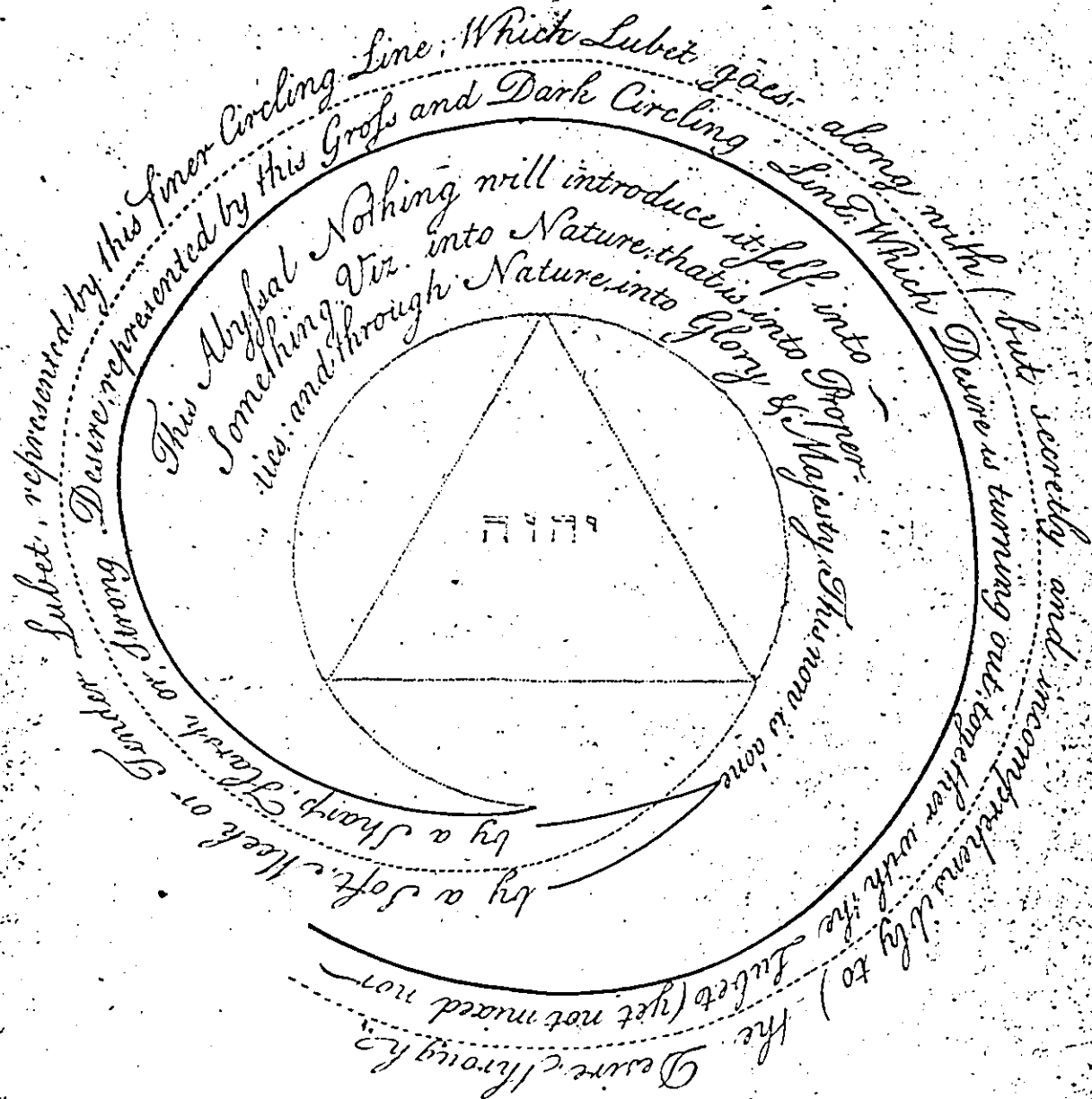
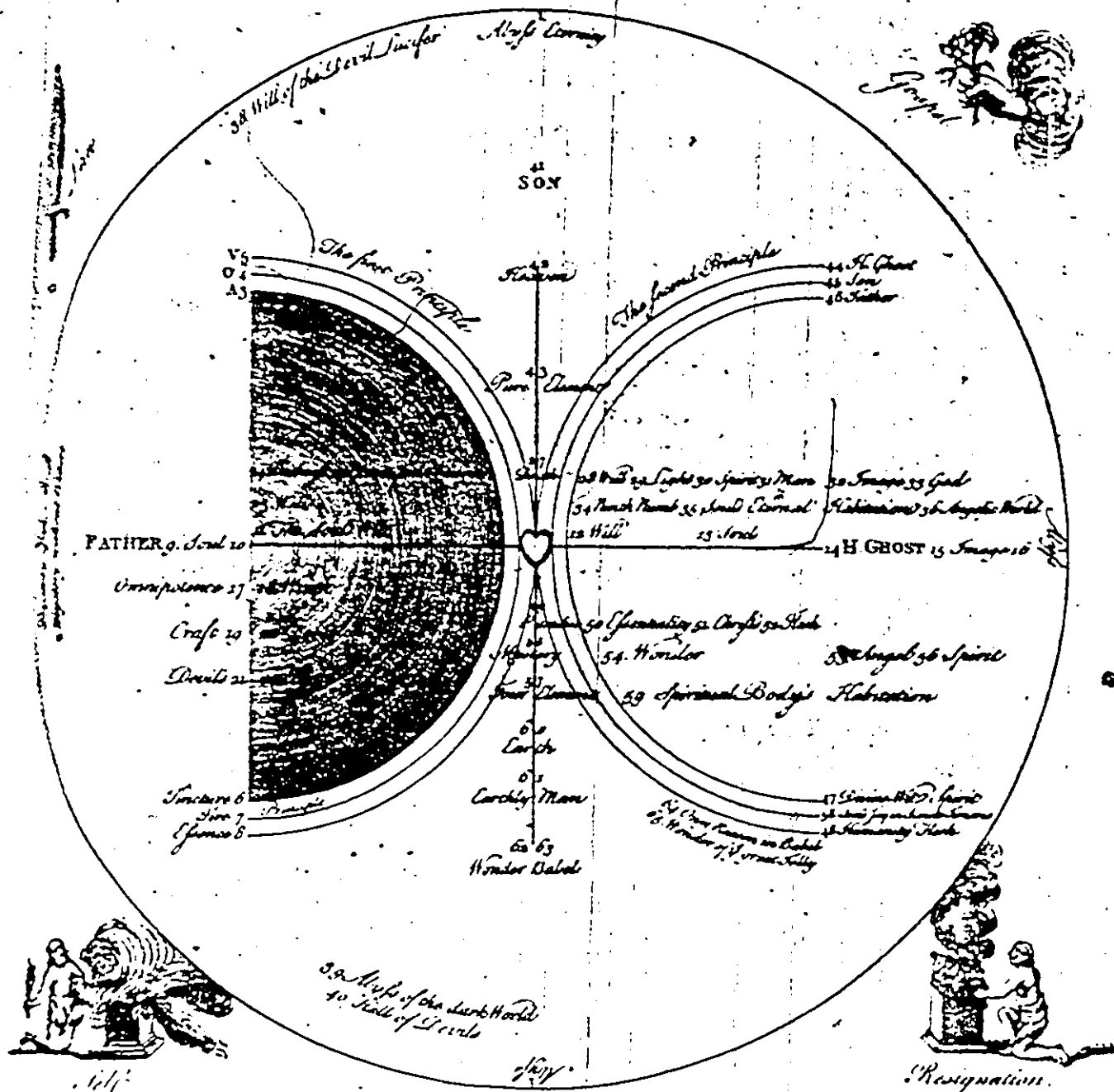


Figure I of Law's Illustrations of the Deep Principles of Jacob Behmen in Thirteen Figures in Vol. II of The Works of Jacob Behmen.

The Looking-Glass of Wisdom

State of the Philosophic Globe, or Eye of the Wonders of Chemistry, or Looking-glass of Wisdom.



Law's illustration to Boehme's The Mysteriorum Magnum in Vol. III of The Works of Jacob Behmen.

Figure III
The Conjunction of the Contraries

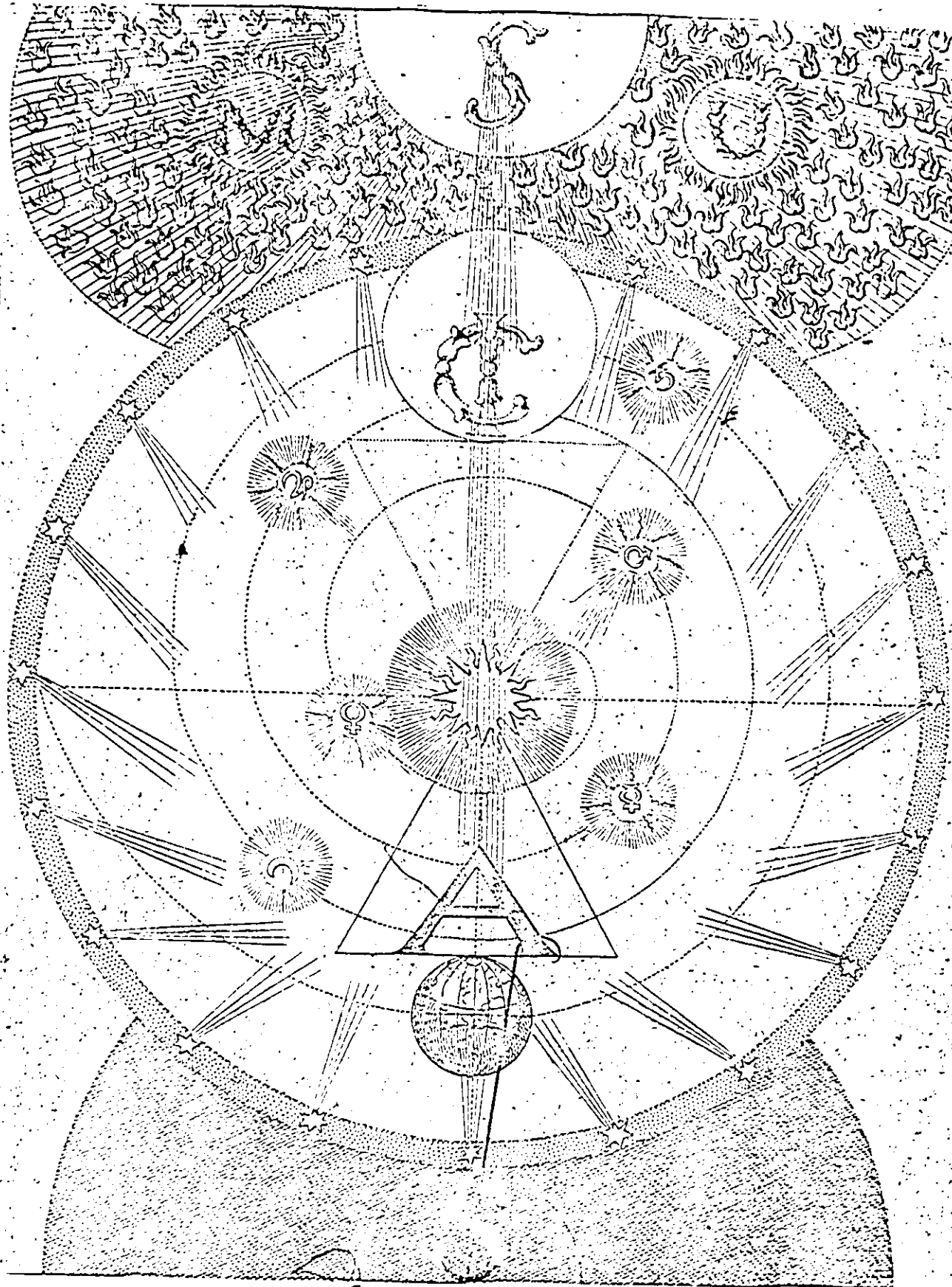


Figure X of Law's Illustrations of the Deep Principles of Jacob Behmen in Thirteen Figures in Works.

Figure IV

The Multi-Scaled Serpent at the Heart of Man



The Second Table of Law's Illustrations of the Deep Principles of
Jacob Behmen in Vol. III of The Works of Jacob Behmen.

Figure IV

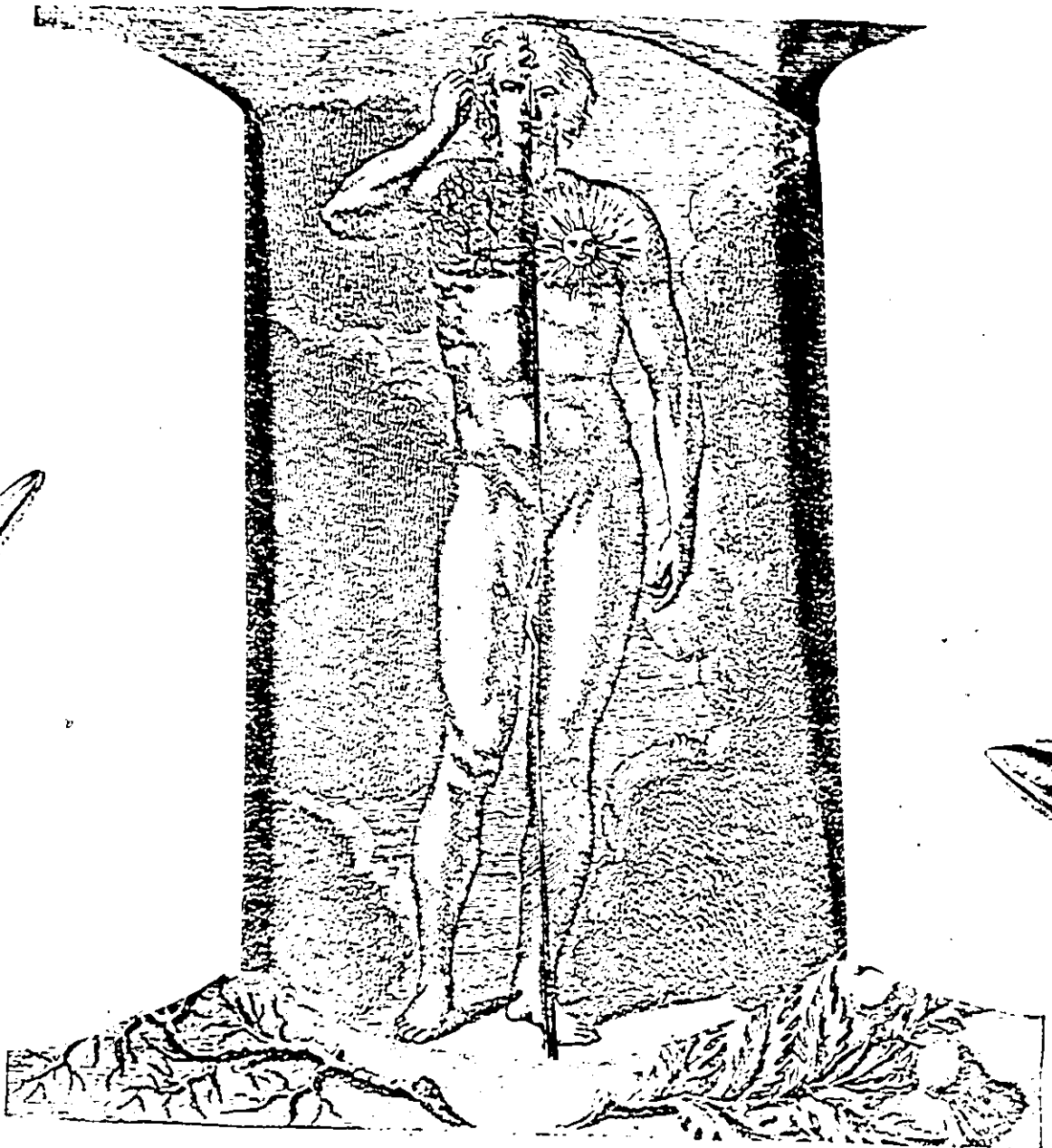
The Multi-Scaled Serpent at the Heart of Man



The Second Table of Law's Illustrations of the Deep Principles of
Jacob Behmen in Vol. III of The Works of Jacob Behmen.

Figure IV

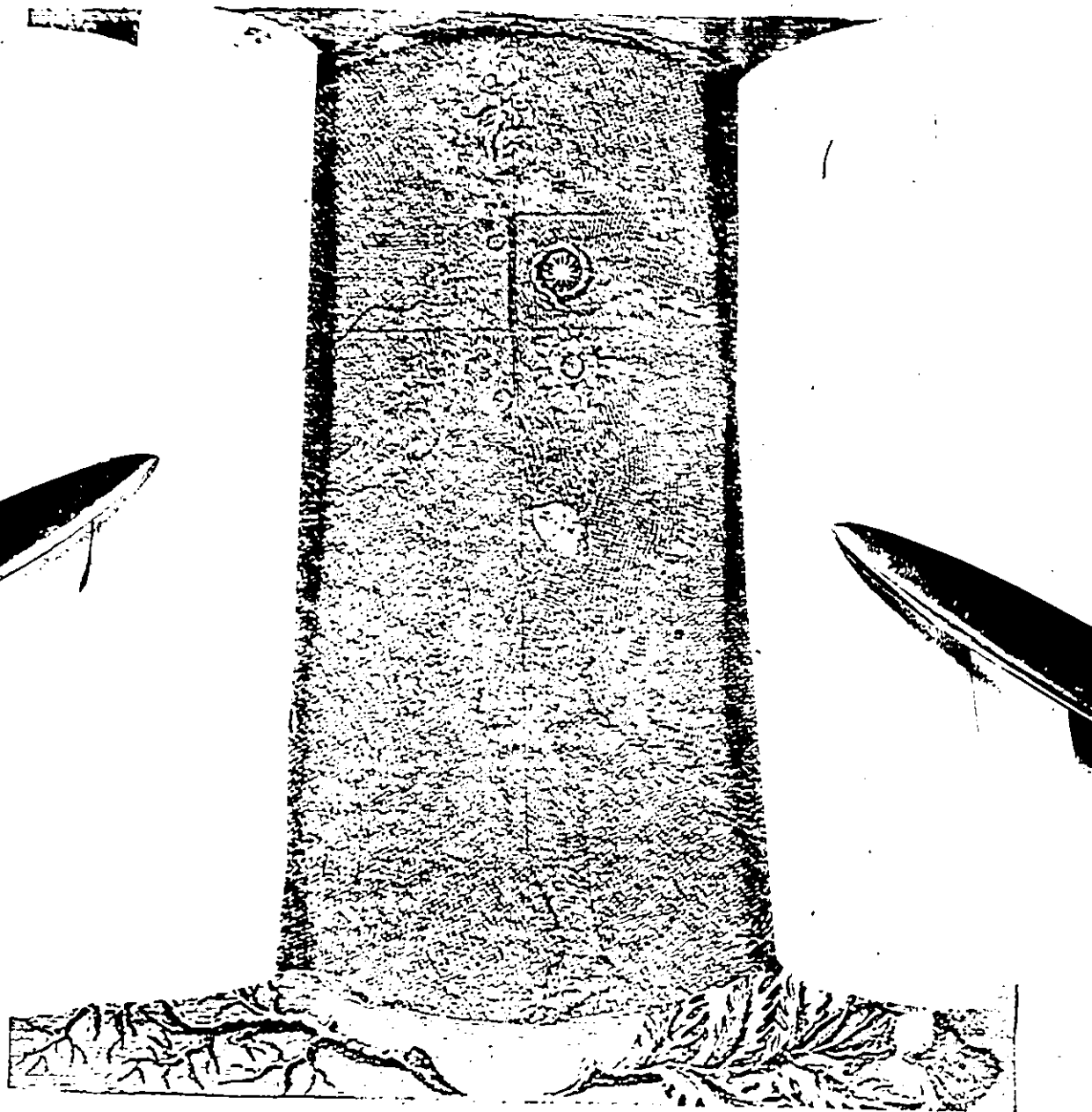
The Multi-Scaled Serpent at the Heart of Man



The Second Table of Law's Illustrations of the Deep Principles of
Jacob Behmen in Vol. III of The Works of Jacob Behmen.

Figure IV

The Multi-Scaled Serpent at the Heart of Man



The Second Table of Law's Illustrations of the Deep Principles of
Jacob Behmen in Vol. III of The Works of Jacob Behmen.

The Lightning Flash

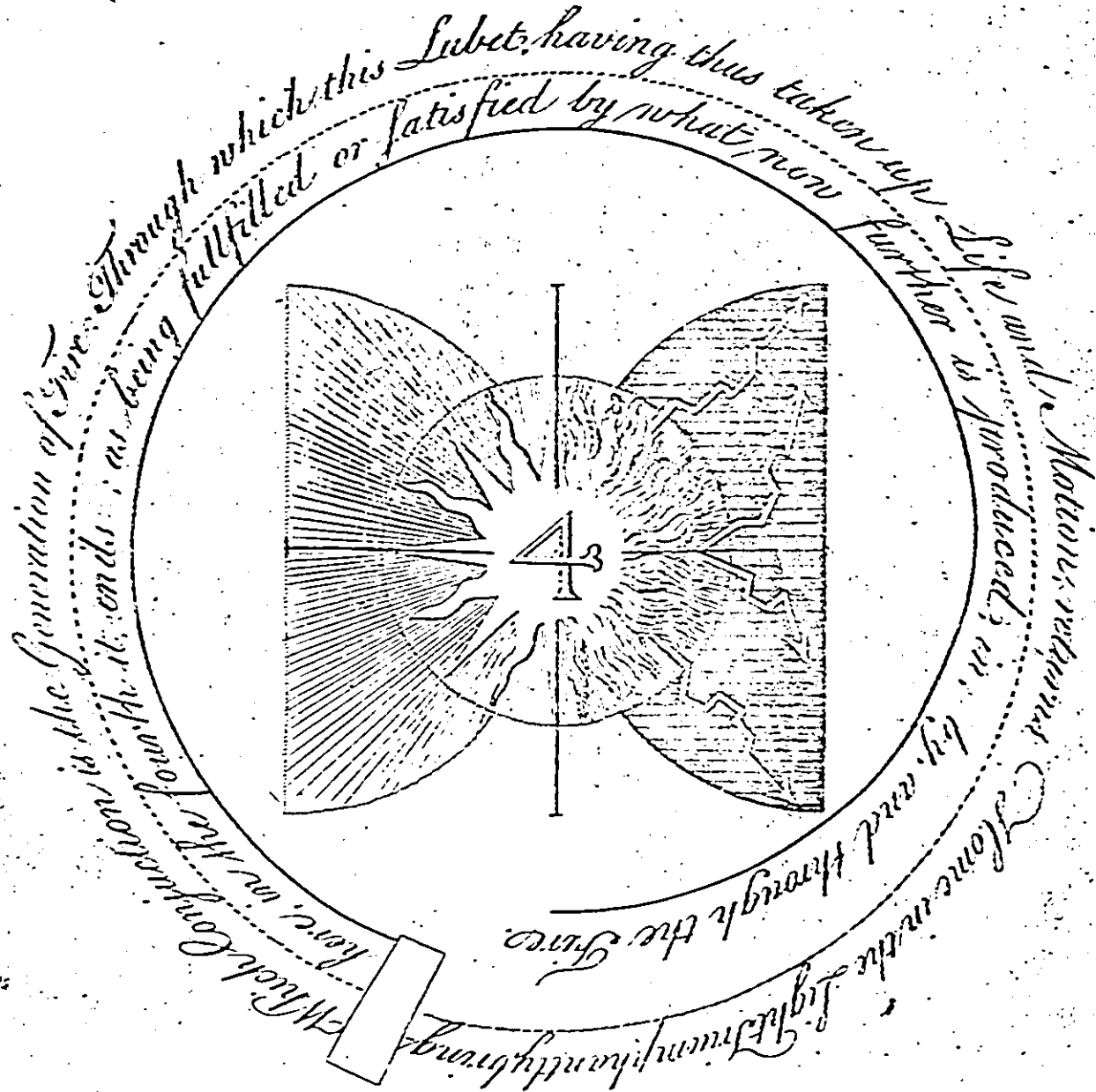


Figure III of Law's Illustrations of the Deep Principles of Jacob Behmen in Thirteen Figures in Vol. II of The Works of Jacob Behmen.

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